

LinkedIn Success Stories

How 11 companies are using
the global networking site to achieve
their business and marketing goals



CASE STUDY COLLECTION

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INTRODUCTION



When the White House sought to gather feedback regarding health care reform from U.S. small-business owners, it posted a query on LinkedIn.

Why LinkedIn?

Though not the largest social network, LinkedIn has been greatly embraced by the business and professional community as the place to network, trade advice, and evince business savvy.

LinkedIn boasts more than 55,000,000 members in over 200 countries, with a little over half of its membership residing in the United States. Plus, executives from all Fortune 500 companies can be found on its network. And according to a study by BtoB Magazine and the Association of National Advertisers, 81% of business-to-business marketers use LinkedIn. The company continues to grow (while many social networks have not) and it possesses a more solid business model than Facebook or Twitter.

Now, how can you make LinkedIn work for your business? The 11 case studies, examples, and tips featured in this collection will help you get started.

Each case study details the tools and approaches used, along with the outcomes achieved and lessons learned. They are grouped according to the following business objectives:

- **Manifesting Thought Leadership and Expertise:** Discover how simple it is to demonstrate your prowess to a global network of potential clients, partners, and employers.
- **Attracting Event Participants and Attendees:** Read about how some organizations are generating interest in their off-network events.
- **Performing Market Research:** See how companies are using LinkedIn tools to reach targeted audiences and gather market insight.
- **Generating New Business:** Understand how marketers are identifying new leads, sparking business relationships, and increasing sales.

But before examining the case studies, let's take a look at the available resources for achieving these goals.

SNAPSHOT OF THE TOOLS AVAILABLE ON LINKEDIN

In the beginning, LinkedIn appeared to be just a place to build contact lists and post resumes. Network administrators, however, have since added elements that let users get more involved—and get closer to their business objectives.

Users can share personal insights, announce achievements and events, and solicit help.

Profile

Each LinkedIn member has an individual profile page to display information, such as: career experience, education, skills, achievements, honors, awards, website links, and portfolio links. LinkedIn also features the member's contact list, which can be set to private. Plus, recommendations from other users can be included. These particulars can highlight a person's strengths and also help build credibility.

Businesses can look at people's profiles to: gain insight into a person's skills and experience; identify nuggets of information that may facilitate business relationships and/or sales; and better understand relationships among employees, partners, suppliers, and/or competitors.

Profiles are searchable within LinkedIn and via the major search engines. Vanity URLs can also be established for easy reference.

Status

Like Facebook and Twitter, LinkedIn provides a space on a user's profile to post status updates. Users can share personal insights, announce achievements and events, and solicit help. These updates also appear on the user's contacts' homepages, where LinkedIn lists any activity related to the user's immediate network of contacts.

Scott Harris, president of Mustang Marketing in Thousand Oaks, Calif., knows that by updating his status daily with company information and news, he keeps his firm top of mind with existing and potential clients, vendors, and freelancers. Harris regularly receives comments about his status posts, often to the tune of "Wow, Mustang must be doing well, based on what I'm seeing on LinkedIn." Harris says that rarely a week goes by that he doesn't line up at least one business meeting due to this effort—not too shabby for a task that requires mere minutes a day.

In 2009, LinkedIn partnered with Twitter to enable users to sync their profiles on both networks. Using this setting, members can choose to have their Twitter updates automatically or manually by including either #li or #in in their tweets featured in their LinkedIn statuses. (Note that LinkedIn filters out any "@replies" posted on Twitter.)

SNAPSHOT OF THE TOOLS AVAILABLE ON LINKEDIN

LinkedIn also offers company profiles, which include a brief overview, company description, and information about company employees, new hires, recent internal promotions, key statistics, and related companies.

InMail

LinkedIn's private, in-network user messaging system is InMail. Messages can be sent for free between any connected person on the network. For example, as a basic member, you can send InMail messages to people on your LinkedIn contact lists and in the same LinkedIn groups.

Kathy Steele, creative services director at Elmhurst, Ill.-based Desert Rose Design, upgraded her account to the largest package, so she can send unlimited InMail messages. Steele says she generally receives a much quicker response from her outbound InMail messages than she does from regular mail. This may be because recipients receive fewer InMails, so those messages tend to stand out. Plus, recipients can immediately check her profile if they don't recognize the name.

Individual accounts can be upgraded for a fee so that messages can be sent to any LinkedIn user, or so that any user can send you an InMail message regardless of whether they have an upgraded account.

Divya Gugnani, CEO of the culinary website Behind the Burner, has her account set up so that anyone on LinkedIn can send her InMail. She frequently receives messages from users seeking culinary and restaurant information, and small-business and entrepreneurial advice. Thanks to InMail, Gugnani can share her insights, establish authority, and sometimes even foster new business relationships—all with people who might not have reached out to her otherwise.

Company Pages

LinkedIn also offers company profiles, which include a brief overview, company description, and information about company employees, new hires, recent internal promotions, key statistics, and related companies.

Company pages can be used to manage publicly available data about one's organization as well as to learn more about clients, competitors, vendors, etc.

According to LinkedIn, the information supplied is collected from LinkedIn user data and LinkedIn's partner Capital IQ. The network says it also plans to enable companies to edit certain information and add images, product and services information, and job postings.

SNAPSHOT OF THE TOOLS AVAILABLE ON LINKEDIN

In addition to separating queries by category (as selected by the originator), LinkedIn offers a search capability, so users can easily find questions and answers by keyword.

LinkedIn Answers

LinkedIn Answers is a Q&A forum where users can gather advice, gain insight on important issues impacting their industries and businesses, and show off their expertise. A report by Business.com in December 2009 found that 59.2% of companies and 79% of B2B organizations who participate in online business forums use LinkedIn Answers, making it the most used in its category.

Posted questions appear under the site's Answers tab (unless designated as private by the user), as well as on the author's LinkedIn profile page and on his/her connections' LinkedIn homepages. Users can also request that the question be emailed to specific contacts via InMail.

Members can choose to answer posted questions publicly on the forum or privately via an email to the user who first posted the query. When a user answers a question publicly, that fact is publicized on the user's profile and his/her contacts' homepages.

In addition to separating queries by category (as selected by the originator), LinkedIn offers a search capability, so users can easily find questions and answers by keyword.

Patrick O'Malley, a New England-based social media consultant, says he regularly searches the Answers section on LinkedIn for keywords that potential customers might use. Then he responds to those questions to which he can add value and exhibit his mastery of the subject. He reports that this has led to offline conversations, new business relationships, and contracting jobs. "If people like your answers, they are more likely to contact you and hire you."

LinkedIn community members can rate their favorite responses to any question as a "Best Answer." Each time this happens, the user whose answer was rated receives an "expertise point" for the category in which the question is posted. Users with the most points are then featured as category experts within the Answers section of the site.

Groups

LinkedIn Groups are communities of common interest within the larger network. Groups typically include discussion, news and job boards, along with member directories and group update postings. Subgroups can also be launched within the group.

SNAPSHOT OF THE TOOLS AVAILABLE ON LINKEDIN

Users can set up custom polls, which can either be distributed to their immediate network of contacts for free or target select groups of LinkedIn members (e.g., based on industry, company size, job title or function, age, gender, or geography) on a pay-per-response model.

Groups can be started by any LinkedIn user. That person decides who can join, assigns group moderators, designates a group logo, and sets up automatic email responses to people who request to join their group. (For more information on launching a LinkedIn group, see the “Tips for Getting Started” section of this report.)

The Groups Directory can be used to search for groups specific to an industry or interest. Upon joining a group, users can select whether they want the group logo featured on their profiles, how often they wish to receive group updates via email, and whether other group members may contact them directly.

LinkedIn Services

LinkedIn also provides a vendor services directory made up only of providers recommended by the user’s network. The directory can be searched by category/industry and refined by geographical location.

To get featured in the directory, another user must recommend your service through the LinkedIn Services home screen (i.e., not through a recommendation on your profile).

LinkedIn Advertising

On-site advertising options include display ads (banner ads, text links, content ads and homepage takeover), sponsorship (of various applications, polls, events, and different categories under the Answers tab), white paper distribution and partner messages (sent via email). Campaigns can target the entire LinkedIn network or more defined segments. They can also be customized to reach specific demographics.

Applications

LinkedIn applications can be added to users’ personal profiles and homepages:

- **Polls:** Users can set up custom polls, which can either be distributed to their immediate network of contacts for free or target select groups of LinkedIn members (e.g., based on industry, company size, job title or function, age, gender, or geography) on a pay-per-response model. Poll results are analyzed by the application and dissected by factors, such as seniority, company size, job function, age and gender.
- **Company Buzz:** This application tracks what’s being said about your company on Twitter, blogs, and elsewhere online.

SNAPSHOT OF THE TOOLS AVAILABLE ON LINKEDIN

Private collaboration can take place among connected users directly within LinkedIn using Huddle Workspaces. Documents and spreadsheets can be co-edited with tracking of all changes.

- **Tweets:** Tweets syncs with your Twitter profile to offer basic Twitter capabilities, including the ability to simultaneously update your Twitter and LinkedIn status, display your tweets, and view your followers' tweets.
- **Blog Link:** Users can sync their blogs with their LinkedIn profiles so the most recent blog posts are also automatically published directly on their profiles.
- **WordPress:** Similar in function to Blog Link, the WordPress application works specifically with WordPress-hosted blogs.
- **SlideShare:** This application enables presentation slides to be featured on a user's profile. Slides can be tagged with keywords so that they appear in search results.
- **Google Presentation:** PowerPoint presentations can be uploaded to the user's profile with this application.
- **Box.net:** Users can post content on their profiles and share documents with specific contacts via Box.net.
- **Huddle Workspaces:** Private collaboration can take place among connected users directly within LinkedIn using Huddle Workspaces. Documents and spreadsheets can be co-edited with tracking of all changes.
- **Events:** This application displays upcoming events that you and your contacts plan to attend.
- **My Travel:** Powered by Triplt, this application alerts your network to your current location and where you'll be traveling.
- **SAP Community Bio:** For those certified in SAP, this application displays credentials and SAP contributions directly on their profiles.

LinkedIn also offers a mobile application for accessing the network from any WAP-enabled phone. Additional applications are available—with more on the way.

CASE STUDIES: 11 REAL-WORLD EXAMPLES

Now that you're familiar with the LinkedIn tools at your disposal, here's a look at how they're being used by 11 organizations to perform market research, demonstrate thought leadership and expertise, attract users to off-network events, and boost sales.

MANIFESTING THOUGHT LEADERSHIP AND EXPERTISE

From individual profiles to groups and Answers boards, LinkedIn provides the channel and tools to showcase your expertise, manage your professional reputation, and establish yourself as a leader in the space.



Anvil Media

Compelling content, strategic connection building and search engine optimization (SEO) are just a few tools that Anvil Media president Kent Lewis uses to gain prestige via LinkedIn.

Company: Founded in 2000 by Lewis, Anvil Media, Inc. is a search engine marketing agency specializing in SEO, pay-per-click management, search engine marketing public relations, online reputation management, and social media marketing services.

Challenge: Lewis works to continuously cultivate both his firm's reputation and his personal brand.

Solution: To proactively connect with prospective clients and partners, Lewis requests introductions from existing contacts and uses the "People you may know" feature on his LinkedIn homepage. His goal is not to make as many connections as possible, but to make quality connections. The main reason Lewis makes an effort to grow his contact base is to "flatten out the six degrees of separation" to the people he wants to meet.

A high number of recommendations was a priority for Lewis, however. "Recommendations show quality and depth," he says. To strengthen his profile, Lewis reached out to associates from every line item of his experience with a request for recommendations. Today, his profile boasts 84 recommendations and covers every position but the oldest listed.

Lewis also optimizes his profile by incorporating keywords so that his information shows up in both LinkedIn and Google search results. For example, he lists every bit of experience he's ever had—every board membership, group affiliation, award received, you name it—and includes pertinent keywords in each description. He also lists key industry terms under his "Interests."

"Social sites are highly trusted by Google," Lewis says, "and you can gain control of your brand through profile optimization."

LinkedIn lets users list three links on their profiles, so Lewis uses this space to describe each link with industry keywords instead of the default titles of "my website" or "my portfolio."

MANIFESTING THOUGHT LEADERSHIP AND EXPERTISE

“Create messaging so compelling that people are likely to share it, vote it a ‘best answer’ and contact you directly,” Lewis says. “When someone reads your answers and then take the time to learn about who answered it, they’re already sold by that point.”

He also leverages applications, such as SlideShare, WordPress, and Events, to showcase his expertise and keep his name prominently featured on connections’ homepages.

“SlideShare on its own is great SEO/brand management tool, but it’s also good for marketing when others see your slides,” he says.

His Twitter profile is synced, too. He uses it to broadcast interesting industry news. Lewis says he gets as much (and sometimes even more) interaction with these posts on LinkedIn as he does through Twitter.

LinkedIn Polls is another application he leverages. His network is notified each time a new poll is launched. Plus, Lewis takes to opportunity to share both the initial feedback and final results he collects from respondents—which exhibits credibility and his understanding of the marketplace.

Perhaps the most advantageous resource Lewis uses for establishing authority is LinkedIn Answers. He searches for questions relevant to his line of work then answers anywhere from three to 10 per week. So far, 28 of his responses have been nominated as “best answers,” which means he usually appears as one of the top five experts in his contacts’ networks.

“Create messaging so compelling that people are likely to share it, vote it a ‘best answer’ and contact you directly,” Lewis says. “When someone reads your answers and then takes the time to learn about who answered it, they’re already sold by that point.”

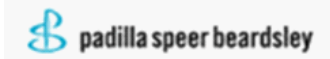
Results: Lewis’s responses on LinkedIn Answers, supported by various elements of his profile, have been instrumental in positioning both himself and Anvil Media as highly competent.

Lewis reports that LinkedIn is one of the top three sources of qualified leads for the agency. It has helped him identify and connect with key clients, such as the firm’s largest one, Borders Books. It also helped him secure a keynote speaking engagement at SEM4SMB in Austin, Texas, and aided in the development of an important partnership with an out-of-state company, for whom he may become a strategic advisor.

Business Lessons Learned

- Bridge the gap between you and the people you might like to meet by connecting with quality industry contacts.
- Don't be shy—ask for recommendations from people who appreciate your good work.
- Optimize your profile with keywords that will help improve your search rank.
- Add applications, such as SlideShare and WordPress, to your profile to introduce a stream of relevant content and validate your command of germane topics.
- Deliver insightful and compelling responses to LinkedIn Answers questions to showcase your expertise to a broader audience.

Padilla Speer Beardsley



This study shows that positioning a company as a go-to authority can be as simple as posting relevant news and encouraging conversation with targeted audiences.

Company: Padilla Speer Beardsley is a national, employee-owned public relations firm with 115 employees in Minneapolis and New York.

Challenge: The name of the game for any PR agency is generating awareness for the firm's clients. For Padilla Speer Beardsley, one such client is Virtual Hold Technology (VHT), the provider of queue management solutions that enhance the customer experience while improving operational efficiencies for call centers.

Solution: Whenever there is major news regarding VHT that may be of interest to other businesses (e.g., when Southwest Airlines started using the company's solution), Padilla Speer Beardsley makes it known on targeted LinkedIn groups, such as Worldwide Contact Center Professionals, which currently has more than 15,000 members who make up a very relevant audience for VHT.

To share information, Padilla Speer Beardsley creates a “news item” post that links to a posted press release or a related media article (e.g., one written by TMCNet regarding the Southwest Airlines news).

Spur discussion of your product or service with posted news items on LinkedIn group boards. Aim for educational or information items that are useful to other people.

Padilla Speer Beardsley director Amy Fisher says the firm regularly uses LinkedIn to promote VHT news for key reasons. For example, although the groups on LinkedIn may be smaller than those on other social networks, LinkedIn Groups maintain a strong business focus. Plus, audiences are very targeted. “We know people are specifically there to interact and network with others facing the same challenges,” Fisher says.

The firm then keeps track of any discussion regarding its posts and immediately notifies VHT’s chief technology officer, already a member of these groups, of opportunities for him to jump in and offer additional value. Fisher says, “Because LinkedIn groups are primarily talking about the technology, he is the most likely spokesperson to participate.”

Results: This approach has resulted in broader reach for company news, positive conversations around VHT’s solution, and exposure for the company’s CTO as a knowledgeable resource. Moreover, it led to new industry relationships, including one with an industry analyst firm who offered VHT the opportunity to participate in a research project.

“This relationship is important because we want analysts to be advocates for the company and to reference our clients in their conversations and research reports,” Fisher says.

Business Lessons Learned

- Spur discussion of your product or service with posted news items on LinkedIn group boards. Aim for educational or informative items that are useful to other people.
- Select groups pertaining directly to your industry that are comprised of people with whom you want to connect.
- Find your hook. The Southwest Airlines news garnered more user interaction than usual because it involved a high-profile recognizable brand.
- Link to third-party articles to appear less self-promotional. Also consider having the company’s agency post the news.
- Have someone who is conversant on the subject ready to log in, answer any questions, and contribute to the conversation regarding your posts.
- Follow through and respond to all related comments, even when the author doesn’t match your prospect profile. You never know where those conversations may lead.

David Moye



How one man used LinkedIn to get a job—and switch careers—during the worst recession since the 1930s.

Marketer: David Moye is a creative type with a diverse background that includes 20 years in the field of journalism.

Challenge: The recent economic downturn left Moye—like many respectable professionals—unemployed and with few prospective opportunities. If there was any good time to switch careers, this was it, he thought, hoping to forge his way into public relations.

A journalist for many years, Moye knew how to best go about pitching the media, and he had consulted for PR agencies. Still, few would give him the time of day.

“I had been helpful to publicists in the past, but they disappeared when I needed help,” says Moye. “So, I decided to fight fire with fire.”

Solution: Moye sensed that LinkedIn would be the tool he needed to get a job.

He began building his profile by listing every job he had ever had—even his roles as supermarket cashier and phone psychic/astrologer. Those he used as an opportunity to showcase his personality, with descriptions, such as “It was hell for a creative person” under the cashier position, or “to get material for country songs without having my own dog die on me” to justify his phone psychic years.

“I wanted to show that I have a certain amount of creativity and a sense of humor—those are my selling points in business,” he says.

Next, Moye set out to further demonstrate his creativity—and his knack for PR. He created five videos starring himself and his daughter’s toy puppets discussing the ins and outs of public relations. He called the series PR Puppet Theatre, and he kept the production as cheesy as possible so that people would be more apt to laugh and share the videos with their connections.

After posting the videos to YouTube, he reached out to his LinkedIn network with a personalized email that linked to the videos.

MANIFESTING THOUGHT LEADERSHIP AND EXPERTISE

Accentuate your experience—all of it. And keep your LinkedIn profile up to date, so potential employers can immediately see your “latest and greatest” work.

He also joined PR-focused groups on LinkedIn and engaged in the conversations taking place within those groups, mentioning the videos when appropriate as an example of how he was creatively marketing himself in a tough economy.

Results: Through his LinkedIn contacts, Moye’s videos made their way in front of the folks at CNBC. They ended up featuring two videos on the CNBC website, where they were dubbed “must-see entertainment/education for every PR flack.” That, of course, served to further get the word out.

In all, the five videos were viewed more than 1,440 times on YouTube. One viewer liked the content so much, he offered Moye a job at Alternative Strategies, a boutique PR agency in San Diego. Mission accomplished.

PR Puppet Theatre has since become part of Moye’s “legend”—and another experience listing on his LinkedIn profile. Plus, it helped establish his footing as an expert in the field. Just four months into his new career, Moye was asked to start contributing to a PR industry blog.

Moye says LinkedIn was the key to making it all happen. As it turns out, he had also posted the videos on Facebook and received comments to the tune of “that’s really cool” from relatives and old high school friends. But nothing close to a business connection ever came out of that, let alone a job.

Business Lessons Learned

- Find a personal angle that will help set you apart.
- Bear in mind that a little creativity—even wackiness—stands out on LinkedIn much more than other networks where users aren’t always down to business.
- Accentuate your experience—all of it. And keep your LinkedIn profile up to date, so potential employers can immediately see your “latest and greatest” work

Mark Amtower



When you’re a master of your niche, LinkedIn makes it possible to exponentially and pervasively expand your authority.

Marketer: Mark Amtower is an author, consultant, speaker, and radio host who focuses on one market —doing business with government. He is the founding

MANIFESTING THOUGHT LEADERSHIP AND EXPERTISE

“When you share good information, you get more people looking at you interested in what you do, wanting to pick your brain, and wanting to follow you,” Amtower says.

partner of Amtower & Company and the author of *Government Marketing Best Practices*.

Challenge: Mark Amtower was an early adopter of LinkedIn, having joined the network in February 2004. But beyond signing up, filling out his profile, and connecting with associates, he wasn't sure what to do with it. “Like everyone else, I leaned my head up against the screen and waited for something to happen,” he says.

It wasn't until he read Jason Alba's *I'm on LinkedIn—Now What??* and David Meerman Scott's *The New Rules of Marketing and PR* that he started thinking it was time to get more involved.

“After I read David Meerman Scott's book, I put him on my show, where he said that everything's migrating to Web 2.0 and you can be a bigger power if you play this game,” Amtower says. “That got my attention.”

Solution: In March 2007, Amtower started getting active by joining and participating in groups and sharing his insights on LinkedIn Answers forums.

Those activities led to new contacts as users reached out after reading his comments and posts. “When you share information, you get more people looking at you, interested in what you do, wanting to pick your brain, and wanting to follow you,” Amtower says.

He would also look through his posts' comments—some totaling more than 60—to see whether any of those users would make interesting contacts. He would then privately message those users, thank them for commenting, and invite them to check out his profile to see if they were interested in connecting further.

Amtower also started his own groups on the network. He invited everyone in his network to join and sent periodic reminders every couple months to those who didn't immediately respond. He made an effort to keep his groups lively with frequent discussion posts, weekly news articles, and an active job board.

His “tip of the week” posts were so popular that he evolved them into a weekly newsletter for all group members. He kept the newsletter content brief but relevant to member interests and regularly reminded members to invite their friends and actively participate in group conversations.

MANIFESTING THOUGHT LEADERSHIP AND EXPERTISE

Use LinkedIn to grow your thought leadership exponentially and become a “niche master.”

Amtower learned early on that overt selling on group forums and within the newsletter wasn't well received. But he has found that on occasion—every four weeks or so—he can include a plug for his informational CD program that sells for \$50 without causing members to leave.

Another way Amtower has kept his name top of mind is by regularly updating his status and ensuring it always revolves around his niche.

He also takes the initiative to recognize and write recommendations for people who have helped him in some way, before they even have a chance to ask.

“Call it karma, if you will,” Amtower says. “When you do good deeds, they circle around.”

Results: Today, Amtower's LinkedIn profile exudes credibility and authority within the government marketing sector. Since March 2007, he has grown his connections from 150 to more than 2,200. He now actively participates in 50 groups and 12 subgroups and manages seven. He has more than 200 recommendations from clients and peers, and has been nominated for 25 best answers in 14 Answers categories.

All of this has led to not only broader awareness for his expertise and services, but also numerous consulting gigs. And his CD sales aren't doing too poorly either.

Business Lessons Learned

- Use LinkedIn to grow your thought leadership exponentially and become a “niche master.”
- Start by setting realistic short-term goals, prioritizing your activities based on those goals, and dedicating 10 minutes a day to them.
- Shoot for value-added interactions, give before you receive, and recognize others for the helpfulness they provide.
- Use a regular series of tips or a weekly newsletter to constantly remind your audience of who you are and what you do.
- Keep at it. To become a magnet in your niche, Amtower says you must make an ongoing effort and become a constant student of your market.

ATTRACTING EVENT PARTICIPANTS AND ATTENDEES

People are finally realizing that LinkedIn can be an effective channel for driving qualified users to webinars, enlisting participants for contests, and so much more.



Ventureneer.com

LinkedIn's free resources enabled entrepreneur Geri Stengel to promote her new business launch and build a following on a shoestring.

Company/Marketer: Ventureneer.com is a startup online peer learning service launched by Stengel.

Challenge: To generate interest in her new endeavor, Stengel developed a series of free introductory webinars designed to demonstrate her site's value proposition. With only a small budget remaining, she next needed to find a low-cost way to drive traffic to the webinar sign-up page.

Solution: Stengel started aggressively building her LinkedIn contact list by inviting everyone in her address book, combing through her connections' contacts for mutual associates, and searching through alumni groups for companies she had once worked for to find former colleagues.

Next, she used the Blog Link application to sync the company blog to her profile and her connections' LinkedIn homepages. She made sure to edit the blog title on LinkedIn each time a new post appeared so that it better captured the essence of the webinar she was promoting.

She also started posting information and links for the webinars in groups catering to the industries her webinars centered on. Rather than pure promotion, her messaging talked about the benefits each webinar offered. She kept messages short so that interested users would click through to learn more.

She was also careful to mind the rules and regulations of each group to avoid coming off as a spammer or have her messages erased from the boards.

Results: LinkedIn now accounts for more than 13% of Ventureneer's site traffic each month—hitting a whopping 20% in January 2010—and anywhere from 15% to 50% of sign-ups for the free webinars.

"LinkedIn is my workhorse," Stengel says. "It's always one of my top five referring sites. And sometimes, it's in the top three."

Business Lessons Learned

- Take a targeted approach. Find groups that serve the specific audiences you want to reach, then frame your messaging to accommodate their specific interests and needs.
- Read and follow each group's rules and regulations so that it will continue to permit your participation.
- Use LinkedIn applications to further get the word out and keep your name prominently featured on contacts' homepages.

McClenahan Bruer Communications



Centralized micro-targeting on a global scale makes it easier to locate well-qualified people.

Company/Marketer: Based in Portland, Ore., McClenahan Bruer Communications (McBru) provides integrated advertising and public relations services for B2B technology companies.

Among other clients, McBru represents the Itanium Solutions Alliance, a global community of hardware, operating system, and application vendors dedicated to accelerating the adoption and ongoing development of solutions based on Intel's Itanium microprocessors.

Challenge: Every year, the Itanium Solutions Alliance holds its Innovation Awards Celebration, an event in which ground-breaking work and humanitarian achievements developed using Itanium-based solutions are recognized.

For the Alliance's third awards event, which was in September 2009, McBru was charged with cultivating the best submissions and attendance it could find. One might think contestants would quickly line up for a chance to receive industry acclaim and international publicity, but as McBru found, these people can be difficult to pin down. In addition to being based all around the globe, they tend to be extremely busy and dedicated to their work.

"Although winners and finalists receive attractive prizes, it's always a challenge to get busy IT professionals to take the time required to develop a serious and detailed submission," says James McIntyre, McBru's senior communications counsel. "What's more, to manifest the gala event we were planning, 200

ATTRACTING EVENT PARTICIPANTS AND ATTENDEES

attendees were required.”

Back in 2008, the company had tried targeting a purchased list of IT executive contacts and had some success in attracting applicants and attendees. On the day of the event, however, it became clear that the market reached was not of the caliber expected.

The LinkedIn post generated 19 comments, led to five substantial conversations about Itanium usage, and paved the way to agency relationships with three OpenVMS group members.

McBru needed to find an alternate means to engage high-performing IT executives for the 2009 event.

Solution: In March 2009, Brandon Wick, communications counsel at McBru and the team member who handles social media activities for the Alliance account, began a discussion in the OpenVMS group on LinkedIn. The post read: “Anyone using OpenVMS on Itanium? If so, we’d like to hear about it. There are many ways to get publicity for your work, including blogs, newsletters, and an Innovation Awards program.”

The firm wondered whether this group would accept and openly communicate with someone not from their circles, especially because Wick’s title and information were clearly visible next to the post. But the company was pleased to find that the answer was yes. The LinkedIn post generated 19 comments, led to five substantial conversations about Itanium usage, and paved the way to agency relationships with three OpenVMS group members.

“We saw positive results right off the bat,” says Wick. He further used the exercise to gain a better understanding of group interactions and member interests. He then used that insight to launch into one-on-one conversations with respondents and answer their questions.

To build on the success of this approach, Wick used a keyword search to identify 25 groups relevant to Itanium where he could replicate this effort.

As the awards date neared, the McBru team shifted their efforts to audience acquisition to assure a “critical mass” of qualified people at the event. They read up on group member profiles and reached out to those matching the core demographic. The team also searched through members’ contacts for other interesting parties and opened the invitation to industry executives located in the San Francisco Bay Area, where the event would take place. Invitations were presented via one-to-one messaging, rather than a mass blast, so that they were more personal and authentic.

ATTRACTING EVENT PARTICIPANTS AND ATTENDEES

The McBru team agreed that, particularly relative to the investment of time and resources, LinkedIn delivered “outsized results.”

Results: The Alliance received 35% more submissions for 2009 than it did in 2008. It also received more submissions from around the world than it had in previous years, thanks to LinkedIn.

The McBru team agreed that, particularly relative to the investment of time and resources, LinkedIn delivered “outsized results.” Plus, 17.4% of all submissions received could be tracked back to these efforts, making LinkedIn the second most productive source for the year. Three of the 2009 Award finalists came through LinkedIn.

“It enabled us to field a critical mass of qualified submissions in each of the four Awards categories,” says Wick, noting exceptional success with the “Humanitarian” category, which is traditionally the most challenging to fill.

In addition, McBru was able to attract higher-quality attendees to the event through LinkedIn at a much lower cost than it had incurred using purchased lists.

Moreover, many connections that the team made during this campaign have evolved into mutual ongoing relationships, with several contacts contributing to whitepaper development and other initiatives.

Business Lessons Learned

- Use LinkedIn groups to reach a centralized network of internationally based contacts.
- Identify groups based on your specific goals, and don't simply assume the largest groups are best. McBru says some of its best responses came from smaller targeted groups and that often the members of those groups were more willing to help out.
- Take the time to listen to what's happening within the group and figure out what they deem relevant before you begin posting.
- Use personal one-to-one communications for extending invitations in that are credible and apt to be received well.

PERFORMING MARKET RESEARCH

LinkedIn is proving to be fertile ground for unraveling customer opinion. In this section, you'll see how more companies are leveraging LinkedIn to gather user feedback and market insight.

Penman Public Relations

This agency finds that connecting with potential product users individually online results in more straightforward feedback and less groupthink.

Company: Penman Public Relations is a strategic public relations firm headquartered in Austin, Texas.



Challenge: Rochester, Minn.-based Hardcore Computer hired Penman PR to assist with the launch of its company and flagship product, a total liquid submersion gaming PC. However, it had performed little research outside the friends and family circuit. So, before the big launch, Penman set out to determine whether hard-core PC gamers would find this system worthy of its high-end price tag.

Penman wasn't keen on using focus groups, feeling that such exercises can result in groupthink and inhibit individual opinions from surfacing. Instead, having learned from previous experience that gamers tend to be vocal online participants, Penman opted to go after these people via social media. In particular, the firm chose to use LinkedIn given that its audience was there and its message could endure longer than it would on other social networks.

"Twitter is real time, and you're a blip on the screen," says Patti D. Hill, CEO and founder of Penman Public Relations. "LinkedIn waits for us. Like email, it's there when you want it."

Solution: Penman associates were already actively involved in LinkedIn groups, including those focused on technology and gaming. They posted short discussion posts on each group's board requesting contact from users who would be willing to provide feedback on PC gaming computer features and their advantages.

Hill also sent the call out to everyone in her personal LinkedIn network, which included about 600 contacts at the time.

To people who responded, Hill sent a more detailed message that thanked them for their willingness to help out and explained that she was conducting research for a high-performance PC manufacturer whom her firm represented. The message then inquired into users' expectations for a factory-built system in the

PERFORMING MARKET RESEARCH

Engage in a manner that is meaningful for participants, and frame your questions in a way that encourages people to share their passions and deliver real insight.

\$3,000+ range, as well as for one that might cost \$5,000 or more. She kept the question open-ended so that respondents could provide as little or as much insight as they desired. However, she also listed specific criteria of interest—including processor, memory, video/audio, I/O device, support/warranty and value for the money—to help guide response.

Results: Hill said she received several hundred responses, many from people who were not in her contact base nor members of the groups Penman targeted but who had instead been forwarded her query. “This speaks to the passion of this audience, but also to the willingness of people to provide information and contribute even when they’re not directly connected,” she says.

In this way, respondents were also self-selected and participating of their own accord.

Hill went on to create a synopsis of the information received, which validated market position and product specs for the client. Hardcore Computer posted that summary as web content on its launch site.

Hill then went back and thanked every person who participated with a message that also included a link to the Hardcore Computer site. This drove a concentrated target audience to information about the company and the new gaming PC, while at the same time demonstrating to those participants how their feedback had been employed.

In the end, this approach worked to not only gather appropriate information and insight for the new product launch, it also pushed additional traffic to the Hardcore Computer website and generated great visibility among gamers and developers for both Penman and its client.

Business Lessons Learned

- Leverage groups, but also use your personal networks to jumpstart an outreach campaign.
- Engage in a manner that is meaningful for participants and frame your questions in a way that encourages people to share their passions and deliver real insight.
- Be thoughtful in return. Follow up with a note of thanks and an explanation of how the user’s participation contributed to the overall project.

PreferredVendor

LinkedIn has become popular with recruiters in search of new talent, and this, in turn, has made it an effective channel for vendors wishing to reach that segment.



Company: PreferredVendor is the startup company behind a new fully functional beta tool of the same name that facilitates direct, real-time transactions between hiring companies and staffing vendors.

Challenge: When marketing manager Brian Meeks joined PreferredVendor in September 2009, he was given the task of finding experienced HR professionals willing to try out the company's online recruiting tool and provide feedback.

With a background in building corporate-sponsored spaces for Second Life, Meeks understood social networks to be effective resources for building quality relationships. He felt that if he could establish such relationships with HR professionals online, they would be not only more willing to participate but also apt to provide the type of feedback that would really advance his company's cause.

Solution: Meeks started by joining 10 large recruiting/HR-focused groups on LinkedIn and reading through each group's discussion board. In particular, he looked for interesting and thoughtful posts, believing that those would come from experienced HR professionals genuinely interested in sharing useful information.

When he found such a post, he contacted the author directly and asked to connect. Because Meeks was able on LinkedIn to review individuals' professional profiles and determine the extent of their experience before making contact, he reached out to qualified folks. And because he was involved in the same groups, those contacts were typically more willing to connect.

To optimize the acceptance rate of his invitations, Meeks was careful to customize his messages and not simply use the generic text offered by LinkedIn. He kept his messages concise and referenced the posts that caught his attention to explain why he was motivated to connect. Around 90% of the individuals he approached accepted his invitation.

He then initiated further conversation with those contacts, often based on information he gathered from their profiles, before asking them to trial the beta

Meeks says that around 75% of people he has invited to participate via LinkedIn have obliged—much more than the 30–40% he anticipated. And LinkedIn is now one of the two major sources of feedback received.

solution. When he did make the request, he included company background information and explained that there would be no cost.

Results: Meeks says that around 75% of people he has invited to participate via LinkedIn have obliged—much more than the 30–40% he anticipated. And LinkedIn is now one of two major sources of feedback received. The other is Recruitingblogs.com—a site he found through his connections on LinkedIn.

Meeks also notes that he had several participants find him through recommendations from other users and through his own participation in group discussions.

He further reports that PreferredVendor has made huge leaps forward, not only in product design but also in some of the wording used and in the way users enter the site, thanks to the fresh perspective and countless suggestions in the feedback received.

“It is my opinion that LinkedIn will continue to be a great place to connect with people and in our case, help us progress,” he says.

Business Lessons Learned

- Focus on fostering relationships before asking for assistance. “It’s about getting to know people,” says Meeks. “When you’re genuine, they return the favor.”
- Personalize your communications to demonstrate you are sincerely interested in getting to know the person.
- Take advantage of the background information offered in user profiles to refine your search.

GENERATING NEW BUSINESS

LinkedIn is for more than just establishing contacts, relationships and brand awareness. The following are examples of how organizations are leveraging LinkedIn to improve sales and grow their businesses.



PJA Advertising + Marketing

PJA was named “BtoB Agency of the Year” by Advertising Age’s *BtoB Magazine* three years running. Still, times were hard in 2009. Even this favorite needed to find new avenues for drumming up business.

Company: PJA is an advertising and marketing agency with offices in Cambridge, Mass., and San Francisco serving technology, life science and health care clients.

Challenge: After successfully using LinkedIn to fill key positions within the agency, Greg Straface, vice president of business development, decided to find out how effective the network might be for new business outreach.

Solution: Straface invested around an hour a day and focused on three main activities.

First, he performed targeted searches for such keywords as “VP of marketing,” specific ZIP codes and company names, to identify key contacts to call, InMail, email, or forward the agency’s portfolio.

“90% of the time, LinkedIn search gets me close to whom I need to talk to,” he says. “It saves time and is very effective.”

Next, he kept track of who was looking at his profile and those of other PJA staff, as featured on each user’s homepage. He then researched those companies in more depth, identified their marketing directors and sent out the agency portfolio by FedEx so that it would land on their desks the next day. The following day, he followed up with a phone call, email, or InMail.

Lastly, Straface joined LinkedIn groups catering to CMOs to build conversations with relevant individuals. He monitored each group’s discussion posts until he found one seeking advice or a defined need he could answer, then he responded thoughtfully with content, rather than a pitch.

Results: These efforts have led to real business inquiries, agency pitches, and new accounts, such as Guidewire and Chase.

“By using LinkedIn actively in this way, it has become a very productive channel with huge financial return,” Straface says.

Business Lessons Learned

- Proactively search and drill down to the prospects you hope to reach using the various resources available through LinkedIn.
- Take advantage of InMail, particularly when a contact’s email address isn’t listed. Straface says InMail not only made it easier for him to reach certain people, it also generated more and quicker response than email on average.
- Actively listen to the conversations on group forums and look for distress signals that you may be able to answer.
- Take time to respond thoughtfully and to build the conversation. At the same time, respond with a sense of urgency that mirrors the contact’s need and demonstrates you’re willing and able to take it to the next level.

SimpleLeap Software

The logo for SimpleLeap, featuring the word "SimpleLeap" in white text on a dark purple rectangular background.

The staying power of LinkedIn group discussions—which don’t get lost in the timeline as quickly as Twitter and Facebook posts—makes the channel highly effective for getting the conversation started with industry decision makers and driving focused traffic to a company website or blog.

Company/Marketer: SimpleLeap Software is the two-person company behind Cram, an educational application that enables students to create, study, and share tests through their mobile devices and a web portal.

Challenge: SimpleLeap set out in 2009 to generate interest for its mobile application by investing thousands of dollars on Facebook Ads, Google Ad Words, and ad space on select Mac and iPhone-focused enthusiast sites. But while some people became Facebook fans or clicked on the company’s ads out of curiosity, these efforts weren’t very successful, and the traffic that did come through did not convert.

In October 2009, SimpleLeap founders Ashli Norton and Patrick Chukwura decided to scrap that plan and take another approach that wouldn’t involve any ad spend.

“Your reputation on LinkedIn is more important than on Twitter or Facebook because it’s really tied to your business,” Norton says. “When you post on LinkedIn, your real name is right there with your title and company name.”

Solution: In November, Norton decided to try LinkedIn for reaching decision makers in the education field. She posted a news item with a bit.ly link in one of the network’s education industry groups “just to see.” That post immediately generated clicks and sparked conversation. “The feedback was incredible,” she says. “We knew we had to continue.”

Using the company’s blog posts—which cover information on the education industry, the iPhone and other Mac products—as linkable content, she began posting in approximately 30 groups regularly. She staggered these postings so that users of multiple groups wouldn’t see as much duplication, but also so there would be a more regular stream of traffic to the blog. She did, however, post regularly enough to each group—approximately every two or three days—so that she would maintain a consistent presence and become known as an authority on these topics.

Norton also refrained from posting company-centric news unless it was relevant to other users in some way, so as to avoid being viewed as a spammer. “Your reputation on LinkedIn is more important than on Twitter or Facebook because it’s really tied to your business,” Norton says. “When you post on LinkedIn, your real name is right there with your title and company name. There are no aliases, and people take it a lot more seriously.”

To boost interest in her posts, Norton says she often edits the blog title and summary so that they’re brief and to the point. She also incorporates keywords to make them more search friendly.

In addition, Norton began commenting on others’ posts to further get her name out there. “If they’re even slightly interested in what you say, they might check your profile, and there they can view all the information we normally have to beg customers to see.”

Results: Every time Norton posts a link on LinkedIn to the company blog, traffic jumps significantly. She says the network tends to bring in double that of her other sources.

Although difficult to track direct referrals because many customers now come through the blog, the company has seen sales rise since Norton became active on LinkedIn. SimpleLeap Software is now in talks with three huge prospects who are considering using the company’s app in classrooms.

GENERATING NEW BUSINESS

“I personally think our efforts from simply sharing our blog posts could not be matched with paid advertising as posting links to our blogs posts is free, takes seconds to do, and at the very least positions our company as experts in our field,” Norton says. “We think people have learned to ignore traditional advertising and that by using LinkedIn to reach a group of decision-makers’ inboxes unobtrusively and have meaningful, one-on-one conversations with those that we usually would have to schedule appointments to talk to really is worth more than the thousands we spent last year in advertising.”

Business Lessons Learned

- Post information of interest to LinkedIn group discussion boards to reach decision-makers’ inboxes unobtrusively via group digests and draw interest in what you do.
- Structure your post titles and summaries to be catchy and keyword-rich.
- Link to your blog to usher traffic and introduce your company in a relevant manner.
- Use link-shortening services, such as bit.ly, to track real-time interest in your posts.

Global Recruiters of Seattle Eastside



Intent on doing more than just help associates find work, this recruiting manager found some truth in the saying “what goes around comes around.”

Company: Global Recruiters of Seattle Eastside specializes in placing top-quality diagnostic imaging field service engineers, biomedical equipment technicians (BMETs), information technology, software development, quality assurance, engineering, and consulting services professionals with the country’s best health care, medical device and consulting services employers.

Challenge: Jordan Shaw, recruiting manager for Global Recruiters of Seattle Eastside, originally joined LinkedIn to stay connected with a group of very special candidates he had recruited for a high-end consulting boutique. From there, his network continued to grow organically.

But as the market began to change and unemployment rose, Shaw increasingly started hearing from many contacts in search of new career opportunities. He decided to make more of an effort and get actively involved on LinkedIn as a

Shaw began posting and answering discussion questions on other industry groups with the intention of demonstrating his company's value proposition through helpful answers and insightful information.

means for both attracting new business and helping his friends find work during these difficult times.

Solution: One of the first things Shaw did was start a LinkedIn group called Pacific Northwest Networking, which he designed as a platform for HR professionals, hiring managers, and candidates to congregate and connect. "It's about helping people get back to work, whether it's through me or another company," Shaw says.

That's not to say he neglected the opportunity to promote his services completely, however. On the group's Overview page, he briefly listed contact information for hiring managers interested in launching a new candidate search and another email address for users wishing to submit their resumes.

To ensure the integrity of the group, Shaw made a point to not allow anyone in who was not at least willing to have a quick conversation with him over the phone or in person. "I wanted to grow the group into a network of people whom I know I can call upon and who hopefully feel they can call upon me."

Shaw also began posting and answering discussion questions on other industry groups with the intention of demonstrating his company's value proposition through helpful answers and insightful information. When appropriate, he would offer to further connect with a group member, and, when possible, move the conversation offline.

Additionally, he used keyword search to identify executives from regional companies who were also members of these same groups. He would then check out their websites to find out if they had any staff openings. If so, he'd find some common ground to warm up his introduction and use InMail to contact those people directly.

"I won't send someone a cold InMail message about my firm unless I have good idea they're going to want to hear from me," Shaw says.

Not fond of conducting relationships via email, Shaw said he kept those messages "as short and sweet as possible" with the intention of transitioning the conversation off LinkedIn to phone or in-person meetings.

Results: Shaw generated approximately 50 new job orders in 2009 through these efforts, with around 20% of those coming through the group he established. He expects this volume to grow in 2010, no doubt aided by the extensive referral network he has cultivated along the way.

GENERATING NEW BUSINESS

Business Lessons Learned

- Launch a group that pertains to your product or service but aims to assist others in a way they deem valuable.
- Allow connections and opportunities to evolve from the value you continually add to network interactions.
- Do research to identify defined needs or common connections before you reach out to potential clients.
- Begin the conversation on LinkedIn, then aim to move it offline where deeper relationships can form.

TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED

Now that you have an idea of what can be achieved on LinkedIn, here are a few ideas for getting started on the right foot.

“Be an unabashed self promoter, and make your profile sing your glories. Don’t be too inflated, but don’t be ashamed to tell people what you’ve done.” (Mark Amtower)

Complete and optimize your profile: Sell yourself and your business by filling out all relevant career history, achievements and interests. Use the profile summary to put forth a compelling elevator pitch. Write in the first person, and make your information easy to digest by breaking it up into short paragraphs and using succinct phrases. Also incorporate industry keywords where appropriate to increase your chances of showing up in search results. (Don’t forget to customize your website hyperlink titles!) Humanize your profile with a respectable picture and applications that sync your blog and Twitter posts. And don’t be embarrassed to ask for recommendations from satisfied clients and colleagues.

Tip: “Use keywords, but not in a way that takes away from your message ... Write your profile so that the search algorithms find you based on keywords, but also write so that when a human being sees it, they want to become engaged and talk to you.” (Jason Alba, author of *I’m on LinkedIn—Now What???*)

Grow your network: Import your email contacts and use the search feature to find and connect with all your business contacts. Search your contacts’ connections for anyone you know if common or would like to become introduced. Join LinkedIn groups and connect with industry thought leaders. Also register a vanity URL, then include it on all outgoing communications and marketing collateral.

Tip: Be personal with your invitations. Customize the text to properly introduce yourself and explain why you’d like to connect.

Build credibility and get some notice: Share relevant content by regularly updating your status, posting to group boards, answering queries in LinkedIn Answers, and uploading slide decks to your profile via the SlideShare application.

TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED

Tip: Enable others to share your blog or newsletter content on LinkedIn by incorporating share features into each entry or mailing. This can be achieved either manually or through a number of services, such as TreeHouse Interactive's "Talk it Up." Chris Frank, TreeHouse's director of marketing, says his company has boosted webinar signups by 200% just by including LinkedIn posting options within its promotional emails.

Start your own group to connect further: Use the popularity of LinkedIn groups to form your own community. Structure your group around a topic or activity of interest that will help you connect with thought leaders, get in touch with past associates, or attract your target market. For example, PJA Advertising + Marketing launched a group on LinkedIn to support its weekly radio show "This Week in Social Media." Hartford Business Journal uses LinkedIn groups to maintain connections with those who attend its local events and to build awareness for future events. And Steve Lubahn, general manager of Supreme School Supply Company and a MarketingProfs Pro member, started the "Lambda Chi Alpha—Iowa State University Alumni" group to reconnect with old friends.

Bonus Case Study: How Arketi Group Created the Largest B2B Marketing Group on LinkedIn



Company: Arketi Group is a high-tech public relations and marketing firm serving business-to-business companies.

Challenge: As a high-tech marketing firm, Arketi's clients expect it to have a certain amount of experience with social media tools. The company already had a presence on LinkedIn, but it sought to capitalize on that presence and demonstrate its prowess to clients.

After studying the network and conducting internal research, Arketi identified LinkedIn groups as an optimal platform for creating deeper connections with and among its target market: B2B practitioners. And not seeing a single B2B marketing-focused group on the network at the time, it seemed the perfect opportunity for Arketi to make its move.

Solution: In July 2008, Arketi established the "BtoB Marketing" group on LinkedIn. Left largely unbranded so that it would not appear too self-serving,

TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED

To facilitate collaboration among thousands of B2B practitioners, Arketi empowered the LinkedIn group's member base to drive much of the conversation that took place on its discussion boards.

the group features only hints of its association to the company. For example, the group logo carries a certain resemblance to the company's own logo.

"We would rather own the high-level space—the B2B marketing space, not the Arketi B2B space," Arketi Group Principal Mike Neumeier says.

To grow its membership, the company promoted the LinkedIn group on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn via status updates. It also sent personal email invitations to everyone featured on *BtoB Magazine's* "2008 Best Marketers" list. Plus, Arketi created a dedicated page on the company website, included links on all staff email footers, and incorporated calls to action in its monthly e-newsletter, which goes out to more than 2,000 recipients.

Each new member received a personalized welcome email outlining the objectives, rules and purpose of the group.

To facilitate collaboration among thousands of B2B practitioners, Arketi empowered the LinkedIn group's member base to drive much of the conversation that took place on its discussion boards. It did, however, inject a few engagement initiatives. For example, in addition to posted discussions, the company began distributing a text-based monthly newsletter called "Synergy," which covers industry information, events, and news. The newsletter also includes a section called "Thoughts From the Sponsor," which works to introduce the Arketi team to group members and briefly demonstrate the company's value proposition.

Results: With more than 3,850 members and 500 ongoing discussions, "BtoB Marketing" is currently the largest group on the network serving business-to-business marketers.

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