

Social Building Blocks for Your Career How to Build Relationships That Matter!

From the previous article we discussed how to create a robust profile, now it's time to put it to good use! As previously mentioned, having a good number of contacts is important but it's **not** how many you have rather it's the quality of the network that's **more** important. Social networks are really no different than personal networks, the more you spend time with them and the more you nurture them, the more they reciprocate.

So whether you are using LinkedIn for job hunting, requesting information from colleagues or looking for the perfect candidate to fill a role, to do this effectively, it's all about building real and useful relationships with others. When you are at a meeting, face to face with other professionals, you work hard to ensure that they understand you and know who you really are. This practice must be part of your social media strategy as well. It's easy to build a relationship face to face or over the phone as that is what most of us are accustomed to. Doing so in a social media context is slightly different in that it is more content driven, however, it is important to let your personality and sincerity shine through so those who know you see that in your content and words while those that don't are able to get an idea of who you are.

The best way to grow your relationship in your online presence is to add value to it by sharing as you would in person. Everything that you know about your industry is useful to someone, somewhere. Share, share, share!

Adding Connections

Building relationships starts by adding connections. Your search for new connections can begin close to home. You have already built a personal network that includes family and friends and business colleagues, so it makes sense to find out if these people are part of the LinkedIn world already. This can be done easily by using the importing function available under the Contacts tab at the top of the LinkedIn page. Simply identify where your existing email contacts are stored on your system (Outlook, Yahoo, etc.) and let LinkedIn do all the work. It will search your records and provide you with a list of your contacts already using LinkedIn. It will then ask you if you would like to invite these individuals to connect. Anyone in your address book who isn't currently a member of LinkedIn is also available by inviting them to join and build their own network. LinkedIn generates a generic message on your behalf as the invitation goes out but I highly recommend that you "personalize it" by entering your own message in the box provided. This is the first personal touch that your contacts get from you so make it represent you fully.

You can also search directly for people you know by name on LinkedIn. Enter a name into the Search box provided at the top right of the screen and if the individual you are looking for is on LinkedIn, you can invite them to connect with you. As you locate more people that you are looking for, invite them to connect.

Each person who appears in your search results will be identified based on how closely connected you are. There are several levels including 1) Your direct connections, 2) Two degrees away (these are friends of your connections) and 3) Three degrees away (friends of your friends). All of these people are reachable either directly or through an introduction from one of your network members.

There are a number of ways that you can add someone to your network. The invitation page will provide you with a list of ways in which you might know the individual that you are trying to connect with. If you know this person, it will be an easy matter to connect simply by clicking on “We’ve Done Business Together” then select the company that is most relevant to the relationship you, or click “Friend” if it is someone you know personally.

You may encounter the phrase “Not in your network” when attempting to connect with someone. This can generally be easily overcome through several means by either connecting through a mutual friend by asking for an introduction to your target connection, by adding them as a friend yourself or by using their email if you have it. LinkedIn will direct you as you proceed.

As you add connections and build your network, you will notice a box to your right hand side of your home page entitled “People You May Know”. This will provide a short list of people who, based on your profile and contact list, you may also wish to connect with. Pay close attention to this list. You may find extremely strong connections here. If there is someone in the list with whom you would like to connect, simply click on their name and you will be taken to the standard LinkedIn connection box to create your invitation. Remember, to make it personal so that the individual will know how important they are to you!

Building Relationships

On Your Own

As you accumulate more connections on LinkedIn, your network will grow exponentially. Check the Statistics tab to see how far-reaching your network is with even a few contacts. As mentioned above, there are three levels of separation used on the LinkedIn network and your reach is quite broad. Develop your network with care. Networking online is about the same thing as networking in the office or a social function – building relationships.

Relationships are the bread and butter of our lives and we all benefit most when we put effort into developing and maintaining them. Plan to spend time each day (or at least each week) reaching out to your network of contacts. You can share information such as industry news, significant links to interesting articles you’ve read, topics you find interesting and even sharing a quote that gave you a much needed laugh. Ask pointed and interesting questions to get discussions flowing or even provide insight into current issues. Provide timely relevant information that will keep you memorable to others. A good rule of thumb is to provide more than you ask for. Keeping your comments current keeps you “top of mind” for others especially when you can provide information they need.

Groups

Another way to connect, stay current and demonstrate your expertise is to join LinkedIn groups. Joining groups is also a very effective way of making connections and gives you the opportunity to connect with people you may not know now but will in the future because of the group connection.

On LinkedIn, there is a group for virtually everything. There are industry specific, political interest, product information, educational, social and many, many more. Visit the “Groups” tab on your home page and find the ones that are relevant to your objectives. Select a few and request to join. Within these forums, you can pose your own questions and add your thoughts to discussions. This can be an extremely effective way to build your network and learn about the companies that interest you personally or professionally. The names of the groups that you join will be displayed in your profile in order that others may understand your interests and connect with you in those environments. If you are a Human Resources Professional, you might want to join the HRPAs as an example of an industry group that may be of interest to you.

As well, you will often find an industry-specific job posting board within the group. Just click on the “Jobs” tab within the group to see recently posted opportunities or to post one of your own.

Starting Your Own Group

You can even start your own group based on a specific subject matter or interest. Remember, though, the groups forum is designed to provide a tool to communicate news and views on specific subject matter. If you are going to start a new group, make sure that it reflects you and that you are able to commit some time to making it a place where people in your industry or subject matter want to spend their time. Offer interesting questions, invite others to provide their ideas ... and, above all, name your group based on keywords that people will search for and that they will remember. Update regularly and keep a close eye on the posts of others. It is your responsibility to keep your group on task.

Building a professional network on LinkedIn is a quick and easy process that can provide you with huge benefits if you are willing to put the effort into nurturing it into a close-knit and reputable place for others to find insight and benefit.

If you have any more LinkedIn questions, please let me know and I'll address them in follow up articles.

Take care,

Lotte