Marketer Toolbox

Using LinkedIn® for Business Development

By Wendy Nemitz, Principal, Ingenuity Marketing Group

LinkedIn® kicked off the year with the announcement this month that globally they have over 60 million users (half of those in the U.S.). Yes, that's fewer than Facebook, but for business networking you can't beat LinkedIn®. How can you use it for business development without spending a lot of time? Our tips below will help you focus your efforts.

Profile

Fill out your profile with marketing language from your firm — yes, you can use language off your firm's Web pages to flesh out the summary and work description sections.

Add either the Amazon bookshelf application or some interests — a few pieces of information that humanize you and make you easy to connect with.

Search

In the upper right-hand part of the screen you'll see a place where you can type in search terms. Ignore this and click the word "advanced." This will take you to the paradise of business network searching.

Practice searching. Search by geographic area, title, company names, industries. Notice that results can be sorted by degree of connection to you.

About the Author:

Wendy Nemitz is the founding principal at Ingenuity Marketing Group, LLC. Ingenuity provides client positioning and go-to-market strategies to professional service firms, including tips and tricks for social media. Visit www.ingenuitymarketing.com. Wendy can be reached at 651.690.3358 or wendy@ingenuitymarketing.com.

Search the names of prospects and make sure you look at their profiles before meetings. Scroll all the way down so you can see any interests they have. Look for commonalities that will help you build rapport: same school, same organizations, similar interests, etc.

Visibility

Ask for recommendations and be specific about what you'd like to be recommended for. Also be prepared to recommend anyone you ask for a recommendation.

Choose one of these areas to master first: status updates, answers, groups (don't try to do everything at once!)

- If you picked status updates: think from the perspective of your clients and prospects and offer something they'd find valuable. Write two or three a week until it feels natural to you.
- If you picked Answers: go into the Answers section on LinkedIn® and use the right-hand menu to find areas of interest to your clients and prospects. Answer one or two questions a week until you get a "best answer" green star, then you can slow down.
- If you picked Groups: join 4-6 groups to start, a mix of larger and smaller groups in your industries or areas. Spend a few weeks just listening to what other people are saying. Then start a discussion topic in the group that seems most active and most relevant to your business.

Chuck Roberts and Alan Olsen of GROCO CPAs and Advisors take a break during the 2009 AAM Summit.

Managing it all

It's okay not to connect to someone if you don't want to. You can put their invitation in your archive in case someday you do want to connect to them.

It's okay not to make an introduction you don't feel rock solid about. You can politely decline.

Do not spend a lot of time on this. You should be able to manage your LinkedIn® business development in about half an hour a week. If you're hating it, avoiding it, or annoyed by it, consider finding someone in your firm who loves LinkedIn® and asking for help.

Using LinkedIn® for business development is not a sprint. Give yourself time to learn and get used to it and you'll find it becomes a natural part of your prospecting, researching meetings and staying in front of clients. AA