

LinkedIn Lesson

Six steps get you in business on this powerful online network.

▶ **WITH SO** many social media platforms to choose from, why do businesspeople flock to LinkedIn? Because unlike Facebook, whose users share a steady stream of personal updates, LinkedIn subscribers sign on to get down to business. That includes networking, marketing, recruiting employees, researching companies, receiving industry news, and learning about career and client opportunities.

LinkedIn continually improves its format, adding features that let users interact in a targeted way, including customized industry groups and advanced searching. You can also see who has kicked your tires, how many searches you've turned up in, and when your contacts update their profiles or connect with other people, even if those folks are outside your network.

Maybe that's why the company's stock was trading around \$165 a share in June, more than triple its initial public offering price in May 2011. So investors recognize the network's value, too. Use the plan below to grow professionally and fortify your brand with LinkedIn.

Six Weeks to LinkedIn Results

Wayne Breitbarth, a LinkedIn expert who helps companies improve their prowess on the social media platform, has laid out a six-week program to bulk up your presence on the network. The two-hour-a-week plan, adapted here from his recent book, *The Power Formula for LinkedIn Success: Kick-start Your Business, Brand and Job Search* (Greenleaf Book Group Press, 2013), trumpets your expertise and that of your company. Breitbarth's plan relies on LinkedIn's free service, which he says is powerful enough for most users.

Start by setting specific objectives for your LinkedIn activities and stick to them. "What are you trying to accomplish? Are you looking for customers? Vendors? Just trying to put your brand out there in a positive way? Once you know your goals, then you can jump into these steps," says Breitbarth, a former small-business owner.

Deborah L. Cohen is a Chicago-based business journalist specializing in entrepreneurial subjects. Her previous *SUCCESS* articles include "A New Era in Crowdfunding" (March 2013) and "Rewarding Experiences" (July 2013).



Every Week

- For each of the next six weeks, you'll:
- ▶ Accept invitations that meet your criteria.
 - ▶ Invite 20 or more trusted professionals into your network.

Week 1

- ▶ Put your most recent jobs into the Experience section of your profile. Import a résumé if you have one.
- ▶ Complete the Education section of your profile.
- ▶ Add a high-quality photo that reflects your professionalism (a party snapshot is not cool).

Take care in describing your skills and expertise. "You get one chance for a first impression," Breitbarth says.



Week 2

- Complete the Experience section, which may help you reconnect with colleagues from your past. Referrals will be valuable to you and to them.
- Put a link to your company website on your profile and give it a description other than the standard My Company, perhaps elaborating about its wide range of services, exclusive brands carried, awards/recognitions and years in business.
- Write a killer 120-word marketing headline that includes important keywords such as the primary services and skills and the key attributes (on time and under budget) you offer.
- Join five groups: industry groups, alumni associations, chambers or regional networking groups.

Your Week 2 activities begin your marketing push. By joining LinkedIn's groups, you meet people with similar interests. And as you finish the Experience section of your profile, consider that the keywords in your marketing headline should be specific to your business: brands/products sold, industry skills/services (engineering,



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chiropractic, spa treatments, etc.). Use an engaging narrative for your company description—repeating your crucial keywords—to make your experience come alive and demonstrate important achievements. “If you have the right keywords, people will find you,” Breitbarth says. “And if they find you, the stories [narratives about your company and what you do] will help you stand out.”

Week 3

- Review the People You May Know section and send invitations to anyone you know and trust.
- Send a message to a professional you respect and who knows you well, asking him or her to write a detailed testimonial for you.
- Write a recommendation for someone in your network who would be appreciative by selecting Recommend under the Send a Message tab. Then submit it.
- Do a company search on either a competitor or potential customer and “follow” that company.
- Do an Advanced People Search; this allows you to execute a more targeted search to find customers, competition and expert help using important keywords for your business or industry in the region you serve. These keywords could include job skills and descriptions, industries served, and specialized training you have, etc. See whether you know anyone who comes up. Send invitations to those you know and respect—and to others whose expertise and interests dovetail with yours. The worst that can happen is... nothing.
- Join five more groups.
- Post a status update that showcases your expertise. For example, let people know you've just attended an industry conference or attained a professional certification. You could mention you just celebrated your company's sixth anniversary or served the 5,000th customer.

Modern Marketing

Trustworthy personal recommendations are the power behind LinkedIn. As you probably know, LinkedIn suggests People You May Know, a feature that mines the database based on your previous connections. It will show you how to do Advanced searches for people and companies and how to follow them to receive their news.

Meanwhile, your first status update will give your network a taste of what you have to offer, whether it's an engaging article you recently read or a useful web link. "People are waiting to hear from you," Breitbarth says. "If you don't talk to them, the other LinkedIn experts they're connected to will."

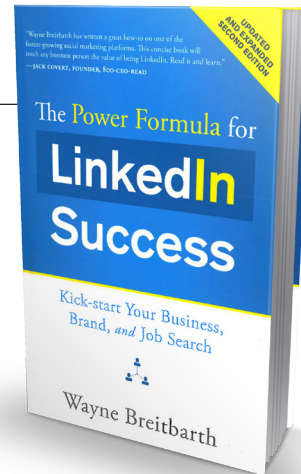
Week 4

- Add two more links to your website section: areas of interest, your blog, etc.
- Add volunteer experience to your current Experience section or your Volunteer Experience & Causes section.
- Add any specialty classes or technical industry training to your Education section.
- Write a recommendation for someone in your network.
- Join five more groups.
- Do a company search on either a competitor or a target organization and "follow" that company.
- Perform another Advanced People Search to uncover more valuable contacts you'll add to your network.
- Request a recommendation from a professional you know and trust.
- Draft the text for your Summary section and polish it before pasting it in. You can type in as many as 2,000 characters; use them all and use them wisely. Add the summary to your profile.
- Post another status update.

The outside activities you add here say a lot about your values and interests. "Start thinking about your brand, realizing it's more than just, 'I worked for ABC Company for the last 25 years and plan on working there forever,'" Breitbarth says. "It's about what you stand for, what's important to you."

Week 5

- Write a recommendation for someone in your network.
- Join five more groups.
- Request a recommendation from a trusted professional.
- Add the Skills section to your profile.
- Import contacts from your personal database and connect with classmates.
- Post a status update.



You'll see that LinkedIn automatically created a skill set for you based on the text in your profile. And it allows you to include as many as 50 specific skills and to edit/customize those skills. The site recently began allowing users to "endorse" others in their network based on skills. Although not as important as a personal recommendation, LinkedIn users probably will notice which of your skills net the most votes. List "the best skills for what you're trying to accomplish," Breitbarth says. "You get 50, so don't be bashful."

Week 6

- Write a recommendation for someone in your network.
- Join five more groups.
- From your marketing materials, professional talks or other online content, select a helpful PDF, video or presentation and link to it in your Professional Gallery, a recently added multimedia section of LinkedIn that lets you share content; your posts will often serve as a portfolio for you.
- Download the Outlook Social Connector (a tool that integrates with Microsoft Outlook, allowing you to perform tasks such as emailing your connections directly).
- Ask for an introduction from one of your connections using the LinkedIn Introduction feature.
- Post a status update.

LinkedIn's Professional Gallery lets you post video, slide shows and more, as long as the content is linked to another website.

What to Expect

After completing the six-week plan, others searching the database will consistently find you, and your own searches will identify important connections in your business, plus valuable industry information.

Bear in mind the most successful users of LinkedIn are not those who toot their own horns, but those who find creative ways to showcase expertise by giving others useful information (articles, tips, industry reports and more) on a regular basis. "You have to be careful," Breitbarth says. "It's not advertising." **S**