

How to use LinkedIn to bring in business

By [Sonja Jefferson](#)



LinkedIn has just hit the 1 million user mark here in the UK. With over 2000 business professionals signing up every day, it can no longer be discounted as a US phenomenon: LinkedIn is now a mainstream tool for business professionals here in the UK, and a highly useful one at that.

Most consultants have heard of it, many have their profiles on it, but how can we use LinkedIn to bring in work?

Often referred to as a 'networking tool for grown ups', LinkedIn is a social networking site developed solely for business interaction.

"LinkedIn takes your personal business network online and gives you access to people, jobs and opportunities like never before."

Built around your résumé, the site lets you create and maintain a network of people you know and trust in business. You can invite anyone - whether a user or not - to become a 'connection'. It's a free service. As of May 2008, there are over 20 million registered users worldwide, making it the world's largest business network.

Creating a LinkedIn profile is a good idea:

- **It's a way of getting your profile online.** Your profile looks professional and is very easy to update. Some commentators see the LinkedIn profile as a replacement for the traditional CV. It will ensure people find you on the web as Google loves it. For those who already have an online presence it can improve your ratings and increase the chances that you are found. My LinkedIn profile appears near the top of the list when you type in my name. [Try it.](#)
- **It gives more information than a traditional CV.** It shows the extent of your network and recommendations from others, plus easy links to other online information that backs up your case.
- **It makes networking easy.** As one independent consultant said: 'it's like they are making the networking aspect of freelancing too easy to fail.' It's a useful database of your contacts that is easy to grow. It builds a professional community and reminds you who you know.
- **It gives you permission to keep in contact.** If someone accepts your invitation to join your network, they are giving you permission to keep in touch. Using LinkedIn to keep in contact

is a more personal and less intrusive method than email. It is a form of permission marketing; you can remove connections too.

Getting started is easy. All you need to do is [complete your profile](#), as fully as you can (remembering to include your web address or blog address if you have one). You can then start making connections to past colleagues, clients, friends and contacts. You can ask them to recommend or endorse you on the site. These recommendations are clearly visible on your profile and are a great way to lend credibility to your claims.

It's time to get proactive.

Here are 5 simple (and free) ways to use LinkedIn to grow your business:

1. **Develop your network:** The process of connecting is a marketing opportunity in itself. The people you contact are likely to view your profile ([so make sure it's good!](#)). You can use the 'I want to add you to my LinkedIn network' feature as an opportunity to briefly introduce what you do and ask for connections to people who might have an interest. Promote your LinkedIn URL on your website and emails.
2. **Ask for introductions:** Ask to be introduced to other professionals, businesses or potential clients through people in your network. LinkedIn allows you to do some research. You can often see who your contacts are connected to (NB - this is not always the case. Users have the facility to protect their network so you cannot see it. At the moment, the majority of networks are open). You can find potential clients or partners and ask your contacts to make an introduction.
3. **Use the 'what are you working on' feature:** This is a valuable, non-intrusive way to tell people what you are up to and keep you in their minds. UK change management consultant [Jane Northcote](#) promoted her new book in this way. American marketing guru [Robert Middleton](#) tells people when he's speaking at an event. Other independents have used this feature to tell their network that they are available for work or have launched a new business, for example.
4. **Produce and market valuable content:** if you create [useful, educational content](#) (such as white papers, articles or books), LinkedIn is a great place to promote it. Communicate this to your network and ask them to send it on to anyone that might be interested. LinkedIn is a great way to get this content out there.
5. **Use LinkedIn Answers:** [LinkedIn Answers](#) allows you to give and receive business related advice. You can show your expertise on a subject by passing on knowledge and insight to the community. This helps to brand you as an expert in your field, helping you to generate new contacts and business opportunities.

I think LinkedIn is a fantastic tool for independent consultants and consultancy businesses here in the UK. I'm working on websites for several small consultancies and I recommend that they promote their LinkedIn URLs on their sites, inviting people to connect to them. LinkedIn is a great way to establish and formalise your network and promote your services.

If you're not signed up already, have a look at www.linkedin.com.

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