

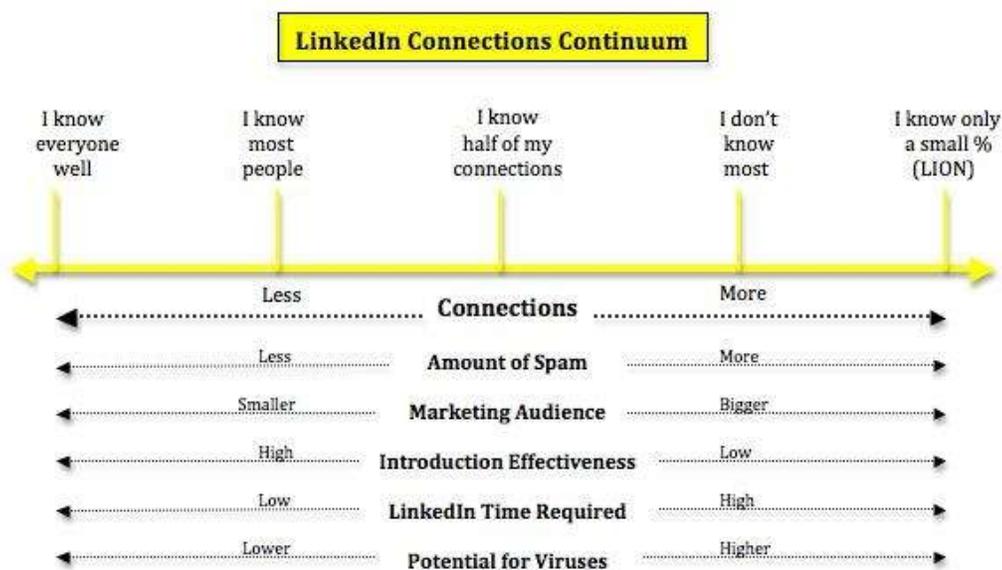
LINKEDIN CONNECTIONS CONTINUUM

THE GREAT LINKEDIN DEBATE – QUALITY vs. QUANTITY

I am a firm believer in your network being people you trust, at least in the early stages of your LinkedIn journey. Webster defines trust as "one in which confidence is placed" or "reliance on character, ability, strength or truth." My personal definition has always been someone you know, love, care about, and would help if he/she called you.

You have to come up with your own definition of *trust* each and every day and not just for LinkedIn purposes. LinkedIn was designed for you to connect with people you trust. I know this because if you go to your Network Statistics (go to the top toolbar under Contacts, then select Network Statistics), you will see in big green letters "Your Network of Trusted Professionals."

All this being said, LinkedIn can be one heck of a tool to meet people you don't know but would like to know, but this is where some of the problems begin. As I was thinking about how to address this quality versus quantity debate, I came up with a visualization tool that outlines some of the issues and questions, and I am calling it the LinkedIn Connections Continuum. It is definitely a work in process, but I think you will get the feel for it if you just step back and think about it for a while.



What I would like to do next is share with you what my strategy/approach has been during my time on LinkedIn as it relates to the great quality versus quantity debate.

For my first 18 months or so on LinkedIn, I was simply the owner of an office furniture dealership doing business mostly in southeastern Wisconsin, but I did quite a bit of LinkedIn training on the side for the

purpose of developing that office furniture business. I knew all 400 or so first-level connections in my LinkedIn network, and I was sure that if I wanted to help anyone in that network get introduced to another of the 400 people, I could (and did) do just that.

Then during all my training classes, I met some very nice people, not necessarily trusted but not "untrusted" either. I just didn't know them well enough to fit my definition that I mentioned earlier.

That being said, they wanted to connect with me because, after all, I was the guy who helped many of them "see the light" on the power of LinkedIn. I always joked around in my classes that if you want to connect with me in the appropriate way (tell me where we met and why we might like to be connected), I would accept that invitation. But if in a year or two I find that you are connected to someone who is moving, growing, remodeling or expanding their business and might need my office furniture expertise and help, I sure hope you will remember the bald guy who helped you with LinkedIn when I ask you to introduce me to your friend.

As time continued to pass, my passion and interest in LinkedIn went past the best business development tool I have ever had for my office furniture business and into a business of its own. At that time I realized that people all over the world were interested in connecting with me. Most of them would state in their invitation that they were learning, growing, and getting lots of benefit out of my information or a friend of theirs recommended that they start following my advice and information because it could help them as well.

It was then that I became more of an open networker but no where near the strategy of a LION, which stands for LinkedIn Open Networker. These people accept any and all requests. As a matter of fact, they usually have run out of invitations and are asking people to invite them.

My thought is that I look forward to helping these people who are all over the world, and maybe someday they will invite me to their little corner of the world to speak/teach/train a group from their company or other organization. As a matter of fact, this just happened recently, where a person whom I met sent me a LinkedIn invitation saying some of these things and subsequently hired me to do a LinkedIn webinar for several of their offices on the East Coast.

I share this because it shows that over time my strategy on LinkedIn as it relates to who I let into my network has changed, but it has changed strategically, and yours could do the same. The key is still who do you want to meet, and LinkedIn has all kinds of features that can help you do that—and I don't mean just the Introduction feature, which is designed to get an introduction "friend to friend," but more open meeting features, like Groups, Answers, Status Updates, etc.

The action step for you now is to think about where you are currently on the LinkedIn Connections Continuum and whether that spot is getting you what you strategically want to get out of your efforts on LinkedIn. But keep in mind that moving out further to the right has its benefits but some issues you may have to manage through as well.

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