



LinkedIn as Your New Rolodex

There is one social media tool that stands out above all of the others in the business-to-business sales environment – LinkedIn.

LinkedIn is a great resource for marketing, prospecting and building relationships. The reason is that in B:B sales market segmentation strategies involve on a macro-level industry segmentation and on a micro-level specific identification of target customers. In this environment LinkedIn is one of your best friends.

The untapped power of LinkedIn is the online placement of the rolodex that used to sit on your desk. Everyone you connect to on LinkedIn becomes part of your online rolodex, and for every connection you have you can see their online rolodex. It's like the decision maker from 20 years ago telling you before you leave his office – "here, take my rolodex. See if there is anyone there you want to meet, and then let me know".

When viewed this way, LinkedIn is great for developing warm introductions and referrals. And as most business people will admit, the best source of business is through warm introductions and referrals. Everyone on your sales team should (if they have not done so already) develop their LinkedIn profile and invite at least 70+ people to connect.

Let's step through some specifics on why this works and how to do it. First, why it works.

- LinkedIn is almost exclusively a business focused tool
- Well developed LinkedIn profiles provide good business background information, including one's experience and areas of expertise
- LinkedIn features such as postings and groups afford opportunities to be generous with your connections, providing expertise, information and insights on topics where you are an expert
- Enabling at least 70+ connections opens up a world of 2nd level connections where you will find your warm introductions and referrals

How to proceed

- Think strategically first. You want 1st level connections that will open up the most opportunities for you. Look back over the last year or two and see where your new business opportunities came from, particularly the referral business. Identify your best sources of referrals and Link to them.
- Link to everyone you know that looks like your referral sources.
- Invite all of your customers, past and present, to link.
- Invite everyone up and down your supply chain to link.
- Invite prominent individuals in your industry to link.
- Invite people in media to link.
- Invite Association personnel and industry influencers to link.

Think of your connections in LinkedIn in a Hub and Spoke configuration. Ideally, your 1st level connections are hubs that are potentially connected to a wide array of warm introductions, referrals and new opportunities.

Once you connect to enough 1st level people take the time to peruse the connections each of them have on LinkedIn. You are looking for people to whom you should connect for introductions and business opportunities.

Once you identify the people you want to meet, go back to your connection with a simple request – “I saw on LinkedIn that you are connected to Jane Rogers. I’ve wanted to meet Jane. Would you mind if I use your name in reaching out to her?”

Your connection will say yes, say no for a variety of reasons, or in the best case offer to make the connection call for you. Bottom line -- if you don’t get a no you get a warm introduction.

A few other things to bear in mind –

- Your connection is putting their relationships on the line. Respect that and respect the relationships.
- Don’t ask your connection to work for you. They are not your sales force. All you want is permission to use their name.
- Limit the number of requests per connection. Don’t abuse your relationship with them.

To help with your efforts I recommend (believe it or not) *LinkedIn for Dummies*. It really is a great primer for getting your LinkedIn strategy up and running.

For B:B companies LinkedIn is one of your best marketing and prospecting resources. Develop a strategy for what you want to do, and use LinkedIn to find warm introductions, referrals and new opportunities. If done well and consistently LinkedIn can become a cornerstone of your proactive marketing efforts.

Original Column by Ken Cook published in *CONNSTEP Advantage Magazine* and *The Hartford Business Journal*