

# Networking the New Way

**Heidi Nicholson and David Welsh, Senior Partners at Richmond Solutions highlight the benefits of LinkedIn and**

**G**ood news for people who aren't natural networkers: there is now a clear alternative to having to pitch your skills and expertise to strangers over a glass of warm, white wine.

Social networking has truly broken beyond the boundaries of keeping up with friends and family and is playing an increasingly central role in building professional relationships and in recruitment; whether in employing others or in seeking employment.

We, of course, mean LinkedIn. Personal relationships are still key in attaining your professional goals. However, using LinkedIn shrewdly makes it easier than before to network with the right people.

That's the prize, but, no surprises here, it requires some work. People are more likely to be interested in you if they can get to know you a little through your profile. This is your first incentive to complete your online profile, complete with your photo.

The second incentive is that it will be far easier for people to find you if you have a complete profile. As a minimum, ensure that your profile is 100% complete and that you have included good quality information about yourself. The system is not discerning – it's quite possible to build a poor

profile but for it to still appear as 100% complete. However, the best profiles go further: they include additional sections and applications which allow the reader to learn more about the person, their professional aptitudes and interests.

## Get recommended

You need at least three recommendations for your profile to be complete – more recommendations are preferable. Moreover, recommendations give the reader a way of verifying your achievements. Seek to attract recommendations from people who can speak about different aspects of your professional life. These will be your advocates. Then the fun begins.

## Build your network

LinkedIn is not about building a small, trusted coterie of contacts – save that for Facebook. It's good to have as broad a community of people in your network. LinkedIn works up to three degrees of separation – i.e. in searches, people find others up to their third 'circle'. It stands to reason that if your first circle is broad and rich, then your second and third circle will also be broad and rich – and so you have more chance of people finding your profile. Don't rest until you're part of the 500+ club!

Remember, this is about establishing a professional network for yourself. Would you refuse someone's business card

at a networking event? Similarly, do not reject requests to connect on LinkedIn unless you have good reason to be concerned about their provenance.

As to the people you invite to connect, it goes without saying that you should connect with current and former colleagues. You should also look up clients, suppliers, and others you have worked with. Connect with your friends – but keep it professional. The emphasis needs to be on "networking" not "social".

Look also for those who are useful for your current objectives. Looking for a new job? Connect with the leading recruitment consultants in your field and make sure you stay in touch so that you are in mind when a suitable opportunity arises. Got your heart set on working with a particular organisation? Actively set about connecting with people who work there and enter into discussions with them with the aim of making them think you'd be a good person to have on board and also of learning something of their culture and ways of working. At the end of the day, this will allow you to write a better job application or contract bid when the time comes.

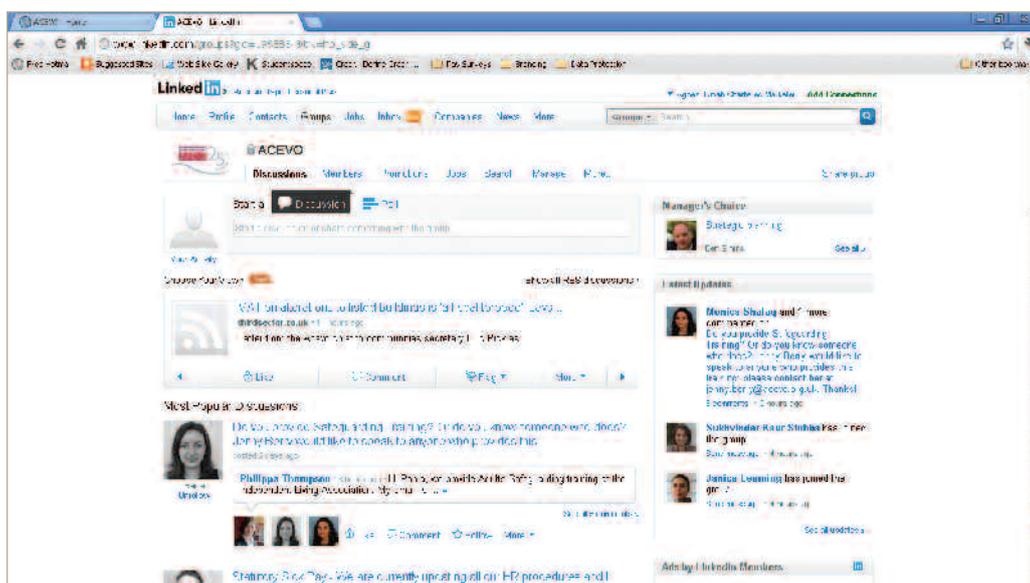
## Join useful groups

Groups are another great way of signalling your interests in a given field. There are plenty to choose, reflecting all manner

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what you can do to progress your career and get spotted by headhunters.



of interests. If you're serious about building your professional profile and especially if you're currently looking for work or new contracts, ensure you belong to some that relate to your professional field. Some carry postings about jobs and assignments but this is not the only reason to join. Be active. Start discussions and comment on other discussions with a view to demonstrating your expertise (a bit like you'd strike up conversation at a live networking event). This is all part of establishing your reputation online.

Furthermore, as people are becoming more aware of LinkedIn, they're not only using it to connect with colleagues and business associates. Professional recruiters and employers are also making

active use of it for recruitment.

### Develop your career

Think about your LinkedIn profile from the point of view of the headhunter. LinkedIn provides them with a free, ready-to-use database. Sure, they will have to search for people suitable for the job they want to fill and this is not the only method they'll use to find candidates, but LinkedIn has become an extremely useful tool for finding candidates beyond their usual network. Every assignment needs "new blood" and jobs do not always go to the "usual suspects". By putting yourself in a position to be found, you may just land a much sought-after position.

The old method of seeking recommendations from trusted sources still endures but if the people who have been recommended have a good

profile, they're more likely to get a call because the headhunter is able to get a better sense of the person and whether they are likely to be suitable.

Similarly, if making that first cold call to a new candidate, headhunters have found that candidates who have first been approached through their LinkedIn profile engage more readily in the process. As Cynny Sharp of Sharp:search told us: "As social media has come to the fore, I have found that an approach is viewed by candidates with far more interest if they are initially contacted via their profile." To put it another way, it makes new candidates more approachable. Believe it or not, one of the trials of a headhunter's life is getting someone you don't already know to take your call, even

if you are bearing news of an interesting new opportunity.

The other way it informs a recruitment process is that it provides a snapshot of who you are to the consultant if you call them for more information before applying. Serena Speller of attenti highlighted this benefit, saying: "If someone calls in response to the advert, it's really useful if I can quickly find their profile and even better if it contains key information about their career. This means that as well as talking to them about the job, I can offer them advice and generally have a more fruitful conversation about what the role entails and whether they fit the bill."

In a tough job market, LinkedIn may just be another tool in the job seeker's box. However, it is an increasingly important one, offering you the opportunity to make connections that may help you secure your next position. What's not to like about that?

**Richmond Solutions, an ACEVO corporate partner and a career advocacy service offers LinkedIn profile creation, CV writing and interview training. If you would like to know more about their services – and their special rates for ACEVO members – contact them at [info@richmondsolutions.co.uk](mailto:info@richmondsolutions.co.uk) or call 020 8265 6684.**