

Leveraging LinkedIn's Networking Power

By Cherish Flieder

“I'd like to add you to my professional network on LinkedIn.”

You may have been sent an e-mail with this exact request on more than one occasion by a friend or colleague. If you have dismissed this invitation as just another one of those time wasting, friend collecting sites, then you may be at a considerable disadvantage.

So, if it's **that** important, what exactly **is** LinkedIn you ask . . . and that's a great question!

LinkedIn, found online at <http://www.linkedin.com>, is by far the largest and most professional, business-oriented, social media, networking site on the World Wide Web. Although it has only been around since 2002, it has over 25 million participants worldwide and grows at the rate of over 130,000 members each week!

LinkedIn is easy to use and opens the doors of opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with key players of the human race, in a new and effective way. The basic concept of how it works beckons back to the theory of “six degrees of separation.” On LinkedIn it will only show you up to three degrees of separation, but that alone will connect you to millions of professionals once you start linking up with other users. Your network will consist of your connections (1st), your connections' connections (2nd), and then the connections to which they are connected (3rd). This dynamic function will start to make more sense as you begin see it in action.

It's a good idea to create and maintain a professional LinkedIn profile page if you want:

- a beneficial way to promote your brand, products and/or services online
- to meet key players in your areas of expertise
- to discover new business or job opportunities
- to learn about a new industry in which you hope to expand
- to reconnect with colleagues, classmates and clients

10 Tips to Making the Most of Your LinkedIn Profile

1. Upload a professional photo of your face

The first thing to realize, is that this site is designed to connect you will other humans. Having your picture uploaded will give people the reassurance that you are indeed a real human they are connecting to and not a random spammer. This will also serve as an excellent reminder that you are the “John Smith” (or whatever your name is) that they know and trust, with whom they want to connect.

2. Use the URL links to encourage people to visit your websites

Since this is a “professional” site, it doesn't give you the options to customize the colors and add special designed backgrounds to your profile. The only way people will ever be able to see your books, content and other services you offer, is through a link to your online website and blog, if you have one.

3. Carefully write your summary

Your summary gives you the opportunity to write passionately and intelligently about who you are as a professional. You should include an overview of your career experience and goals, as well as touch on your areas of expertise. If you desire to be picked up in the search engines, use important keywords that are popular search terms in your field. You might also consider using your full name in the summary (i.e. write in the third person), if you want people to find you at the top of the list when they conduct a search of your name on LinkedIn.

4. Add your current company job description, honors and awards

These details are significant as they establish your experience and expertise. Also, don't forget to include past companies, education, affiliations, and activities. Again, use keywords and terms that are relevant to your industry as you write your descriptions.

5. Only send invites to people you know from real world relationships and those you have a lot in common with in the digital world

Quality is more important than quantity. Remember, the idea behind this site is to gather a group of connections of people you know and trust, so you can do business with them and recommend them to others. When you send an invite, be sure to remind them who you are and how they should know you. If you don't know them, explain how you found out about them, introduce yourself, and explain why it is mutually beneficial to link to one another. There is also an easy to use introduction feature if someone you want to know is already in your network, a friend of a friend perhaps. **NEVER** try to connect with someone out of the blue without explanation and do not spam people for links. These tactics will not help, and even worse, you will risk getting your privileges suspended if you get tagged with the "I don't know this person" link too many times.

6. Share your expertise with the world

Go to the "answers" section, search for questions in your areas of expertise, and show off what you know to your network by answering other member's questions. This area also gives you the opportunity to link to expert websites with every answer you provide. If you **are** the established expert, link to your own site. You may also ask advice of your industry members, which will keep you informed while opening up new doors of networking possibilities. Either way, you will be credited in the community for active participation, which is always a good thing, if you want people to remember you.

7. Give and ask for recommendations

There is no better way to see a person's track record than with a succession of positive reviews of past job performance. Also, you will want to practice the art of returning one good recommendation for another. Your generosity in spending a little time in this area may just pay off in spades.

8. Join relevant groups

Once your LinkedIn profile is up and running, the next step is to find groups with which you have common professional interests and apply to be a member. Once you are accepted into a group, you can connect with other members and network within the field. You may also participate in the new group discussion forum on topics of mutual professional interest. This is another wonderful place to ask and answer questions in a more specific and exclusive format.

To find out about groups that are specific to your industry, just do a simple search or look to see in which groups your connections are participating. Also, look to see if your long time professional membership groups have an online LinkedIn version and join those at well. If they are not yet represented, encourage them to start a group on LinkedIn and add another lively benefit to their membership package.

9. Share the link to your profile

Your "public profile" URL is listed on your profile page. You can add it to your e-mail signature, blog links or website contact page for starters. When you are out networking face-to-face with people you have come to know, don't forget to encourage them to connect with you on LinkedIn. You could even print it on your business card as a point of reference. There are many ways to creatively spread the word about your profile and integrate LinkedIn with your other on and offline marketing efforts.

10. Don't try to do this in one day

Building an effective profile can be an overwhelming task that is best approached a few minutes each day or an hour each week. Check back regularly to send notes to your connections, approve and send new invitations, answer questions, add recommendations, update your status, and polish your profile.

5 Things I Love About LinkedIn

- LinkedIn helps me to “stay in touch” and “touch base” with people that are important to me. Often, we get so busy that we never follow up on important connections and we loose out in the long run. LinkedIn is a superior tool for keeping you cognizant of your important connections and gives you an easy way to contact with them when the time is right.
- LinkedIn gives you a visual reference of your network, helping you readily discover commonalities. You can find someone with a skill you desire. You can post jobs or even apply for them online. When you are looking to join or serve with a new company, you can use LinkedIn to conduct preparatory research. LinkedIn makes it easy to discover which connections you have working with that company or who is associated with it, even before you have your first interview.
- LinkedIn is a great way to learn about any industry. You can see what other people are up to, see how they are promoting themselves and view their notable accomplishments.
- LinkedIn manages my database of connections for me. I don't have to go and look up an e-mail for anyone that is connected to me or even open up my e-mail composer to send out a message. It gives me an instant connection to their e-mail in-box from their profile page.
- LinkedIn makes it simple for each member to keep their own information current for the benefit of the community. This feature helps users quickly access updated job summaries, aspirations, interests, status, website links, and more.

One last thing about social media sites . . . there are **so many** of them out there. If you are using them for your business you will need to carefully select the ones that help you best maintain professional connections and ultimately keep your brand in front of your clients. Professionally, I use [Plaxo](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), in addition to LinkedIn. [MySpace](#) can be good too, if you approach it with a professional touch. But, if you only choose one, I urge you to go with LinkedIn, as it will give you the most professional online presence and effective online networking available.

About the Author: Cherish Flieder is a visionary illustrator, designer, art licensor, and marketer. She loves the adventure of discovery and freely teaches others what she has learned. Cherish is the founder of [Cherished Solutions, llc](#) and art licensing brands [Something to Cherish®](#) and [Painting for Life™](#). She assists publishers, manufacturers and other niche businesses with art services and thoughtful marketing strategies. She and her team work on the development of custom designs and licensed illustrations for consumer goods, product collections, books (especially children's books), packaging, print, web, and marketing. Of course if you want to know more, feel free to visit Cherish's LinkedIn profile at: <http://www.linkedin.com/in/cherish>.

Permission to re-publish this article in its complete form is permissible with the inclusion the "About the Author" section.