

# LinkedIn networking can be very beneficial

By Jim Kendall | Columnist

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Playwright John Guare, who penned "Six Degrees of Separation," likely would fit right in at LinkedIn, the Internet-based business networking tool that just might put you within six touches of any contact you'd like to make.

For believers, LinkedIn is changing the way they seek new business. Barely a cousin to traditional shake hands, trade business cards networking, LinkedIn is very targeted marketing based on personal profiles; individual networks that theoretically can reach gazillions of contacts; and even special interest groups.

"The context is different," acknowledges Christopher Rollyson, managing director of CSRA Inc., a Chicago consultancy that helps businesses use technology. "On LinkedIn, you don't connect without a purpose."

The initial linking in process can be daunting, especially if you're one whose PC skills sometimes come up a little short. Then there's Rollyson's suggestion that a LinkedIn strategy based on your business plan would be helpful.

If you're up to an exploration, take a look at Rollyson's free users' guide to LinkedIn. Start at [www.rollyson.net](http://www.rollyson.net), click "Executives Guide to LinkedIn," then "Tools to help" and, finally, "'Unofficial' Users Guide to LinkedIn for Executives and Professionals."

"LinkedIn isn't for everybody," says Bob Lambert, partner at Samurai Business Group LLC, a Chicago sales and business development training firm. "Like a lot of executives, especially the 40-plus crowd, I had a lot of trepidation about LinkedIn. It's not a silver bullet, but LinkedIn is one of the things to have in your tool kit."

Kathryn Odell is LinkedIn because "The sales landscape has changed so drastically in the last year. I see people looking for a prospective client going to LinkedIn to (view) the profiles of executives as a way to get ahead of the game. I find myself doing that. First we go to the Web site, then to LinkedIn.

"It's a different way to do business," says Odell, CEO of Sales-Onsite LLC, an Oak Brook firm that provides outsource sales for small businesses. "You have to jump on board."

Jack Hilty, managing principal, SentientPoint Inc., a Chicago best practices consulting firm, jumped on board because "It's difficult for people to find a small firm like ours." Consequently, he reasons, "We must learn how to use networking tools.

"Most people don't understand the benefit of LinkedIn," Hilty says. "It has made me available to people around the world looking for my skill set.

"I've really started using LinkedIn in the last month. I've updated my profile. (Now) people I worked with 10 years ago, ones I had strong business relationships with but lost, are finding me."

Newcomers have a tendency to want to build a large network. But, cautions Mary Conley Eggert, director of business development at Tech Image, a Buffalo Grove tech PR firm, "I erred when I first started LinkedIn. I thought it was about making connections with everyone. (Instead), you should be selective with your network."

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