

LINKEDIN TRILOGY: Part 1. Top 10 Reasons You Should NOT Join LinkedIn Professional Network!

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Disclaimer: I have been an active “free” user of LinkedIn for 5.463 years with more than 3000 (1st degree) connections from all over the world. I have no vested interest in LinkedIn other than as a user of the services it provides. Despite the fact that LinkedIn was originally designed as a network for business professionals, not academicians, I have learned a few techniques on how it can best serve my peers. LinkedIn has also added several features and apps over the years to address the specific needs of administrators and faculty. This article is an extension and update of a blog series I wrote 2.683 years ago to acquaint faculty with the features of LinkedIn.

Introduction

Social media networks are not just the rage among Net Geners; they have revolutionized the way over a bazillion people communicate. Hollywood even made a movie about how one of them sprouted from the mind of a Harvard drop-out, Mark Zuckerberg. These networks are free and open to every age, from diapers to diapers. Yet academicians tend to resist most of them, even those that were designed for professional, not social, use. My informal surveys of faculty at universities and conferences in the U.S. and countries in Europe, Eastern Europe, and Asia indicate only about 20% are members of LinkedIn or have any interest in joining.

So what's the problem? There seem to be two salient issues that bubble to the surface: (1) TIME! and (2) networking. First, *a network profile requires time to set up and maintain*. If you don't contribute to the network, it doesn't serve its purposes and yours. And time is a major issue with all of us. For example, LinkedIn requires a specially formatted profile, which is longer than your university website profile and much shorter than your vitae. But how many profiles do you need? Additional maintenance time

on LinkedIn is necessary weekly to stay active with your network and in groups.

Second, administrators and faculty are overwhelmed with a gazillion tasks that usually do not require a vast network of colleagues or the need to build a network. *Networking is not part of an academician's DNA*. Except for professors in the business field, most do not have the “business mentality” of constantly thinking about how to generate clients, boost sales, and recruit employees. Usually, they don't even carry business cards to distribute at conferences. Researchers, especially, thrive in a very narrow world of colleagues contributing specifically to their research. Professors function primarily within the tunnels of their respective disciplines, despite the increase in interdisciplinary journals, conferences, and email lists.

So who needs another Internet source that will just send you more emails you don't want? This article is intended to answer that question so you can make an informed decision about whether to join LinkedIn. Just what can LinkedIn do to make your life better? The next three sections will provide the following: (1) an inventory of the top 10 traditional resources for communication, excluding social media, (2) the top 10 reasons NOT to join LinkedIn, and, finally, (3) what happens next in terms of a summary of LinkedIn's five purposes, deciding whether to join LinkedIn, and LinkedIn's 2013 profile updates.

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Top 10 Traditional Resources for Communication

Let's begin with basic academic communication. Assuming you are not a total recluse and you do communicate with colleagues at institutions outside your own, how do you contact them? What resources do you use? Here's an inventory of 10 traditional low-tech networking resources you may be using:

1. stone tablets
2. faded business cards with a paper clip or rubber band around them
3. scrunched napkins with a smeared ink name and phone number (WAIT! That's for dates.)
4. print address book
5. Rolodex® cards in or out of the tray or base
6. print directories from institutions, associations, and conferences
7. online address book (e.g., AboutOne, Plaxo, Telnic, Unyk, conXt, and WikiWorldBook)
8. contact lists from Outlook, Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo, and AOL
9. PDA (personal digital assistant), PIM (personal information manager), or mobile phone directory
10. phone a friend to remember the person sitting next to that friend at the table with horn-rimmed glasses and a leather headband

If you're a Net Gener or Gen-Xer faculty member reading this list, you're probably throwing up right now and thinking: "What's a Rolodex®?" I'll wait a moment. Are you okay? There may be other "on-the-fly," low-tech techniques you have used, such as Googling your colleagues or their institutions to track down their emails or phone numbers. How time-consuming is that? Certainly, your iPhone®, iPod®, iPad®, or other iGadget® is an option since it has an infinite number of apps and can be used to contact and connect with just about anything with or without a pulse, including LinkedIn. Beyond all of these resources, what other options are there?

Top 10 Reasons NOT to Join LinkedIn

There are social media networks such as *LinkedIn*. It's the professional counterpart to Facebook. Instead of facing, you're linking. It is only a decade old with more than 200 million members (compared to Facebook's 800 million), including 2.8 million active company profiles, spread over 200 countries (Weiner, 2012). Of course, there are other similar networks originating from several countries, such as Viadeo (45 million, France), Plaxo (20 million, USA), XING (10 million, Germany), Ecademy (.6 million, United Kingdom), Academic.edu (2 million, USA, research sharing only), and Young Black Professionals (YBP, USA),

but they don't seem to be growing in membership at the rate of LinkedIn nor do they have the number or variety of features and apps that LinkedIn offers.

So why bother? What does LinkedIn provide that could streamline some of your job tasks or make your job easier so you can produce more efficiently and effectively? Since many of you are looking for reasons not to join LinkedIn or any other social network, let's consider exactly why you should NOT join the network. Here are 10 reasons.

As a bona fide, certified, fully functioning faculty member or administrator who plans on a career in academia, DO NOT JOIN if you have NO NEED TO:

10. consolidate the preceding 10 resources and your institutional website profile into one location. If you prefer to continue contacting everyone using those different resources, that's your choice.

LinkedIn Feature: In the upper left corner of your profile page (Contacts), you can click "Connections" and easily find any connection in your network by last name, locations, companies, or industries lickety-split or faster. In the upper right corner, the "Search" box permits you to locate any person (People) in the dropdown, as well as company, jobs, groups, etc. in or outside your network with up-to-date contact information. In fact, LinkedIn will send you a message if a connection changes jobs, contact information, T-shirts, or other elements on his or her profile.

9. build a network of like-minded (teaching, research, writing, clinical) colleagues. If you have no interest in networking with others in your field and you prefer to be a hermit, then this feature is useless. Also, if you're not like-minded like any of your colleagues, you may need an appointment with Dr. Phil.

LinkedIn Feature: You can create your own custom network. Adding connections increases the likelihood that colleagues will see your profile. In fact, your LinkedIn network can help boost your ranking in Google. Further, professionals usually prefer to collaborate with people who they know and trust rather than strangers. That can be a big plus in assembling your research team or being asked by someone in your network to serve on a working group or any job. There are more than 20 sources you can use to build your network, which will be described in Part 3.

8. contact colleagues and students in your field easily and quickly. If you prefer your Rolodex® or you have an interpersonal emotional intelligence quotient (EQ) of 0, then building and maintaining contacts with LinkedIn will be a waste of time.

LinkedIn Feature: Members of LinkedIn typically update their job titles, institution, iPhone carrier, and other profile information, which means you can probably contact anyone in a blink. But "anyone" means a contact on LinkedIn. Your colleagues and students must be on LinkedIn. There is

no online site that's faster. Even Googling a person, locating the institution link, and then finding the contact information are much more time-consuming. *As an online professional directory, LinkedIn can't be beat.* This feature alone is worth the price of joining, which, of course, is free.

7. increase your professional visibility and credibility with colleagues. If your interests are exclusively within your department or you plan on leaving academia, then you will have no need for visibility outside your institution. Not knowing colleagues at other universities who can write glowing letters of support when promotion time rolls around could come back to bite you.

LinkedIn Feature: Why keep your expertise a secret? Unless you're Jason Bourne or work for Homeland Security, CIA, FBI, or Her Majesty's Secret Service, display your skills and abilities along with past jobs and experience, education, certifications, publications, patents, Oscars, Emmys, Tonys, and other accomplishments on your profile to showcase your work. There are even separate sections for *"skills & expertise" and your colleagues' endorsements and recommendations* (testimonials). (NOTE: It's advisable to omit recent convictions, time served, and appearances on *Law & Order*.)

6. share your writing or research with colleagues. If you don't care to share your work with colleagues or students who have similar interests, you won't need this feature.

LinkedIn Feature: If there are colleagues and students who follow your research, you can send a message to those connections to let them know when your publications and conference presentations are available on your profile or website. You can easily *display your print and nonprint media products on your profile*, such as most recent publications with URL links to PDF copies, PowerPoint presentations, videos, and any other products in an easily accessible format. Your profile can also provide *links to your personal and business websites, blogs, online journals, and other electronic resources.*

5. consult, speak, or provide other professional services. If you do nothing outside of your university chores, why are you working in a university? What is wrong with you?

LinkedIn Feature: Your profile page provides *a one stop site to quickly find you and contact you.* It's also written by YOU in your style for colleagues, potential employers, prospective clients, or any other niche you've chosen. Outside offers can provide credibility for your inside job, plus add to your credentials when it's time for promotion.

Someone might benefit from the services you can offer. As academicians, we're all potential consultants in some capacity. Since my first year at Johns Hopkins, I was told that one of the criteria to determine your value and worth as a professor is the requests you receive from outside your institution to consult and speak. I was in business and didn't even know it. *Outsiders can affirm your*

expertise and build your credibility. The number and types of invitations to the White House to advise the President and to Capitol Hill to testify before Congress really count when you come up for promotion, assuming you also have a wheelbarrow of publications.

Your abilities and skills are clearly described as well as the *benefits you can provide an employer or client.* Those benefits, in particular, should be highlighted in your Background open "Summary" section. It's what you can deliver for your employer or client better than anyone else that counts. If you're running a business, *you need to be reachable quickly and easily or someone else might get the job.* Had I known in 1976 when I began my career at JHU what I know now about running a business, my consulting life might have been more productive. Yours can be now with LinkedIn.

4. hunt for a job in or out of your field. If you are totally committed to your current position, have tenure, or have been kidnapped by your department chair, then you will have no need for this feature.

LinkedIn Feature: Otherwise, if you've been whacked, shoved out, or forced to retire, this feature might be useful. Or, if you just want to keep your options open to pursue other positions and move up the ranks as a free agent, the free employment resources in LinkedIn could help. Beyond *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and other professional sources that post positions, LinkedIn lists positions based on your specifications all over the world. There are also specific job posts within LinkedIn groups. When you're in search mode, you need all available search engines to drive you to a new job.

You can *find jobs, people, and business opportunities* recommended by someone in your contact network. As a job seeker, you can also review the profiles of hiring administrators or chairs of search committees and discover which of their existing contacts can introduce them. Now you can follow different institutions and receive notifications about the new jobs and offers available and also save (i.e., bookmark) jobs for which you would like to apply.

3. search for the best candidates for job openings you're trying to fill in your department. If you have no need to search for job candidates, then you won't need this feature.

LinkedIn Feature: As an employer, you can list jobs and search for candidates all over the world for any faculty, administrator, research, clinical, or extraterrestrial openings in your institution. LinkedIn offers another significant source of job possibilities along with *The Chronicle*, your professional journals, and other media that post jobs.

2. be part of multiple communities of scholars other than your own institution and association. If you work alone and have no need to collaborate or interact with others in your field, then fawgettaboutit.

LinkedIn Feature: There are 1.2 million professional groups in LinkedIn, many related to your associations, conferences, and a variety of institutions and companies, including your college alumni. You can join up to 50 groups. If you can't find one that fits your interests, you may be really weird. But guess what? LinkedIn permits you to create your own.

You can initiate or comment on discussions, poll members with specific questions, advertise upcoming events, search for jobs posted by group members, or do nothing. *Level of participation is within your control.* Visibility in these groups and your comments to questions can also contribute to establishing your expertise and building credibility.

And the NUMBER ONE REASON:

1. have important questions answered promptly by international experts you don't even know (beyond your association listserv). Do you ever have a probing or seemingly intractable problem you can't solve? "No." What about your students?

LinkedIn Feature: Questions can be sent in a message to your connections, posted on group discussions, or shared in an update. *The scope and depth of expertise available on LinkedIn is beyond our imagination.* The human resources worldwide and in a few small planets can provide perspectives on issues you may not find within any single association, organization, email list, blog, or other specific source. You can tap those resources for free.

What Happens Next?

If you are convinced that you have no need for any item on that top 10 list, then get back to work. Stop fooling around. If, however, there is at least one reason you might benefit from LinkedIn, then keep reading. We're almost done. Think carefully about that benefit. When you craft your profile, your purpose(s) for using LinkedIn should be clear.

Five Major Purposes

The preceding top 10 list can be boiled down to *five major purposes for joining LinkedIn:*

1. Display your professional credentials to promote your expertise, credibility, and job-hiring potential
2. Communicate easily and quickly with colleagues, clients, and students anywhere in the world on any topic
3. Market your business, whether individual consulting or a large company, and products (books, webinars, institutes, etc.) to obtain clients
4. Search worldwide for a job, while employers search for you as a candidate to fill positions in their institutions

5. Search worldwide for the best candidates to fill positions in your institution or business

Should You Join?

How do these purposes align with your professional needs for using LinkedIn? Which ones are most important? How can LinkedIn affect your professional life as you now know it? Will it make your life easier, add or create opportunities you want to pursue, or expand your professional aspirations? Consider those possibilities.

Remember that LinkedIn is just a tool or vehicle for the preceding purposes. If you don't commit to using it properly, those purposes may not be realized. It provides FREE professional services (of course, there are upgrades) you can use to propel yourself forward in your career. All of the preceding five purposes can be attained with free memberships. (*PERSONAL NOTE:* I have never paid anything to LinkedIn. If you need a LinkedIn ad or profile for your business, there will be a fee.) *Once you set up your profile, it will require only a few minutes a week to update and keep your activities visible to your network.* Any additional activity on the site is at your discretion and time.

Given the importance of designing your profile and building your network, my next two articles in this trilogy will be devoted to those topics. I encourage you to jumpstart the process using my previous blog series in November 2010 and LinkedIn blogs and tutorials.

LinkedIn 2013 Profile Updates

LinkedIn also updated their profile format this year. According to LinkedIn representative Bronson (2012), the updates were intended to

1. **Tell your professional story.** Our new visual design helps you make a powerful first impression and showcase your skills and accomplishments. We've also provided tools such as inline editing, making it a snap to create a complete, up-to-date profile.
2. **Discover people and opportunities.** Have you ever wondered how many of your connections already work for your dream institution? Or what you have in common with the prospects you're trying to reach? The new profile shows you rich and visual insights on the people and institutions in your network. These insights also make it simpler to discover people outside your network and quickly establish common ground to make more meaningful connections.
3. **Engage with your network.** We've also made it easier to see what your network is doing and to engage with your connections. Recent activity is now on the top of the profile, allowing you to stay current with what your network has been sharing and doing.

LinkedIn continues to make improvements and respond to the needs of its members. It's definitely worthy

of your serious consideration. Think about it and let me know your thoughts.

The next article in this trilogy (Part 2) will cover the following sections of the profile: (1) Name, Headline, and Photo, (2) Contact Information, (3) Customize Public Profile, (4) Activity or Update, (5) Background (Summary & Specialties), (6) Experience, and (7) Education. The final article (Part 3) will describe the remaining profile sections, particularly Connections and Recommendations.

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