



What's the big deal about LinkedIn?

Many people have heard of LinkedIn, some haven't, but the bottom line is anybody who wants to maintain a professional presence in their industry needs to be on it. LinkedIn is a networking website that currently has 225 million users in 200+ countries. It is an excellent resource for industry forums, news articles, company information and job opportunities. My recruiting and human resources contacts call it "the world's largest online passive client database". They tell me that if you are not on there, you simply don't exist.

More often than not, you will be "Googled" before being called in for a job interview. The great thing about LinkedIn is that it ranks in first or second place in Google's search results. Having a quality LinkedIn profile highlights you as an industry professional others want to know.

It changes frequently but here are **10 points to consider when creating your own LinkedIn profile:**

- 1** Take advantage of the "Your professional headline" area right underneath your picture (yes, you need a picture). Your most recent job title usually auto-fills into this field but you can change it. Select a marketing title that represents you in the context in which you want to be known. Choose wisely because this is the single most heavily weighted field in LinkedIn's indexing scheme.
- 2** The "Summary" section is similar to the opening paragraph in a résumé except that here, it's okay to use personal pronouns such as "I" and "me". Avoid writing it in the third person. This is stuffy and dated.
- 3** Fill in your complete professional work history. Not only does this give the reader a snapshot of your career journey, the hyperlinks to each place that you have worked set the stage for even more networking opportunities and recommendations.

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Take the time to change your profile's default URL to what is called a vanity URL. This means it is "cleaner" looking and thus easier to read. Place the URL in your cover letter, résumé and reference sheet letterhead as well as your email signature. (e.g. <http://ca.linkedin.com/in/yourname/>)

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Connect, connect and connect some more! Search for and request meaningful connections with current and former colleagues, managers, and other professional friends and family members. Customize the default invitation that appears in the request text box. People like to feel you took a moment to prepare your own phrasing. In fact, many current LinkedIn members will not accept invitations unless they have been personalized. It is appropriate and smart to use your expanding network pool to get introduced to new, key contacts. (e.g. recruiters, HR staff, etc.)

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Why not share information, relevant online articles or let others know where you are and what you are doing? Do this by regularly writing in the "Share an update..." field at the top of your home screen. This also keeps you visible within your network. Likening this to marketing, we call this "top-of-mind awareness".

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Another key area of a LinkedIn profile is the "Skills & Expertise" section. This is where you can select core hyperlinked skills that are relevant to your career. Choose buzz words to make it easy for your profile to pop up during searches. Recruiters and human resources personnel are always trolling LinkedIn for viable candidates.

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Although I advise you to indicate foreign languages you speak in the summary section, you should also include them in the dedicated "Languages" section. Like many other parts of your profile, you want to tap into the indexing scheme and search functions.

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Often, people try too hard to make a point with others in the discussion forums. If you argue or challenge others incessantly, you appear argumentative and challenging. Period. Similarly, some people cut up their current employer. Whether you like your job / boss or not, just understand that you are an ambassador for your workplace. Everything you write becomes part of your online digital footprint. Be positive. When you make others look good, you look good. When you make others look bad, you look bad.

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Perhaps the most practical feature on LinkedIn is the “Jobs” button across the top of the screen. You can search opportunities and set up automated job search alerts with weekly / daily / as-it-happens notifications. It’s becoming quite common to apply to jobs using your LinkedIn profile. There is often the opportunity to ask the recruiter or job poster a question about the position. You can see when the job was posted and how many people have looked at and applied for the opening. With the “Apply now” button, submitting your candidacy using your LinkedIn profile is easier than ever.

Good luck!

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