

How to create a LinkedIn Group

Introduction

LinkedIn Groups are online meeting places where you can engage with new people and demonstrate expertise or thought leadership. They are themed communities of like-minded people, and are often industry-related, event based or focused on an area of common interest.

There are already many different groups on LinkedIn on a wide variety of subjects, and if you are looking to join one you should consider those that are relevant to your area of expertise, or groups where you think prospective clients are likely to be.

Alternatively, you can create your own LinkedIn Group on your chosen specialist area of expertise.

Guidelines

The key elements involved in building a successful LinkedIn Group are:

- Make sure the title of the Group is compelling, authoritative or topical. It needs to contain a phrase that will make invitees believe the content and experience of membership will be of major interest and benefit to them.
- Do not overtly brand your LinkedIn Group as your company's Group. This will put potential members off immediately as they may feel the Group is simply a sales vehicle for your business.
- Ensure that you, or someone well known, takes on the 'owner' role for the Group. This is a figurehead position and doesn't mean that the 'owner' will have to do all (or any) of the work.
- 'Manager' status should be given to two or three colleagues who understand how to use LinkedIn and understand that the LinkedIn Group is a marketing platform for your business.
- You should source and actively invite enough members to join and participate in your Group.
- Aim for quality and not quantity and select your chosen members carefully – it is easier to preserve the integrity of your group if all the members have an active interest in the subject.

Preparation

- Before you create your Group, you should spend some time getting your ideas together. Think carefully about what you want to achieve by creating your own Group. Depending on your overall LinkedIn strategy, you may wish to create a Group for LinkedIn users based on a common profession, industry, geography or issues.
- Use the LinkedIn Groups directory to see the types of groups that already exist. Are there Groups on similar subject areas to the one you are

considering, and if so, are they thriving? If there already is a Group on your proposed topic, then you could consider narrowing or widening out your subject to differentiate it.

- Once you have decided on the subject for your Group, you should create an appropriate logo. There are free online 'create a logo' websites that can help you with this. The logo will appear on the profiles of your Group members.
- Prepare a series of discussion topics you think the Group members will be interested in, and plan to post them on your Group in succession over the coming weeks to really 'kick-start' the interaction. Aim to have between two and four 'discussions' available on the appropriate section when the Group goes live, so that there is already content for the members to comment on when they first enter the Group.

Creating Your Group

- On your LinkedIn 'Home' page, select 'Groups' and from the dropdown menu, select 'Create a Group'.
- Near the top click 'Choose File' to select your pre-created Group logo and attach this.
- Add the name for your Group. This should be descriptive, relevant and concise.
- Enter the summary and description for the Group in the relevant places. Use keywords related to your subject in your description, so your Group will show up in search results for these terms.
- If you want anyone to be able to join the Group without your approval, click on the 'Open Access' option. If you want to control who joins then leave the 'Request to Join' option checked.

Inviting members

Think carefully about your prospective Group members. You ideally want to invite members who are peer-level, work in the same sector or have other elements in common which should appeal to them as a reason for joining.

- Once you have created your Group, you have the option of inviting your existing LinkedIn contacts to join. Click on their names from the list to send them an invitation.
- You can also use the 'advanced search' function and enter job titles, locations and any other criteria to find suitable LinkedIn users to invite to join your Group.
- Once you have your list of prospective Group members you need to source all their email addresses through the normal research channels you would use - for example, by searching online or calling the company for contact details.

- Once you have the email addresses, you should go back to your Group, click 'manage' and click 'invite members'. You can then upload the email addresses in order to broadcast the Group to suitable members and invite them to join.
- Create your invitation and welcome message for members. These need to be concise but must tell the recipients how and why they will benefit from joining and participating in the Group. The language should not appear to sell your business but should imply your knowledge. The invitation should come from the Group 'owner'

Maintaining your Group

Once you have carried out the stages outlined above, you are likely to have built a strong Group with an excellent theme and members with common interests. There are a variety of things you can do to continue the Group's momentum to ensure you benefit as much as is possible:

- Continue to post regular discussions on the Group. You should post a minimum of two new discussion topics a week. We have found that Friday morning is the best time to post new discussion topics, as LinkedIn traffic surges on Friday afternoon.
- Post appropriate news stories on the Group.
- Comment on other people's discussions on the Group.
- Invite new Group members to join when you come across their LinkedIn profiles.
- Broadcast your LinkedIn Group on other correspondence e.g. your email auto-signature, or your facebook or twitter account.
- Add details of any seminars, conferences, webinars etc related to your Group subject.
- Arrange Group 'meet-ups' offline if this is possible.

If you need more information or support with your LinkedIn Group, contact Christine Black, Client Services Manager on 07964 713592 or at christineblack@winningwork.co.uk or Adam Gordon, Director on 07870 268288 or at adamgordon@winningwork.co.uk