

MBF Meeting Notes, Tuesday 3rd July 2012

Promoting your business using LinkedIn

The subject for the meeting was “Promoting your Business”. We started with a practical look at how to use LinkedIn and this proved so interesting that it took up the whole of the meeting.

What is LinkedIn

LinkedIn is the largest online network for business people with **160 million members** in over 200 countries, over which over 9 million are in the UK. It is free to join.

You can send a request to connect to anyone with whom you have previously studied, worked or done business and if the person accept your request they become part of your network. Once connected, you can ask people to recommend you and to pass on message to their own connections, which can rapidly increase the number of people you can contact. For example, I have nearly 350 direct connections and these people are connected to about 30,000 other people which gives me a large number of potential contacts.

LinkedIn also has **groups for all types of business topics, interests and industries** – often many with overlapping interests since anyone can start a group. Some groups have selective membership (e.g. Chartered Accountants Ireland is for chartered accountants who qualified in Ireland) but many are open to anyone.

Company profiles can also be added to LinkedIn, making a useful source of information about businesses.

Members can provide updates on their activities which are seen by others in their network.

Uses of LinkedIn

1. For **contacting potential customers, partners or suppliers** for your business (mostly for B2B businesses). It is very easy to find people by name or company and you can then check to see if they are known to someone in your network who can give you an introduction. Looking at a company's profile shows you the names and job titles of LinkedIn members who work there, which may be helpful in finding other ways to contact the right person.
2. For **building up a valuable set of connections** that help you keep up to date with what is happening in your network and in your industry or area of interest. If you fill in details of your employment history and education, LinkedIn is very good at suggesting people you are likely to know and with whom you can connect.
3. For **building your professional reputation** by: filling in your profile with details of your achievements and experience ; providing links to any documents, presentations or videos you may have published; by contributing to discussions on groups; and by showing your expertise in providing helpful responses to questions in **LinkedIn Answers**. Chris Lilly told us that he had been offered work only that week because of his LinkedIn profile.
4. For **finding jobs**. There are lots of head hunters and recruitment agencies on LinkedIn but more importantly you can make yourself attractive to potential employers by building your professional reputation. David Wilson told the meeting how he had found jobs via LinkedIn.
5. For **improving your search ranking** on Google, Bing and other search engines. Personal and company LinkedIn profiles can be highly ranked because LinkedIn is such a large, dynamic and reputable network, but you need to work to make sure your LinkedIn profile is as complete as possible and mentions the key words for which you want to be found.

Pitfalls of using LinkedIn

Using LinkedIn can result in unwanted mails

- Requests to connect from people pretending to know you. The experience of the meeting was that this only led to a few unwanted mails a week, so it was not a serious issue. You can just block the senders or send them a polite refusal
- If you follow discussions taking place in groups, you may receive lots of emails, one every time someone comments on a discussion. But you can change the settings to reduce the number of emails (e.g. to one weekly digest from the group)

Also it is possible that competitors will try to connect with you to see your network in the hope of stealing your clients. But you can either not connect to potential competitors or else change your settings so that your connections cannot see your network.

Thirdly, your activity on LinkedIn can give away your intentions – people looking for a new job tend to update their profile and start connecting to head hunters. You may not want to broadcast your intentions, but on the other hand you may want to tell as many people as possible about a new role, project or interest.

Premium Subscription

It is possible to pay for a premium subscription (c.£16/mth) which allows you to send mails directly to those you do not know, to see more information about those not in your network and to send out more introductions at a time. But the two people at the meeting who had signed up for this had not found that it brought great benefits – it seemed to be better to build up your network slowly and steadily via the people you knew.

Best practices

- Use LinkedIn regularly if your company or job is selling to other businesses or professional people. David Wilson often spends a minute or so checking for updates every hour but most of us check every day or two and spend ½ - 1 hour a week
- Complete your profile and your company's profile, including a good description of your expertise and services (with the right key words) to make the most of the opportunity to be found and noticed
- Add a photo. Do not be shy – it is not a beauty parade but people buy from people and are more willing to connect if they can see your photo. If you are really hesitant, at least add a company logo or picture
- If you are trying to sell particular expertise, spend some time on LinkedIn Answers seeing if there are questions you can answer to build your reputation
- Find the biggest and most active groups on the subjects that most interest you or that involve the people whom you want to influence. If they are active, join in the discussions. It is usually better to be an active member in a few groups than a member of lots of groups in which you rarely participate.

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