

Best Practices for a Professionally Branded LinkedIn Profile

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LinkedIn Overview

Launched in 2003 with the goal of building a professional network because the founders realized how integral networking was in business. Within a month of launch, 4500 professionals were on LinkedIn. As of November 2019, LinkedIn has 660+ million people in 200 countries. There are 165 million US members on LinkedIn. Over 30 million organizations have company profiles on it and over 3 million US jobs are listed on it monthly.

It has become the top recruiting tool for talent acquisition teams and its reach for industry news and information is fast becoming its top value add for professionals. Companies use it to showcase their company brand, services and products.

Over time, LinkedIn has become a key marketing collateral for job seekers, recruiters and hiring managers - your LinkedIn profile can convey far more than the information on a resume, especially in this environment of online application systems. Your LinkedIn profile tells your story, communicates who you are as a professional, can demonstrate your value add, and highlights your voice differentiating you from similar profiled professionals.

Branding Your Profile

What is a Personal Brand?

Done well, your LinkedIn profile will reflect your personal brand. Regardless of if you're seeking a new job or if you are content with where you are, your personal brand is important to your success. Our brand is our reputation; it is how we are thought of by others. It is what you value and how those values are demonstrated in the work you do and with whom you interact. It is more than what you do; it's how you do it and the unique value you offer.

- Your brand is a promise - what others can expect from you and what differentiates you.
- Your brand is derived from: Who you are, what you do, who you want to be, and how you want to be perceived.

It requires close attention and management because ultimately, YOU own your brand.

Recommended Components of a Strong and Effective LinkedIn Profile

A strong and effective LinkedIn profile is determined by these three questions:

1. Is it optimized for search engine optimization?
2. Do visitors leave knowing what you do and how you add value to an organization?
3. Will they remember you? Did you make your profile uniquely YOU?

Various components on the LinkedIn profile can offer you increased optimization AND branding. The following pages will highlight each component and how best to use it to strengthen your LinkedIn profile.

Create a Plan: Review each section and create a plan around its purpose and how it can best represent you. Consider where you want to GO and allow your past experience to INFORM what you include on it to ensure your profile aligns with and supports your career goals.

Make sure your **SHARE JOB CHANGES, EDUCATION CHANGES, AND WORK ANNIVERSARIES FROM PROFILE** feature is set to “NO” on the Privacy settings tab (refer to Waldron’s *LinkedIn: Setting Account, Privacy and Communications* (p. 9) for details and recommendations for all LinkedIn account, privacy and communication settings and features).

Keep in mind that more is not always best. Do not overload your LinkedIn profile with information, data, etc. Offer JUST enough to support your brand and expertise. Consider relevancy of information you’re providing (e.g., is including a 20-year-old publication still relevant?)

Profile Section

Your Name

1. Use the name you’re known as in your professional career. What is the name that represents your brand? This is not always your “legal” name and that is ok. The new LI user interface allows for a “former” name to be included. This is useful if you have been known by another name throughout your education or career.
2. Be consistent on all marketing materials - resume, cover letters, business cards, LinkedIn.
3. Designation/Licensing: If your industry/trade requires or may prefer certifications and designations for roles, consider adding it as it allows a visitor to note it quickly without having to scroll, and it can strengthen your SEO. Example: CPA, Ph.D.

Headline

LinkedIn allows you to create a “headline”. Often, we want to use this field to highlight our title. From a branding perspective, consider using a descriptor of what you DO. Consider using descriptive words common in the industry. Ask yourself, “Where do I excel? What are the functions I love and am an expert in?” The headline field allows for 120 characters.

The headline field is integral to LinkedIn’s advanced search algorithm - rarely do recruiters source potential candidates by using a title because titles can vary so much from organization to organization. Using the Vertical Bar/Pipe (|) ensures all words are included for search results; they are “piped together” for search results.

We do not recommend using this valuable field to use “seeking new role” or “open to networking” or using the word “professional”.

Some examples:

- Human Resources: Human Resource Executive | People Strategies | Talent Practices
- Client Services: Talent Consulting Leader | Client Services & Business Development
- Communications: Strategic and Creative Branding, Communications and Public Affairs Leader
- Policy/M Measurement: Measurement Expert | Program Design | Development of M&A Systems

Photos

Consider your photos to be your “logo”. Your LinkedIn profile supports two photos - Background and Profile photos. Both can reinforce and complement your brand.

Profile Photo:

This is a professional photo of you; it doesn’t require a professional photographer but must be professional in content.

- Consider the brand you want to convey and the type of cultures you work best in. If more traditional, ensure this is reflected. If you are at, or targeting, a startup, make sure it reflects this in your dress, pose and background.

- Focus on your face - a headshot or shoulder-above shot is recommended. Your face should take up 80% of the shot and you should be looking straight ahead.
- Do NOT wear sunglasses.
- Do NOT have others in the photo.
- Do NOT “Photoshop” people/objects out, it rarely works.

NEW SPRING 2020 - Open to Work Photo Frame



As a result of the economic recession and overwhelming number of unemployed LinkedIn members, a new feature was offered Spring 2020 that allows your profile photo to include a frame indicating you're open to work.

It is too early to assess the measurable results for job seekers when this is used. Using it does not impact LinkedIn's SEO algorithm, but it will provide an instant visual to those visiting your profile that you're looking for a new role.

Background Photo: This is the background photo behind your profile. Consider how it can reinforce your brand.

- What are the attributes that best define you? Consider one and select a photo that might communicate this.
- What is an element of your industry? Is there an image that would reinforce it?
- Make sure your background photo does not clash with your portrait photo or distract from the content; you want it to complement these elements of your profile.
- A couple of sites that offer LinkedIn cover photos include:
 - <https://linkedinbackground.com>
 - <http://freelinkedinbackgrounds.com>
 - <https://www.pexels.com/>
 - Or, design your own at www.canva.com

NEW! We recently learned that if you name your photos (profile and background) using functional terms they will be included in SEO algorithms.

Industry and Location

These fields also inform where you land in search results.

- **Industry:** Choose the one that best mirrors your own. If you have experience in MANY industries, select one that you want to strengthen your representation in. With the updated user interface introduced Q1 2017, additional industries have been added. If you haven't updated your profile since the new layout, consider visiting your industry options.
- Your **location** can be a limiting factor in results for advanced searches as well as your own brand. Consider selecting the location that will best serve you relative to being visible to a larger community and network. We recommend selecting the option that represents a larger metro-area. For example, Greater Seattle Area. Members with a location receive up to 19 times more profile views.

Summary Section: About

The About portion of your profile is THE SINGLE MOST DIFFERENTIATING feature on LinkedIn at this time. About five years ago, the summary mirrored the branding/professional statement on a resume, we just copied and pasted into the summary field on LinkedIn.

Over the past few years, there has been a quiet but steady move from a boring summary written in third person that uses every buzzword possible to a summary written in first person that gives voice to the profile photo on the profile.

- The first 2-3 sentences are the most critical for engaging a visitor to expand your summary and read it in its entirety. Write a compelling hook/tagline.
- Combine key words within the telling of your story to provide evidence of what you do and how you do it.
- Allow your personality and style to be reflected - if you're direct, concise and thorough, have your summary reflect this. If you are linear and logical, reflect this in how you write.
- Keep in mind someone is reading this and when well-written, they hear your voice. Have someone read it to confirm it reflects and "sounds" like you.
- We recommend including a "specialties section" that lists functional expertise and skills required in the type of role you have or are looking for. Use the vertical pipe/bar between each word instead of a comma. (See Headline examples)
- The section allows for 2,000 characters.
- This section is a primary section for LinkedIn's algorithm; use it wisely and strategically.

Background Section

Work Experience

This section is designed to reflect your work history. People tend to copy/paste the content of their entire resume into it. That's not the best use of this component of your profile. Be strategic with how you reflect your work experience; it should mirror your resume but not include ALL that is on *the resume*.

It's recommended that you take only the **position profile paragraph** from your resume; the section for each role that explains your scope of responsibilities. This offers insight into the complexity of your role and details, such as direct reports and budget size.

Do you list every job you've had? You may or you may not. Be strategic with your experience history. Some ask: Is it best to just highlight the last 15 years to fight ageism? Not necessarily. What if your earlier career demonstrates a depth of experience and tells your story of learning from the "ground up"? That might be of value to an organization. Consider how your experience could support your story and brand.

LinkedIn allows you to upload or link to specific documents, articles, websites, etc., providing a great way to showcase the work you do. This is especially helpful for anyone in marketing, gaming, communications, website design, etc.

Some reminders for this section:

- Only 5 most recent companies will be visible on your profile unless a visitor expands section.
- Do not list months for each role, just use years - including months can take visitors' attention away from what you did.

- Make sure you're using the company name that will reflect the brand logo with it.
- LinkedIn introduced a new feature in August of 2018 that allows users to add multiple roles at one organization, without pushing your previous experience too far down the profile.
- If a company was acquired or merged with others, consider which brand name is most relevant and that you want to be most recognized with.

NEW SPRING 2020 - Creating Work Experience Entry as a Job Seeker

If you're currently looking for work and are no longer employed, rather than note "unemployed," you can add a title similar to what you want to pursue. For example, "marketing executive open to field marketing positions. We have learned that job seekers who create an entry in their Work Experience section noting they are "active" in a job search are 27 times more likely to show up in recruiters' search results.

When you add this new entry, the headline will change to what your "title" is in this new Work Experience entry. It is ok to have a different headline, using the previous headline best practices noted in this document, while having the title in this placeholder work experience entry reflect you're seeking a new role.

Examples of titles that you could use for your new entry noting you're seeking a new position:

- Marketing Executive seeking Content Marketing role
- IT Project Manager expert in Agile, Scrum, Lean

EXAMPLES:

Experience



Seeking project manager/ product manger / consultant / policy analyst / consultant roles

Recently relocated to London
Jan 2015 – Present · 5 yrs 8 mos
London, United Kingdom
In transition

Experience



Currently Seeking Vice President/Senior Vice President/General Manager role
To be determined

Apr 2020 – Present · 5 mos

I am seeking an executive level position where I could lead an operations team or shared service function and be accountable for delivering bottom-line business results. I enjoy tackling something big and hairy or brand new. I want to work for a company where I can rally behind their mission, and has a complex, fast paced work environment. I enjoy roles that require cross-functional coordination and is a business imperative. I also can address performance gaps in existing operations through process improvement, project management and change management techniques. I gravitate to transformational roles and/or projects that require a suite of solutions. [...see more](#)

Education

Add all higher education degrees received. If you did not complete education, leave the degree field blank. If you have more than 5 years of professional experience, referencing GPAs and honors received are not recommended. Noting graduation years is also not recommended for anyone.

LinkedIn defaults to the highest level of education in the Intro section. However, if you would like a different college/university to be displayed in the Intro Section, you can do so by editing it and selecting a different school/university to display.

Volunteer Experience

For many individuals, volunteering is a very important part of their identity. Take this time to highlight your volunteerism. Keep in mind that some organizations may be viewed as too political, religious, etc. If you're concerned that displaying one will impact your professional reputation, do not include it.

You might consider listing any non-profit Board of Directors experience in this section so that visitors to your profile can easily see additional ways you're flexing your professional skills/leadership in the marketplace.

Additional Brand Supporting Sections/Features

LinkedIn provides a myriad of additional sections that can be added to your profile. Below are a few that we believe can strengthen your brand.

Recommendations Section

Based on research, we understand that recommendations play a role in LinkedIn's advanced search algorithm. In addition, recommendations (not endorsements) can demonstrate your brand. It's suggested that you have at least three recommendations: peer, supervisor and if you are a manager, a direct report. Others to consider: customers, vendors, project/product stakeholders.

To learn how to add/request recommendations, reference Waldron's *LinkedIn Recommendations - How To* document.

Accomplishments Section

This section allows for you to highlight your brand by highlighting various aspects of your professional career experience. As with all content you add to your LinkedIn profile, be strategic with how each section is used, or IF it should be used. This section was originally created for those individuals who did not have enough work experience to convey their experience, skills, and differentiators (i.e., college students and recent grads).

Publications

This section allows you to link to publications you've authored. Be strategic with those you post - ask yourself how listing them strengthens your brand/value add and ask if they are relevant to the work you do and direction you may be going.

Certifications

Highlight certification programs you have completed and received certifications for. It's a wonderful way to highlight your continued professional development and interest in learning. If you received a certification during a gap in your work history, including them and the year received can help support your messaging relative to the gap. The new LinkedIn user interface requires visitors to expand this section to view the information. You may want to consider listing SIGNIFICANT certifications to the Education section instead.

Courses

Highlight significant courses you are taking or have completed. This may be a great way to convey you are continuing to learn or increase your expertise. It was originally created to help students provide additional branding opportunities on LI that their limited experience could not support.

Projects

A great way to highlight large projects that showcase your functional expertise. Be smart about what to highlight - remember to always include the result of the project and do not include projects that do not strengthen your brand and value add, including those that are outdated.

Another way to showcase these are in the Experience section. This is a great tool for product and project managers, and those in marketing or consulting.

Test Scores

This section should only be used by college students to highlight any significant test results.

Honors & Awards

This section is best for significant awards that would be widely recognized in your industry/field. Highlighting awards that are unique to a company will not necessarily resonate to the general public and may add content to your LinkedIn profile but does not differentiate you or increase your SEO results.

Patents

In the case of R&D, software and biotechnology, listing patents can be a differentiator and a way to highlight your pedigree. Patents can be included even if they were many years ago. They demonstrate depth of expertise in many cases and can differentiate you as an “early adaptor”.

Languages

Only highlight languages that you have business proficiency in and do not list English as your Native language unless you are targeting companies that specify it as a requirement. This section is best used to highlight those languages you can use in a business setting that will help differentiate you. If you are highlighting additional languages in this section, be prepared to use it during interviews and networking.

Organizations

This section is beneficial for noting any Board involvement you have. Board work can be extremely beneficial to your personal brand as well as a company's. If you held a leadership position or did committee work, make sure you note this. As noted previously, you may want to highlight any non-profit leadership/unique roles you have had in the Volunteer Experience section. Corporate board roles should be added to your Experience section. Additional organizations to consider are industry or professional organizations.

Interests Section

LinkedIn makes it very easy to follow thought leaders, companies, organizations and colleges/universities. Who/what you follow can give visitors to your profile great insight into what you value and find interesting. Not only can you find people and organizations that reflect your functional or industry interests, but also, other aspects that you feel are an important part of your brand.

Influencers

LinkedIn Influencers are selected by invitation only and comprise a global collective of 500+ of the world's foremost thinkers, leaders, and innovators. As leaders in their industries and geographies,

they discuss newsy and trending topics, such as the future of higher education, the workplace culture at leading organizations, changes in oil prices, and the missteps of policymakers.

Following influencers helps represent your brand and interests; doing so also allows you to engage in the social media aspect of LinkedIn and may expand your network connections.

Companies

Following companies, you are targeting in your job search is a great way to be aware of what is happening at the company and to better understand their brand, products and services.

Additionally, many companies will highlight open jobs on their LinkedIn company profile page and may give you direct access to company recruiters.

Groups

Joining groups supports your brand in a few ways. Visitors to your profile observe your engagement in your professional life and joining a group will allow you to engage in conversations that can expand your professional brand and network. Consider groups that are geared toward your professional level, functional expertise, alumni for both schools and company alumni groups.

Groups are also used by recruiters to source potential candidates, and many organizations post their job opportunities in groups.

Some groups are “closed”, and you must request to join. Don’t let that stop you. If the group description appeals to you, request to join it.

LinkedIn allows you to join up to 100 groups.

Schools

Following schools you’ve attended is a great way to be included in alumni events and will help if a recruiter is specifically targeting graduates from your alma mater(s).

Posts/Articles

The most active LinkedIn users will regularly create original content, comment on their networks’ posts, and repost these on their own profiles - it’s a very effective brand-supporting technique. In the same way, it can deflect from your brand. Here are a few guidelines/best practices for posting on LinkedIn:

1. Pick a purpose - LinkedIn allows free reign on what you post. If you want to increase your voice and presence on LinkedIn, be purposeful.
2. People don’t buy products; they buy authentic relationships, so use LinkedIn to build out the HUMAN part of your brand, whilst of course promoting your value add.
3. You can’t fake good content, as in, there is no magic cheat code for this to be done - you really must put thought into what you’re publishing.
4. Commenting/interacting is truly great, but remember it shows up in the Activity section of your profile. This is a great opportunity to underscore your brand, because it’s a natural way to build authentic content onto your page. When commenting, add value. Say more than “thanks”, “this is great”, “congrats”. Personalize it. Reflect you.
5. Consider a general cadence for your posts - weekly, monthly, sporadically? Give your followers some structure as to when they can expect to engage with you and each other. The most popular posters publish anywhere from three to four days each week or monthly. They are

consistent with their schedule.

6. Make it engaging: your subject line and photo/image associated can draw followers to it. Be creative.
7. Be wary of posting “live”; take time to review/edit your work before posting it.
8. Keep comments, posts and tone professional. We can become all too comfortable on social media, forgetting that being too informal can negatively impact our professional brands.

A Word about Endorsements

One of the most misunderstood sections of LinkedIn, the *Skills & Endorsements* area, started out as a directly searchable group of keywords. Now, it’s evolved into an SEO tool that can draw traffic, but only if it’s used correctly.

The terms you add to *Skills & Endorsements* factor more heavily in your LinkedIn ‘search ability’ when you are endorsed for them. Therefore, it makes sense to add keywords and obtain (and accept) Endorsements on them.

A caveat: Ensure the terms you add in this section are really keywords that strengthen your brand and SEO results. Given a choice between a “hard skill” (such as “*Project Management*”) and a character trait (such as “*Leadership*”), employers may prefer to search for specific competencies.

Only 3 endorsements can be viewed on your profile before expanding the section to highlight additional ones. Be strategic with the top 3 endorsements you highlight. Note that you can rearrange the skills/expertise regardless of how many people have endorsed that skill/expertise.

Customize your LinkedIn URL

Each LinkedIn profile defaults to a system-generated URL that is nonsensical and not brand-supporting. Customize your URL* and use it on your email signatures, resume, cover letters and other marketing collateral. Doing so will also convey your awareness and familiarity with this professional social media site, a good way to demonstrate being tech-savvy.

*Directions for customizing your LI URL are found in Waldron’s *LinkedIn: Setting Account, Privacy and Communications Settings*.