

The Job Seeker's Guide to LinkedIn

A Strategic Approach to Leveraging
LinkedIn for Professional Success

By Michelle Merritt

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LinkedIn, the “professional social networking site,” has over 575 million registered members with over 260 million of those users actively engaging on the platform every month and 40% of those access it daily. Whether you love it or hate it, LinkedIn will benefit your career search if you use it properly.

Using LinkedIn is about more than just having an account. It's about leveraging the platform to connect with professionals, industry leaders, and your existing network. So how do you do that? Follow this guide to ensure LinkedIn success!

Section 1: Building Your Profile

U.S. News and World Report reports that approximately 95% of all recruiters use LinkedIn as a major sourcing tool to find top-tier candidates. With so many users on the site, a well thought out profile is key to getting their attention. Here are our top tips.

Protect your privacy. Many job seekers are concerned their current employers will be notified when they've updated their LinkedIn profiles.

- To prevent your updates from being shared in your connections' newsfeeds, go to click "Me" in the top right corner of your screen and select Settings and Privacy from the dropdown menu.
- From the Settings and Privacy page, click Privacy and scroll down to "Share job changes, education changes, and work anniversaries from profile." If you do not want to share this information, click "No"
- If you want to be noticed on LinkedIn, be sure to make your profile public. This will allow non-logged in members to find your profile via search engines such as Google.

Let recruiters know you're looking. LinkedIn gives you the option to let recruiters know you're open to being contacted, making your profile appear in their searches. If you're open to being recruited, be sure to turn on this feature in the privacy section of your account.

Start with a photo. That's right, you need a photo on your LinkedIn profile. Why? According to the LinkedIn talent blog, your profile is 14 times more likely to be viewed when you include a photo. Professional headshots are great but are not a requirement. Be sure the photo looks like you, is high resolution, and is a picture of only you.

Need additional inspiration? Search online for tips on choosing the right LinkedIn profile picture.

Add a banner image. That space behind your photo that stretches the width of your profile is called a banner image. This is a great space to add an extra image that highlights your story. Consider a skyline image of your city, a photo that highlights your mission, a picture of the product or service you offer, or perhaps tools you use every day. Steer clear of family photos, pets, or photos that are not framed properly.

Bonus Tip: Be sure to use attribution-free Creative Commons images that are free and legal to use. Unsplash.com is a great source for these, too.

Write your headline. Your headline tells people what you do and a little bit about who you are. You can choose the headline to default to your current title and company name, opt for something more general, or get creative. Remember, these headlines help make your profile searchable on platforms like Google so stick with headlines that are easy to understand and clearly state what you do. This is also a place to brag so enlisting a friend who knows you professionally might be good to give you an honest opinion.

About Section: Include the information from your resume's professional summary in your profile's About section. This should be the information that describes what sets you apart from your peers. Use adjectives that describe you as a leader, peer, and professional. Keep it to three sentences or less and be sure it's easy to skim. Additionally, if you include a Key Accomplishments Section in your resume, you can add it to this section below the summary.

Experience Section: With so many employers offering the ability to apply to positions via LinkedIn, it's important that each position listed mirrors your resume. Enter your title, company name (be sure to use their profile if available), and the dates (years only) of your employment. In the description section of each position, copy and paste the content from your resume. Remember, this content should be accomplishment-focused with results-oriented information. If you have examples of your work, consider uploading them in the media section of the position. This can be a great way for people to experience your work. Finally, if you do not want your updates to be broadcasted in the newsfeeds of your connections, click "off" in the Share with Network box.

Bonus Tip: Your experience section should only include positions from the previous 10-15 years unless the position directly impacts the type of work you plan to do next.

Education Section: This is your opportunity to include any educational experience you have included in your resume. List your degrees and the schools you received them from but do not include dates as this may contribute to age

discrimination. No need to include GPA or social activities unless they directly impact the type of position you are pursuing. Do not upload a copy of your diploma in the Media section.

If you, like most Americans, attended college but did not complete your degree, it's important to still list your education in this section. In the degree sections, simply list the field of study and 'coursework'. Example, undergraduate business coursework may be listed for someone who started but did not finish a bachelor's degree in Business Administration.

Bonus Tip: Do not include the high school you attended.

Licenses and Certifications: Include all certifications and licenses that are current and/or have been obtained in the previous ten years. List the certification and issuing organization. If appropriate, list the certification (aka license) I.D. number and the website where it can be verified (if applicable).

Volunteer Experience: Include all volunteer experiences you listed in your resume. List your position (aka Volunteer, Board Member, etc.), the organization name, and the dates (years only) you were involved. No need to list a description of the work you did unless it directly applies to the type of work you plan to do next and your paid experience is insufficient in that area.

Skills and Endorsements: This is your opportunity to include all of the skills you've built during your career. Think of this as the place to insert the keywords from the job descriptions you're interested in. LinkedIn is now offering a skills quiz that allows you to test your proficiency in a variety of software and technologies. From C++ to Sharepoint, these 15-minute assessments will verify your knowledge and provide you with a stamp of approval on your LinkedIn page. Don't worry, if you don't pass, they won't post your results.

Accomplishments: This section is slightly different than the accomplishments section of your resume but may include similar information. This is the location to highlight your publications, patents, honors, or awards. In addition, be

sure to include any courses you've completed that directly apply to the type of work you do/plan to do. Share your part in any compelling projects that demonstrate your experience here, too. Are you a member of any industry associations or organizations? Those will fit into this section, too. Lastly, include any foreign languages you speak and be sure to list your fluency level.

Recommendations: The recommendations section of LinkedIn is often overlooked but is one of the most important sections. This is the section that allows your colleagues, supervisors, customers, and direct reports to brag about you. It tells readers who you are as a professional and what it's like to work with you. Be sure to give recommendations to those you've worked with. You're not only doing them a service, but your profile is now seen by hiring managers who are viewing your colleagues' profile.

Section 2: Engage on LinkedIn

It's a common misconception that posting a well-curated profile is enough to make recruiters flood your inbox with stellar offers. While that's a fantastic fallacy, the truth is that a well-curated profile is only the first step in using LinkedIn as a job seeker. A great profile will make you searchable to hiring managers. Engagement will make hiring managers want to know you.

First Time LinkedIn User? If so, consider sharing your email list with LinkedIn. It will ask for permission to upload your email list, if you say yes, it will show you all the people from your phone or contact list that are currently on LinkedIn. From there, you can choose who to connect with.

Bonus Tip: Do not select all of your contacts without double checking who you're inviting to connect with you. It's likely you have forgotten that the coworker or ex mother-in-law you dislike is in your contact list. No need to bring that negativity to your LinkedIn relationships.

Follow industry leaders. Begin your LinkedIn engagement by searching for companies that are well known in your

industry. These could be companies you're interested in working for, those who are doing exciting work in your space, or even competitors. Search the company name and click the follow button on the company page. This will start to populate your newsfeed with the articles and posts from and about these companies.

Next, start following individuals who are experts in your field. These people could be people you already know from your industry or people you've heard about but have never met. Here are a couple ways to find them:

- 1) Once you've followed a company on LinkedIn, click "People" from the company's LinkedIn page. This will show you current and former employees, allowing you to search by title, keyword, or school. Click on the person's profile picture (do not click 'connect') to view their page. Like what you see and want to know when that person engages on LinkedIn? Click the 'more' button at the top of their profile and select 'follow'. This will allow you to be notified when they post or engage with other posts on the platform but will not add them to your list of connections. In turn, they will not be able to view

your updates unless you connect with them or they follow your profile.

- 2) Use the search field to search an industry. Do you work in the medical device industry? Type 'Medical Device' into the search bar and hit enter. Magically, you have almost 700,000 profiles to review. From this page you'll see where the person currently works, and who you may know that they're connected with. See the steps above to follow their individual profiles.

Join an industry group. Industry groups are a great way to connect with others who share your interests. Search for groups from the My Network tab at the top of your page. From there, find 'Groups' and start searching for groups that match your industry or interest. For example, a human resources professional may find groups for human resource professionals, regardless of industry. They can also join industry groups to stay abreast of industry-related trends. Select groups with larger numbers of members as they are often more active than small groups.

Give before you get. Like all successful networking, engaging on LinkedIn is about giving not asking or taking. Consider how you can share valuable information or content about your areas of expertise throughout the platform.

Comment on other's posts. While the numerous articles and posts shared on LinkedIn can make for good reading, it's critical to comment on posts that you like or have something to add to. When someone asks a question about the article they posted, share your thoughts or ask a question. Just be sure to stay away from selling yourself, your company, or the fact that you're a job seeker. Think of the exchange on a post like polite but purposeful conversation at a cocktail party with other industry professionals. Avoid political comments, foul language, accusatory or negative comments, and sarcasm. Remember, there is no nuance in text and you never know when your next employer (or current one) is reading your comment.

Share industry related content. Engaging on LinkedIn is your opportunity to showcase yourself as an industry

expert. This requires more than commenting on other's posts. In addition, be sure to share content you find especially interesting relating to your field or industry. Are you an expert at Blackboard software? Share the article that announces their latest enhancements. Be sure to comment on why you like this and what you think the impact will be. Consider starting your post with a question to engage your audience. Example:

"Have a love/hate relationship with Blackboard? These enhancements look like they'll make things better. What do you think?"

As a human resources executive, you may be on the lookout for better ways to engage your employees through corporate events. Share articles that you've found helpful. Example:

"HR friends- what has been your most successful employee event? Some great ideas in this SHRM article!"

Try the \$1.80 method. Social media guru, Gary Vaynerchuk recommends the \$1.80 method to engage and grow a following on social media. Essentially, he encourages people to leave their two cents on nine posts across 10 hashtags per day. Choose hashtags that matter to your vertical and/or industry and begin engaging. Do this in addition to liking posts. And remember to make the comments about the other people, not about you or your specific need.

Be careful what you like and/or engage in. As you're scrolling through LinkedIn, it can be easy to forget that every post you like or comment on can be viewed from the activity section of your LinkedIn profile. This means when you've liked a snarky political post, inappropriate joke, or an argument you've engaged in, it is visible to all who can see your profile. Employers and future employers are aware of this and are checking your activity. While engaging in negative or controversial posts is always risky on social media, it's an absolute no-go on LinkedIn.

Section 3: Search LinkedIn Jobs

LinkedIn is one of the most popular sites for employers to post professional positions. Whether you're an entry level bank teller or a CEO, there are literally thousands of postings to choose from. Many of these postings allow you to apply directly with your LinkedIn profile, making it even more vital your profile mirrors your resume. LinkedIn offers the ability to search by employer, job title, date posted, experience level, and even remote work.

Searching LinkedIn Jobs is about more than simply posting to the position listed. Each posting will tell you who among your connections works for the employer, how many have applied through LinkedIn, where the position is located and the position description/required qualifications. The posting may also tell you how you match the position description and provide competitive intelligence about other applicants (a LinkedIn premium feature). Do not let that intimidate you! If you are passionate about the position and feel you're at least 50% qualified for the position, GO FOR IT. If any of your connections work for the

company, reach out to them and inquire about the opening, too. 75% of all jobs are still found through networking.

Based on the job description, you may be able to determine who the hiring manager is. Use this information to follow up within a week after you apply for the position. Use the messaging feature to send them an email letting them know you applied and that you're interested. Encourage them to review your profile and the recommendations listed at the end.

Section 4: Connecting with Recruiters

An estimated 90% of recruiters are utilizing LinkedIn in their search for top talent. This easily allows you the opportunity to get to know those recruiting in your industry. A quick search for recruiters in your chosen industry will provide you with a long list of potential contacts. Not all hiring professionals use the recruiter title. Be sure to search for “talent acquisition” and “talent development”, too. Once you’ve searched by title, you can begin narrowing the field by searching for those who are in your area, share connections with you, or work for a company that interests you.

Once you’ve identified the recruiters you’re interested in contacting, send them a request to connect. Be sure to include a brief introduction (300 characters or less) explaining why you’re interested in connecting. LinkedIn members are more likely to accept invitations that include a personal note. You can also opt to follow the recruiters, just as you are following industry leaders. This will allow you to see their posts without being a personal connection.

Engage with recruiters using the \$1.80 method just as you engage with professionals in your industry. Avoid selling yourself for every position in the comment section. Instead, choose to comment, like, and engage with others who comment on the post. This is a great way to passively get the recruiters attention without looking desperate.

Section 5: Searching for the Hidden Jobs on LinkedIn

Looking through job postings is easy but that will only lead you to the positions that companies are advertising. What about those mysterious positions that never seem to be publicized and yet somehow other people seem to find? These are called 'hidden jobs' and are easily accessible if you know where and how to look.

Engage with the right people. Now that you know how to engage with recruiters, industry leaders, and hiring managers you can start doing your research. If you're targeting a specific company, be sure to reach out to in-house recruiters, external recruiters who regularly work with the company, and most importantly, the decision-makers. Looking for an accounting position? Connect with the CFO and begin actively engaging with the articles and topics she posts about. Once you've built some rapport, send her a message letting her know how much you admire the organization and that you'd be interested if an opportunity should ever arise.

Follow people who currently hold the title you want. Is your dream job to be the Marketing Director at your local hospital? Connect with and/or follow the person currently holding that position as well as those who report to him. This will begin to give you insight into the team and may also notify you when a position becomes available even before it's shown online. When that person announces a promotion or they've decided to move on, you can seize the opportunity to reach out to the Chief Marketing Officer who they reported to. This may seem opportunistic but it's vital we seize every opportunity to pursue the job of our dreams.

Hang out with those in the know. Search the profiles of the hiring managers you're interested in working for to see what companies they follow, where they went to college, and what groups they belong to. Join those groups and follow those companies or schools. A quick Google search may tell you what organizations they belong to, where they went to college, and where they volunteer. Getting to know people by attending the same events or volunteering for the same cause can give you a casual opportunity to get to know them.

Use your alumni association or fraternity/sorority to your advantage. If you attended college and were a member of the fraternity or sorority, research the alumni lists to see who may work for your desired employer. Your shared educational experience is an easy way to reach out and start a networking conversation. Be honest about your interest in the company as well as other positions she/he may know of.

Activate your social network. People are often willing to help people who share their same passions. Use LinkedIn to engage those you know personally as well as professionally. Follow their pages, learn more about what they do for a living, and share your desire to make a change. These could be people from your religious organization, volunteer group, or even fellow parents you meet while attending your child's Little League games.

Section 6: The Do's and Don'ts

Do This:

1. Actively engage Stalk
2. Be Persistent
3. Complete Your Profile
4. Post to LinkedIn Jobs
5. Apply to positions you're 50% qualified for
6. Implement the \$1.80 rule
7. Engage daily

Don't Do This:

1. Stalk
2. Pester
3. Assume readers will know your history
4. Forget to follow-up
5. Wait to be 100% qualified before you apply
6. Assume strong profile is enough
7. Forget to take a break.

About the Author

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