

9 Mistakes You're Making on LinkedIn

Lots of articles describe how to create a more marketable LinkedIn profile, how to find the right groups to join, how to choose the best profile photo.....Since most people understand the value of taking those steps, let's go deeper. To really harness the power of LinkedIn, don't make these mistakes:

1. You give only because you expect to receive.

Connect with people on LinkedIn and you can write a recommendation that gets displayed on their profiles.

That's awesome, unless you're only giving recommendations because you want one in return. Then it's tacky.

For example, say you're a plumber. A pipe burst and we call you at three in the morning. You immediately rush over, fix the leak, and save us from inadvertently converting our basement into a swimming pool. I'm extremely grateful and I write you a deservedly glowing recommendation.

Then I ask you to write a recommendation for me.

The problem is you don't know me professionally. The only thing you really know about me is that I could be heard in the background screaming like a little girl when my wife called you. How can you recommend me? You can't. You shouldn't. And you shouldn't be asked to.

Give sincere recommendations. Recommend because you want to, not because you expect to receive a recommendation in return. The people who know and respect you may return the "favor." If so, great; if not, also great. Either way you've given credit where credit is due.

2. You don't give at all.

Great networking is based on giving, not receiving. Endorsements are an easy way to give; go to someone's profile, click a few boxes, maybe click a few plus signs--done.

Endorse another person's skills and you not only give them a virtual pat on the back, you may also help them show up in search results.

Show other people you respect their skills. Sure, it may be a good networking move, but making other people feel good about themselves is reason enough.

3. You wait until you have a need.

If you put off making solid connections until the day you need something--customers, employees, a job, or just a better network--then you've waited too long. Think about where you someday want to be and start now to build the connections, the network, and the following that will support those goals.

Building great connections is a parallel, not a serial, task. Later is always too late.

4. You forget where you are.

Most people use LinkedIn as a *professional* social media platform. So when you want to leave comments, share material, etc., consider letting your freak flag fly somewhere else. You never know when a potential employer, employee, customer, vendor--anyone--may notice.

Safe, at least where being professional is concerned, means never having to feel sorry.

5. You ignore the signs.

LinkedIn clearly aspires to be more than a place where millions of professionals make connections.

In less than two years LinkedIn Today has become an extremely powerful news aggregator. Landing an article on a category page generates a flood of traffic; landing an article on the home page can crash your servers.

LinkedIn Today now provides original content from "thought leaders" and allows you--whether you are connected to the person or not--to follow those individuals, comment directly on their posts, share their content with your network, etc. Currently only "influencers" can be followed (Richard Branson has over a million) but it's safe to assume that someday all users will be able to directly post their own content and build their own followings.

What's next? I don't know. All I know is something will be next. Pay attention, look ahead, and start positioning yourself now.

Smart people get the most out of a tool. Really smart people do too, but they also plan for how to get the most out of what a tool may become.

6. You don't share.

The easiest way to frequently update and "customize" your profile is to share. The articles, blog posts, videos, etc. you share appear in your Activity stream, giving other people a great look at what you're doing and what you're interested in and creating a running journal where others can learn more about you.

Plus your connections can respond by liking or leaving comments, which helps you avoid another mistake...

7. You don't care.

Want to know what your connections, your network, or your audience thinks is important? Want a better sense of interests and perspectives you share?

Share, and then watch your Activity feed. See what people "like." Read the comments.

The only way to better know people is to listen to what they have to say. Make it easy to listen: Share, see what strikes a chord and what doesn't. It's the perfect way to get direct feedback and build stronger connections. See your Activity feed as real-time feedback from the people you reach--and want to keep reaching.

8. You ignore your team's network.

Relationships, referrals, and rapport are powerful ways to open doors.

The people you work with have great networks. (If they don't, encourage them to start building.) When you're looking for an "in," see if someone on your team already has the right connection.

Chances are they do.

9. You go generic.

"I'd like to add you to my professional network on LinkedIn."

Yeah, I know you're busy. Still, is using the auto-generated LinkedIn connection text really the best you can do?

Delete the generic message and take a few seconds to say how you know the person. Or to say what you have in common. Or to say something complimentary. Unless you're just trying to pad your numbers, you have a good reason for wanting to connect, so say what that reason is.

Making real connections starts with the word "real."

Be real.

INC. Special Report: Kickass Social Media, Jeff Hadden, Dec., 2012