

LinkedIn Guide 3: Social selling

By now you've hopefully now had some successes networking, and are effectively communicating your expertise and professionalism. You may have even become something of a "Web Celeb" in certain areas. But what you really want to do is generate some hot leads and create some long-term business relationships. Read on to find out how.

Can LinkedIn networking really ring the tills?

Simply put... yes. In fact, my business network has already had a number of experiences in starting very profitable, long-term relationships through LinkedIn.

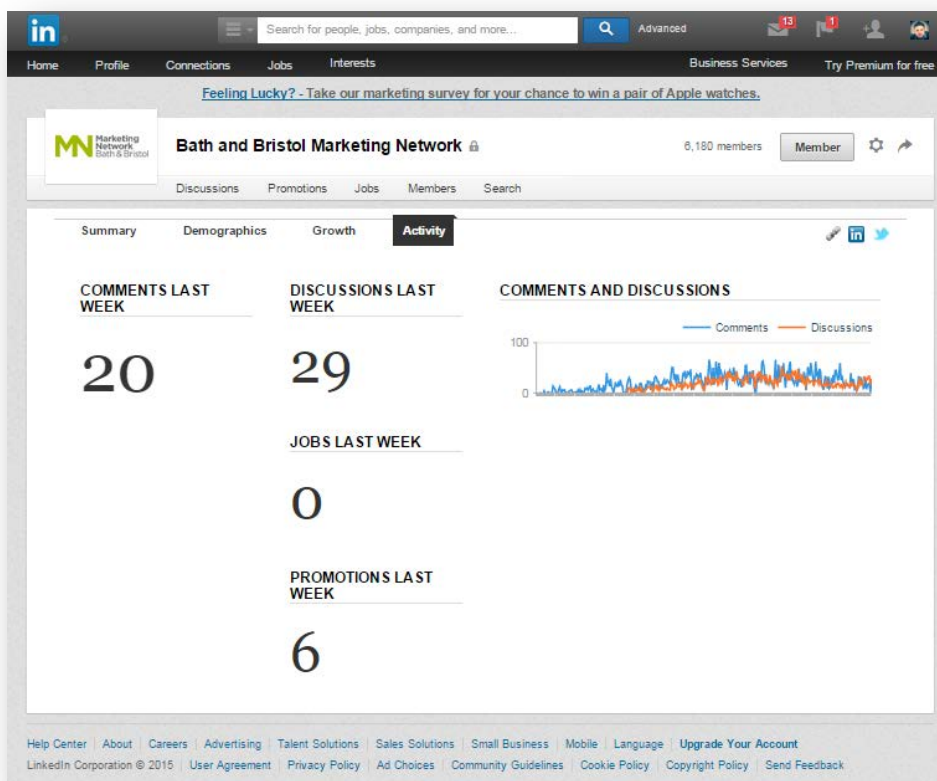
If the organisations you are targeting are on LinkedIn, it's very likely that decision makers from that organisation are also active on LinkedIn. They may not be a LinkedIn Influencer writing daily content. They might not even be particularly active in groups. But they will be doing something, and if you can find them, the intelligence LinkedIn can give you on the people you want to talk to can prove invaluable.

This social selling can shift the agenda from 'pushing the sale' to 'building relationships', turning occasional contacts into loyal clients.

Good groups

This was covered in the last guide but is repeated here so you don't end up wasting time and effort. To find out if a group is active

1. Navigate to the group home page
2. Click the cog icon that lives next to the member button
3. In the drop down click on group statistics
4. Hit the "Activity" tab and you'll be presented with the below screen



If you have a close ratio between discussions and comments, what you should find is that people are engaging with the content and questions being posted. Lots more for you to listen to and interact with. A good group.

Networking 2.0

Now that you've had some practice networking in order to promote your own expertise alongside company content (see the last guide: Developing a valuable LinkedIn network), it's time to step it up a gear – networking with the intent to write business.

Again, this isn't rocket science. And it doesn't have to be time consuming. You just need to know what to look for and where to look for it. Your first port of call is to find active networks where clients and prospects are operating.

Finding relevant groups

Relevance is key and it is important to join groups where your prospects network. Using LinkedIn's search facility, you can find groups by entering appropriate keywords. If you are looking for new logistics contacts you might search 'Logistics' or 'Haulage' and end up on the "Road Haulage Association Discussion Group". In this group alone, there are 5,000+ members all ready to discuss hot topics affecting their industry.

Another route to finding the discussion topics and pain-points affecting the people you want to connect with is to go directly to their profiles and see what groups they have joined. This method will allow you to find active groups they are involved in that are not as obviously associated with their industry.

Stay in the know

Once you have joined a group you can opt in to get e-mail notifications for new discussions so you can stay on top of current topics and key issues. Within your settings for the group, tick the 'Digest E-mail' that will inform you of all discussions in one e-mail rather than a notification for each one.

Two ears. One mouth

Now it's time to listen. Jumping in guns blazing is probably the worst way to build authority within a group. Seconded closely by using a group to blindly broadcast your own agenda. You need to be confident on the hot topics being discussed and on the groups 'vibe' before you try to get involved. So take a little time and listen to what the group is talking about. What are the hot topics?

Two ears. One mouth. Part 2

Once you have a good feel for what the group is interested in, try participating in a discussion that another member has started; think about how you can add value to conversation. You want to be seen as an expert, with worthwhile opinions so that other members see the benefit of connecting with you.

If you have identified an individual as a prospect, you'd like to connect with, be extra mindful of their comments. Listen to what they are saying and if you can, reply.

It's important not to broadcast content blindly, but if you are aware of some Jelf content that is relevant and adds to the conversation, sharing it at this point will be welcomed.

Build rapport

Overtime, if you stay on message, prove yourself a valuable source of info, and reply to comments in a timely fashion, you can start to pick individuals you want to treat differently. In addition to adding to the group discussion, you can choose to reply privately to comments an individual has made. This is a great way to build on the relationship you started in the group.

Connect

It's important that you don't ask to connect right away. Wait until you are in full discussion mode. You wouldn't act this way offline so don't make the mistake of doing it online. Build a relationship first.

Once you have built rapport send a connection request, but be sure to personalise the request by explaining why you want to connect them.

Overtime you can continue your discussion, expanding into services topics. At that point, you're safe to take things offline, set up meeting and make the sale.

Doing the right thing

Using the tactics covered in this set of guides is a great way to fill and nurture your pipeline, as well as positively influencing your income. But you have to do it in the right way.

Remember, if you are bound by any sort of regulation you need to check the rulebook. You may also be under agreement with your company's internal social media policy and an expectation of professionalism. So it's important that before you start using social media to influence sales that you are confident on how to conduct yourself online.

The best approach is to undertake actions to demonstrate how you are in service to your client network – making yourself available and establishing yourself as a source of insight that can help clients and their businesses. It's through this sort of activity that you stay front of mind allowing you to set up meetings and recommend products and services. Not online.