

Linked IN: Marketing Yourself ...Marketing Your Company

January 15, 2009

By Raelin Musuraca

Today, I installed LinkedIN on my new iPhone. Am I an early adopter? Am I on the bleeding edge of technology? Actually, No. I'm what marketers call a "late majority" consumer. My colleagues usually drag me kicking and screaming into the next new technology. Back in the 90's, my grandmother had a cell phone "just for emergencies" even before I had one. And, much like a cell phone - I strongly resisted the "social networking" fad. Until it seemed like everyone I knew was "IN."

Participation on social networking web sites like LinkedIN.com has avalanched as of late. First it was one invite, then another, soon a flurry ... and next thing you know an avalanche of LinkedIN requests in my email. So I joined, and I linked, and I found it to be truly one of the most advantageous business to business marketing tools available... and it's free!

The key with LinkedIN is to look at it as a marketing tool for your business... it's not a "I need a new job" tool or a "catch up with old friends" tool (Use The-Ladders.com or Facebook.com for either of those). It's an excellent professional networking site where you can connect with past colleagues, possibly meet new business partners or customers, and join shared-interest groups where you can build your business.

While your LinkedIN profile is about you, think of it more like an advertisement for your business, for your company. People buy from people ... especially in a service-driven business like title and settlement services. People buy from YOU - not the company you work for (or the company you own).

Social networking web sites are not a "get me new business leads now" marketing tactic, but instead a long term referral-based marketing tactic. Its effectiveness grows over time, and increases with how often you participate in the networking. Here are some tips for effective marketing through social networking:

1. Pick one or two professional networking websites...

using too many dilutes your effectiveness. How do you decide which one? In your industry, among your contacts, which sites do they use most often? Use the websites' "search for people" feature to look up high profile professionals in your industry... use that site. I've spoken about LinkedIN in this article because it is the best site for my industry...marketing; I have also found that the appraisal, title, and settlement industry predominately uses this website as well. See the side bar for other social networking websites.

2. Build a robust, professional profile.

While the profile is about you, use it to promote your current company as well. Add to it over time... when you update your profile a message is sent to all your contacts ... this is great way to stay top of mind. You don't have to make a career change to update... just change the way a section is worded... or rewrite your Summary to include more recent topics... and be sure to use the "What are You Working On?" to promote projects, accomplishments, etc.

3. Join and participate in Groups.

Groups come together from a variety of organizations, from college alumni groups to professional associations. I've seen a group of "alumni" come together from a certain company to share information. Groups allow you to put logos on your profile (think of the third-party credibility) and have discussion boards where you can participate and communicate with the rest of the group. This is an excellent way to promote your products and services - but be careful - don't sell too hard. If you are on LinkedIN, look for the "Title Insurance and Settlement Services Network."

4. Respond, search and update.

Don't just join and let it set. The goal is to increase your professional contacts. When people email you asking to Link to them, always allow this right away (it's as simple as clicking a hyperlink) - but then also take the time to look at their contacts. Who do you know? Who can you link to? I generally spend 30 minutes each week updating my contacts, participating in discussion boards, or making edits to my profile.

What's important to keep in mind is that social networking is not just about Facebook and hooking up with friends (I also have a Facebook page that I use for personal networking NOT professional). It's about extending the core of any good sales effort that is, networking ... online to the Internet. It's no different than the networking you do at a trade show or conference... it's just on a web site.

It's easy, it's low maintenance - and it's free! So ... get online and get IN... If you're new to social networking, you can get started by sending me an email and I'll send you a LinkedIN invitation to get you going. If you have a profile, but it's out of date - don't waste another minute ... get online and get that profile updated!