

LinkedIn is like MySpace for professional networkers

Posted: May 13, 2008

Connections



**Tannette
Johnson-Elie**

[E-MAIL](#)

It's one of the most popular professional networking Web sites in America, the place where folks go to make connections, share ideas and search for jobs and business opportunities.

Most people have heard of LinkedIn, and if it's not on your radar, then you're missing out on an important business networking tool.

Thousands of entrepreneurs, professionals and executives are using LinkedIn to solve complex business problems, find customers and potential employees, and build strategic relationships.

For those of you who might not be up on your social networking services, let me explain what LinkedIn is. Consider it the MySpace for the business community. Sites like MySpace and FaceBook have been widely popular with teenagers and young adults.

LinkedIn is a business-oriented, social-networking tool that allows its members to maintain a list of contacts from among people they know and trust in business, make new contacts and reconnect with former colleagues and old friends from high school and college. The people on the list are called "connections." Users can invite anyone, regardless of whether they're a site user or not, to become a connection.

"Think of this as your community, as your neighborhood to go to, to find people as customers, to find employees, to find answers and to find money," says David Nour, a business relationship expert and founder of Relationship Economics, an Atlanta consulting, training and technology firm.

"It's a great tool to create access to people you want to get to know through the people you already know. As a small-business owner, you can't afford to ignore social networking sites like LinkedIn."

Opening doors

It's paid off for Kathy Gaillard, a partner in Mosaic Communications, a Milwaukee public relations and marketing agency. She used LinkedIn to make a key connection within a company that could lead to potential business.

"I wanted to get into this one company to pitch business to them. I didn't have a contact there. I e-mailed someone in my network that was connected to this company," said Gaillard, who has 60 connections. "I was able to get a meeting."

Tom Graybill, director of sales for Tri-Marq Communications Inc. in downtown Milwaukee, has used LinkedIn as a resource for finding potential clients and staying plugged in to the advertising community.

"I have a number of advertising folks who are on my list, and they talk to folks who may not be on my list," says Graybill. "It never hurts to get your name out there, but you wonder if some people are trying to put in names to get the most connections. Is it a hobby for them?"

While you may want to be wary of people who are on LinkedIn simply to collect names, some have a large number of connections to build their database.

An account manager for the Brookfield office of executive search firm DHR International, Susan Foley swears by LinkedIn. She has 251 connections and on her "three degrees of separation" list of contacts boasts 2.8 million connections. The site is a key resource for recruiters like Foley.

"It's probably one of the top three resources I use," she says. "What's nice about LinkedIn is you can get people's backgrounds, what companies they've been with, where they went to school and what roles they've been in. But it's also fun to reconnect with people I've gone to school with."

Don't just sit there

I first was invited to join LinkedIn about two years ago. Feeling unsure about the site and thinking it was just another fad, I filled out scant information about myself, and just sat back and did nothing for two years.

This is a common mistake of novice LinkedIn users: People just wait for things to happen and don't do anything to grow their network. The whole idea behind LinkedIn is for folks to actively grow their network. Since I began working on this column last week, I have added 23 connections.

Chris Crawley was the first person to invite me to join LinkedIn. Crawley is executive director of the Milwaukee University Graduate School Cooperative, known as the MUGS Co-op, a nonprofit organization that helps prepare young adults for college and careers. Crawley has 211 LinkedIn connections.

"Last year we helped over 1,000 kids in Milwaukee get access to jobs. Without LinkedIn, I would not have had the success we've had so far," says Crawley. "I contact my contacts and other people's contacts on LinkedIn to help the kids find immediate jobs. Those same contacts often will agree to be mentors and coaches for our young people."

Social networking sites like LinkedIn have profoundly changed the way we build relationships in the business world, and they are here to stay. It's something we have to embrace to stay connected. So are you LinkedIn?