

LinkedIn[®] or Lose Out

In 50 Words Or Less

- More than 100 million professionals worldwide have joined LinkedIn, the online professional networking site, but many still do not use it.
- LinkedIn helps you see your connections with colleagues and friends, and their colleagues and friends.
- LinkedIn may help you discover your next job, customer or opportunity.

10 reasons why now is the time to **get active on LinkedIn**

by Wayne Breitbarth

WHICH OF THESE

statements applies to your current situation?

- I am tired of people asking me to join their LinkedIn network.
- I have no idea what to do after I connect with someone.
- I don't want to join LinkedIn because I'm worried my boss will think I'm looking for a new job.
- I can't figure out why complete strangers are asking me to join their LinkedIn network.
- I can't believe it would make any sense for me to put all that information about myself on the internet.
- I don't really understand the popularity of Facebook. Why would LinkedIn be any different?
- I don't have time to check one more set of emails.
- I joined LinkedIn, but I'm not really sure how to get the most benefit from using it.

Chances are, you can relate to at least one of these statements, and you're waiting for that revelation about what the fuss is all about. You're asking why you should get serious about this thing called LinkedIn.

There are plenty of reasons you should get excited about this social networking tool. After you wade through all the hype, you'll see some of the realities about how valuable this website can be for job seekers and business professionals who want to do a better job and get improved results.

LinkedIn launch

LinkedIn was unveiled May 5, 2003, for the purpose of professional networking. The five LinkedIn founders—Reid Hoffman, Allen Blue, Jean-Luc Vaillant, Eric Ly and Konstantin Guericke—invited about 350 of their most important contacts to join. At the end of its first month of operation, LinkedIn had 4,500 members in the network. By the end of the first year, it had 81,000 members.¹

This March, LinkedIn reached another major milestone: 100 million registered professionals worldwide.

Jeff Weiner, LinkedIn's CEO, wrote in his blog that the network was "growing at roughly 1 million new LinkedIn members every week."²

Three years ago, I was not on LinkedIn at all—or any other social media platform for that matter—and I was darn proud of it. Not only was I a non-user, but I was also a complete skeptic.

As an experienced 50-year-old busi-

nessman, I felt pretty confident I would be able to outrun this thing called social media. In other words, even if the fad turned out to be a legitimate business tool, by then I certainly would be enjoying life in a nice retirement community.

As the owner of an office furniture dealership, however, I was experiencing the effects of the depressed economy and looking for ways to connect with people who needed my products and services. Finding myself in a hotel room with some time on my hands one day, I went to LinkedIn and began poking around the site.

I started reading about LinkedIn's membership: 35 million business professionals; average household income of \$107,000; those with college degrees or post graduate work at 77%; business decision makers at 49%.³

This was the kind of company I wanted to keep. Almost immediately, I established an account and began

connecting with people from my past, including college classmates and employees of many companies I had worked with in the Milwaukee area during the past 30 years.

In response to my newfound enthusiasm, friends and colleagues began asking me questions about LinkedIn. I would invite them into our company's boardroom and spend time showing them how they, too, could use LinkedIn to help their careers and grow their businesses.

These informal get-togethers quickly turned into formal classes. Three years later, I have taught more than 10,000 business professionals not only how to use LinkedIn, but also how to use it with a strategic business purpose. In addition, I've written a book on using LinkedIn.⁴

Realize the benefits

During my transformation from skeptic to believer, I've learned the benefits LinkedIn can bring to users who want to further their careers, either by strengthening their current job situation or building bridges with others on new opportunities.

Maybe you'll stop hoping LinkedIn will go away and start investigating how it can help you grow your network and, in turn, discover your next job, customer or opportunity. Here are a few facts to help sway you:

1 LinkedIn is the largest and best database for finding business professionals in the world.

With millions of LinkedIn members around the globe, never in your lifetime have you had an opportunity to keyword search such an immense database to find just the right person.

Whether that person is a potential employer, customer, vendor, supplier, strategic partner or maybe just a speaker for your upcoming event, LinkedIn will help you find a person who meets your specific criteria.

Finding is just the beginning of the story. You can also learn how you can be connected to that individual. LinkedIn enables you to leverage the relationships you have developed over the years to make contact with that person—somewhat similar to the Kevin Bacon six degrees separation trivia game.

2 You can see relationships that exist between your friends and their friends.

Consider LinkedIn your own set of 3-D or X-ray glasses to see who knows whom. After you connect with someone on LinkedIn, you can then see who they know and who their friends know—three degrees of separation. The bigger your current offline network, the bigger your LinkedIn network

LISTEN IN

Hear QP's latest Author Audio segment with Wayne Breitbarth as he discusses more about LinkedIn and how to use the networking tool to advance your career. You can find the link to the interview at www.qualityprogress.com.

will be and the more help you will be able to get from that expanded network.

In my case, for every person I have in the first level of my LinkedIn network, I have 165 individuals at the second level and 4,300 third-level connections. In total, I have access to more than 10 million people—any one of whom may be the person who can help me accomplish my goals. Remember, these relationships have always existed, but I just couldn't see them.

3 You and information about your organization are now keyword searchable in the world's largest business database.

Finding contacts is one side of the equation, but the other side is that you will be found in this database if you optimize your personal and company profiles. For many users, LinkedIn has become the way to find new companies and people with whom to work. By strategically crafting your profile, you can make sure you and your company come up high in the search results when people are looking for someone with your expertise, products or services.

In the past, the lion's share of a organization's marketing was done through marketing and PR departments. With LinkedIn, every employee can use his or her profile to promote the strengths and services of the organization, and more than 100 million sets of eyes can view this information. Best of all, it's free.

4 Your competitors are undoubtedly using LinkedIn, and you can keep an eye on them.

If you are trying to gain some ground on your competitors, monitoring their individual and organizational profiles can prove to be very useful.

LinkedIn has features that allow you to "stalk" them in a legal and helpful way. Viewing the recommendations they have received will give you a window into their customer and supplier base. Seeing what LinkedIn groups they belong to may give you some ideas about what groups you should join. Knowing who is coming and going from their organization may open the door for you to take advantage of some type of future opportunity.

5 We could all use a free 24/7 virtual assistant.

Several "save" type features on LinkedIn will provide you with updates on people, job openings, companies and events you have defined as important to you. Updates on new relationships between people, changes at companies, industry discussions and jobs can be delivered right to your email's inbox.

GROUPS ON LINKEDIN

LinkedIn has hundreds of groups that touch quality and other related disciplines. You can find groups you might want to belong to by first clicking on the "Groups" tab. There, you have options to search groups, review suggestions on the groups you want to join.

You might even want to create your own group. You also can look at individual profiles of people you are connected to and see which groups they belong to. This might give you more leads.

The following is a sampling of quality-related groups you might want to join:

- **Quality Progress:** 1,140 members.
- **ASQ—American Society for Quality:** 26,053 members.
- **Continuous Improvement, Six Sigma and Lean Group:** Enables networking and the ad hoc exchange of ideas among practitioners of Six Sigma, lean and other continuous improvement methods. 29,161 members.
- **ISO 9001:** Covers topics related to ISO 9001 and quality management. 3,177 members.
- **Lean Six Sigma:** Billed as a group for lean Six Sigma professionals and practitioners to "network, develop business, jobs, Q&A, best practice sharing and relationship building." 73,068 members.
- **QualityNet—Quality Professionals Network:** Billed as a group "to benefit from the power of networking - seeking help and answers. Share knowledge and information." 5,056 members
- **Supply Chain Today:** Covers topics including procurement strategy, logistics, lean Six Sigma, business sourcing and project management. 42,426 members.

6 More business is being transacted online.

Consider today's typical shopping experience—everything from books and cars to professional services and industrial supplies. It generally starts with an online search and investigation.

If a potential customer looks on LinkedIn and finds your products or services being described completely and compellingly, and recommended by credible sources, the potential customer may look no further. If you are not on LinkedIn, potential customers will probably find (and perhaps buy from) one of your competitors.

Having a company profile on LinkedIn, along with individual profiles for every employee, will increase your chances of being found, your story being heard and your return on investment improving.

7 Your profile, or "résumé on steroids," will display your credibility and expertise.

A LinkedIn profile allows you to share with the world your unique personal and corporate story, and offers the

ability to enumerate the products and services you offer. Your profile should be compelling, thorough and action oriented.

The recommendations section enables you to post testimonials of satisfied customers and business partners. You also can include links to websites, slide shows, company brochures and other documents that increase your credibility. If used strategically, these features and tools will put you ahead of your competitors when people are conducting their online research prior to a call or other contact.

8 Experts from throughout the world are available to answer your business questions. Taking advantage of the groups, discussions, answers and status-update features of LinkedIn makes it simple to find answers to those challenging issues you are facing. Someone in the world—and maybe even in your network—has undoubtedly encountered the same situation, and LinkedIn allows you to capitalize on that person's experience and uncover the answer to your question.

In addition, taking part in discussions and sharing your knowledge and expertise with others enables you to become recognized as an expert in your field. After you have established a high level of credibility on LinkedIn, people will be much more interested in your products and services.

9 Researching companies and the people who work there just got much easier. Are you trying to get a feel for a company you are targeting for a career move or business opportunity? LinkedIn will not only help you learn who works for that company, but also who previously worked there, where they went to school, how much experience they have, which customers are recommending them and much more.

This is just the tip of the iceberg of information you get in the company profile section of LinkedIn, which is continuously adding new features. Because knowledge is power, the more time you spend investigating this

SOCIAL SETTING

Read Babette Burdick's "Social Graces," an overview of social networking and ways to establish your presence online in the January 2011 *Quality Progress*. Visit <http://asq.org/quality-progress/2010/01/career-development/social-graces.html>, or get there directly by using your smartphone and a free QR app to scan this code.



company profile section, the more you will make this your must-do step before contacting a company.

10 It is free and easy. LinkedIn offers upgraded services for a monthly fee, but the vast majority of people will be able to accomplish their goals with a free account. I have found no reason to upgrade my own account.

As a baby boomer, I certainly understand that "easy" is a relative term, especially when it relates to new technology. But, I have found that most people who read up on LinkedIn and become familiar with its features can, in just one weekend, create a compelling profile, invite friends and business associates to join their LinkedIn network, and search for new people and opportunities.

Substance to sell

If you are an experienced professional, you already have a leg up on the younger generation when using LinkedIn. Those in the Facebook generation may grasp the nuts and bolts of the site more quickly, but the more experienced businessperson will undoubtedly have a more substantial and compelling profile, as well as a more extensive and well-connected professional network. The wealth of experience you have gained and the relationships you have formed through the years will be an integral part of the success you will enjoy from using LinkedIn.

The next move is yours. I am not expecting everyone who reads this article to jump right in and become a LinkedIn expert over a weekend. What I do hope, however, is that you now understand the potential of this powerful tool.

Whether you decide to jump on the LinkedIn train or stay on the platform, one thing is certain: Your colleagues and competitors are on board and going full speed ahead. **QP**

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