

LinkedIn: Maximizing Your Online Profile

LinkedIn is the gold standard for getting your skills into play with online recruiters who are looking to find job candidates. We highly recommend that you take the time to take some online courses to make the best use of the career functionality of LinkedIn; there are many free ones on YouTube and some more specialized ones on paid eLearning sites like Lynda (Lynda was acquired by LinkedIn in 2015), Udemy, Coursera, edX, etc. LinkedIn is a very robust platform, with tons of features. Outlined below are some of the most important ones you should be familiar with if you are looking for a job:

1. Your LinkedIn profile is not the same as your resume. Your resume should be a fairly consistent document that lists key details of every major role you've had along with your accomplishments. Your resume can (and should be) tailored for specific job opportunities to highlight relevant skill sand experience. Your LinkedIn profile is a calling card in the digital world, and a very important one to convey key facts about your capabilities, career interests, and intent to find a new role. LinkedIn is also a sophisticated database “endpoint” that will allow your skills and interests to be searchable by recruiters and search engines. There is an entire science behind how LinkedIn works, similar to how Google searches are constructed and prioritized.
2. LinkedIn is a professional networking site; not a social/political/entertainment site. Take the time to get a good, clear, professional photo, and get rid of the photo of your dog licking your face (unless you plan to be a pet-sitter). At a minimum, your profile should include your educational history and a brief summary of your jobs and key accomplishments. Profiles with a photo get significantly more hits in search than those without.
3. LinkedIn headline. The professional headline field that appears below your name in your LinkedIn profile is of critical importance to the LinkedIn search algorithm. Most people just have their name, their title, and their company name in the headline, which is a complete waste of time: thousands of people have that same title, and maybe thousands of people work in that same company. You should have at least 8-10 keywords that convey what you do well and what types of roles you are suited for in this section. This information will help your profile be in the top few profiles with those skills versus winding up as profile number 3,986 out of 4,000 profiles that come up in a recruiter search. Here are two examples of a professional headline; one is weak, and the other is much stronger and “keyword rich:”
 - WEAK: [Jane Smith] Project Manager, ABC BioTech Company
 - KEYWORD RICH: [Jane Smith] Entrepreneur | Software Engineer | Sales Executive | Project Team Leader | Biotechnology | PhD., Bioengineering | Author

4. There is a “summary” section in your LinkedIn profile that should be carefully constructed to provide keywords that recruiters can use to find you for jobs that you are interested in. Search online job sites for job descriptions that sound interesting to you, and try to relate key phrases or words from those position descriptions to your own LinkedIn profile. The summary will also provide greater detail on the areas you identified in your professional headline. There is a software application that can do an analysis of your LinkedIn profile compared to a job posting, to check and see which keywords in the posting are present in your profile (<https://www.jobscan.co/>).
5. Check the privacy settings in your profile to insure your profile indicates that you are interested in being contacted by recruiters. Some recruiters will contact you no matter what this says, but if you are actively looking you should be sure this function is turned on. To enable it, follow these steps (subject to change):
 - a. Go to your main LinkedIn profile page, and at the top right corner in the blue bar you will see a small arrow under your picture that says “Me.”
 - b. Click on the arrow and a pop-up will list “ACCOUNT;” below that you will click on “Settings & Privacy”
 - c. This will open a tab with 3 options (Account, Privacy, Communications)
 - d. Select “Privacy” and then on the left “Job Seeking”
 - e. Once you are at the “Job Seeking” section, you will see a sentence that says “Let recruiters know you are open to opportunities.”
 - f. There will be a light grey “Change” option on the left.
 - g. Click on “Change” and insure the radio button is turned on to “Yes”
6. Paid vs. Free.* Anyone can set up a LinkedIn account for free, and for most people, having a free account is good enough. But if you are searching for a job, does it help to have a “premium” account with LinkedIn? Maybe. LinkedIn has a “Premium Career” product for \$29.99 per month that gives its users a few distinct features over a free account. Let’s review some of these features:
 - a. When you apply for jobs as a Premium Career subscriber, your application will appear as a “Featured Applicant” above applications from non-premium members.
 - b. You can see the full list of who has viewed your profile in the last 90 days. In theory, this could be useful if you contact those persons who might be able to help you in your job search. But in practice, this may be of limited use. If recruiters (for example) are looking at your profile, they’ll contact you if they’re interested, so seeing who looked at your profile may only confirm that someone who works at a company you applied for a job looked at your profile (it doesn’t tell you whether they liked your profile or decided to pass).

- c. You get 5 “Inmail” credits per month to reach out to hiring managers or recruiters directly. This could be useful, however you can always approach these persons with a free account and ask to join their network. If you ask someone to join your network, ALWAYS give a bit of background on why they should accept your invitation to connect. Nothing is more irritating than getting an email that says “Hi Steve, I’d like to join your LinkedIn network.” There are plenty of people that want to get into other people’s networks, and most of them are looking to sell something, or want to reach someone else in your network after they get in. That’s fine, of course, but they should say it when they first send the connection request.
 - d. When you see a job position that looks interesting, “Premium Insights” will appear on the LinkedIn job listing and give you some analytics on how many people have applied, what the education level is compared to you, what the seniority level of other applicants is (for example, “7 Manager level applicants”), and the estimated salary for the job you are considering applying to. There is also a company overview of the target company that tells how many employees it has, average tenure, growth rate, and some “talent sources” including which companies and universities the target company recruits from. All this information is interesting, and may be useful if you can estimate how competitive the job is (based on your skills and profile) vs. other jobs. Finally you get a daily “Premium Group” email that is private to members only, and has links to content for job seekers as well as a Q&A forum.
 - e. So is it worth it? You decide. We would advise you at least try it for a couple of months and if you don’t think it is valuable, you can cancel. Some of the features may be valuable to you if you are primarily applying for open jobs listed on the LinkedIn jobs site, or if you want to learn more about the competition you are facing for specific jobs as outlined in paragraph “d” above.
7. What if recruiters aren’t reaching out to you on LinkedIn? Some candidates receive more unsolicited job “interest inquiries” from recruiters on LinkedIn than others. Obviously, your skill profile, your picture, your profile headline, and yes, your age, can all play greatly influence whether or not you get solicitations. If you are not getting any recruiters contacting you about jobs, even after purchasing a “Premium” LinkedIn subscription, you might want to try the following tactics:
- a. Consider removing dates suggesting that you are much older than the average worker. For example, if you have an undergraduate degree that you earned in 1978, ponder this: the average recruiting sourcer is likely to be a college grad working at a very junior level who was born sometime *after 1990*, a full 12 years after you received your degree! Of course, this is only an example, but the cold reality is that the more reasons you give a complete stranger looking at your profile to pass on it, the deeper hole you dig for yourself.

- b. Make periodic updates to your LinkedIn profile. Taking periodic action on your profile, even a very small change here or there, will send a “signal” to recruiters that you may be active in a job search or considering other opportunities. There is a setting in the communication section that allows you to turn on or off notifications to your network when you make a change to your profile. We recommend turning it off, as your network might get annoyed seeing an email with your name on it every time you change a word or two in LinkedIn.
- c. Reach out directly to the recruiters listed on LinkedIn job applications. If you have a premium account, you will have 5 “inmail” messages you can send per month.
- d. Consider removing experience or education (or jobs held with specific dates) that go back beyond about 15-20 years. Similar to item “a” above, this one hints at age, but also can negatively affect the relevance of skills you do want to get noticed. For example, if you have 5 years of experience as a programmer for IBM mainframe computers, you’re calling attention to a business that doesn’t exist anymore. Try to match your more recent skills to specific opportunities or types of jobs you want to get contacted for. LinkedIn is a dynamic tool, and you can mix it up from time to time to see if you get different results.
- e. Try sending an email to your entire LinkedIn contacts list. This is really what LinkedIn is all about: helping people network with one another to take advantage of business opportunities. If you have already left your last company (and thus not worried about signaling to your employer you are considering leaving), a concise, well-written email to your network can be a great way to generate leads. If you go this route, let people know that you are in the market for a new role, specify what kind of role it is, and ask them to refer anyone who might know of such a role to you. People in your network can’t help you if they don’t know you are looking. If you generate leads this way, be sure to follow up with the person who referred the leads, and thank them for the help they’ve given you. Even if the referral/lead doesn’t respond or doesn’t pan out for some reason, saying “thanks” to the person who referred you will reinforce that they’ve done something positive and are being recognized for it.
- f. Focus on “power referrers.” You’ve heard of the 80/20 rule, right? 80% of the results derive from 20% of the efforts. The same is true with networking. If you take the time to act on leads and keep the person who referred you in the loop, you will soon find that you have a handful of people in your network who send you leads over and over again. Chances are, you already know some of these people: people with whom you’ve worked in the past and have a great relationship with will have your back when you are in need. Take the time to update them on your progress, and if their schedule permits, take them to lunch or dinner as a “thank you” for the help they have offered. Although the LinkedIn platform has an external focus on having the largest network

possible, everyone knows that the large majority of LinkedIn contacts they have are people they barely know. Focus on the 20%.

8. Take a Class. Learning how to “tweak” your online profile with LinkedIn can pay off in a job search. Even if you have had a LinkedIn profile for years, there are always new features and functionality being added, so it is well worth taking a class or two on how to improve both your overall profile and also your ranking when recruiters search for candidates. There are many, many classes on LinkedIn and related topics, including many free ones on YouTube. Here is a sample of some good LinkedIn training sites (the following three are paid classes that we have actually taken and found useful):
 - a. “*How to Stand Out on LinkedIn: Tried and Tested*,” by Drew Patterson, paid course on Udemy (<https://www.udemy.com>)
 - b. “*Leveraging LinkedIn Webinar*,” a paid webinar conducted by Matt Youngquist of Career Horizons (<http://www.career-horizons.com>)
 - c. “*Job Search Mastery #1: Write a Killer CV + LinkedIn Profile*,” by Hamza Zaouali, paid course on Udemy (<https://www.udemy.com>). This course spends significant time on preparing a winning resume, and the instructor has some great ideas and creative solutions to common resume challenges.
9. Hire a Pro. LinkedIn has a large database of freelancers called “Profinder” that can help you with everything from accounting to resume preparation. The service asks you a few basic questions about your project or need, and then connects you with several “pros” that can deliver the service. Individual pros determine their own rates for the service you are requesting. <https://www.linkedin.com/profinder>.
10. Get the Details Right. Your LinkedIn profile is your brand, and for most people, one of their most public and accessible sources of background information. Take the time to get the details right:
 - a. Do a spell check. Spelling errors send a message, and even small things like leaving out commas or having a misspelled word in an important section can be detrimental.
 - b. Make sure your email is current! If you have just left your job, the last thing you want is for recruiters to be trying to contact you on your old/previous company email. Check your settings and update your email, and then have a friend send you a “test” email to confirm.
 - c. Check the acronyms. Not everyone knows the industry jargon you know, and even common things like “PMP” (Project Management Professional) should be spelled out on your profile at least one time.
 - d. Check all of your privacy settings. If you are making frequent changes to your LinkedIn profile, you may not want to share every single update

you make with your entire network. In the “Settings > Privacy” part of your account you can select whether or not you are “Sharing Profile Edits.”

11. Ask for Recommendations. Having several professional recommendations on your LinkedIn profile is important. Ideally, you should have at least one recommendation from each major job you’ve had (no need to go back more than about ten years if you’ve been in the workforce for a long time). When asking people in your network to provide a recommendation, make it easy for them. Tell them the areas you want them to highlight. For example, you could say:

“Hi [Name], I wanted to see if you would be willing to write a professional recommendation for me from our time at [Company]. If so, please highlight my ability to work with teams, capacity to get results, provide great service to my customers, as well as [etc., etc.]”

Another tactic, particularly if you are asking very senior people to give you a recommendation, is to write a brief narrative referral that they can cut-and-paste word for word or modify as needed. Always offer to write your referrers a recommendation in return, and don’t ever use a “generic” request for recommendation: each one should be tailored to the person you are asking.

To get recommendations on your LinkedIn profile, go to your profile page and scroll down the page until you see the Recommendations section. There is a link that says: “Ask to be recommended.” Use this link to send an email request for a recommendation to the people you are asking for help. Once your recommender completes the recommendation, you will see the draft recommendation on your home profile page, but you will have to “accept” the recommendation before it shows on your public profile.

12. Set Up Job Alerts. LinkedIn and other job sites have features for you to sign up for alerts when new jobs become available, based on your criteria. Although these job sites are reaching a very wide audience, sometimes you will be able to be one of the first applicants for a new job when it is first posted. Does it matter if you are among the first 10—or even 100—applicants for an online job posting? We think it does.

Good recruiters will be motivated to find great candidates for the roles they have open, so they will frequently look carefully at the first few candidates who apply for a given job. After a job posting has received 50, 100, or 500 applicants, the recruiter is simply drowning in resumes. At that point the recruiter is probably not looking at individual resumes, they are instead using keywords to filter candidate resumes that most closely match the job posting.

Job alerts also give you valuable data on which companies are hiring, and by having the ability to set up your criteria you will be able to focus only on those

jobs that are a close match with your needs. For example, an alert set for “product manager” will return thousands of jobs, but with the simple addition of your zip code or city you can quickly reduce the list of jobs to only ones in your area.

To set up LinkedIn job alerts, go to the home page for LinkedIn, and select “Jobs” from the top menu bar. There will be two search bars, one is a general keyword bar, and the other one is for location. After you run a search, you will see an option to “Create Search Alert” from the search you have just run. You can set up multiple alerts, and there are many more filters on the Jobs page to help narrow down your searches.

**Note: LinkedIn changes its functionality and features periodically; this summary is as of November 2017.*