



## A New Way to Network: LinkedIn catches on

Local professionals connect on social Web site

By Matt Wagner - 6/23/2008

Springfield Business Journal Staff

Ken Childers is unusually upbeat for someone who recently lost his job.

That's because the former special events director for Dick Clark's American Bandstand Theater in Branson joined LinkedIn – a business-oriented online networking site – just days before he and two other directors got the ax.

In the weeks that followed, Childers delved into the many features of LinkedIn, which enables registered users to customize professional profiles and build an online network of businesspeople through a series of invitations and introductions.

Childers is now connected to 93 people with LinkedIn profiles, and 29 of them have recommended him to prospective employers who are increasingly casing the Web site for recruits. LinkedIn lacks the hipness of social networking counterparts MySpace and Facebook, but Childers said he's a big fan of the site's simplicity and versatility.

"I hope they don't mess too much with LinkedIn," he said. "I kind of like the nice, clean look and layout of it and the way that it's making it simple for me to get a hold of other people. Having a site like this that is smart enough to recognize the value of networking connections – I find that incredibly exciting."

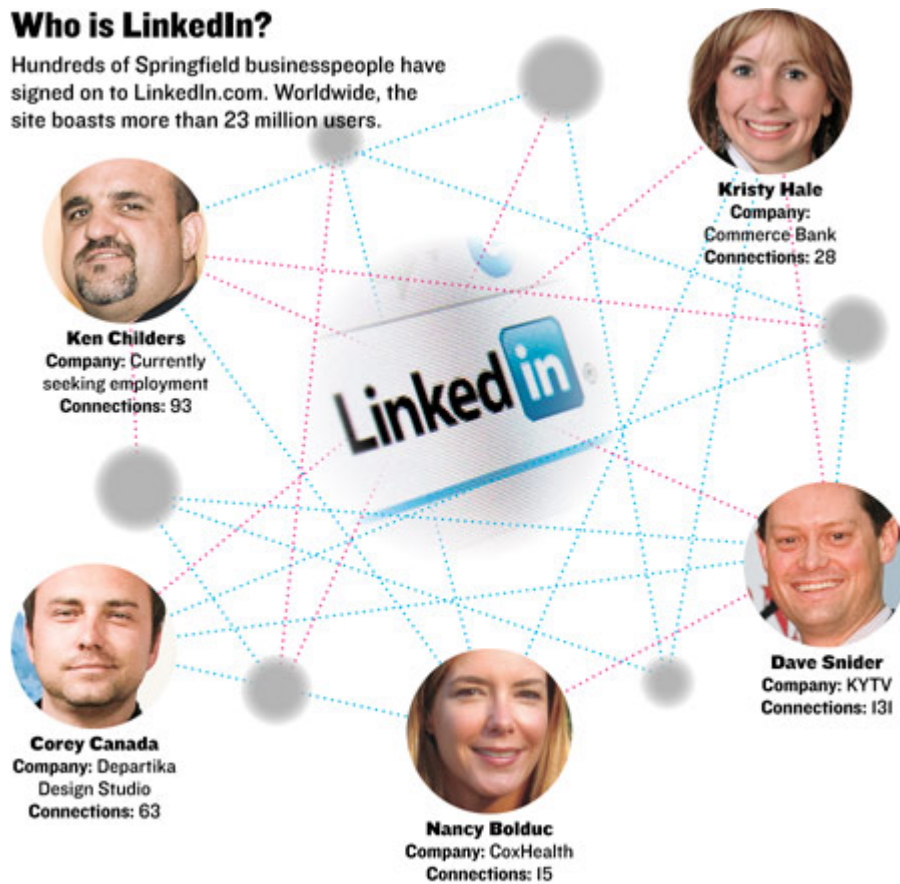
Childers' LinkedIn page includes a photo, detailed résumé and links to the Springfield Sertoma Club and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Springfield, two civic organizations with which he volunteers.

Basic LinkedIn services are free, but upgrades tied to increased exposure are available to individuals and businesses at a cost.

### Taking off

### Who is LinkedIn?

Hundreds of Springfield businesspeople have signed on to LinkedIn.com. Worldwide, the site boasts more than 23 million users.



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In just four years, Mountain View, Calif.-based LinkedIn.com has taken the business world by cyberstorm. The site now claims more than 23 million professionals use its services to "exchange information, ideas and opportunities."

Last week, LinkedIn made headlines when it received a \$53 million capital infusion, mostly from Boston-based private equity firm Bain Capital Ventures. LinkedIn CEO Dan Nye said the financing boosted the site's value to more than \$1 billion.

The number of people using LinkedIn in May tripled from the same month last year, according to a June 18 report in the New York Times. The site also is catching on with hundreds of Springfield businesspeople, many of whom are using it to talk shop with peers, pinpoint potential clients or carefully chart a career move.

Kristy Hale, who joined Commerce Bank as a small-business banking specialist in April, said she's seen a surge of Springfield professionals creating LinkedIn profiles within the last three or four months. Hale said she invites friends and business acquaintances to join the site and then mines their contacts for new connections. She's also used LinkedIn to follow up with people she's met in person who may not have had a business card or to keep tabs on who's working where.

"It's kind of the professional MySpace," Hale said, noting that LinkedIn has avoided the "junk content" often associated with other networking sites that cater to younger crowds.

Sara Cochran, director of special events and promotions at Springfield-based grocery chain RPCS Inc., said she's selective about who she invites to join her LinkedIn network, which now has 139 connections. And she doesn't typically accept invitations from anyone she hasn't met face-to-face in a professional setting.

"I definitely don't add anyone I don't know," said Cochran, who recently encouraged an intern to join LinkedIn.

### **The LinkedIn learning curve**

As word spreads about LinkedIn, businesspeople of all ages are educating themselves about the Web site and its networking tools.

On June 18, Jefferson City-based IT consulting firm Huber & Associates led a lunch seminar on LinkedIn and other social networking sites at University Plaza Hotel.

Clayton Shepard, a Missouri State University student interning at Huber & Associates, demonstrated how LinkedIn users could import their contacts from e-mail accounts to send out mass invitations, create online workgroups for co-workers and search some 160,000 company profiles.

Springfield-based companies with LinkedIn profiles include BKD LLP, Bass Pro Shops and architecture firm Butler, Rosenbury & Partners Inc. Each company page lists which of its employees have LinkedIn profiles, where most of them previously worked and lists recent promotions and changes involving those employees.

Shepard said LinkedIn users can adjust settings to limit the amount of information that can be viewed on their profile pages and establish passwords to restrict access to internal workgroups. "Just because you're connected with somebody doesn't mean they have access to everything you're working on," he said.

Representatives from Ozarks Technical Community College, Central States Industrial and Ridewell Corp. were among those who attended the workshop. Stephen Wheeler and Gary Hamilton with Ridewell, which manufactures suspension systems for trucks and recreational vehicles, said an inner-office generational divide poses a challenge when it comes to LinkedIn and other networking sites.

"I keep joking about pulling Ridewell into the 21st Century," Wheeler said. "We've got people who, if you change an icon on their desktop, can't do their job."

But Hamilton, who works in Ridewell's engineering department, said he thinks that setting up an internal workgroup on LinkedIn could be a great way to communicate about ongoing projects.

"Some people may be more likely to check that Web site than their own e-mail," he said.