Networking Tips 3: Top 10 Suggestions for Using a Free LinkedIn Account

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If you're not on LinkedIn yet, get on it in a hurry! If you are but haven't used it in a while, get serious as an incomplete or dated profile can be worse than no profile at all. And if you're already active on the site, pay attention as you could learn something new. In Part 3 of our networking series, we look at how you can use a free LinkedIn account to develop and maintain your network. There are also paid add-ons to the site, but we'll look at those next time.

1. **Profile**: Provide as much information as you're comfortable sharing. Recruiters search for key words or skills, so a comprehensive profile will help get you found. If you're worried about privacy, hide contact details and other personal information. You do want people to be able to contact you though, so create an email address just for LinkedIn and display that in your profile.

2. **URL**: Customize your LinkedIn address. By default, your address links to you through an ID number (eg. www.linkedin.com/profile/view?id=658232716). This can be changed on the "Edit Profile" page (Edit Contact Info) to a more personal www.linkedin.com/in/name/.

3. **Headline**: When you're working, this defaults to job title and organization. If you're looking for work, create a custom headline that lists skills and industries. Keep it to key words, separated with long bars (|) to break up text, for example: "Management Accountant | Bilingual English & Chinese | Service & Construction." You may be tempted to include phrases like "looking for new opportunities" or "in transition," but these "sad sack" terms have been shown to negatively influence your "brand" (reputation) and work against you.

4. **Picture**: While a photo does reveal age and ethnicity information, profiles with a photo are treated more positively by recruiters and potential connections (eleven times more page views) than those without. If you do post a photo, make sure it's recent and you're dressed and posed professionally.

5. **Summary**: This is a good place to put information from your resume profile. Let connections and potential contacts know what sets you apart right from the offset.

6. **Experience**: To make things easy, copy position details from your resume. If you'd rather not go into too much detail, at least put a couple of bullets describing key accountabilities for your current job(s). Basic details for past positions (title, employer, dates) is fine.

7. **Skills**: Showcase them. Highlight work skills of course, but also skills you've used in volunteer work and clubs. Include a balance of technical, soft and I.T. skills. Enter these in the Skills section. As you type in each new skill, LinkedIn will suggest popular terms; choose what describes you best. Using suggested terms is the best way to get found as these are what recruiters search for.

8. **Endorsements**: Give them. Take 10 minutes every Monday morning and devote it to endorsing your connections. This is a great way to encourage others to endorse you for your skills. You can also endorse new connections for skills like networking, coaching, advising or listening after a networking meeting; this is a great way to thank them for meeting you!

9. **Recommendations**: Get them. Ask previous bosses, colleagues and clients to recommend you. Try to get recommendations for each of your positions. Having others sell you adds huge credibility to your profile. Offer to provide recommendations in return.

10. **Groups**: Join them and participate. Ask questions. Contribute answers. Like interesting posts. Share helpful articles. This is a great way to advertise yourself, and build relationships within your field. It also provides an avenue for connecting and exploring work prospects (you can connect with fellow group members without needing to know their email address).

Once you've taken care of the basics, it's time to decide if you want to take advantage of the upgrade features on LinkedIn. These aren't free, but can add efficiency and functionality to your search. In Part 4 of the Networking series, we examine these features and how they can help you land your dream job.