

How to Build Your LinkedIn Network:
Using LinkedIn to Connect With Others

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Introduction

Today's technology has changed the way small businesses market themselves. Small businesses use to thrive by having relationships with their customers. Small businesses did well to remember their loyal customers who would come in every so often to support them. This relationship helped gain new clients for small businesses, especially as their loyal customers told others about their products or services. This word of mouth marketing technique used to be enough to keep small businesses competitive. This was the advantage that small businesses had over large corporate businesses. But just as customers changed and adapted to new technology, it is important for small businesses to change as well. One of these changes that small businesses can implement is in the form of using social media networks to connect to new and existing customers.

Social Media: LinkedIn

According to the textbook *E-Marketing*,

“Social media is a term used to describe the type of media that is based on conversation and interaction between people online. It can take many different forms, including internet forums, Web logs, social blogs, micro blogging, wikis podcasts, pictures, video, rating and social bookmarking. Technologies include: blogs, pictures-sharing, vlogs, wall-postings, e-mail, instant messaging, music-sharing, crowd sourcing, and voice over IP, to name a few.” (Strauss, 2012).

Of all the social mediums available today, the most well known and used social mediums are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Google+. For the purpose of the paper, the author is going to concentrate on LinkedIn and how it can be used to connect with groups.

LinkedIn is a social networking website for people in professional occupations. It was founded in December 2002 by Reid Hoffman and launched on May 5, 2003; it is mainly used for professional networking. The company is publicly held and has a diversified business model with revenues coming from hiring solutions, marketing solutions and premium subscriptions (LinkedIn, 2012). As of June 2012, LinkedIn reports more than 175 million registered users in more than 200 countries and territories (Wikipedia, 2012). LinkedIn also operates the world's largest professional network on the Internet in over 200 countries and territories (LinkedIn, 2012). LinkedIn is currently available in 18 different languages including English, French, Dutch, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish and Turkish.

Features of LinkedIn

Knowing what LinkedIn is now, how can it be applied to small businesses? We can accomplish this by looking at what features LinkedIn provides and how to use them. The first thing all small businesses should do is fill in and update their profile. This profile page is the main page that all other users see when viewing your LinkedIn account. If it is your first time creating an account with LinkedIn, they have a tutorial to help guide you along the way and a progress report that shows how much of your profile you have completed. Once finishing your profile, double check it to make sure it is appropriate and the information you have on it will be pleasing for others to see. You can change who can view your profile in the settings options. From there you can

choose to make your profile public for all to see, or have those that are interested in the small business profile request to be a connection first to be able to see your full profile.

One of the major functions of LinkedIn is that it allows for registered users to create a list of contact details of people with whom they have some level of relationship. These relationships are called Connections in LinkedIn. Users can invite anyone to become a connection. From here, it is up to the invitee to accept this connection or decline it. Once connected to another person, a network is created and you will be able to see all their connections. This connection is termed second degree connections (Wikipedia, 2012). The connections of second degree connections are termed third degree connections. These connections can be used to gain an introduction to someone a person wishes to know through a mutual contact. There are many others functions and features that LinkedIn has to offer; it is a matter of taking the time to explore the purpose of each of those features to best fit your small business.

Finger Guide

The purpose of this paper is to help Finger Guide to understand how to use LinkedIn effectively to build connections with different firearm safety community. Finger Guide is a small firearm safety business located in Eau Claire, WI. Their primary product they sell is the Finger Guide. According to Finger Guide,

“Finger Guide is an innovative and valuable firearm safety attachment. With special adhesive Finger Guide is placed above the trigger, providing the proper safe placement of the trigger finger. Finger Guide keeps the trigger finger off the trigger and away from dangerous and often deadly accidental misfire. Finger Guide can be customized to fit any

type of firearm, just cut, trim, peel and stick. With Finger Guide's unique adhesive you can easily remove and reposition to get that special comfortable position for each person” (Finger Guide, 2012).

The core values that make up Finger Guide are Comfort, Guidance and Safety (Finger Guide, 2012). Finger Guide also provides a firearm safety instructors program that is taught in the United States and Canada. Individuals or organizations are able to purchase Finger Guide on their website. They can order Finger Guide individually or as a whole sale. Finger Guide currently has a LinkedIn account with 4 followers and a few connections. This is a great start, but there is the potential to improve Finger Guide’s LinkedIn account.

Getting connected in LinkedIn

The biggest feature that LinkedIn has to offer Finger Guide is its “Groups” function. With the Group function, Finger Guide can join other firearm and gun safety “Groups”. These other groups include Firearm Industry, Firearm Instructors, Supporters for Advance Firearm Safety, Gun Law, National Rifle Association and many individual state rifle associations. To join these groups is simple. After logging into your LinkedIn account, simply type firearm, gun safety or a keyword that Finger Guide may be interested in. Remember to change the default “People” drop down button to “Groups” to find groups. Hit enter and a list of groups will appear. Choose to join which ever groups Finger Guide is interested in. Remember that this is one of the first steps of getting connected in LinkedIn.

After being accepted into these groups, it is important to become involved. Many of these firearm safety groups have forums that discuss current or trending topics. This is a great opportunity for Finger Guide to show how knowledgeable they are in firearm safety. By participating and providing guidance and insight, Finger Guide can gain the trust of those that read these forums and potentially earn a customer in the process (HubSpot. n.d.). LinkedIn also has an “Answer” section just like the “Groups”. From the drop down box, change “Groups” to “Answers” and type keywords related to fire arm safety. This feature will bring up questions that other people may have regarding fire arm safety. Once again, this is a great opportunity for Finger Guide to provide information and insight on fire arm safety (HubSpot. n.d.). Many times you can direct them to your organization’s website to learn more about the topic.

Finally, after making a connection with other users found in the “Groups” and “Answers” section, be sure to add them as a connection for future references (Jackson, 2011). This is extremely important because this is the bread and butter of how LinkedIn works. You want to connect to others who know of other connections that may be interested in your product or services (Jackson, 2011). If they see that you have helped a friend or other users, they will be more likely to connect with you for help or other services.

Conclusion

Technology is every changing and it is important for small businesses to learn to change as well. Those that learn to adapt to new technology will reap the benefits of the hard work put into it. Social media has changed how businesses can market to their customers and how they can relate to them. LinkedIn is a great example of how businesses can utilize these social networking sites

to meet the needs of their customers and at the same time build a connection. Finger Guide has a great start to their LinkedIn account, but there is always room for improvement. Finger Guide should utilize LinkedIn's "Groups" feature to connect with others. This will provide the chance to show others how knowledgeable Finger Guide is in fire arm safety and hopefully win the respect of others to draw traffic to their company website.

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