



CREATING A STRATEGIC SOCIAL NETWORK

INTRODUCTION

Feel like networking on social media is a waste of time?

Worried that you're not connecting with the right people online?

In this ebook, you'll learn about some common misconceptions when connecting on social media. We will discuss how to:

- Create a plan of action
- Audit your network
- Identify ways you can connect more effectively
- Use your time more efficiently
- Reach the right people
- Establish yourself as an expert
- Figure out where you should be spending your time based on your business needs
- Use your business plan to strategize the way you interact with prospects, referral partners, and other valued connections

Sound interesting? Let's dig in.



CONNECTION MISCONCEPTIONS

1 **You need as many social media connections as possible.** Far from it. In fact, depending on your career goals (more on that in a bit), it might be counterproductive to have a ton of contacts on social media. The number and type of connections you have in each platform depends on the purpose and general audience of the platform, as well as your goals.

2 **You should connect with everyone who wants to connect with you.** Yes—no—maybe. It depends on the platform, and it may still vary based on your goals. On Twitter, for example, any number of people can follow you, and you don't necessarily have to follow them back unless you find them interesting and valuable. On Facebook or LinkedIn, the connections are mutual, and you may want to be a bit more selective in who you connect with. It's generally better to connect with people you know in real life, but there's no expectation for that on Twitter.



3 **What works on one social media platform will work on another.** In a word, nope. In two words, definitely not. But don't worry—that means that you can use different social media platforms for different purposes, instead of trying to juggle the same goals on multiple platforms. You can think of each social media platform as its own entity, with a specific purpose and audience.

4 **You need to be on as many social networks as possible.** For the majority of professionals, you won't get an equal amount of mileage on every social media platform. You can efficiently use your time and energy by focusing on the platforms that fit your business and career goals.

In this ebook, we'll touch on the “big three” social media platforms that most commonly make sense for professionals: Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. We'll spend a bit more time on LinkedIn specifically, since it's designed to promote connections between professionals.

But keep in mind that for your goals, some other platform may make more sense. Just because we limit our discussion to those three platforms doesn't

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CREATE A PLAN

Skeptical that social media can be a productive business tool?

Know that you're "supposed to" be on social media, but unsure why?

Feel like you aren't getting much out of social networking?

These are common frustrations. Too often, professionals are told that social networking is important and that they need to take advantage of it, but aren't given much direction or many compelling reasons.

Admittedly, we're somewhat biased. But we're happy to tell you why we think social media can and should be a powerful networking tool for you.

Like many good things in business, it starts with a plan.

Think about your business and career goals. Don't even worry about social media at this point. Focus on what you want to see happen in your professional life in the next several months and years.

Are you trying to grow your business? Do you want to change your career trajectory? Trying to find mentors or people who you can mentor?

What are your professional needs? More sales, better training, or wider pool of referral partners?



Social Media Strategies

There are two main ways to approach social media as a professional:

- Marketing and influence-building
- Sales and networking

Marketing and influence-building

If you're the face of an organization or if your professional goals include becoming an influencer in your field, this is the approach you'll want to take.

Through marketing and influence-building, you're trying to grow your audience, and you will probably end up with more connections than if you were taking the sales and networking approach.

Sales and networking

If you're trying to build a professional network within your industry, need to develop a referral network, or want to connect with people who may need your services in the future, this is the approach for you.

You'll need to be a little more judicious about who you connect with on certain platforms, particularly Facebook and LinkedIn. You should connect with people who you actually know—people who you could call up on the phone, or people whose phone calls you would accept. We'll get into how that works on LinkedIn specifically in a bit.

Can you use both of these approaches? Definitely! In fact, you may want to use different platforms for different purposes. For example, you can cast a wider, influence-building net on Twitter, and reserve Facebook and LinkedIn for connections that are in your personal, offline network.



AUDIT YOUR NETWORKS

At this point, you may be thinking one of two things:

- Wow, I already intuitively connected with people who only further my business goals!
- Well, I have a whole lot of contacts that don't actually make sense for me.

If the latter sounds more like you, that's okay. Once you've considered your business goals and created a plan for your social media networking, you may need to revisit some of your connections.

Now is a good time to go through your connections on the big three social media platforms and decide if they further your goals or not. Each platform has a slightly different purpose and is best suited for certain types of relationships; feel free to use these guidelines as ways to rework your online networks.

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Facebook

The way you use Facebook depends on how public a persona you want. You can choose to use Facebook exclusively for your friends and family, and that's perfectly fine. Some people also connect with certain business contacts on Facebook, so it's not weird to do that if it makes sense for you!

Facebook tends to be a more personal platform than, say, LinkedIn, so use that as a filter for who you choose to connect with. If you don't want your potential referral partners to view your family vacation pictures (but want to share them with your family and friends!), you may not want to connect with them on Facebook.

Twitter

One of the distinctive features about Twitter is that you can mutually follow other users, but you don't have to. You don't necessarily have to follow the people who follow you, so your audience can be pretty broad.

While you're taking stock of your Twitter followers, you may want to follow members of your audience who you could see yourself mutually doing business with in the future.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is the platform where you will want to spend most of your online professional networking efforts. It's specifically designed for professionals who want to build and maintain connections.

For most people, it's best to only connect with people you know in real life on LinkedIn, as on Facebook. Even for people whose goals fit with the marketing and influence-building approach to social media, you should still try to have some kind of conversation with people requesting to connect with you on LinkedIn (if you don't know personally know them) before you accept their request.



CONNECTING ON LINKEDIN

If you need additional help getting started on LinkedIn, you can download our free ebook, [LinkedIn the Sandler Way](#).

If you haven't set up your LinkedIn account yet, **what are you waiting for?**

IT'S SIMPLE TO SET UP, AND ONCE YOU'VE DONE THAT,
**you can get down to business
making connections and
growing your network.**



Connect with people you know

This seems intuitive, but think about how many people you meet in the course of a month that you probably aren't connected with on LinkedIn. It's important to go through your list of contacts every so often and add people you've connected with offline.

LinkedIn recommends that you only connect with people you actually know. It's less likely someone will refer or recommend you if they don't personally know you.

If you have 500 or more connections that you've come by honestly, kudos! That means you'll have a badge on your profile that indicates your network is 500+, and it will help you show up more often in LinkedIn searches.

LinkedIn (and some other networks) also have the concept of open networking, adding and connecting with anyone and everyone in order to build a wide audience. On LinkedIn, open networkers may refer to themselves as a LION, which stands for LinkedIn Open Networker. While as a general rule we don't recommend that approach, it does make sense for some people—as long as it's consistent with your business and career goals.

Make recommendations

Having thoughtful recommendations on your profile is an excellent way to showcase your experience and boost your credibility. You can ask coworkers, bosses, or colleagues who have worked with you on a project for recommendations.

But you know what's even better? Giving a recommendation first. Writing a thoughtful recommendation for someone you've worked with in the past is a way to pay it forward, and it often makes people more eager to write a recommendation for you in return.

You may even want to set the goal of giving a set number of recommendations each week, which can create a steady stream of recommendations in return.



What happens if you get an invitation to connect with someone you don't really know?

Especially if you're taking a marketing and influence-building approach to your social networking, there might be times when you should connect with someone on LinkedIn who you don't know personally.

First, check to make sure it's a real account. If there's no profile picture or it seems fishy for other reasons, don't connect with that person. It might be a scam or SPAM robot—and you definitely don't want to have a bunch of fake profiles as your LinkedIn connections.

If you can tell that they're a real person, send a reply to their invitation to connect (you can do this without actually connecting). Ask them how you know each other, or ask why they'd like to connect with you. Be friendly and polite, and you may find that this person is a great potential connection for you! Or you met them a month ago and forgot...

Feeling especially adventurous? If they live near you, offer to meet them for coffee or lunch to get to know them.

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Be friendly and polite, and you may find that this person is a great potential connection for you!”



Make time for networking

You wouldn't expect to join a networking group or a peer advisory group, show up once, and then continue to receive benefits from that group, right? However, some people make that mistake with LinkedIn.

Schedule time in your calendar to keep your profile up-to-date and actually engage in networking activities: add connections you've met recently, write and request recommendations, and send private messages to congratulate your connections on new jobs or work anniversaries.

Remember, LinkedIn is a social network, so it's important to interact with your connections on a regular basis. If you're like most people, that won't happen unless you put it on your calendar first.

How much time you spend on LinkedIn is up to you. It depends on how many connections you have and how active you want to be on LinkedIn. But setting up a profile, adding connections, and then never logging in again will certainly not give you the results you're looking for.

Is a paid account right for you?

You may even want to consider a paid, premium LinkedIn account. Most social media platforms don't require you to pay to play, so it's understandable if you are reluctant to do that.

But with the way that LinkedIn is currently set up, you'll get a lot more out of a paid account than a free one. Curious about pricing, or what you can expect for your investment? Learn more about the Premium Solutions or sign up for a free 30-day trial of Sales Navigator.



WHERE DO YOU GO FROM HERE?

Ultimately, the way you connect with people online should reflect the way you connect with people in real life. Think about your current networking strategy. Are you looking for clients, referral partners, or future hires? Do you need to be viewed as an industry expert by people who don't know you yet?

Decide whether you need to focus on marketing and influence-building, or sales and networking.

Think about where you'll find the types of people you want to reach: that's where you should focus your energy.

You may find that you want to spend more time on LinkedIn because of the connections you can make there. Make sure you schedule time to actually interact with your connections on social media!

**Download the free offer,
10 Ways You Can Use LinkedIn To Prospect More Effectively
to learn more about building a network on LinkedIn.**

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