

# LinkedIn for Business Success

## An Extended Abbreviated Guide

**The following information is based on Gordon BDM's work with local and international clients in the accountancy, advertising, call centre, financial services, IT, legal, recruitment and voluntary sectors. This information is not fact; merely our opinion. However, we've lived LinkedIn for 5 years and don't know of any other companies providing the services we do, so feel justified we are writing with authority.**

Adam Gordon  
Director  
Gordon BDM Ltd  
August 2010

Founded in July 2009, Gordon BDM's team works with B2B clients across the UK and internationally to help them win new customers, using unique, modern techniques.

### Preliminaries

LinkedIn is for collaboration and networking. So it says. We say you might choose to use LinkedIn to win customers, get headhunted, hire people, seek and share best practice, research companies or people, demonstrate your expertise, find suppliers or just keep on top of the hot topics in your line.

**LinkedIn's a movement, a culture and a way of working.**

LinkedIn is *not* a 'social network' exactly. Jeff Weiner, LinkedIn's CEO doesn't allow that term to describe LinkedIn and we don't use it either. It looks and functions quite like Facebook but don't be tempted to use it like Facebook. Keep it professional.

Who's on it? It's not just for early career professionals. Barack Obama's on there. As is Bill Gates. In fact, there are very few well-known figures who aren't there. LinkedIn's a market full of budget-holders, line-managers and decision-makers ready to be influenced to make good buying decisions. The world's changing fast as we progressively more embrace and embed LinkedIn into our working lives.

### Concepts

*"Nothing avails but Perfection' may be spelt shorter: Paralysis."* Winston Churchill

(This is for lawyers in particular) Too many professionals either don't sign up to LinkedIn or take membership and do nothing because they are procrastinating about what not to do. Take some advice from Nike and 'just do it'... If you don't, your competitors will. And they'll be talking to your customers...

This is an old concept but as valid today as ever. In order for someone to buy from you (or hire you or recommend you to their close associates) they need to trust you. In order to trust you they need to like you. In order to like you they need to acknowledge you. LinkedIn is the best tool for professionals to gain acknowledgement with a wider circle, peer group, community, industry, alumni pool, profession or geography.

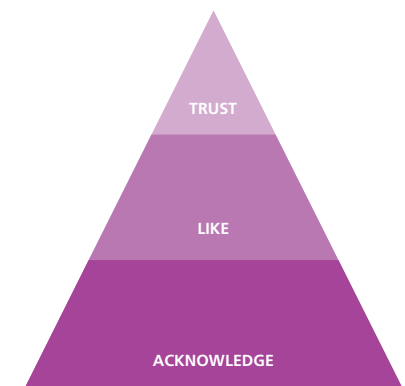
### *Six degrees of separation... Rubbish!*

It used to be said (and still is by some who haven't cottoned on yet) that you were only separated from Kevin Bacon (or anyone else for that matter) through 6 steps at most; AKA 'six degrees of separation'. This is no longer true. We're all much closer than ever before. Mostly everyone who's anyone is within your direct reach. I no longer need an introduction to you and you no longer need an introduction to me. I/we can do it ourselves. We don't need to rely on others and when we do connect, we've come to a joint decision to do so. I've approached you and you've permitted me to speak. Now not everyone's comfortable with making their own introductions and building direct relationships in this way but LinkedIn makes this abundantly easier.

### *The currency of 'Free'*

Everyone on LinkedIn has *something* to offer. Everyone has experience that is interesting to other LinkedIn members. When you give people that 'something', for nothing, you develop associated goodwill. People warm to you, trust your word, your authenticity and you set yourself up as the 'go-to' person for your subject.

*The relationship pyramid*





You can give something for nothing through your status updates, on LinkedIn Groups' discussion boards, via LinkedIn Q&A, through LinkedIn Events and using other inbuilt tools.

Between May and August 2010, I handed out over 1,600 copies of this LinkedIn miniguide to people who requested it after I made it available on 4 LinkedIn Groups.

I didn't previously know hardly any of these 1,600 people. Unfortunately a lot of them know me as 'Gordon' now (rather than Adam which is *actually* my name!) but at least they know me.



This screenshot shows 200 people had commented on my offer on one LinkedIn Group alone. This kept me very much in people's minds as a specialist.

Because of the activity I created from one post on the McKinsey Quarterly Group I was ranked as 'top influencer'.

Think carefully about what you can offer. What do you know about that people will find **both** interesting **and** useful? Now take it to your audience on LinkedIn.

### *Be curious*

Use LinkedIn to find out other peoples' opinions. Post questions and discussions on LinkedIn Groups. Find out how people do things and what they think best practice looks like. Send messages directly to people who may have answers. Research people, customers, intermediaries and competitors.

The people who get the most out of LinkedIn have a natural curiosity OR learn to have such.

### *People have egos... Flattery gets you somewhere (sometimes)*

People are much more likely to react positively if you tell them you would value their opinion. They will take more notice if you say their LinkedIn profile looks interesting.

Incorrect approach: "Please meet me next Tuesday so I can tell you how good I am at my job and you will want to use my services."

Correct approach: "I see from your profile that you have some fantastic international experience. It would be great to hear your views about the latest Sarbox issues. Let me know if you have half an hour for a coffee at some point next week."

The main point here is, really think about the language you use. What will people respond to better? Don't be sycophantic - that doesn't go down well in any quarters but build bridges, let people know they have value and build relationships.

### *Lead the conversation*

In series 3 of Mad Men, Donald Draper said to Conrad Hilton, "If you don't like what's being said, change the conversation." I love this line. And when I first heard it, it made me immediately think of LinkedIn Groups. Now, you don't need to dislike the existing conversation but you should use LinkedIn Groups and other LinkedIn channels to create and lead people into the type of conversation you relish. Get people involved. The right type of people. And make sure you position yourself as *the* expert.

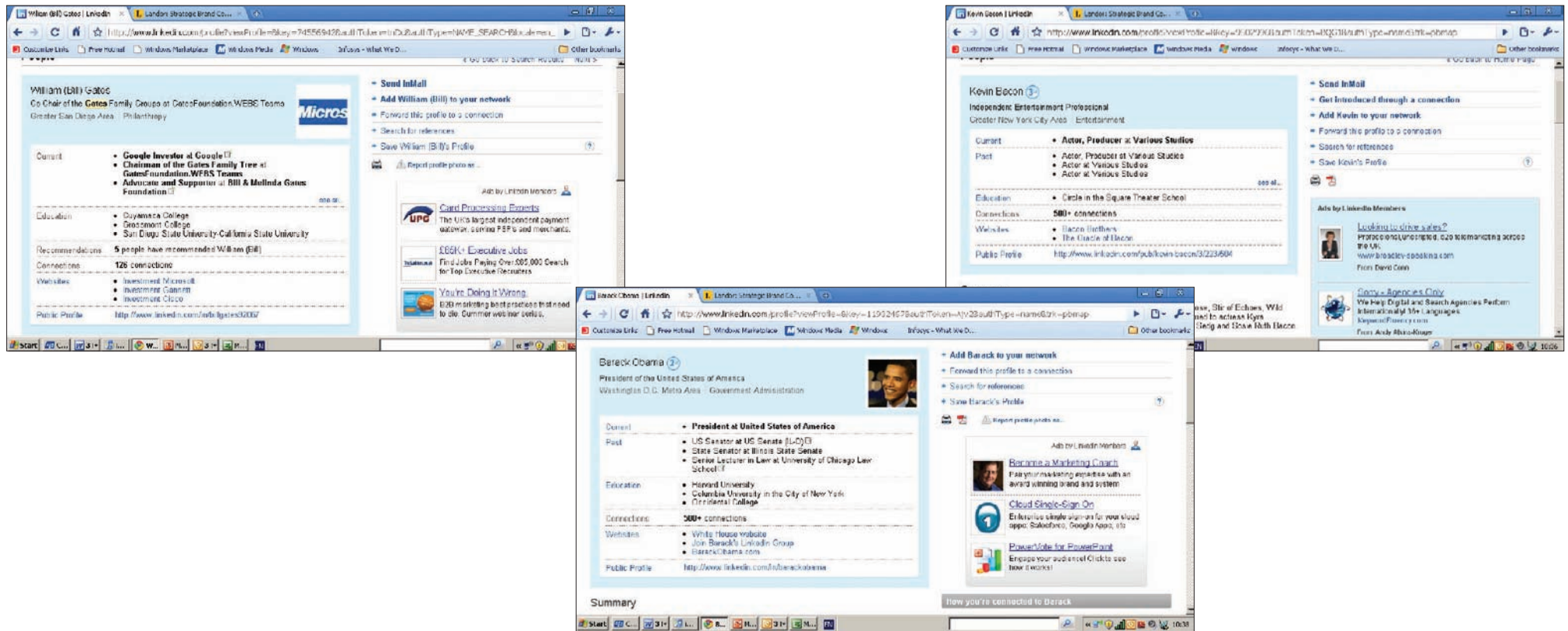
### *Man Marking*

LinkedIn's not just for the most senior executives. An organisation would do very well to engender an 'entire firm' approach to business development. If your most senior people connect on LinkedIn with your clients' and targets' most senior executives, your mid-ranking client teams connect with their peers and your early career professionals link to their upwardly mobile counterparts, you will have created a true man-marking approach. That way, you will get a true and full picture of your markets and be in a position to enhance client relations not just now but also for the future.

"If you don't like what's being said, change the conversation."

## Who's on LinkedIn?

You might find this surprising. I don't...



Yes, look at your contacts' contacts. This will be very useful in helping you map your world. Subliminally you'll take a lot of this information in and it will come to your conscious when you need it. However, don't make assumptions about people and their LinkedIn contacts.

Because everyone has a different personality and a different LinkedIn approach, some people connect with a wide network and others only with trusted contacts. Just because someone is connected to an individual you want to know, it doesn't automatically mean they are close enough to refer you or even pass on information for you.

### Your Profile - Our Rules

- Make sure you **add a photo**. People are less likely to want to interact with a mysterious, faceless internet page. *If people are searching for an expert, find your profile which has no photo and the profile of someone with comparable skills and a photo, your competitor is much more likely to receive contact before you. It doesn't matter what you look like. Unless your head has been chopped off, there's no valid excuse.*
- Ensure your **job title is understandable** to people outwith your organisation or sector. If it contains uncommon acronyms, spell them out. If your job title contains jargon, change it. (But check your boss is OK with you doing so).
- Add information to your '**Status update**' section regularly - at least once a week. The purpose here is to attempt to capture your connections' attention. Perhaps talk about a project you're working on, an expert view or even some recent thought-leadership relevant to your job and industry. If you have a work-related blog, you can alert your contacts to new posts using this section too.
- Clearly, you should list **your current job** but remember to list any non-executive or official advisory positions too. People will respect this breadth of activity.
- *If you have a number of job titles or there are multiple ways of explaining your role, add these all - this contributes significantly to your listing at the top of searches. If your official job title is 'Finance Director', add 'Chief Financial Officer' also. If your official job title is 'Sales Director', you might want to add 'Business Development Director' also.*
- In terms of your **previous jobs**, if you have more than you'd like to broadcast, perhaps only list the last two or the two which have been most significant, relevant or maybe prestigious.
- That said, if you're proud of **your career history**, list them all. Many people search for ex-colleagues or experts by using the 'company' search criteria and this could lead to interesting enquiries.
- If you previously worked for a **competitor business**, list this, but don't go into much detail about all the successes you achieved. *You don't want viewers of your LinkedIn profile to develop so much of a positive impression of your ex employer that they also get a call...*
- List all **your education**. Some people place major value on academic qualifications. This might make the difference between someone interesting getting in touch or otherwise.
- *Include the school and university you went to. People search for former class mates to re-connect.*
- If you have some **close professional connections** on LinkedIn, *do* ask them to recommend you if you feel this is appropriate. Many LinkedIn users read recommendations with great interest and respect the opinions of others.
- **Your summary** should be comprehensive but easy to understand. Write in the first person and make sure you appear confident and impressive but not boastful. Ask someone to review your summary for a second opinion before you make your profile public. Others are often better placed to judge the tone of your summary.

- Use the **'specialties'** section to add all the key-words relevant to your role. If you're an accountant for example, you might list your key-words as such "management accounting, budgeting, forecasting, fixed assets, inventory control". *There is no need to write in sentences here - comma-separated key-words are fine.*
- In **'additional information'** add a link to your website's homepage and potentially to the section of your website most relevant to you or your specialty. Probably don't add links to Facebook or other personal sites. This just isn't appropriate *in most circumstances. Do add links to other information people will find interesting. If you have a Just Giving page, add a link to this. If you are on Twitter for professional purposes or maintain a blog, link to these here.*
- Under **'interests'** I would encourage you to give a little information about what you do out of work. People will find it interesting. Perhaps don't list your favourite football team or activities that some people might find objectionable but if you're an ice skater, twitcher or love baking, this could just start a conversation. Give people material to use to make contact.
- Join Groups on LinkedIn by all means but if you join loads of them, make most of their logos 'invisible' on your page - otherwise people will think you have nothing better to do than sit on LinkedIn all day (actually not a bad thing in our opinion but some might form other opinions!).
- List all **'Honors and Awards'**. But if you have many, perhaps only list those most impressive or perhaps restrict this to those achieved in the last few years. *You don't want to look like you are showing off or 'collecting' Honors and Awards for the sake of it. You also don't want to dilute the impact of your most impressive Honors and Awards by surrounding them with less interesting accolades.*
- Unless you want to avoid contact with prospective customers, **make it easy for them to get in touch. Add a mobile, direct dial, email address, co-ordinates for carrier pigeon and any other way for people to get in touch.**

### Meeting new People

We firmly believe the best opportunity for you in using LinkedIn is in creating acknowledgement between you and others and taking these new relationships offline. Here is our methodology for doing so, if you're a confident networker. *And even if you're not, our approach will remove any nerves you have about making that initial contact.*

- Our research suggests that a LinkedIn connection with another person simply means they are giving you **permission to speak to them** and nothing more. *It doesn't mean they want to meet you (yet) and it certainly doesn't mean they want to buy from you (yet).* It's up to you to influence your LinkedIn connections in a courteous and intelligent manner in order to really make rain.
- There are 70m+ people on LinkedIn at the time of typing (August 2010).

<b>25%</b> of LinkedIn users will never connect with you if they don't know you.	<b>25%</b> will connect with anyone from Mars to the Tora Bora mountains.
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**50%** of people will accept your LinkedIn invitation if they feel they may benefit from making your acquaintance. These are the people you want to reach. They are discerning about their contacts but the door is open for you if your approach is just right...

- You need to use the advanced people search facility (top right on your home page) to **find all those people who are relevant to you**.
- The most useful search criteria include 'job title', 'location' and 'industries'. This will help you to **find all those you don't yet know but want to**. If you work for a B2B PR agency covering Norfolk for example, you might want to search for people with 'marketing' in their job titles, 50 miles from 'NR1' and tick the appropriate sectors in the 'industries' section (i.e. accounting, banking, business supplies...).
- Once you have created your list, you will now need to select those people who you really do want to connect with. Bear in mind that just because you haven't yet heard of a company, doesn't mean you should rule them out as relevant to you without some research.
- Now you will **invite your chosen prospective clients to connect** with you on LinkedIn.
- When you invite someone to connect with you on LinkedIn, the site asks you to identify how you know the other person. This is to prevent spam. You must NOT check the box that says 'colleague' or 'friend' if this is not the case. You will look disingenuous to the recipient as they will know what you have selected.
- You must check the 'other' box and then enter their email address.
- Use your normal research procedures to find the prospective connection's email address. Google will be invaluable in this process.
- Before you send your invitation to connect, **make sure your message is tailored for the recipient**. Make sure it's polite. Make sure it gives the other person reason to feel there's value in accepting your invitation to connect. An example may say:
  - "Dear X, I am a tax expert working with many clients in your industry in Norfolk. I noticed your profile and thought we may have some interesting perspectives to share in the future. In the meantime I'd like to invite you to join my professional network on LinkedIn. Yours sincerely, Y."
- This example has demonstrated rapport, a little flattery and offered an invitation. Compared to the default message LinkedIn suggests using, this approach will **massively optimise the likelihood** of the other person connecting with you.
- Once your new connections have accepted your LinkedIn invitation, you will receive an email to inform you. Do nothing for 2 days so you don't look desperate. After 2 days (no longer or the momentum will have fizzled out), make sure you send your new connection a follow-up message to thank them for accepting your invitation and suggest it might be good to get together to share some ideas on a subject of mutual interest. Don't be too specific. Don't suggest a venue or particular dates and times. At this stage, your new contact is c33% **likely to respond positively** without feeling under pressure.
- To an extent, this process is a controlled numbers game. The more people you attempt to connect with using this methodology, the more likely you will meet new people and win new clients.

### LinkedIn Groups

LinkedIn Groups are wonderful online meeting places for you to **engage with new people and demonstrate your expertise**. I would recommend joining Groups that are relevant to your expertise and also **Groups where your clients are likely to be**. This way, you can use Groups to maintain your knowledge and, in a tasteful way, show off a bit. There are many Groups on LinkedIn. If Groups you're a member of don't provide you with any benefit, leave them and find others that do. The process of finding the most valuable Groups for you involves trial and error.

Once you're familiar with the format for LinkedIn Groups and you understand how to use language to post discussions that gain a positive reaction, you may wish to build your own LinkedIn Group(s). You can create LinkedIn Groups to suit an audience (your prospective clients) and demonstrate your expertise with ease. The key elements involved in the success of building your own 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 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 but doesn't necessitate the 'owner' does 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.
- Ensure the Group description acts also as a 'welcome' message, is informative and **clearly describes the benefits** to members of their participation.
- Pre-load between 2 and 4 'discussions' on the appropriate section so there is already content for the members to comment on when they first enter the Group. Make sure these discussion topics are relevant to the members, give them information, **demonstrate your expertise** and encourage them to get involved.
- Once you have prepared the Group, like you would prepare a venue for a function, you need members.
- Using the research method outlined above, create a list of prospective Group members. Make sure that you've thought about the guest list carefully. Your members should be **peer-level people**, work in the same sector or have other **elements in common which should appeal to them** as a reason for joining.
- Once you have built your guest list, the invitation should come from the Group 'owner'. If that is not you, perhaps you could suggest doing this for them.
- As above, you will need to find the email addresses using your normal research procedures in order to invite the guests to join the Group, unless you are already connected to them on the site.

Engage with  
new people and  
demonstrate  
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- The invitation should be phrased in a way whereby the **invitees immediately feel compelled to join** and participate. The language should not appear to *sell* your business but should implicate your knowledge.
  - Assuming you get the tone for the invitation right and you have found sufficient, appropriate, prospective Group members, you should be able to encourage enough to join your Group **to ensure success**.
  - Make sure you post relevant discussion topics every week. We recommend a minimum of two new discussion topics and suggest posting these on a Friday morning because **LinkedIn traffic surges on Friday afternoons**.
  - Now it's up to you to reap the rewards of your work and **win new customers**.
- You *must* use language that is open, not 'salesy' and makes **the prospect of meeting you seem almost irresistible**. An example may say:  
"Dear X, I read with interest the comments you made about the latest tax legislation in the property sector. I've been working with clients who appear to have a similar profile to yours and may face some of the same opportunities and challenges you do. You might wish to hear about our approach and how we've saved our clients (squillions) in tax at some stage? If that's suitable, I'm due to be in Norwich in the next couple of weeks and would be happy to meet you if you'd like to let me know when you're available?"
  - This approach clearly outlines the **benefit to meeting with you**. It also gives the recipient the opportunity to tell you when suits them best and you've used soft language such as 'might', 'if that's suitable', 'if you'd like' which creates an unthreatening tone and will **optimise the likelihood of success**.

### Taking Your New Connections Offline

- Because a LinkedIn connection or acceptance to membership of your Group simply means a person is giving you permission to speak to them, you need to **do more to really benefit** and win new customers.
- You need to look for reasons why other **LinkedIn members would want to meet you**. There are many clues in participants' LinkedIn profiles to help you determine an approach.
- Make sure you tailor each approach to the individual. There's nothing worse than receiving a message from someone and feeling you've 'been mailshotted'.

### Case Studies

#### *Targeted Connections and Selective Meetings*

A senior lawyer with a deep industry specialism only wanted to connect with a very rare and specific profile. He was therefore initially unsure whether there would be many relevant contacts on the site for him.

However, when we undertook research on his behalf, we found 30 decision-makers that he wanted to know and was yet to have met. Within days, we successfully connected him with many of these.

He is selective about those he invests time in meeting but, because of this approach, those meetings are highly rewarding.

#### *Expanding Your Profile*

A tax adviser with industry expertise was keen to build his business. He has half a dozen large clients who spend around £150k in fees each per annum and his objective was to double this figure in two years by expanding his portfolio.

Having spent time interviewing this specialist, we then sought out around 80 decision-makers on professional networking sites, within his geography and target industry.

Within a couple of weeks, he was connected with around half of this group. After five meetings so far with his new connections, he has already received an invitation to pitch for around £40k worth of planning work.

### *Rainmaking*

An audit partner wanted to connect with the SMT, regardless of job function, at 12 'red flagged' prospects, to break the ice with these companies.

After a week, we'd connected her with Sales Directors, HR Directors, CFOs and CEOs and had arranged meetings with 8 of the 12 targets at which she has built engagement and sought opportunities for her colleagues.

Having used telemarketing, events, publications and all the usual professional services tactics to get close to these companies, the personal approach through a professional networking website was the initiative which finally led to breakthrough.

### *Setting Up a LinkedIn Group*

The Group Owner set up a LinkedIn Group called 'Strategic Sales - Scotland', aimed at Sales and Marketing and Business Development Managers and Strategists in Scotland (all sectors).

The purpose of the Group is to enable members to share ideas and learn from each other. It allows anyone who is a member of the Group to post discussions as well as contribute to discussions posted by others.

Within one month the group had approximately 100 members, with one tenth of members contributing to discussions.

After six weeks, the Group Owner has arranged five meetings with new connections made from the Group.

**GOOD LUCK... BUT YOU SHOULDN'T  
NOW NEED AS MUCH...**

I hope the information in this short document has been useful for you and you can implement some of our ideas yourself. Some of the opportunities outlined above are incredibly rewarding but we're aware that they are also very time-consuming. Partially, that's why we exist.

**Please do get in touch now if you want to hear about case-studies or talk through possible opportunities.**

**Adam Gordon**

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### **Gordon BDM**

Founded July 2009

5 FTE (July 2010)

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Acting for some of the world's leading B2B organisations

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