

## **Benefits of using LinkedIn in a B2B Environment**

### **Introduction**

Online professional networks, such as LinkedIn, are full of opportunities for B2B enterprises. As the name suggests, they offer an excellent platform for networking, but there are other, less obvious ways in which they can be used to win work, and achieve influence.

### **What is LinkedIn?**

LinkedIn is a professionally focused social networking service that connects business professionals with their colleagues, clients, suppliers and others. It is a place for people of similar and different backgrounds to connect, problem solve and find employment. It also serves as a fantastic forum for making new connections.

### **Benefits of LinkedIn for B2B businesses**

In no particular order:

- Great networking capability:
  - LinkedIn is a business networking powerhouse. The number of people using it is staggering. In fact, a new member joins LinkedIn approximately every second. As of June 2010, LinkedIn had over 70 million members in over 200 countries and territories. Executives from all FTSE 350 and Fortune 500 companies are LinkedIn members.
  - LinkedIn works by allowing you to connect with people: it can search through your email addresses and check whether your existing contacts are on LinkedIn.
  - It can search through your profile details, and find possible contacts who went to University with you, or worked at the same company as you.
  - You can search through LinkedIn yourself to find people you would like to be connected with.
  - Most importantly, LinkedIn allows you to see who your contacts are connected to, and to ask them to provide a warm introduction to interesting prospects on their connection lists. This increases your networking capability exponentially.
- It is target-rich:
  - LinkedIn can be used to identify potential clients, suppliers, employees, employers, or even the best people to invite to a forthcoming event.
  - The search facility makes it easy to identify the decision-makers and influencers at prospective client companies.

- You can search for and connect with people in a specific position within a company in the industry that you are interested in - or even in a particular geographic area.
- It is much easier than using mailing lists, which very quickly become out of date and must be 'cleaned-up' at great expense and time before using them.
- Market research:
  - LinkedIn has many discussion Groups on a wide variety of subjects that you can apply to join. These Groups are a great way of connecting with other professionals in your area of work, and discussing market issues and trends.
  - You can carry out surveys and polls on LinkedIn.
  - The research capabilities of the service are useful when trying to find out about your competitors.
- It allows a respectful and intelligent approach:
  - LinkedIn serves as an excellent pre-cursor to speaking to your prospective client on the phone or face to face. The first stage in the sales process is 'acknowledgement' and you can achieve this through LinkedIn without any of the awkwardness involved in a 'cold call' or networking event.
  - You can use the service to research your target company or client, so that you have all the information necessary to craft a respectful and intelligent introductory email.
  - Your prospect's LinkedIn profile may reveal that you have interests in common, helping to break the ice when you do make your first call or have that first meeting. Perhaps you went to the same University, or grew up in the same area? Perhaps you're both interested in sky-diving or collecting vintage wine?
  - A mailing list or generic internet research is far less likely to provide sufficient intelligence to allow you to really engage with your prospect from the beginning and at different levels.
- You can create a compelling profile:
  - A compelling profile page on LinkedIn helps you to stand out from the competition. It is your face to the online world, and the key to winning work online.
  - You can optimise your profile so that when people search for an expert in your field, your name appears near the top of the list.
  - You can craft your profile in such a way that when people read it, they are encouraged to get in touch.
- You can showcase your expertise:

- First impressions count - you can use the introductory message you send to your prospective connections to position yourself as an expert.
- You can use your profile to highlight the depth of your knowledge and experience.
- You can display recommendations from colleagues or clients praising your expertise.
- You can contribute to the Answers section of LinkedIn, where you can demonstrate your expertise by providing answers to questions or requests for information from other members.
- You can offer thought leadership:
  - LinkedIn's many discussion Groups are perfect for demonstrating knowledge and offering insights into the market.
  - You can initiate discussions, giving your thoughts on areas of interest to you. Members often forward thoughtful comments onto their connections, 'virally' raising the profile of the contributor.
  - If there is no Group for your specialist subject, then you can create one.
- You can promote your personal or company brand:
  - Using any aspect of LinkedIn, including the personal profile, discussion Groups and LinkedIn Answers, helps to raise your profile and promote your brand.
  - You can create a detailed LinkedIn profile for your company, including a description of what your company does, how many employees it has and where you are located.
  - This profile can be helpful in establishing an employer brand, as well as for online brand awareness in general.
  - You can promote this profile in a similar way to your personal profile by including the URL in your email signature, on your business cards or on your blog.
- You can use LinkedIn to run alumni programmes:
  - Alumni programmes allow current and former employees to keep in touch with each other, and are a natural fit with a networking website like LinkedIn.
  - Such programmes can create a sense of community, improve your employer brand and encourage old employees to keep you in mind when business opportunities come along.
- You can increase your internet presence:
  - Creating a profile on LinkedIn will increase your presence on Google, as LinkedIn pages generally have a high Google ranking.

- To get the full benefit from this, you should select the 'Full View' option on your public profile, and also customise its URL to include your name, or your company name for a company profile.
- You can also use your contributions to Group discussions, or in LinkedIn Answers, to drive traffic to your website.
- You can seek information or advice on work-related issues:
  - The Questions section on LinkedIn enables you to pose questions or seek information that will help you in your business.
  - You can choose to restrict your questions to selected connections, or you can open them up to the wider LinkedIn network.
- It is cost effective:
  - Creating an account on LinkedIn is free, unless you choose to upgrade to a premium account.
  - It is also very straightforward to create an account and develop your profile.

If you need more information or support in discovering how LinkedIn can benefit your business, contact Christine Black, Client Services Manager on 07964 713592 or at [christineblack@winningwork.co.uk](mailto:christineblack@winningwork.co.uk) or Adam Gordon, Director on 07870 268288 or at [adamgordon@winningwork.co.uk](mailto:adamgordon@winningwork.co.uk)