

MARKHAM **NEED HELP TO TAKE YOUR BUSINESS TO THE NEXT LEVEL?** *pg.8* CONVERGENCE CENTRE

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COMBINED ISSUE

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LinkedIn: Foster Your Connections to Build Relationships

You may have hundreds of connections on LinkedIn, but are you leveraging this part of the professional web for your career and business success? If you're not seeing tangible business value, a likely reason is that you're not actively participating. Just as your participation in the Markham Board of Trade brings you value, the real benefit of LinkedIn unfolds when you start interacting with fellow members – turning connections into fruitful relationships.

Finding tangible business value using LinkedIn is all about building relationships, trust and credibility – the pillars of any successful business. Follow these four steps and move beyond growing your number of connections to growing relationships with these individuals.



Share An Update

It's a simple concept, but one that plays a central role on almost every social media platform because of how it can deepen relationships. Think of your profile's 'status update' as the headline to your personal news release and share your story in one succinct phrase. I recently used a status update to announce that I would be speaking at a conference in Whistler. One of my LinkedIn connections read the update, and since I was already going to be in British Columbia, invited me to keynote a conference in Victoria two days earlier. How much work did this take on my part to generate additional revenue and secure a coveted marketing opportunity? About 60 seconds. Lesson: don't be shy. Communicate relevant news about you and your company to your connections.

Places & People

Speaking of travelling, under the 'My Connections' tab in your profile you can view the geographic locations of your contacts. So whether you're going

to Sarnia or Singapore, take a minute to quickly see who you might want to meet. And don't forget about the power of your extended network – always review your contacts' connections and ask for an introduction should there be a good fit.

Strategic Meeting Preparation

Successful sales professionals search for common ground with their prospects or customers – a common sport, alumni from the same school, etc. Reviewing an individual's profile and who they're connected to allows you to enter the meeting armed with information that will facilitate a smoother introduction and deepen relationships. And perhaps more importantly, researching their connections may offer insights on additional decision makers who you want to attend the meeting. An Ontario-based sales executive from a multi-national packaging company did this exact research while pitching Dell Computers and he was able to secure the CEO, Michael Dell, in their very first face-to-face meeting.

Applications

LinkedIn is an incredibly robust tool. Even the free version allows you to easily and quickly add a growing number of applications. These range from integrating your latest blog post into your profile and uploading your presentation via SlideShare or Google Presentation to displaying your travel plans with TripIt or even sharing files and creating private work spaces using Box.net Files or Huddle Workspaces. These and other LinkedIn applications allow you to seamlessly integrate this online platform with your current work processes. Once your workflow includes LinkedIn, you'll start to see the benefits accumulate.

I'm a believer in LinkedIn and other social platforms as tools that can help your career and your business. But the online platform you choose must make sense for the prospects, customers and suppliers you work with. Since you're probably a time-starved professional, if you find LinkedIn has value after trying these four steps, why not use it to replace a marketing or sales tactic that provides less value? You'll become more efficient at work and still have time for your personal life. ■

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