

How to Successfully Use LinkedIn for Business and Networking

By Nancy McCord, President of McCord Web Services

Okay, I admit it, I have dabbled half heartedly with social networking for the last year. Yes, I do have the cursory [MySpace site](#), a [Facebook page](#), and a [LinkedIn profile](#), but I have not embraced social networking; it seems like too much trouble.

It wasn't until this last month that I decided I really should carefully evaluate social networking to see how the typical business owner could use social networking for successfully growing their business and connecting with customers.

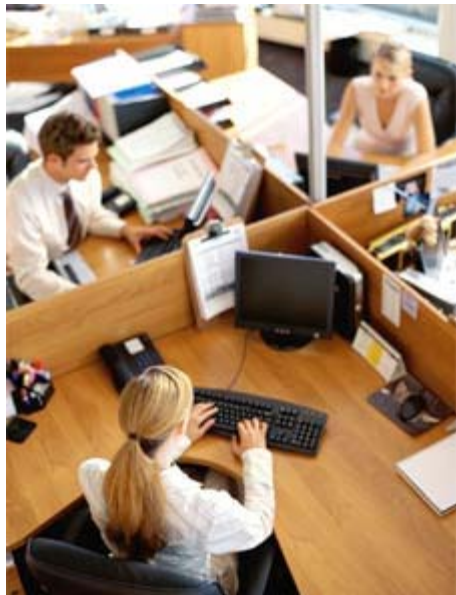
I selected LinkedIn as the social networking service I would really focus on. One reason is that this is where many professionals in my business arena have migrated. MySpace is still owned by the high school set, Facebook by the college and young professional set (although I do use and like Facebook too), and LinkedIn has become the social networking platform of choice for most business professionals such as myself.



What I found out in my testing was, well, shocking. So much so, that it has dramatically changed my viewpoint of social media and social networking. Here's my candid experience and story.

In mid August, I had 10 contacts on LinkedIn. I had simply connected to anyone who had sent me an invitation. I had not aggressively tried to grow my own network. My point of view was I was incredibly busy and spending time on a social enterprise was "fluff" and consumed time that I simply did not have.

So, one afternoon, I decided I would give it a "real go" as research for an article for this e-newsletter. I loaded my Outlook address book to LinkedIn and clicked "send invitations". I didn't even do a custom message, as I was so half hearted on embracing this new "time pit" called social networking. What happened in less than 30 minutes staggered me. I had clients, contacts, and prospects send responses, some with an immediate link to connect with me, others with personal notes. I earned nearly 20 new connections in a very short period of time. Wow, what a response and nearly immediate! What I found was that people are hungry, no, starving to connect.



I then went a step further and sent a request for recommendations to a number of clients. In no less than another 30 minutes I had five excellent reviews of my services that were posted on my LinkedIn profile. As I staggered away from my computer, I was shaken with how quickly all this had all happened. Word of mouth testimonials are "worth their weight in gold" for a business such as mine.

I was able to get an approval from each client to use the recommendation on my website for marketing purposes. (If you post testimonials on your own website, you know and understand how truly important great comments can be toward establishing your authority and winning new clients.) The people who did my recommendations were warm and eager to help me. Wow, the power of social networking at play right in front of my own eyes.

The next thing I did was to post a question in the "Question and Answer" section on LinkedIn. I asked what types of social media people were using, was it generating sales, and did they consider social networking a "time pit". (Oh, I was woefully ignorant then!). In less than 30 minutes again, I had 12 excellent responses; thoughtful in nature and addressed to me

personally. Many of the responses to my question were from top executives at companies like Boeing or from film makers or professional social networking consultants. I really benefited from the group insight and comments returned from my "loaded question".

After that I decided that maybe I should interact too in the "Question and Answer" section and went on to review and then answer 9 questions. All comments and results were posted to my LinkedIn profile as well. My responses allow others to review my insight, candor, and point of view, kind of like a snap shot of my personality and expertise.

The next day, after now having doubled my connections to over 30 or so, I decided that I should really "get serious". I loaded my e-newsletter subscriber list of over 1,000 names and sent a custom greeting and explanation of who I was, how I had their email address, and sent out the invitation to connect with me on LinkedIn using email within the LinkedIn control panel.

In less than 12 hours from my large list invitation my LinkedIn network contained over 90 connections. Less than one week later I am at 140 connections and still growing. In the first 24 hours, I also picked up a possibility for a new speaking engagement in front of 60 local area public relations professionals and a potential new subcontracting partner project for search optimization, ghost blogging, and Google AdWords management. All this with a wee bit of time investment.

This is the bottom line of what I have found from my own personal experience with social networking and LinkedIn. People crave, no, they thirst for personal interaction. People want to connect with you and want to share their knowledge and themselves!

Here Are Some of My Tips and the Lessons I Have Learned

One - You should not be focused on selling all the time in using LinkedIn. The value of your expertise and open sharing of resources and ideas is well worth the time investment alone. Being able to tap others for references or to recommend someone you know to a connection has incredible value and is super easy to do. Reviewing new connections' profiles and then their network can give you opportunities to join new conversation groups and to connect with people with common interests in your industry. To do this, you can either introduce yourself to a new connection directly (if they have that option enabled) or ask your common connection to introduce you. You get five free introductions with your LinkedIn account set up. After that, you can buy more.

Two - Responding to "Questions and Answers" can help to educate you and to share your knowledge with others. Each time you answer a question the information is posted to your profile allowing others to see your insight and style.

Three - Asking for a recommendation is easy and painless. You can even ask for a revision gracefully, if you do not like what someone has said and you have the option to post the recommendation or not in your profile. If you decide to use the recommendation off the LinkedIn site best business practices recommend that you ask the author for approval. What a great way to build your authority for your services and products in an easy, unthreatening, and painless way.

Four - Have fun and invest 15 minutes each day to add new connections either from new prospects you have had the previous business day or by reviewing connections of your connections and looking for common ground to connect with new people.

Five - When a prospect contacts you by email through your website, make sure to not only add their email to your e-newsletter subscriber list, but invite them to connect with you online with LinkedIn or Facebook. Make sure you have noted in your privacy policy on your website what you will do before you do this to prevent a problem. Although you may not create a sale, by adding the individual to your network, you retain a



way to easily share information back and forth and keep connections up-to-date with new services offerings, promotions, new white papers, and other things that bring value to your relationship that may lead to a possible future sale or recommendation.

My Conclusion

What has surprised me from all of this was the friendliness, speed of response, and overall positive attitude from others eager to connect with me. Truly people are starving to connect and share with others. It just takes you to make the first step to reach out to them. By doing so, you build your network, your credibility, and enhance your LinkedIn profile allowing connections to view your "resume" and interact with you and even approach you for a business.

On my end, I have already recommended one previous client to a connection who was looking for a branding expert, and written one recommendation for another. So referrals and recommendations work both ways benefiting your connections from your relationships with others.

You can also send out notes to your connections and post news updates. In fact, I notified my connections that I was publishing this newsletter to share my experience and to encourage connections to subscribe to my monthly e-newsletter list.

There Are Options to LinkedIn - Facebook Is an Excellent Application!

Now one note about Facebook, although I am speaking solely about LinkedIn in this article, I do use and like Facebook. One of the big differences between LinkedIn and Facebook is the ability to add applications like Google Lively, YouTube videos, Grow a Plant, and Flairs to your profile. These are very cool interactive widgets that are easy to add, and add color to your profile, and interest to your profile page, and allow you to interact with "friends" in a fun way.

Additionally, I like that you can instant message other connections directly from Facebook by clicking the icon in the bottom right of the page. There are more cool interactive features on Facebook from my point of view than for LinkedIn, but I find LinkedIn simpler to use on a daily basis.

Which social networking system you use is really best based on where your colleagues and clients have migrated. Whichever one you choose, make a small time investment to reap big benefits. I think that you will find out just like I did your relationships with clients, prospects, and other people will be richer for their use.

Ready to Try Out Some of These Social Networking Sites Yourself?

If you are ready to try out social networking, it is easy. Just visit [LinkedIn](#) or [Facebook](#) to set up a free account and get rolling. You can send me an email invitation as I would be glad to be your first connection for Facebook at nmccord56@msn.com or to nancy@mccordweb.com for LinkedIn. I'll look forward to meeting and sharing with you online at either LinkedIn or Facebook.

Want to Find Out More? Visit My Social Networking Sites

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