

How to Build Your LinkedIn Business Network

Walter Adamson
www.Digitalinvestor.com.au

April 03, 2004 – 2200 words.

Building an effective LinkedIn™ Network takes more than simply importing your Contact List and bulk mailing.

Ironically, LinkedIn provides a bulk Outlook import tool, but also issues the following suggestions about who to invite:

- Only invite those you know well;
- Only invite those you trust;
- Only invite those you want to forward things to you.

If I am typical of a business user and their Contact List this means that you would only select about 20% of the Outlook list that you have bulk imported to send invitations to join your LinkedIn Network.

How do you build your LinkedIn Network if you can't leverage most of your Contact list?

People Fall into Two Groups

To build your Network sounds simple, but I have seen the majority of my colleagues fall into two categories of people when facing the task of building their Network. The first group simply bulk mail with the standard invitation, and tell me that they had a poor response rate and doubt the usefulness of the system.

The second group firstly tell me that my type of consulting is different to their line of consulting and therefore LinkedIn probably does not suit, and then when pressed they admit they don't know how to start to invite people. They fear that the people they approach are too busy and will see no value in being part of their Network.

My response to the first group is that the LinkedIn system is not the problem - rather, **their approach to building their network** is the problem.

To the second group, I firstly ask how they build their business if not through contacts, and that is the purpose of LinkedIn. Actually when they tell me that LinkedIn does not suit their style of work I usually ask them what they are smoking over there! I mean, *are we on the same planet here or not?* I then go on to (1) agree with them that people have to be convinced to join, and (2) this takes investment and effort.

What Does It Take?

What it takes is an operational approach to **how to** get the networking done.

This requires more than the guidelines given by LinkedIn at the site. In fact the guidelines are a little simplistic for this following reason: you can use LinkedIn as a wonderful opportunity to build a very powerful network of new and influential people, where they reflect the trust of others, but where you may not know them really well yourself when you want to invite them.

Here are the operational steps that I recommend:

Posted on DIBlog.com by walter adamson on April 03, 2004
Permalink: http://www.diblog.com/2004/04/how_to_build_yo.html
TrackBack URL: <http://www.typepad.com/t/trackback/599742>

1. START WITH AN OBJECTIVE

Think through **what kind of network** you want to build, and why, and why this will build your business and attract others to be a part.

For example, you might want to build a network of the world's leading thinkers in shared services and the cultural change and service model orientation that is needed to make shared services successful. Write these elements down and think about them - map them on paper as visual links, whatever, **get them clear**.

2. SELECT YOUR CONNECTIONS STRATEGICALLY AND INVITE THEM TACTICALLY

Now, you probably know people in the field of your newly defined objective, but when you look over your Outlook Contact List there are not many that really suit the new purpose. This is where **you have to do hard** research.

Firstly, mark the people that you know are best in the field, and then get into Google and research all the leaders and opinion-makers that you don't yet know (or don't know you!). Work hard to find desired people and the responsive people, and the people who you believe would accept your invitation. Why would they accept if they may not know you, or hardly know you? Because you follow the following two steps.

3. WORK HARD ON YOUR PROFILE

Next, set to work on your Profile. This is maddening, and blinding from staring at the screen and the words for too long, and difficult - but you must get it **aligned** with your new objective. That is, **get your Profile fit for purpose**.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that a general profile will do. Your Profile has to motivate your potential new members who you want to be influencers and leaders in your sector.

The more time you put into your Profile the better result you will get. The more time you put into the Headline of your Profile the better result you will get - this Headline is what is seen by others when they search through visible connections.

4. SPEND AS MUCH TIME AS IS NEEDED ON EACH INVITATION

Preparing invitations is a little different to the work needed on the Profile.

For some people, who you know well, you only need a simple quick invitation. For others you need a carefully crafted and personally appealing invitation. After all, some people have large egos, some people have a compulsive need to network, some people are keen to be recognised for their powerful position - make the invitation sing to the invitee. If you are building a new business network to suit your well-thought-through objectives then this is essential.

To build a good strong network with worthwhile objectives, if my experience is a guide, will take you 100's of hours.

Next you move to the most tactical step, and the one not written about in the general guidelines on building your network.

Posted on Dblog.com by walter adamson on April 03, 2004

5. INVITE PEOPLE IN ORDER OF INFLUENCE

This is not a rock-solid rule or tactic, because you can invite many colleagues and 'lateral' influencers in a near random order.

However, if you want to build a strong new network then you have to think carefully about the order of invitations. Don't rush because you are impatient or excited. The most effective way is not always the direct way.

It works like this. If you really want person A to join, because A will lead to a worthwhile relationship aligned with your network objectives, but you know A to be reluctant, then target person B who is respected by A. Research B, and work out if B is likely to join directly, or whether you might have to even target person C in order to attract B in order to attract A. In my network building I had many such instances.

Then painstakingly craft an invitation to C, then include their acceptance into your network in your hand-crafted invitation to B, and then the acceptance of C and B becomes part of your invitation to A.

Also, think about those relevant contacts who are good networkers and make sure that you invite those early, and in the best sequence as described above.

What Not To Do

Here's what experience taught me not to do:

- Don't invite your friends into your business network;
- Don't invite your old colleagues and people from your old firm - because if you do they will keep your business network tied to the past and not aligned with your new objectives;
- Don't invite people who are not going to build their own network; and
- Don't accept invitations too easily from people wanting to link to your network.

Aim High

What you should do is aim high, aim for the most strategic network objective that you can think of, and aim for the people who are hardest to get into your network.

By doing this you build and even multiply the power of your business network, and LinkedIn is the best tool I know to help you do it.

You should invest in and coordinate these three marketing tools to most effectively represent your business on the Internet and grow your network:

1. Your Website - for reference presentation, methodologies and articles, and coordinated email marketing;

2. Your LinkedIn Membership - for an effective and efficient networking tool;

3. Your Blog - for interaction and mind capture in your field and for expanding your influence.

Posted by: Konstantin Guericke | August 2, 2004 04:18 AM

Comments

I'm one of the co-founders of LinkedIn and found your article very refreshing. Most blogs repeat cliches about online networking tools like LinkedIn, but few focus on *how* they can be used most effectively.

And it's all about "how." With hundreds of thousands (900,000 currently) of LinkedIn users, we just did a survey of how professionals use LinkedIn and what their results have been.

The result: some are very savvy about building their network, establishing a quality reputation and leveraging the reputation they've earned with their peers and have already amazing results to show.

But clearly the majority is not quite sure what to do with it, and a small group has gone with a quantity over quality approach they learned at open-access sites.

LinkedIn is a tool, so the results vary tremendously depending on who is using it. A hammer makes it easier to build a house, but it is also worth remembering that it requires an arm and a brain to use it well and that it's also possible to injure yourself with it.

But pain from injuries are a good thing, too, since it stimulates learning. To keep things simple (and the KISS principle is important for any good tool), we launched LinkedIn 15 months ago with just one relationship in mind: a very strong one.

After all, you have to be willing to recommend not just the person with whom you are connecting, but also know them well enough to trust their judgment in people they recommend to you.

To keep relationships strong, we built in feedback mechanisms that encourage people to invite their best and most trusted contacts and not just the convenient ones (those who are already signed up). After all, every link will get tested sooner or later if the person asks you for an introduction on their own or a friend's behalf or if you need to make a judgment call on whether or not to forward a contact request to them from one of your contacts.

Not knowing both parties well not only leads to awkwardness, but can also damage your reputation by forwarding requests that are not win-win or by not acting on a request and letting your contact see that you are not forwarding theirs.

I think a well-reasoned decline is always better for relationships than an ignore (and we designed LinkedIn, so you can do so anonymously).

And, for example, if the person does not heed your advice to provide more useful info when asking you to introduce their contact or to clearly present the value proposition to the intended recipient, then you can always disconnect.

Our customer service now has a system in place that prioritizes dis-connection requests above all others and connections should be cut within hours of requesting them if you contact us during business hours California time.

Posted on Dblog.com by walter adamson on April 03, 2004

But we are learning a lot, and LinkedIn has evolved considerably since we launched in May 2003.

In the beginning, we did not show how many degrees people were away, we did not even allow your direct connections to see who you know and we only allowed contact by referral.

All were designed to provide privacy and very fine filters to satisfy business people who get deluged with people wanting things from them in the real world and who find it intolerable to be on network where they get more of the same.

But it made things too opaque. For people to trust the system, we had to open it up a bit more.

Later, we found out that a very small percentage of users went overboard with invitations (quantity over quality approach) because our feedback mechanism above which emulates real-life human behavior takes too long to kick in.

Rather than being heavy-handed and directly impose limits on the senders, we added a feature for invitation blocking for those poor souls (VC's, reporters, execs) who are found in the address books of tens of thousands of people because these people met them once and thought LinkedIn would be good way to reach out to them.

Now the people who are in the address books of others can control who can invite them based on who they keep in *their* address book.

I'm sure we will be learning more things and evolving the system. After all, people inviting lots of people to LinkedIn is not generally a bad thing. It's just a bad thing for the one and only kind of relationship we currently allow in the system.

Also, having a large group of users and many of them with lots of content on their profiles, we are learning that we are becoming a sort of business people search engine for many where people look up people they are meeting for the first time or even people they know, but whose history they didn't know.

Posted by: Konstantin Guericke | August 2, 2004 04:18 AM

Konstantin Guericke is one of the co-founders of LinkedIn.

Walter Adamson is the Founder and Principal of Digital Investor, based in Melbourne, Australia. He provides business advice to IT and Telco services providers, and key users of their services, in Asia Pacific. In particular he helps these businesses with strategy, partnering and customer value definition and delivery. He is the External Advisor to the ICT Strategy Board of the Government of Victoria, Australia.

You can find Walter at:

www.digitalinvestor.com.au
www.imodestrategy.com
www.OpenTTO.org

*i-mode Business Strategy
World's first open source Technology Transfer Office*

or Call (Australia) +61 403 345 632.

Posted on Dblog.com by walter adamson on April 03, 2004

www.Dblog.com

adamson@digitalinvestor.com.au