

HOW LINKEDIN.COM CAN ASSIST YOUR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

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I have been in sales for a long time and have still not met a successful salesperson who enjoys prospecting, especially cold-calling. The top 7 reasons most often cited are: 1) it is a waste of time; 2) the list of prospects that I am working from is out-of-date and worthless; 3) it is difficult to reach people by telephone; 4) I leave voice messages, but never receive return calls; 5) I do not like rejection; 6) I do not know what to say when I reach somebody; 7) I do not like being told what to do, and 8) I am much too busy and am more productive doing something else.

Without challenging the validity of these reasons, I will accept that they are all valid. But if your goal is to exceed your sales target this year and your company does not provide you with enough leads, you need to own your sales success and start prospecting now.

I have used LinkedIn.com (LI) for business development for many years and have found it to be valuable and easy to use. In 2017 I used LI to identify a person that recently joined a targeted company in an executive position. I contacted him and he referred me to a person that he recently hired for a critical strategic project. I contacted this person and later that year closed the largest sale in our company's history.

Why are you not using LI for business development? It should be part of your sales toolbox. There are almost 700 million professionals in over 200 countries that currently have profiles on LI. It is highly likely that your targeted buyers are using LI.

It is easy to understand how LI can be used for business development if you think of the popular parlor game of "The Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon." The idea of this game is that you can find any movie actor that is connected to Bacon through no more than 6 acquaintance links, or degrees of separation. So, for example, Bacon can be linked to the late actress Barbara Stanwyck in just 3 degrees because Bacon was in the movie *JFK* with Edward Asner. Asner was in *Change of Habit* with Elvis Presley. Presley was in *Roustabout* with Stanwyck.

So, if you wanted to reach a targeted person you could contact a person who knew that person or knew a person that knew that person, and ask them to introduce you to them. Or, if you could request to be connected directly to that person.

Here are 7 steps that you can use to begin using LI effectively for business development:

1. Join LI and build your profile. I advise using a "head-shot" photograph and carefully write your profile. It should not be your resume. Consider the headline you choose, as it is one of the first things that people you contact will notice when deciding to accept your invitation.
2. Invite people you know to connect with you. This may be easily accomplished by importing your Outlook, Google or iPhone contacts, or by individually inviting your friends, former co-workers one at a time. An email will be sent to them. They can choose to "accept" or "ignore" the invitation.

3. Join from 30 to 50 Groups. There are many types of groups: for example, industries and occupations, college alumni, special interests, team sports, military veterans, pet-lovers, and geographical for local networking. Members of Groups post news items or articles of interest every day. The benefits of joining groups are networking, education, current news and information, job searches, and obtaining sales leads. People will often look to see which groups you are a member of when deciding to accept or reject an invitation.
4. You should have a list of targeted companies. Search on the company's name. You will then see a list of people that currently or previously worked for it. Next to the individual's name will be a numerical designation, such as 2nd, which indicates they are a second-level connection, indicating that the person is 2 connections away from you. To reach the person, you will need to contact one of the people listed under their name to request an introduction to the person listed. LI does not show anybody beyond a 3rd level. You can also search the "Company Pages", for information about the targeted company, including the latest company provided updates.
5. You can also contact the listed person directly by sending an invitation to connect with a message explaining why you want to connect with them, such as that you are both members of the same group. Do not just click to send an invitation. It is important to understand the goal of making contact is to obtain a conversation, not to make a sale during the contact process. It is also important not to be perceived as a pest or stalker, as it can turn off the contact or potential buyer.
6. You have the option to upgrade to LI premium to take advantage of being able to send a certain number of Inmails, or direct messages, to anybody on LI.
7. Lastly, assuming that you have been introduced to the targeted person, or they accepted your invitation to connect, you can request to set up a telephone or video conversation with them. That is the beginning of your sales cycle.

Sounds simple. It is, but it requires substantial work to build a quality professional profile, invite people to connect, determine which companies to target, craft messages, and then attempt to connect with targeted individuals. I can assure you that it will be worthwhile and help you achieve your sales goals.

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