



Entrepreneurs



## What's To Love About LinkedIn?

Melanie Lindner, 06.20.08, 11:45 AM ET

In the Internet age, keeping pace means cultivating contacts at a mean clip. Hence the **big news at LinkedIn**, the online social network aimed at working professionals: On Wednesday LinkedIn announced that it nabbed \$53 million in venture funding from the likes of Bain Capital, Greylock Partners and Sequoia Capital, setting the company's valuation at a juicy \$1 billion.

**If you aren't using online social networks in one form or another, you are well behind the productivity curve.** Yes, plenty of teenagers and bored cubicle warriors poke about Facebook and **News Corp.**'s MySpace (taken together, the two sites have more than 316 million users; Facebook with 80 million, MySpace with 236 million). But business types are, and should be, embracing this technology too.

Of all the **business-oriented networks**, LinkedIn--now with 23 million users globally--has a commanding lead. (Its arguably closest competitor is Plaxo, with 20 million users.) If you want to stay connected with the people you know and spark professional relationships with those you don't, LinkedIn does the trick. But it also has its irritations.

### In Pictures: Reasons To Love (And Hate) LinkedIn

#### In Pictures: How To Network Like A Pro Online

First, the perks. **LinkedIn is a huge time-saver.** Forget Google; within minutes, LinkedIn can rustle up loads of potential customers, vendors and talented hires in relevant industries and disciplines.

LinkedIn also gives companies more marketing horsepower. They can promote products or services, as well as direct other LinkedIn users to specific representatives for questions concerning topics like sales and technical support.

Better yet, the site offers laser-like targeting. Say you run a limo service and you'd like to market to bigwigs at Wall Street companies. Simply search for a company name and **LinkedIn** spits out all the company's employees (who have LinkedIn accounts) whom you might like to contact.

Another nice feature is the **question-and-answer forum.** Users can post questions, specifying the industry and specialty in order to get the most relevant and useful responses. Say you're a chef looking to open a new restaurant, but you don't know a thing about real estate or interior design. Chances are plenty of LinkedIn members can point you in the right direction.

"In real life, when you're about to do something for the first time, you find someone with experience and ask for advice," says Adam Nash, LinkedIn's senior director of product and engineering. "[This feature] allows you to do the same thing, but reach out to people you may not even know."

Now for the irritations.

As the site has grown, users complain that it has more technical problems than it used to. "Never-ending bugs hinder participation and networking," says Devesh Dwivedi, a senior associate at The Siegfried Group, an accounting company based in Wilmington, Del. (LinkedIn's lament: Given all the software code the company pounds out in such a short time, there are bound to be a few glitches.)

Annoying, too, are the limitations on LinkedIn's search capabilities. While the site does allow for some Boolean

searches (those directed by qualifiers such as "and", "or" and "not") to narrow search results, some users complain that it does not recognize longer search strings. "I think the logic [could] be much, much better," says Philip Blodgett, an IT recruiter for Concepts In Staffing in Manhattan. "I find it frustrating that it doesn't recognize quotes for complex strings."

Perhaps the most common complaint that Forbes.com discovered is the cost of membership. While basic membership to LinkedIn's network is free, premium options, such as deeper searches, greater connectivity, priority customer service and sneak peaks at new features, come at a price.

Example: A Business membership costs \$19.95 per month, or \$199.50 per year, and allows users to send three InMail messages per month to folks not already on their contact list; exceed the allotted number and you'll pay \$10 per additional message. (All users can send e-mails to current contacts for free.) As other networking sites like Facebook and MySpace have gone completely free, some users feel LinkedIn should be free too--especially since the company collects revenue from advertising, job listings and corporate memberships.

At least LinkedIn wants to hear your concerns. At the bottom of every LinkedIn page is a link asking for customer feedback. Nash insists those missives land in the inboxes of dozens of product managers at LinkedIn who will actually act on them. Says Nash: "If lots of people are having the same problems, that's a fantastic opportunity for us to make the network better."

