



# LinkedIn – The Greatest Personal Branding, Publicity And Sales Tool For B2B Markets



| By **Gene Stark** |

There are three types of people in business:

- Entrepreneurs
- Intrapreneurs
- The Unenterprising

...and all of them can benefit from LinkedIn.

HubSpot research shows LinkedIn as being the equal leading, customer acquisition channel (together with company blogs) and the definitive leader in the B2B segment for small and medium enterprises.

"LinkedIn is the largest, professional, social network online today. If you are a business professional and you do not have a powerful presence on LinkedIn, you are undoubtedly missing valuable opportunities to connect and grow your business," said Rebecca Corliss, the marketing manager and leader of the social media marketing team at HubSpot.

"There is no other social networking site in which you have a greater chance of being able to interact with an influential decision-maker due to the business-focused nature of the community. Even for business-to-consumer companies, LinkedIn is important, not only because consumers are members of LinkedIn, but also because the network offers a great platform for finding distributors, agents, and strategic alliances," said Neal Schaffer, author of Windmill Networking.

I used to refer to LinkedIn as 'Facebook for Business', but how wrong I was.

The first two points provide a major difference between LinkedIn and Facebook and hence give business people an amazing opportunity unavailable in any other media channel:

- LinkedIn provides a meeting place where people expect to do business.
- LinkedIn leverages relationships by making connections visible. For example, rather than asking your connections, "Who knows an architect specialising in green homes?" you can, instead, search your own and extended network and then see who connects you to the person you want

to meet. LinkedIn is the ultimate networking tool, allowing the power user to get in front of the people who matter – the decision makers, prospects, employers, journalists and venture capitalists. This is all done by leveraging your existing relationships or, what we call, cashing in on your emotional credits.

- LinkedIn helps maintain personal relationships and build new ones.
- LinkedIn provides a platform for the most effective form of marketing - word of mouth, in general, and referrals, specifically.
- It can link all your online marketing assets and essential social media tools, such as your website, blog, slideshare (now incorporating video), Twitter and Facebook.

LinkedIn can assist you in so many areas of your business life. Most importantly, LinkedIn can provide you with the perfect and simple platform for a referral system.

Referrals are critical to success in business.

FACT – 98 per cent of businesses rely on referrals to gain new business.\*

FACT – 3 per cent of businesses have a strategy for referrals.\*

\*Reference: BNI – Business Network International.

Benefits of a Referral System:

- Lower marketing costs
- Higher revenues
- Prospects convert to customers
- Better customer behaviour
- You can concentrate on your business.

A referral system, unlike the unpredictable and ridiculously high failure rate of viral campaigns, is:

- Predictable
- Consistent
- Repeatable.

LinkedIn can assist you with most of the critical steps of a typical referral process:

- Identifying referrers and influencers in your network by listening and studying where opinions are being shared.
- Providing them with a WOW experience (LinkedIn won't help you there. You need to be great at what you do and deliver exceptional value through your products and services.).
- Stay top of mind.
- Help them help you. You need to educate your network about how to refer to you.
- You need to ask for referrals and introductions.
- You need to recognise and reward those that place their trust in you and refer to you.

LinkedIn, or any other technology or media channel, for that matter, will not help you stand out and be noticed:

- You need to give people a reason to talk about your products and services and make it easier for that conversation to take place.
- You'll need to be creative and wow prospects and not just with your message. Remember the old adage, "Great advertising kills bad products faster".

Here is a list of activities that will assist you to use LinkedIn to its full potential, something 95 per cent of the people on LinkedIn are yet to realise:

- Develop a unique profile; if your profile reads like everyone else's then it will be much harder to stand out. Be creative, controversial, funny but, most importantly, be yourself. Make sure that your profile is still considered professional by your intended target audience – your prospective employers, recruiters and prospective clients. What works in the advertising industry may simply be too much for the banking industry.
- Make sure you complete your profile. It is likely to be your most public face to the world. People spend so much effort on their resume which they use intermittently, yet their LinkedIn profile contains barely any information. If anything, your LinkedIn Profile should be more detailed than your resume. Today, it is absolutely fine to be an accountant by day and a fashion blogger by night. Your LinkedIn profile can easily and professionally reflect your many pursuits and passions.
- Optimise your profile – from the way you personalise your public profile and website links, to the optimisation of your keywords, so as to make sure you appear in searches that matter when prospects look for professionals that have your skills.
- Develop a company profile and make sure your entire team connect to it. Due to the

simple and free nature of LinkedIn and all its benefits, we now recommend that start-ups, from consultants to trade professionals, develop a great personal and company profile, especially until such time that they can afford a professional website. The result is a very basic, but powerful, online presence while the website is being developed.

- Connect with clients, suppliers and prospects. Make sure you personalise the invitation and provide a reason to connect when you invite people you know or have just met. Make sure you have a policy as to who you connect with as your network is a reflection on you.
- Use the LinkedIn productivity tools: Web browser toolbar, Outlook Widget, Events, Polls, etc.
- Ask for recommendations. They are your testimonials and are vital to developing trust and credibility.
- Participate in groups but make sure you listen first, and add value, rather than sell. Social media is about communication and education, not promotion. Success comes from helping people achieve their goals.
- Answer questions in Answers section.
- Build relationships, try to meet people for a coffee and pick up the phone if you are in the same geographical location.
- Social media is about developing unique content and then promoting it. Make sure you do both. There are multiple ways to promote your content on LinkedIn, which is why it is an amazing online PR tool.
- Get in front of the people you need to get in front of through correctly using the search function, and then leveraging your existing relationships to make the appointment by asking for introductions, or asking the connector to forward your message to the intended recipient.
- Test LinkedIn Mail as well as LinkedIn Advertising.

If you don't use it, you lose it. Start with 10 minutes a day, track your progress and get LinkedIn or become Locked Out. **ABS**

**Gene Stark** is the co-founder of *The Marketing Network*, an SME branding and marketing agency that brings together every marketing discipline under one roof, providing convenient and affordable solutions for their clients – professional services and B2B firms that need to find, attract and retain customers. You can email him at [connect@themarketingnetwork.com.au](mailto:connect@themarketingnetwork.com.au) or check out the LinkedIn dedicated website and blog at [www.influenceyournetwork.com](http://www.influenceyournetwork.com). Or search for him on LinkedIn.