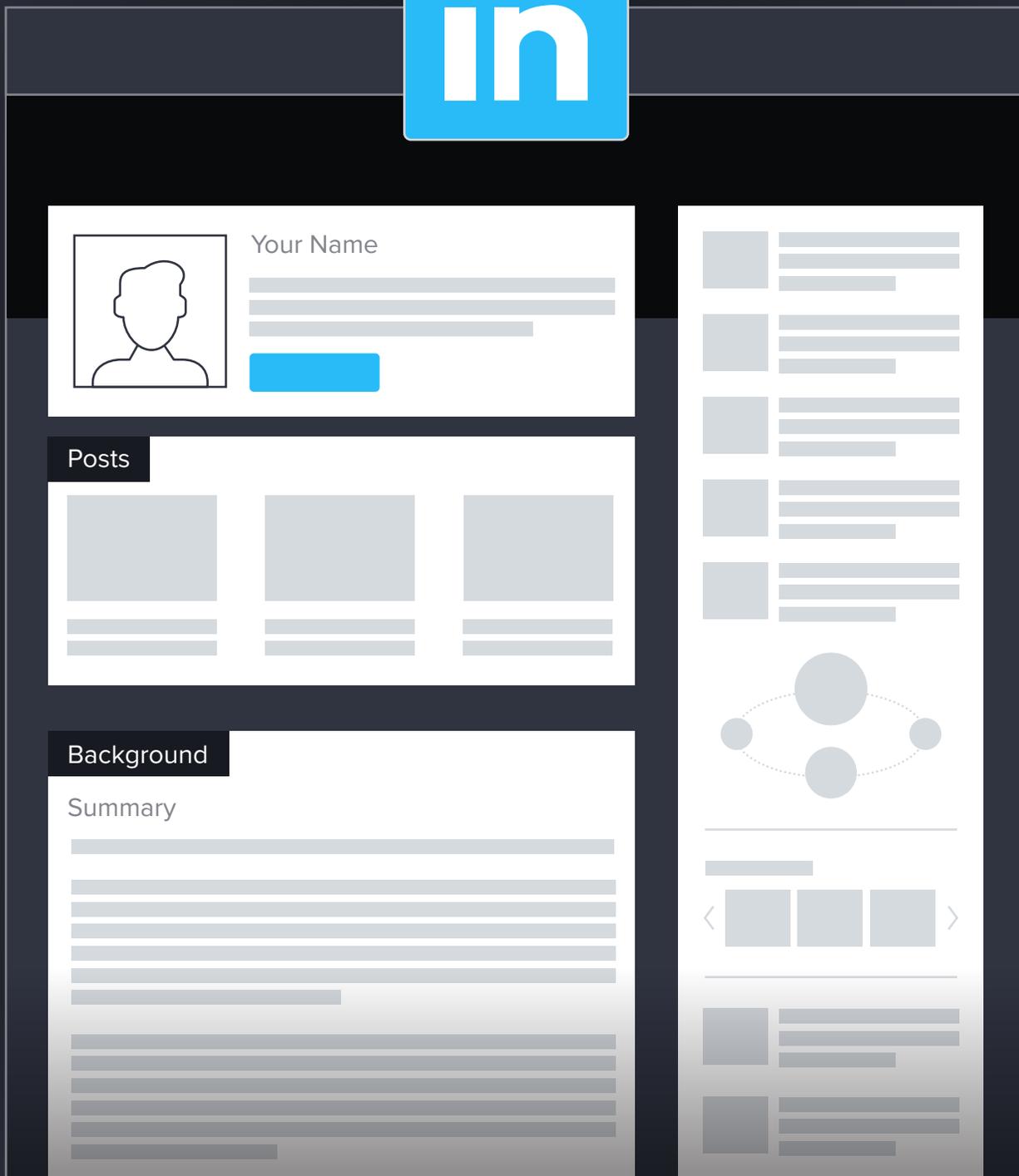


Finding Links to Leads

How Small Business Owners Can Use LinkedIn for Lead Generation



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In the early days of LinkedIn, if you noticed a colleague updating his profile, it was like you knew a secret: He was probably looking for a new job.

But since its debut in 2003, LinkedIn has become far more than a resume tool for job seekers and hiring managers. **With more than 400 million members worldwide, LinkedIn is the top online platform for all sorts of professional activity: hiring, yes, but also building relationships, sharing career updates, and following industry trends.**

For small business owners, LinkedIn is especially valuable for another purpose: marketing. On Facebook, posts from businesses can quickly sink in a stream of wedding announcements, vacation photos, and other personal updates. But users only mean business when they log into LinkedIn, making it an ideal platform for companies to share content and engage customers. According to the company, LinkedIn **drives more traffic** than all other social networks combined, and it's responsible for 80 percent of the leads B2B companies generate through social media.

Moreover, LinkedIn can help small business owners identify and build relationships with the exact type of customers they're aiming to reach. LinkedIn shows professionals what they share in common, giving salespeople the advantage of contacting "warm" leads instead of cold calling. Through strategic use of the network, as well as paid solutions like **Sponsored Updates** and **Sales Navigator**, businesses can ultimately turn those leads into customers. It's a tactic now used by the majority of marketers: In 2013, according to the company, **65 percent** of B2B marketers and more than half of B2C marketers had used LinkedIn to acquire a customer.



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But many companies aren't taking advantage of LinkedIn for marketing and lead generation: Just **half of small businesses** surveyed in the 2015 Infusionsoft Small Business Market Research Sales & Marketing Report said they use the platform.

Whether you're new to LinkedIn or a member of the 500-plus connection club, you can better leverage the network to grow your sales.

In this guide, we'll explain how to use LinkedIn to generate leads, covering strategies for:



Creating and optimizing your personal and company LinkedIn pages



Attracting and engaging followers



Focusing on the right customers through Targeted and Sponsored Updates



Using “social selling” techniques to turn leads into customers



Optimizing Personal and Company Pages

First things first: You can't make the most of LinkedIn without fully building your personal and company profile pages. (Hint: There's more to it than adding your photo and job title). Here's how to create pages that help you connect with customers.

5 tips for building a better LinkedIn profile

Not yet on LinkedIn? Join the club. The platform is still growing at a rate of two **new members per second**. If you're new to the network (or haven't gotten past the basics), here are five best practices for optimizing your profile.



1 Make it picture-perfect

Save the sunglasses and wine glasses for Facebook—your LinkedIn photo should be a professional-looking headshot in which you look friendly and trustworthy. That means a chest-up photo, ideally one shot against a plain background. Pictures do more than make your profile prettier: LinkedIn says that members with profile photos are **14 times more likely to be viewed** than those with the default avatar.

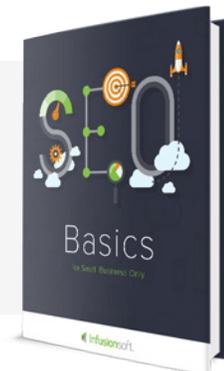


2 Write your own headline

By default, the headline shown beneath your name is your current job title. But you can change it to include a more robust description of your career. For example, “social media marketing consultant for small businesses” says more than “owner at Collins Consulting.” Plus, keywords like “social media” help your profile show up in searches.

Interested in learning more about keywords?

Check out our free e-book, [SEO Basics](#).



3 Make a statement with your summary

As the most prominent part of your profile, your summary is the best place to introduce yourself. Make your 2,000-character allotment count by highlighting how you and your company help customers: Give an overview of your services, accomplishments and what differentiates you from competitors.

Whatever you do, don't leave your summary blank. It's prime real estate for searchable keywords.



4 Include (almost) everything in your profile

There's a reason LinkedIn asks about not only your work history but about your volunteer experience, interests, supported causes, and more: These fields can help you build relationships, which is what LinkedIn is all about. Someday, you might strike up a conversation with a prospective customer by pointing out that you both played college hockey or belong to the same professional organization. Also, LinkedIn prioritizes completed profiles in search results (to see how your profile measures up, check the "profile strength" chart next to your photo).

At the same time, don't use LinkedIn to write the long version of your life story. Summarize your experiences with easy-to-skim bullet points or short paragraphs, and exclude those that are no longer relevant to your career (no matter how much character you built working at the sandwich shop in college).



5 Showcase your best stuff

Use the summary, experience and projects sections of your LinkedIn profile for show-and-tell, making it easy for prospective customers to see samples of your work. Adding media such as links, presentations, and videos also makes your profile more visually engaging.



Reasons to maintain a Company Page on LinkedIn

Compared with a multifaceted personal profile, a LinkedIn Company Page is relatively simple. It entails only a logo and banner image, a 2,000-character description, and a handful of high-level company facts such as specialties, website URL, industry, and size.

LinkedIn also offers a tab for companies to post career information, but in 2014, it discontinued the Products & Services tab that allowed companies to feature products and recommendations. You might wonder: If company pages are so basic, why are they important?



The power of a Company Page is less about the profile itself and more about how it's used. Using a Company Page, a business can build awareness and credibility by posting updates—like blog entries, articles, and videos—that are broadcasted to followers' feeds.

Here are the top three reasons for small businesses to use a Company Page:



Company Pages help prospective customers learn about your business

Your Company Page might be one of the first stops for prospective customers searching for your business. LinkedIn pages generally rank high in search results, and the summary section on your Company Page is ripe for keywords. Users may also land on your company page through links in your employees' profiles.

Customers can also learn about specific products or services you offer through a Showcase Page, an offshoot of the Company Page. For example, the owner of a personal training business could promote the book she wrote with a Showcase Page, which can be searched, followed, and analyzed independently of her Company Page.



B2B marketers use LinkedIn more than any other channel:



Distribute content on the network



Of social B2B leads stem from LinkedIn



Come from the runner-up, Twitter



Company updates give your business exposure among followers—who may turn into customers

With a Company Page, your business can act as a publisher, posting content that followers see in their feeds. The same is true for Facebook and Twitter, of course. But according to research published by the company, B2B marketers use LinkedIn more than any other channel: 94 percent distribute content on the network. They also gain more leads with it: 80 percent of social media B2B leads stem from LinkedIn, while less than 13 percent come from the runner-up, Twitter.

From your Company Page, you can share updates in the form of blog posts, industry news, presentations, and other types of content that demonstrate your company's authority and help you stay on the minds of followers. LinkedIn also allows you to reach specific audiences with updates sent only to followers who meet certain profile criteria, like a location or seniority level.

We'll cover strategies for gaining, engaging, and targeting followers in the next sections of this guide.



Company Page analytics help you learn about your customers and prospects

Your marketing efforts aren't nearly as effective as they could be if you don't know whom you're marketing to. LinkedIn can provide valuable insights into your customer demographics and interests through data collected about your Company Page.

Company Page analytics are measured in three areas: the updates you post, your followers, and visitors who view your page. **That data provides information including:**

- The number of views, shares, and interactions on each update
- Follower and visitor demographics, broken down by facts such as industry, seniority level, job function, and company size
- The number of followers you gained organically and through paid advertising

Such information can help you better speak to your customers' needs—not just on LinkedIn but also across all aspects of your marketing.

Attracting and Engaging Followers

Your personal profile is optimized, and your Company Page is up and running. Now, of course, you need people to see your content. Use these strategies to gain followers—and keep them interested in your business.



Find your first followers

If you're starting a Company Page from scratch, your first followers should be right in front of you: **your employees**. Encourage your staff to follow your page and engage with updates by liking, sharing, and commenting. Ask your family and friends to join in, too. When followers interact with an update, that action shows up in the feeds of their connections, broadening the reach of the update.

To start gaining followers outside of your personal network, add a link to your Company Page or follow button to your email signature, website, blog, and other places where you communicate with customers.

Mix up your updates

Your audience is interested in hearing about your company, which is why they followed your page. Still, members don't visit LinkedIn to see promotions for products and services. They use the network to learn, make connections and otherwise strengthen their careers.

Consider the **types of content** LinkedIn says its members are most interested in:



Industry insights



Company news



New products and services

LinkedIn recommends that for every promotional update, you should have **four posts** related to industry trends and thought leadership—the kind of useful content that informs and inspires followers about issues in their own careers.

On both your personal and company pages, supplement company news with educational content, like a blog post you wrote or a presentation you gave at a conference.

You can also post content from media outlets, blogs, and leaders relevant to your industry and followers. Vary the types

of content you post, sharing articles, videos, infographics, photos, and presentations (LinkedIn has its own presentation platform, [SlideShare](#)). Include photos with your posts: Images increase the comment rate by **98 percent**, LinkedIn says.

Make it a two-way conversation

Treat your LinkedIn page like an online community, showing followers that you're interested in connecting with them. Add questions to your updates (i.e., "How have you solved a problem like this in your work?"). According to LinkedIn, questions generate **almost 50 percent** more comments on updates. And when followers start the conversation with comments, be sure to keep it going.

Staying engaged on LinkedIn helps followers build trust and affinity for your business and, eventually, turn into customers. LinkedIn says that members are almost **50 percent** more likely to buy from a company when they engage with the business on the network.

Keep the updates coming

No matter how interested followers are in your company, they probably won't see every update you post—not with hundreds of other people and companies contributing to their feeds.

HOW MANY PEOPLE SEE UPDATES?



One status update typically reaches 20 percent of your followers.



By posting 20 times monthly—which amounts to most weekdays—companies reach an average of 60 percent of their followers with at least one update.

If you post to LinkedIn only when you have free time, you probably won't post frequently enough. **Be proactive by planning posts in advance.** To keep your schedule full, consider posting certain types of content on certain days, like industry trend pieces on Mondays and videos on Fridays.

Planning ahead also makes your Company Page analytics more valuable. When there's a consistent strategy behind your updates, you can gather more reliable data about the type of content your followers are most interested in and the best times of the day and week to post it.

3 tools for scheduling LinkedIn posts

No need to clog up your calendar with reminders to post content on LinkedIn. Try these tools for scheduling posts on your social media accounts.

Buffer for Business and **Hootsuite Pro** allow your team to manage your social media accounts from a single platform, schedule posts, and analyze metrics like clicks and engagement.

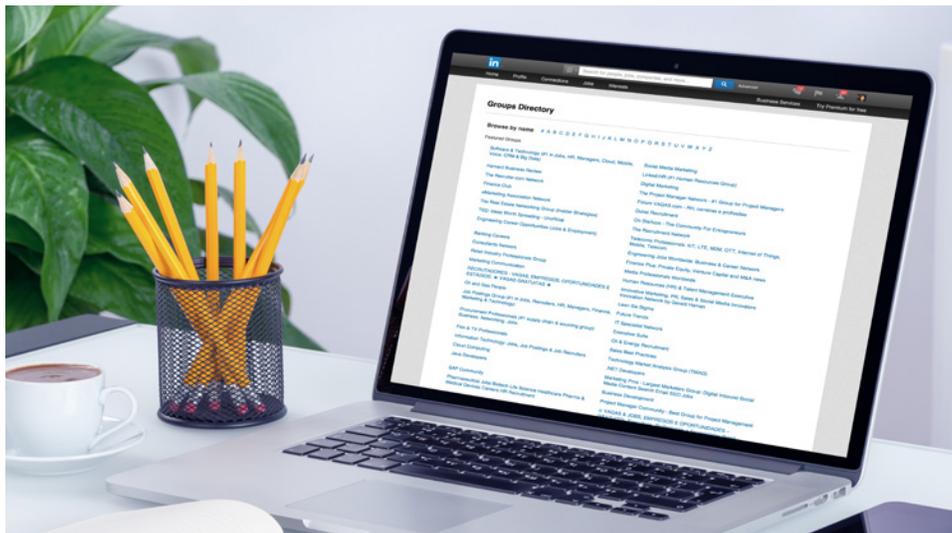
Edgar calls itself “the social media queue that never runs out.” The software automatically saves your posts and, according to the schedule you set, republishes them over time to ensure they reach a wider audience.

Get involved in groups

On LinkedIn, there are always more people to meet. A good way of doing so is by joining LinkedIn Groups related to your industry and getting involved in conversations that take place there, whether by commenting on other members' posts or contributing your own.

LinkedIn allows members to join up to 100 groups. By participating in group discussions, you have the potential to introduce yourself and your company to hundreds—if not thousands—of new followers.

But even if you do more listening than talking, groups can still be beneficial for generating leads. Discussions could inspire ideas for your LinkedIn updates (or better yet, for your business). Group membership allows you to send fifteen free **InMails**—messages that can be sent to non-connections—to fellow members each month. And joining groups also gives you a better chance at landing at the top of LinkedIn search results.



The dos and don'ts of LinkedIn groups

New to LinkedIn groups? Look like a pro by remembering these dos and don'ts.

DO

Speak up. Become part of the community by asking questions, sharing your perspective, and “liking” other members’ posts.

Follow the rules. Many administrators establish rules about the types of posts permitted in the group. Some groups are intended only for discussion, not for sharing content or job postings.

DON'T

Spam everyone with sales messages. No one joined the group to be solicited. Posting direct sales messages is a surefire way to alienate group members.

Name-drop your company. Post as yourself, not as your business. Mention your company only when it's relevant to the discussion.



Reaching the Right Customers

Wouldn't it be nice if you could ensure that your marketing messages reached the exact type of customer you want to acquire? You're in luck. Through LinkedIn's free Targeted Updates and paid Sponsored Updates, you can send your posts to the feeds of specific demographic groups.

Targeted updates

In many cases, you'll want all of your Company Page followers to see the updates you post. But at other times, updates are better for some followers than others. Maybe your company operates in two distinctly different industries or has customers in various regions or countries.

By making your post a Targeted Update, you ensure it reaches only your intended group, segmented by company size, industry, job function, seniority, location, and/or language preference.

Thanks to information from 400 million member profiles, your target audience on LinkedIn could get pretty specific: In theory, you could post only to Spanish-speaking, manager-level accountants who work at an 11- to 50-person company in the arts industry.

But you probably don't have 100 followers who fit that bill, as LinkedIn requires for Targeted Updates. **Remember that while Targeted Updates can allow you to be more precise in your messaging, they should still be broad enough to fulfill your goal: attracting prospective customers.**

Sponsored updates

Sponsored Updates, which were mentioned earlier, apply the same targeting strategy to a different audience: LinkedIn members who don't follow your Company Page. These posts—the cost of which is determined by the number of people who see or click them—differ from Targeted Updates in that they reach LinkedIn members who never invited you to their feeds.

For that reason, it's even more important to steer updates away from purely self-serving content. Sales-oriented updates can be off-putting, especially for people who may have never heard of your company. Instead of talking about yourself, **talk about your readers—offering your help in the form of advice, education, and other useful information.**

Sponsored Updates can extend the reach of your page, exposing your business to new potential customers. Because these readers don't follow your page, be sure to develop a strategy for capturing their contact information so that you can continue the conversation with them. Consider linking your update to a landing page, where you can ask visitors to opt in for your newsletter or require that they enter contact information before downloading the content.



Turn Leads into Customers

When it's time to attempt converting a lead into a customer, LinkedIn isn't so different than a dating website. On a dating site, you'd see what you have in common with a prospective mate, and then strike up a conversation that determines whether you'll take things offline. The dating itself doesn't actually occur on the site (at least, we hope it doesn't).

The same is true in “social selling,” the idea of using social media to interact with prospects during the sales process. Rather than make transactions, salespeople make connections—acting on warm leads that bring them closer to an eventual deal.

The ability to leverage personal connections is one of the biggest advantages of using LinkedIn for sales. To use LinkedIn for sales the right way, remember these strategies.

*In a LinkedIn study, only **4 percent** of B2B customers said they would look favorably on a salesperson who called them cold—but 87 percent would approve of someone who reached out through a professional connection.*

Grow your network

Whether you met someone at an industry conference or at your kids' soccer game, solidify your new connection on LinkedIn. It's not about winning a popularity contest. Proactively growing your list of connections—and asking those connections for introductions to prospects—could someday help you close a sale. **Half** of the second-degree connections contacted by salespeople on LinkedIn subsequently make appointments—compared to only 32 percent of weaker connections, according to the demand generation firm Vorsight.

To find new connections, take LinkedIn up on its suggestion of “people also viewed” profiles and use **Boolean searching** for specific searches. LinkedIn's paid solutions can help you further expand your network to include new prospects. A LinkedIn Premium account allows you to send twenty-five introduction requests and twenty-five InMail messages to non-

first-degree connections each month. It also unlocks additional criteria—like job function, years of experience, and seniority—that help you identify the decision-makers you’re trying to reach.

Another paid subscription, Sales Navigator, builds on Premium features with tools designed for sales teams. The platform recommends leads based on a user’s preferences and historical actions and allows for prospective customers to be saved to a lead list. It also provides updates on leads, alerting you to job changes, new hires, and other company news. Additionally, a TeamLink feature shows you if an employee is connected to a lead—highlighting the best route to a personal introduction.

Make your move

Remember the dating website analogy when it’s time to contact a prospect on LinkedIn. You probably wouldn’t use your initial message to send a list of your best qualities—or immediately ask someone you haven’t met to be your significant other. Your goal is simply to get to know the person.

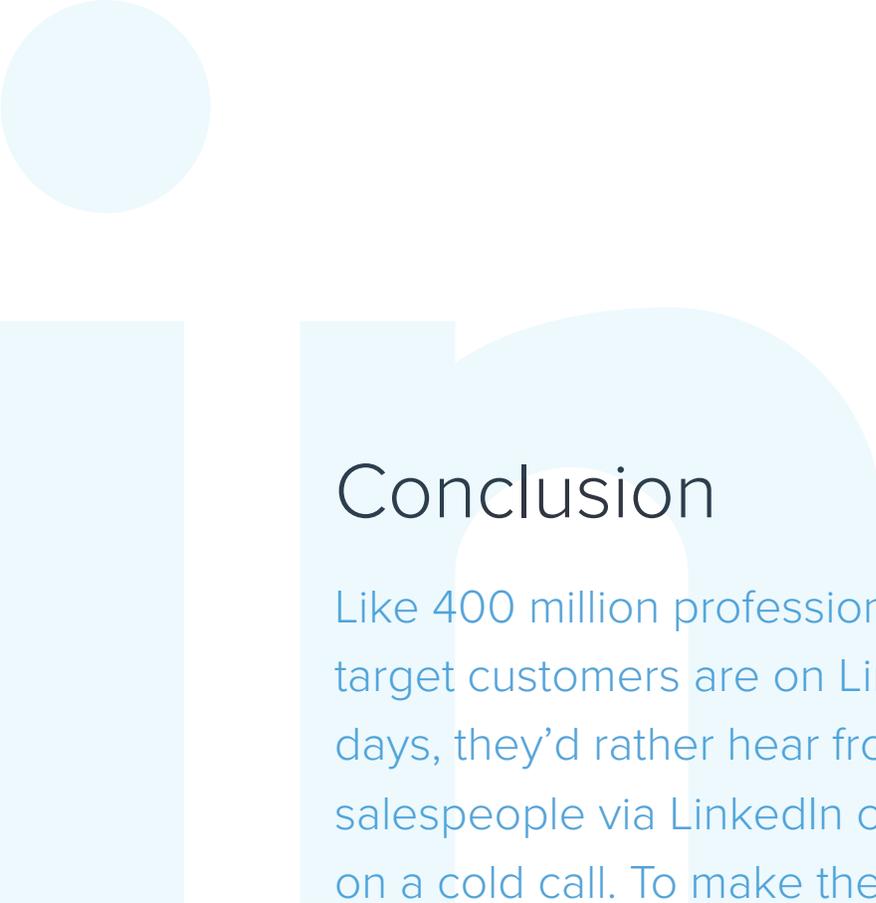
Start off by taking advantage of what differentiates LinkedIn from cold calling: **Mention the people or interests you have in common.** (Even referencing a shared LinkedIn group increases the likelihood of scheduling a meeting by **70 percent**, a study found.)

Show your interest in the prospect’s company, offering your help in solving the problems he faces at work. Limit your note

to five or fewer sentences that focus more on the lead than on you. Close by suggesting the action you'd like him to take.

For example: “Hi Tom, I wanted to introduce myself, as we’re both members of the Small Business Marketers group. I saw your post about your challenges finding qualified leads for ABC Company and thought this e-book about using LinkedIn for lead generation might give you ideas for connecting with your target customers. I’d be happy to tell you more about how my company, Collins Consulting, has helped other small businesses get more value out of social media. Let me know if you’d like to set up a time to talk this week.”

Hopefully, that message leads back to your standard sales process. You’ll talk with the prospect by phone and close a deal—all without the dreaded cold call that’s painful and time-consuming for both of you. According to LinkedIn, these social selling tactics are proving effective: Social selling leaders have **45 percent** more sales opportunities per quarter, and 78 percent of salespeople who use social media outperform their peers.



Conclusion

Like 400 million professionals worldwide, your target customers are on LinkedIn. And these days, they'd rather hear from you or your salespeople via LinkedIn connections than on a cold call. To make the most of LinkedIn, start by building a complete personal profile, adding connections, sharing insights from your Company Page, and participating in group discussions. Then use LinkedIn's tools to find and converse with the exact prospects you want to reach. For businesses, these connections are increasingly links to leads.

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Amy Saunders

Amy Saunders is a content creator at Infusionsoft, where she writes content that inspires and empowers small business owners. Writing about business brings Amy's work full circle: She began her career as a business reporter at The Columbus Dispatch in Ohio before becoming a features writer. After more than six years there, she moved to Phoenix, where she was an editor at a content marketing agency before joining Infusionsoft. As a lifelong Midwesterner, Amy promises to never take Arizona weather for granted and spends her free time riding horses, playing tennis and hiking in the sun.

Follow her on Twitter [@amyksaunders](https://twitter.com/amyksaunders).

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