

‘LinkedIn’ as a Lead Generation Tool

The Evolve “How to” Guide

10 Tips

For maximising your LinkedIn presence

1. **Manage your profile:** Make sure your profile is complete and up to date. Whenever you reach out to a lead you can be sure they’ll be checking out your profile.
2. Include a **professional photo** of yourself in the profile.
3. **Grow your numbers:** Set weekly targets for the amount of new Linked In contacts you want to make. Remember the more connections you have the better chance you have of creating sales leads from your 2nd and 3rd degree connections.
4. **Answer questions:** Responding to relevant questions on Linked In can be a great way to raise your visibility, increase your influence and generate some excellent business leads.
5. Use **LinkedIn’s Direct Ads**: This is a newish feature on LinkedIn. It allows you to push relevant ads to LinkedIn subscribers targeted by profile / demographic information. It works in a very similar way to ad targeting via Google Ad Words.
6. **Don’t Spam:** Make sure that people you contact want to hear from you and that your message is relevant. Don’t spam with mail shots!
7. **Who has been checking you out?** Most sellers don’t think about this, but this could be a great way to generate sales’ suspects.’ Following up with people who view your profile could be a great way to measure their interest in your business offering.
8. **Only connect with people you know:** Your professional network should be just that – a professional way to connect with people you know or have an established professional relationship with
9. Use widgets to **integrate other tools**, such as importing your blog entries or Twitter stream into your profile.
10. **Conduct polls and market research:** Then share the results.

Simply having a LinkedIn account is not enough – you must have a strategy and a plan!

Professional sales people frequently tell me they have a LinkedIn account, but haven’t yet figured out its capability or potential. Even those who use LinkedIn on a regular basis often run out of ideas and steam after a short while. Initially there is a frenzy of activity linking up with friends, college classmates, former work colleagues etc. But then what to do once you have started to gather all these new networking contacts? Many users become inactive very quickly and only dip in and out when prompted by an invitation from someone else.

The issue is that very few sellers have taken time out to devise a social media sales strategy. How should you use LinkedIn? How should you participate? What will work for your industry or sector? How can you keep things fresh? How can you generate business leads from LinkedIn? In this special report we will suggest practical tips and ideas to make Linked In part of your everyday prospecting routine so as to win more business. We hope you find it useful.

Evolve Consultants



The Train has left the station make sure you get on board!

- Fact 1: LinkedIn has almost 100 million members globally.
- Fact 2: LinkedIn has over 20 million members in Europe.
- Fact 3: Ireland is one of the fastest growing LinkedIn bases in the world. [Source: comScore Media Metrix]

* Figures by Krishna De

What's your LinkedIn strategy?

In the Hollywood blockbuster movie "Field of Dreams" a secret voice tells Kevin Costner to construct a baseball pitch. The voice continually tells Costner "build it and they will come." Unfortunately, many professional sellers appear to have seen this movie and tend to base their LinkedIn strategy on the principle of "build your personal profile and they (the business leads) will come. Wrong! You can't expect to generate business leads by simply creating a profile.

So how do you leverage your connections and create real business opportunities? The first step is to get a clear LinkedIn business strategy.

What do you want to use LinkedIn for?

In the bigger scheme of things your business may not be interested in the various social media sites out there. Indeed, many sales professionals tell me all they care about is exceeding sales targets, meeting new sales prospects and up selling to existing clients. The fact is many social sites have tools that might help do this. You need to work out if your target market hang out at LinkedIn - if not, move on, but at least clarify if it's right for you. Answering some of the following questions will help you do this.

- Why do you want to get involved in Social media networking?
- Which site social media sites are right for your business?
- What risks / opportunities are inherent to each social site?
- How engaged is your target market?
- Which social media do your target market use?
- What do you want to do?
 - Communicate with existing clients
 - Position yourself as an expert / build profile
 - Look for referrals
 - Meet potential clients
 - Find strategic partners/complimentary solution providers
 - Grow your network
 - Create focus groups

*Next column



Contd.

- Who do I want to reach?
- Is my lead generation strategy consistent with the rules and etiquette of LinkedIn?
- How often will I engage? How much time should it take?
- How will I engage?

Will you be an open networker (LION - LinkedIn open networker) who will encourage connections from anybody on LinkedIn or do you intend only connecting with people you know (IKY or I Know You). There are pros and cons for both approaches, and you need to determine which strategy is the best fit for your objectives.

- How will you maintain your LinkedIn presence?
- How will you increase your visibility on an on going basis?
- How will you move new connections on to the next step in your sales funnel?
- How will you measure the effectiveness of your LinkedIn activities?
- What might the potential return on investment be?
- What resources need to be put in place to maximize the LinkedIn opportunity?
- Who are they key players from your company that need to be involved in putting your LinkedIn strategy together?
- Who are the key players who will need to get involved with the on going use and management of LinkedIn?

If you don't have some clear goals or strategies in mind for LinkedIn, then you'll end up either wasting lost of time trying to muddle your way around its different tools and or you will end up having a dormant account that makes you look like "Johnny no mates" to people who come across your profile.

Quick Tip: Find decision makers with the advanced search option. You can search for sales prospects using the advanced search option. Think of some names on your target – you can use the advanced search option to find them by searching by name, job title, company, previous company etc. This can provide you with great background info before contacting them.

Building Credibility

1. Fill in everything – a.k.a. – “optimise your profile”

A profile becomes optimised when you have completely filled in every field in the profile set up and when it offers information others are seeking. This includes using key words in your profile and creating content that others visiting your profile may be interested in..

2. Make announcements – use the “status update” option

The status update option should be used on a regular basis to announce business related news such as product enhancements, new blogs, job advertisements, new contracts landed etc. This tool should have a direct link to your company website if readers require more detail. Remember every announcement should be relevant, short, concise and very clear.

3. Publish articles / newsletters via LinkedIn

Here at Evolve we publish all our newsletters, articles, blogs and other resources via LinkedIn. These publications assist in optimising traffic to our website, create more LinkedIn requests to connect, and also help to establish / maintain our position as experts in our own field. Remember similarity creates automatic rapport and exclusivity creates urgency – both of which can be ethically leveraged for lead generation purposes.

4. Get involved in “groups”

Joining appropriate groups brings a number of advantages to the LinkedIn user. The obvious one is that it connects you with new networking contacts. But particularly, where membership of the group is not an automatic thing, it perceptually creates an appearance of trust and expertise – as you were vetted to gain entry.

5. Testimonials & recommendations

Testimonials are very important. Your company probably has plenty of references for its products from happy clients. However, your LinkedIn testimonials should be about you not your company or your products. What value do your clients receive by working with you? These testimonials should be about how much they trust you and how they regard the business relationship you have with them. Invite people who rate you as a genuine business partner to a recommendation.

- Be warned. Avoid doing “sweetheart testimonials”, as in ‘you write one for me and I’ll write one for you.’ Be aware people check out the source of your testimonials and they will often see that the “sweet heart deal” was reciprocally done on the same date!

6. Once you connect you **must keep the relationship** going by working your net. That’s why it’s called the form of introductions, useful web links, appropriate article / blog links etc. This creates real credibility.

Top ten LinkedIn user mistakes made

1. **Unprofessional photo.** Should be a business photo that represents exactly as people see you in your day-to-day work environment.

2. **Not listing your specific URLs.** You can change your URL where it says Public Profile/edit. Use your name, because this is a public link that you can use in marketing materials. Do this now before somebody else takes it.

3. **Making direct sales pitches.** Here at Evolve we are part of the human resources business community. So I often join appropriate HR groups on LinkedIn. Sometimes, when joining a new group I notice certain professions (often recruitment consultants) are barred from joining. This is because a small percentage of recruiters will try and sell directly to group members in the form of mail shot and generic spam marketing. This type of behaviour is not unique to recruiters and goes against all the principles of ethical networking as well as LinkedIn etiquette rules.

4. **Ignoring apps.** Using applications is a great way to bring your profile to the attention of others. There are applications that allow you post videos and slide presentations. Others allow you upload Amazon reading lists. Whilst others such as company buzz allows you track what customers are saying about you on the web. When you don’t utilise appropriate apps you are missing out on ways to help people learn more about your company and its offerings.

5. **Not joining relevant groups.** LinkedIn allows you to join up to 50 groups. Make sure that you join the ones that relate to you and your expertise

6. Doing ‘sweetheart’ recommendations (see point 5 in previous column)

7. **Not answering questions.** Your ability to do business with new contacts requires them to know and trust you. Answering questions and going out of your way to help creates trust, credibility, and positions you as an expert.

8. **Incomplete employment history.** Your employment history is a powerful tool for people to find you. It is common for people to search employees of companies they worked for in the past to reconnect with old friends and associates.

9. **Wrong email address.** Using your personal or info@company.ie as your contact email. Unless you own the company, you should use a personal business email address.

10. Not adding your LinkedIn profile address to your **email signature.**

Recommendations

Recommendations are a valuable part of your LinkedIn profile and could be the one thing that gets you into a conversation with a new sales prospect. Make sure your recommendations are

- Current
- Representative of your work
- Representative of the target market you wish to connect with
- Reflect the views of people in positions of power within your client base not just entry level customers who like you

How to ask for that recommendation

Whilst there is an auto generated template for asking for recommendations, here are some useful things to consider when asking;

- In the subject line title ask the following question, "Are you able to write a recommendation about the work I'd did for your company in March?"
- Be specific; ask them to refer to what was good about the work.

Establishing a presence on LinkedIn is certainly worth 20 minutes a day. Here are six steps ideas to help you establish that habit.

1. Start each day by taking 1 minute to post an update to your profile. It could be a link to a blog, an article, an idea etc.
2. Spend 1 minute responding to any invites in your inbox.
3. Spend 5 minutes inviting new people to connect with you. Aim for three invites a day.
4. Spend 6 minutes going through the contact list of two of your connections and seek out some introductions.
5. Take 4 minutes to read through the current updates in your groups and respond to any questions.
6. Use your final 3 minutes to write a recommendation for someone.

Who are Evolve Consultants?

Founded in 1998, Evolve Consultants are Ireland's leading sales performance authority. We specialise in helping organisations' adapt the right sales framework for their business strategy. We offer a blended approach of consulting, training and coaching to help them get there and we have vast experience of working in the financial services industry.

- Sales strategy
- Sales process and execution
- Account management
- Sales deployment models
- Sales training and coaching
- Sales manager mentoring

Our approach to improving sales performance integrates every aspect of your organization's sales efforts. Our methods are practical and bespoke. Fundamentally, we believe we can help clarify your issues, focus your sales activities and most importantly help you significantly increase your sales numbers.

20 LINKEDIN MUST DO THINGS

1. Place your LinkedIn URL details on all your marketing material, including business cards, email signature, web sites and brochures.
2. Use lots of key words in your personal profile. Just like in Google, people use key words when they are looking for people and services via LinkedIn.
3. Join industry and alumni groups related to your business and past work history.
4. Always be updating. Update your status with examples of recent work.
5. Allow all your contacts access to your connections – otherwise why should they give you access to theirs.
6. If you are unsure of the background of a person or their reasons for asking to connect with you decline the invitation. Only connect with people whom you can ratify.
7. Connect to your sales targets and prospects before meeting them (if you can).
8. Update your LinkedIn profile with your other social media accounts.
9. Use LinkedIn and Twitter to direct people to useful articles, information and blogs on your website.
10. Only recommend people who you know very well. Don't do 'reciprocal recommendations' just for the sake of it – people see through it.
11. Consider publishing your presentations on your profile using a presentation application.
12. Trawl through two 1st level contacts a day and ask them for some introductions to their 1st level contacts.
13. Set up you profile to receive LinkedIn messages in your outlook inbox so you can respond right away.
14. Provide links to articles and content posted elsewhere, with a summary of why it's valuable to add to your credibility.
15. Offer discounts and special offers via LinkedIn ads.
16. Link people together. Put people together particularly where they may be able to do business with each other.
17. Make sure you import your vCards and contacts from other applications on a regular basis.
18. Add a video to your company profile.
19. If you are going to make a comment on LinkedIn – be brief, be direct, and make it useful.
20. Invite people to join LinkedIn. It's obviously to expand your network so invite people who know and trust you to join up.