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Master LinkedIn: a Research-Based Framework for You to Think About Your Profile.

Social networking sites are just behind the major search engines as the most visited sites on the internet. (Ronn, 2007).  LinkedIn has emerged as THE site on the internet where you show your “professional” face.  Indeed, for many social media-conscious professionals, their LinkedIn profiles have replaced traditional resumes.

In November, 2013 nearly 85 million people had signed up on LinkedIn or 27% of the U.S. population.  According to LinkedIn, it attracts two new members every second from 200 countries.  95% of 541 surveyed recruiters used LinkedIn to identify passive candidates versus 58% for Facebook and 42% for Twitter.

Given LinkedIn’s importance to your professional life, how can you best position yourself to be noticed?

Zide (2014) interviewed five recruiters regarding the variables that are important for them in reviewing LinkedIn profiles.  She and her research  team  then reviewed three hundred LinkedIn profile using these variables.  One hundred were classified as “savvy” in business (marketing and sales executives), one hundred were mid-level savvy (human resources executives) and one hundred were placed in the category of not business savvy (industrial/organizational psychologists).

Below are some themes that should be helpful in informing the design of your LinkedIn presence:

**Typos and Spelling Errors**

100% of recruiters interviewed stated that they automatically reject candidates with spelling errors and typographical mistakes in their biographies.  At the very least, put your text through a grammar checker!

If you can, have a disinterested party review your text for ways to reduce redundancy or complexity in your self-presentation.

**Prove You Are Not a Jerk**

80% of recruiters surveyed like to see a large number of connections as well as positive recommendations written by others about the individual.

In her analysis of 300 LinkedIn profiles, Zide found that men tend to have more first degree contacts than women, regardless of how savvy they are.  Men tend to have more positive references than women.

The more savvy the individual, the higher the probability that the LinkedIn profile will have positive references.

We would concur.

For most positions, given a choice between someone who has 250 First Degree Links versus someone with 100 Links, the presumption is those with higher numbers have more useful professional networks for second opinions and to source talent the organization might need.  People with high First Degree Links may not necessarily be collegial individuals.  But people with few First Degree Links might be suspected of being terminally shy or of low emotional intelligence.

When someone writes a reference on your behalf, we and other recruiters take it with a grain of salt.  Letters of praise, however, help rule out that you are a “jerk.”  A “jerk” is defined as someone with low emotional [intelligence](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/intelligence).  We don’t like to recommend “jerks” to our clients!

The best way for you to get a reference from others is to be generous in providing references to others you know on LinkedIn.  If you do, the person on the receiving end will get a copy of your positive reference and have the ability to respond with a glowing reference in return.

In writing your positive reference, don’t just give two or three sentences.  Try to provide specific examples of how the person was of value to you or to the team. Give specific references and you can expect to get specific references.

“Jerks” tend to not want to give praise and so they seldom are on the receiving end of it.

**Personal Email on Your Profile**

Why make it hard for recruiters to contact you?  Put your personal (not business) email on your profile just under your LinkedIn headline.

In a survey of 300 LinkedIn profiles, only 4% of unsophisticated business people displayed their email address on their LinkedIn summary versus 64% of more sophisticated group.

**Photographs**

The absence of a photograph is negative.  People wonder “what is she trying to hide?”  LinkedIn is your professional face to the world: Avoid “artsy” photographs and avoid no photographs.

Women tend to provide fewer images of themselves than men.  And the less savvy the individual the more likely the person does not include a photograph.

The best photographs draw the viewer to your friendly face.  Avoid backgrounds that can distract from your face.  We saw a photo of someone riding a beautiful horse and wearing a polo helmet.  Who remembers the face?  We have seen a head and shoulders photograph spoiled by the shape of an arm draped over that person’s neck.  Your child, dog, and spouse may be adorable.  But they are also irrelevant for the purposes of LinkedIn.

Your LinkedIn photo is not a passport photo.  It is not a mug shot taken by the police.  It is the professional face you chose to present to the world.  Is it friendly?  Do you project openness?

Sometimes you may lack the objectivity to evaluate your own photograph.  One of our outplacement candidates loved his photograph.  But it showed him wearing dark glasses and looking like some type of Mafia hit man.  Of 300 photographs surveyed by Zide’s judges, nearly 20% were judged to be inappropriate or unprofessional

**Personal Interests**

The recruiters like to view Personal Interests to see if there might be a basis for common ground when conducting initial interviews, e.g. “I see you like to ski.  So do I.  What are your favorite places?”

Men tend to provide more personal interests than women.  Experienced business professionals tend to provide more personal interests than inexperienced professionals.

**Listen to the Voice of the Marketplace**

When placing your profile on LinkedIn, remember that you are accessed by a LinkedIn computer programmed to search for key words.  What should these key words be?

When working with outplacement candidates, we ask them to go to job boards and to identify 5-8 jobs for which they are both interested in and qualified.  Review the words used in each job description and place yourself in the role of a recruiter seeking to identify key words to program the LinkedIn computer.

The more the same words appear in different job descriptions the higher the probability that you are locking on to important key words currently in fashion.  Next year the same words may be out of fashion.

Some of these words will focus on technology or specific business events.  We call them “hard” key words.  Examples might be “SAP” or “Oracle” in software or “IPO” or “Initial Public Offering” in finance.  “Direct Mail” or “Social Media Marketing” could be a key word in marketing.

Some of the words will focus on leadership or interpersonal skills.  We call them “soft” key words.” Examples might include “innovative,” “team,” “strategic”, “results-oriented,” “mission-driven.”

Companies are spending millions of dollars each year to tell you what they are looking for.  Are you listening?

If you have identified key words that the market wants and you also happen to have, make sure those key words appear BOTH in your headline, your summary, and your  career history.

Remember you are not writing your LinkedIn profile for yourself.  You are writing it to that a computer can find you.

**Summary and Conclusions:**

LinkedIn is THE social media tool to show your professional face to the world.  In order to be noticed by others, you need to make sure your profile will be friendly to computers that are programmed with key words.  We call this “Listen to the Voice of the Marketplace.”

You want a photograph that reflects your professional self in the best possible light.

You want to show you appreciate others and are appreciated by others through the references you give and receive on LinkedIn.

You want to display your personal interests.

You want to put your home email in your summary.

Make it easy for machines and for people to connect with you!

**Research**

Ronn, K. (2007), “Social networking: closer than you think?”, Bloomberg Business Week Online, June 12 p. 12.

Zide, J., Elman, B., & Shahani-Denning, C. (2014). LinkedIn and recruitment: How profiles differ across occupations. Employee Relations, 36(5), 583-604.

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This article was first published by PSYCHOLOGY TODAY. Each month, Maryanne Peabody and Larry Stybel provide their perspectives about leadership and career success. There have been over 220,000 downloads:

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Maryanne Peabody and Larry Stybel are co-founders of Boston-based Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc. The mission is “Increased Leadership and Career Success:” for valued professionals: retained search+, improved relationship management for leaders, and campaign management outplacement.

Based in Boston, it is part of a network of 200 consultants in 25 U.S. cities and 32 countries. Clients include 21% of the one hundred companies named by **FORTUNE MAGAZINE** as “Best Employers in the United States:”

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