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Can **LinkedIn**® Increase Your Sales?

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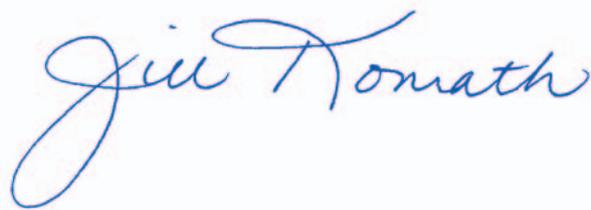
Introduction

As a self-professed technophobe, using social media such as LinkedIn is not second nature to me. I force myself to experiment with these new mediums knowing that ultimately they'll have an impact on the selling profession - even though I'm still unsure what it might be.

So I began an exploration which included research, reading, experimentation and interviews. In the process I learned numerous creative strategies from sellers and business owners who have already embraced LinkedIn as a sales tool.

In this ebook, I share what I discovered. You'll find a 3 articles on how LinkedIn can increase your sales, plus a final article on additional resources on this topic.

In know you'll find it helpful – and interesting!



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Can LinkedIn® Increase Your Sales?

About 2 years ago, I set up my profile on LinkedIn. It was sterile & boring, conveying only enough to enable me to say I had an online presence. Then last year I read entrepreneurial guru Guy Kawasaki's blog article on his LinkedIn Profile Extreme Makeover and felt compelled to redo mine based on what I learned.

Since then, I've accepted numerous invitations to connect, yet fretted if I should since many came from total strangers. I've written a few recommendations and received a few.

Mostly I was a passive observer - waiting for some sales miracles to happen. Of course, they never did and I began to doubt LinkedIn's ability to deliver real tangible results.

Not wanting to quit too soon, I began answering sales and business development questions on LinkedIn. Why would I help total strangers? I saw it as an opportunity to demonstrate my expertise, as well as to get exposure with potential prospects for my services.



Nothing much happened as a result, but still I suspected that I'd barely tapped into the power of LinkedIn. That's when I discovered *I'm on LinkedIn - Now What?* by Jason Alba, the CEO of JibberJobber. I was ready for his help.

Immediately I discovered that I was a "promiscuous linker", willing to hook up with anyone who approached me. (Please don't tell my mother.) But I also learned it was okay.

In his book, Alba shares a whole slew of uses I'd never even thought of before. If you're just starting out, it'll help you get going right away. One thing that intrigued me was when he talked about why & how to ask a question on LinkedIn. I decided to give it a try.

Since I was still trying to discover how to best leverage this social media, here's the question I posted:

- **Question: As a seller, how do you use LinkedIn to increase your sales?**

Explanation: I'm writing an article for my Selling to Big Companies newsletter on this topic. I'd like to include specific examples to help my readers learn how they can leverage this tool. Since I'm a bit of a technophobe, my experience with Linked In is rather limited. If you can tell me how you've used LinkedIn to open doors, create opportunities and grow your business, I'd really appreciate it.

Social media guru Scott Allen, coauthor of *The Virtual Handshake* and managing director at Link to Your World, was the first to respond. Here are his invaluable suggestions:

LinkedIn can be used to support the entire sales lifecycle: lead generation, sales acceleration and solution delivery. Let's look at each of these pieces:

- **Lead Generation**

Find and be found. Search by title and industry for the ideal contacts at your ideal customers. Search by title and company name for specific target customers. Be sure your profile is complete and contains the appropriate keywords for your business so that people looking for your solution will find you. Endorsements/recommendations count for a lot – get them from people who have actually been your clients if at all possible.

- **Sales Acceleration**

Search for people in your prospect's company who are not closely involved in your deal - preferably 2nd degree contacts, not 3rd degree. Ask for an informational interview. This is where strong, trusted relationships count for a lot - "light linking" breaks down here.

Ask your interview subject about the priorities that are going on at the company — what are the high-level factors that might be influencing the buying process. Be completely open/transparent. If you have a good solution and a really good referral to a true "friend of a friend", you will very likely find an internal champion in that person. ***This is the #1 technique that LinkedIn supports better than any other tool.***

- **Solution Delivery**

Quite often, especially for small businesses, you can't do it all yourself. LinkedIn is invaluable for finding partners with particular skill sets who can help you deliver the total solution. In addition to searching, you can post questions asking about the solution area you need expertise in and use that as a way to attract potential partners.

Excellent ideas. And that was just the start of my learning. Numerous LinkedIn users responded to my question. I'll be sharing their success stories in upcoming posts.

In the meantime, if you don't have a profile on LinkedIn, get going. If your profile is mundane or skeletal, flush it out and inject some personality in it. Social media can have a significant impact on sales. You don't want to let these opportunities slip through your fingers.

Can **LinkedIn** Increase Your Sales?

LinkedIn, the online business networking site, connects over 17 million experienced professionals from over 150 countries. Yikes! That's so many that it makes my head spin. I'd love to fantasize that a few of these people would stumble onto my profile, be suitably impressed and initiate contact. But so far, it hasn't turned out that way.

Yet many sellers have learned how to leverage LinkedIn to drive more sales. They're not sitting around waiting for their phone to ring. Instead, they're using it as an additional resource that supports their prospecting efforts. Here's how your peers are using LinkedIn to grow their business. True stories. Real results.

- **Launching Account Entry Campaigns**

Kent Speakman of Suitcase Interactive says: We're very deliberate in pursuing certain targeted accounts. LinkedIn is a tool that allows our business development department to look for connections or contacts within their network they already know.

For example, when creating an account entry campaign for larger organizations, my team generates a list of people within the organization to be contacted to discuss our value proposition. By spending a short time span looking at the contacts they have, and who their contacts know, we can then ask for introductions to people at the target account. We usually have a much warmer response if we do it this way.

- **Connecting with CxOs**

Stu Garrow, Managing Director of Software Traction Pty, Ltd adds: I've used Linked-In a few times to discover that the CxO who I was trying to meet with was a contact of one of my direct contacts. It certainly opened some doors when I needed it, but it isn't a replacement for proper research. Accessing second level contacts works, but 3rd, 4th and 5th level contacts would be a very long shot at success.

- **Inside Information**

From Nick Ehrman, Director of New Business Development for Voltaggio Johnson: I always look everyone up. You can glean all sorts of info this way. You can learn where someone has worked, where they went to school, hobbies and more. You can also find out who they're linked to. Knowing "who knows who" is powerful. Plus, the idea is to become a subject matter expert, right? Well, LinkedIn is a cool tool to help that along.

● **Replacing Cold Calling**

John-Erich Mantius, Director of Business Development at Arvato Digital Services offers this advice: While not everyone you'd like to know is in LinkedIn and the database is only as reliable as those users who keep their profiles updated, I find that it's an indispensable part of my sales tool kit.

I'm pretty methodical about using it regularly to determine if anyone in my network "knows somebody who knows somebody." I'd prefer not cold-calling. Even if my network comes up empty, I'm sure to find someone at the company I was going to cold call who can help me navigate into an organization.

An example: At a conference last month, I was looking for the head of supply chain at one of the leading headset manufacturers in the US. I got the name, but the person was not sure of the spelling. Back in the office, I tried a few different ways of spelling his name on LinkedIn and voila ... confirmed I had the right person. Alas, his profile was out of date. A quick Google search eliminated any doubt who I needed to call as a press release confirmed he'd left and where he was working now.

Sure, a Google search could have eliminated LinkedIn altogether, but what it could not do is tell me who within my network could connect me to my targeted contact. Continuing my search within LinkedIn, I found additional relevant contacts at this manufacturer. Now that I had the e-apargach.

● **Assessing Interest**

Dan Coates, Co-Founder of SurveyU - The Voice of the American Student writes: I recently started a company that provides marketing data on the college student population. We're a new entrant within a new space. It's tough identifying aspects as not all marketers have an interest in collegians.

- **Making a Connection**

The managing partner of a consulting firm adds: We needed to reach the VP of Sales of a larger company. Repeated attempts to connect had failed. I used LinkedIn to find the individual and found 5 different paths that connected with her. I sent different messages through 2nd, 3rd and 4th level connections to get to her. I sent out my requests to have people forward my request to talk with her on Thursday. Tuesday she called me and asked why four different people suggested she call me and ask me the question I had posed to all five connections.

- **Finding the Decision Maker**

Silvia Quintanilla of Industry Gems contributes: I use LinkedIn as a "people finder." For example, I wanted to get into technology company in my area. I typed their name into the company search field. Then I perused who came up. I found a guy who was Director of Financial Services.

I then "cold" emailed him using their corporate email pattern. He wrote back and told me he was leaving, but I should contact his replacement. He then gave me the replacement's email address, I wrote him an email and was successful in getting an appointment. This lead to an w. whoections tl pattergip's area.8o

Most importantly, after the deal is won, I invite my new customer to join my LinkedIn network. This helps me keep in touch with them for up-selling opportunities and to keep an eye on their network for referral selling. And, if my customer leaves the company I am able to find out where they are going. This enables me to continue to engage with them and sell to them throughout the rest of their career. My success comes from building lasting friendships with my customers. LinkedIn provides an excellent platform that assists me in this success.

Savvy sellers are using LinkedIn to research their prospects, find decision makers, assess interest and build relationships. They're leveraging this information and their connections to crack into corporate accounts and win big contracts.

LinkedIn is a tool that augments your business development efforts. It also can shorten the time it takes to get your foot in the door. Finally, it's a great way to keep in touch with your customers when they move on. Hopefully you're starting to see the potential in this online network - because it's there, waiting for us to embrace it.

What can I do to be more effective? It's a question that's always on my mind. That's why I began this exploration of LinkedIn. I wanted to find out if and how sellers were leveraging this technology to improve their sales results.

In the final part of this 3-part series, you'll discover even more ways you can use this tool to create more opportunities, connect with decision makers and win more business. Again, real sellers and real results.

● **Strategic Visibility & Connecting**

Tim Hayden, President of GamePlan Marketing & Events shares what he's trained his team to do with LinkedIn:

- 1.** Focus on connecting. Anytime you receive a business card from its owner, you then "know" this person. While not everyone is a valuable link, search for that person on LinkedIn right away. Because you have their email, you can send them an invitation to connect.
- 2.** Increase your visibility. Don't simply add people to your network. Ask or answer questions on LinkedIn. Make sure your public profile is complete. But most of all recommend people in your network and ask them to recommend YOU! Anytime you do any of the above, LinkedIn posts updates online or in weekly updates to everyone in your network.
- 3.** Make LinkedIn your homepage. Whenever I open my browser, I can immediately review my "LinkedIn Home Page" which shows what others in my network are doing and with whom they're connecting. I also check every 2-3 days to see "Who's Viewed My Profile." Just as you can use web statistics to see what companies are looking at your website, you can also see with about 80% accuracy who's been checking out your profile.

In the past two months, I've used these strategies to identify more than 20 new business leads - and converted two to clients!

● **Keep-in-Touch Strategy**

Stu Garrow, Managing Director of Software Traction Pty, Ltd says: As we know in sales, it's much easier to keep an existing contact happy than it is to create a new one. The real value in

Every week, you take 5 people from your list of contacts and send them a short email. It's amazing how many times a few emails turn into live opportunities. Plus, the simple act of keeping in touch places you way in front of competitors.

- **Visible Network Reminder**

Barak Kassar of the creative marketing firm Rassak Experience shares: Selling is networking - and sometimes networks are hard to visualize. LinkedIn can be like putting a die-trace on your network, making it visible to you. This makes it easier to figure out who to contact in a given situation, even if I don't always make the contact through LinkedIn. Also, I've been introduced to some incredible people directly through the LinkedIn tools.

- **Starting a Networking Group**

Rob Kingma of Ernst & Young Revenue Growth Services adds: I started to focus on LinkedIn as a selling opportunity after hosting the first physical gathering of LinkedIn users in Australia. This event was an outcome of an in-person meeting I had with my country's most connected user. The result was a turnout of 120 LinkedIn users and three business opportunities for our practice.

- **Leveraging Long-Lost Relationships**

Mark Hunter of The Sales Hunter says: LinkedIn can reconnect you with former colleagues you've lost contact with. I've used it to get in touch with people I worked with nearly 20 years ago. The process I used was simple. By entering previous employers into the search bar, LinkedIn gave me a list of people who'd also worked for these firms.

Though I didn't know everyone, I discovered several whom I knew quite well at one point in time. Reaching out to these people not only enabled me to catch up on time gone by, but also to cultivate some significant opportunities that are on track to close this year. Plus these conversations led to other past associates and, again, potential prospects emerged.

Currently, my profile on LinkedIn enables me to be found by others who are doing the same thing. This proves the need to make sure your profile includes all of your previous employers and locations to allow you to be as visible as possible.

● **Creating a Business Relationship**

Nick Wright, head of Nick Wright Consulting contributes: I use my Google Reader to leverage LinkedIn. I go to the homepage, click on the "Answers" tab, then I pick the categories I want to follow (e.g., Marketing and Sales > Sales > Sales Techniques). Then I simply click the RSS button to subscribe to their feeds.

When I pop open my Google Reader each morning I quickly browse the headlines - which are the questions asked. If I find one that's aligned with my interests or business goals, I click on it and go directly to that question's page on LinkedIn. At that point, I use the Q&A's as a reference tool to learn from ... and if I find an answer I really like, I'll click on the person's name to go to their profile.

Then I look for a blog or website listed on their profile and go from there. I subscribe to his/her blog and become a regular, ultimately planting the seed for a possible business relationship to grow.

● **Accidental Success**

Kent Speakman of Suitcase Interactive shares: When I was adding contacts to LinkedIn, I mistakenly included the President of a very large company in my network. We'd been trying to get in to see him for about 7 months, but none of our account entry strategies had worked.

When he got my invitation to connect, he proceeded to check me out on LinkedIn. Then he sent me an email saying thanks for sending the link, but stating that he didn't know how he knew me. (I'd found his email address on Jigsaw.)

I responded with an email that contained our value proposition and a humorous apology. From there, we exchanged several emails and a series of voicemails. Because he liked what I was sharing, he connected me with his Vice President - who was indeed in need of our help. We got the bid for the work and hereby my first accidental LinkedIn success story.

So What Have I Learned?

LinkedIn isn't a panacea or a miracle cure for your sales woes. Instead, it's a valuable tool that we, as sellers need to learn how to leverage to our advantage. It's a way to augment our prospecting and business growth efforts, not replace them.

While I've focused on the numerous ways that people have used LinkedIn to get business, I've also heard from others that it may not be appropriate for what they sell or that the decision makers they're trying to reach don't have profiles posted. I'm sure they're right.

Since I started this exploration, I've discovered a multitude of ways to use LinkedIn that I could never have conceived of on my own. I've learned that it's not just about making connections with someone who knows someone who knows someone. Rather, it's a new way of thinking about your network, your personal visibility and your relationships.

Personally, I am choosing to participate in this new Sales 2.0 world. I believe it's the way of the future. I don't know where it's all going, but I am sure going to find out. Join me!



About Jill Konrath

A leading-edge sales strategist ... author of the instant sales classic, [Selling to Big Companies](#) ... an in-demand sales speaker who provides a much needed wake-up call to sales organizations ... a passionate spokesperson for women in sales ... and a strong believer that in today's business environment, the sales force is the competitive advantage.

Jill Konrath, a leading-edge sales strategist and business advisor, is a popular speaker at national sales meetings and association events. She helps sellers crack into corporate accounts, speed up their sales cycle and achieve their revenue growth goals.

She's the author of the instant sales classic, [Selling to Big Companies](#), which has been an Amazon Top 25 sales book since it was released. As a thought leader in the selling and marketing arena, Jill also publishes a popular newsletter and hosts a [widely read blog](#). She's written hundreds of articles on sales strategy, appeared as a guest expert for numerous podcasts & conducted webinars attended by sellers around the world.

Jill is frequently quoted in top business media including The New York Times, Entrepreneur, Business Journal, Selling Power, Sales & Marketing Management as well as countless other print and online publications. She's been a guest of Entrepreneur Radio, Sales Rep Radio, Small Business Trends and more.

Several years ago, Jill started [SellingtoBigCompanies.com](#) to help salespeople and entrepreneurs win bigger contracts. By creating this invaluable web portal, she became a sought after advisor to this growing market segment. In 2007, Jill launched the [Sales Shebang](#) to empower women sellers to succeed beyond their wildest imaginations – earning good money in a job they love and with a bunch of people cheering them on.

Her own client roster includes such such well-known corporate giants as IBM, Hilton, 3M, Bombardier, AAA, UnitedHealthcare, Carlson Companies, Securian, as well as numerous technology and business services firms.

Visit Jill's website: www.sellingtobigcompanies.com

Additional Resources

Jan Visser of SalesTeamTools provides a contrarian perspective on the value of LinkedIn in his article called [3 Reasons LinkedIn Won't Help You Sell](#).

Rob Kingma of Ernst & Young Revenue Growth Services recommends listening to the [Connections podcast](#), hosted by Stan Relihan. It focuses on using LinkedIn and other networking sites to build business and personal profile.

Brandon Hull of SalesTeamTools suggest checking out [100+ Smart Ways to Use LinkedIn](#) on the LinkedInIntelligence blog. This article has ideas from tons of different users.

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