

Writing an effective LinkedIn profile

Introduction

A compelling profile is essential if you wish to have an effective presence on LinkedIn. It is your face to the online networking world, and your starting point for promoting yourself on LinkedIn.

Registering with LinkedIn and creating an active account are covered in our White Paper 'LinkedIn Basics – getting started'.

'Writing an effective LinkedIn profile' builds on this information, and shows you how to develop your profile into an effective, career enhancing networking tool.

Guidelines

- Be honest. Your LinkedIn profile could be read by thousands of people. If you lie, or exaggerate, there is a good chance you will be found out.
- Take care with spelling and grammar. It will not look very professional if you have a profile full of spelling mistakes.
- Keep the content professional - you want people to take you seriously.
- Always be polite.
- Keep your profile updated. All the work you put in to create your profile will be wasted if you don't take the time to keep it current.

Developing your profile

Once your LinkedIn account is up and running, you can access and edit your profile at any time by going to your home page, clicking on the title 'Profile' and then on 'Edit Profile'. You will see that each section of your profile has an 'Edit' box beside it – just click on the one that you wish to update.

When you are on the Edit Profile page, LinkedIn will display a profile tracker that shows how complete your profile is, and what sections you still have to fill in. Once you have completed all the sections, your tracker should read 100%.

Remember to click 'Save changes' as you go along. You can go back and amend or update your profile at any time.

Profile sections

Photograph

You should add a recent photograph to your profile – ideally a head shot of the 'professional' you. People prefer to see who they are dealing with.

The Professional headline box

The professional headline box is the concise, one-line description that appears directly below your name. It is a key section, as it is one of the first things people will see when they view your profile. Your headline will appear beside your name in search results, and also when you contribute to the 'Answers' section of LinkedIn.

You don't have to use your actual job title as your professional headline, as you will be including that in your current employment section. Instead, you should use words that will make you stand out from the competition, and that effectively promote who you are and what you have to offer. Have a look at other profiles to get an idea of what stands out in other people's headline descriptions.

Post an update

This section is a useful way of regularly refreshing your profile and keeping it up to date. The purpose is to capture your connections' attention and you should aim to give an update at least once a week. Give a brief description of recent work developments, e.g.:

- Have you recently written, or been mentioned in, any articles or blogs – provide links;
- Are you presenting at, or attending, any conferences or seminars – again provide links;
- Talk about a project you are working on, an expert view or even some recent thought-leadership relevant to your job and industry;
- If you have a work-related blog, alert your contacts to new posts; or
- If you are looking for work, describe the kind of position you are looking for.

Education and employment history

- Fill in your employment details, not just for your current post but also for any previous employers. This will directly increase your number of possible connections, as LinkedIn will provide you with a list of other members who worked for the same employer at around the same time. It will also do the same for the college or university you attended.
- Ensure your job title is understandable to people outwith your organisation or sector. If it contains uncommon acronyms, spell them out.
- Include any non-executive or official advisory positions too, as people will respect this breadth of activity.
- Don't just summarise your job description, which is likely to be almost identical to that of other members carrying out a similar role, but instead describe your accomplishments and goals. This will help to showcase your own unique set of talents and experience.
- List all elements of your education. Some people really value academic qualifications, and this extra detail might just encourage them to get in touch.

Recommendations

The recommendations facility on LinkedIn allows you to include testimonials from people you have worked with. These are usually read with interest by other people, and add weight to your profile.

Think about the areas of your work you would like to promote, and then approach people who might be able to recommend you in these areas.

- From the 'edit' section of your profile, click on 'Get recommended'.
- Select the period of your employment history you want a recommendation for.
- Select which of your connections you wish to approach for a recommendation.

- Personalise the LinkedIn default message - be courteous and respectful.
- Click send.

Recommendations should, where possible, be specific. A reference that is specifically related to performance in a particular project or area of work is of much more use to a prospective employer than a generalised statement such as "I worked with XX and they were very good."

You will be able to review any recommendations before they appear on your profile.

You should also be prepared to provide recommendations for other members. You don't have to wait to be asked – proactively contact your connections where you feel you have something relevant and positive to say, and offer to provide a recommendation. They may return the favour.

Listing websites

You can list up to three websites on your profile. If you have your own company or blog site then include the links here. Otherwise, select websites that contain information of interest to you and that you would like to be associated with.

Creating links to these websites will have the added benefit of increasing the search engine optimisation of these sites. As LinkedIn is business focused it is not appropriate to add a link to your Facebook page or other personal sites.

Take advantage of the facility to customise the title of the websites you are listing. Rather than use the generic 'my company' or 'my website' titles LinkedIn provides by default, click 'other' in the drop down box, and type in the name of your site and its URL.

Public Profile address

LinkedIn gives you your own public URL, which you can use to direct people to your profile page - by adding it in to your email signature, for example. You can customise this URL to include your name:

- Scroll down your profile to 'Public Profile' and click edit.
- Click 'edit' next to 'Your Public Profile URL'.
- Type in your customised URL, e.g. if your name is Joe Bloggs, then you should customise your URL to say www.linkedin.com/in/joebloggs.

If you have a common name, you should customise your URL as soon as possible before someone else uses it. If your name has already been claimed, try including a middle initial or swapping your first and last names around.

Public Profile

You also have the option of changing the settings that determine which parts of your profile are available to the public.

LinkedIn recommends that you select 'Full View' to maximise your ability to attract connections. However, you can deselect any elements of your profile that you do not want to be on full view. Click 'save changes' when you have finished.

At the bottom of the page you have the option to 'view my public profile as others see it', which lets you see exactly how your profile will appear to other members.

Summary

The summary section is the point in the profile where you can really sell yourself. You should let everyone know exactly who you are, what you do and what you have to offer:

- Set out the high points of your career and explain how you have made a difference.
- Make the content interesting to draw viewers in, but keep it short and concise – ideally around 50 words.
- Write in the first person and make sure you appear confident and impressive but not boastful.
- Ask someone to review your summary before you make your profile public – it is often easier for others to judge the tone of your summary.

Specialities

After the summary is a section where you can list your specialities. You should include all the areas of expertise that you want to promote on LinkedIn. Use keywords related to these specialisms, to maximise the chances of people finding your profile when they search for the terms. If you are an accountant, for example, you might list your keywords as:

- management accounting
- budgeting
- forecasting
- fixed assets
- inventory control

Applications

LinkedIn gives you the option of adding a number of applications to help enhance your profile.

- Click 'add applications' and you will see a list of available applications, and a brief description of their function.
- Click on your chosen application and you will be taken to a page with further information on that application.
- Select whether you want the application to appear on your home page or your profile
- Click 'Add application'.

Personal information

Towards the end of your profile, there is a section on personal information. If you want to make it easy for prospective customers, employers or contacts to get in touch, then you should add a mobile number, direct dial number and email address. Fields with a padlock symbol beside them give you additional options with regard to their visibility settings.

Additional information

Use the additional information boxes to provide further details that demonstrate your depth of skills and experience:

- List your qualifications and awards.
- Name the Groups and Associations you are a member of.
- Add a link to your website's homepage and potentially to the section of your website most relevant to you or your speciality.
- Under interests, give some information about what you do out of work. People will find this interesting, and it will provide material that people can use to make contact. Avoid potentially divisive subjects such as your favourite football team, or activities that some people might find objectionable.

Contact settings

You can specify how you would like other members to contact you – whether anyone can contact you direct through the email system, or whether you will only accept new contracts when they are introduced through one of your existing contacts.

You can also specify which of a number of listed categories you would be interested in being contacted about.

If you need more information or support with getting started on LinkedIn, contact Christine Black, Client Services Manager on 07964 713592 or at christineblack@winningwork.co.uk, or Adam Gordon, Director on 07870 268288 or at adamgordon@winningwork.co.uk.