Published on *AccountingWEB* (http://www.accountingweb.com)

LinkedIn Tips Part 1: Getting Your Profile Right

Posted by Terri Eyden on Feb 15 2013 4237 printer friendly

By Mark Lee

I've long held the belief that LinkedIn is a serious online business networking tool, and it can be an effective tool for start-up practices. This is the first article in a three-part series where I'll explain how LinkedIn can help the solo practitioner.

Why register on LinkedIn if you're a start-up?
There are three key reasons:

1. Having your profile on LinkedIn makes you easier to find when people are looking for you or for an accountant like you.
2. Once registered on LinkedIn, you can make potentially useful connections with other accountants, professional advisors, business people, prospects, and suppliers.
3. You can also use LinkedIn to identify prospective clients and to find out more about people before you meet with them.

There are other potential benefits, and none of them is unique to accountants starting up in practice. The only difference is that all start-up practices need to grow. Using LinkedIn effectively can help. More established practitioners may be less concerned about growing and see less need to do whatever they can to boost their marketing and networking efforts.

Getting your profile right
As always, you need to keep in mind your target audience. There are some key elements of your LinkedIn profile regardless, but the greater clarity you have as to who you want to impress, the more useful your profile will be.

Be clear about your chosen niche or specific area of expertise. The more your profile looks like other accountants starting their own practice, the more you'll struggle to stand out. The more distinct you profile is, the easier it will be to generate new clients.

Once you've registered on LinkedIn.com [1], you can edit your profile at any stage.

Go the Profile tab, close to the top left of every LinkedIn screen. The first drop-down option lets you edit each section of your profile as often as you feel the need.

Simply click the links marked Add or Edit to make the desired changes. To ensure maximum professional impact, I suggest you ensure your profile:

- Includes a **headline title** after your name that describes your role and approach rather than simply saying something boring, such as "Accountant." You can try different headlines, but something distinct will invariably be more useful than something generic.
- Displays your **full name**.
- Includes a **professional quality photo** – one people could recognize you from if they met you in real life; they'll feel they already know you from your photo and online interactions.
- Makes clear you're an approachable, experienced, and fully rounded person in the **Summary** area. This should be written in the first person and also refer to your new practice and your key focus or niche.
- Includes all of your **skills and expertise**. You want people to find you easily when they search LinkedIn for an accountant with your specialist experience. Include the words and phrases that people might use when they search.
- Includes in the **Experience** section the same name of each of your previous firms as your colleagues used so that you're all linked to the same firm in each case. (Mergers and incorporation as LLPs or limited companies can cause problems here. This is all especially important for recommendations, as I will explain in the next week's article.)
- Includes your **business e-mail address** rather than a personal, Gmail, or Hotmail address. The latter are more common for job hunters than for someone who has started a real accounting practice.
- It's up to you how much of your **personal job history** you include on your profile. But as a start-up practice, you'll want to demonstrate your prior experience and provide evidence of your expertise in your chosen niche. Quite simply, the more credibility you can establish, the better.

Your new practice

LinkedIn requires you to indicate when your practice started.

It's important to make clear how much relevant experience you amassed before you started your own firm. And be clear that it's an accounting practice. This should also be apparent from your headline to avoid potentially confusing anyone.

Make it easy for people to find you

This is a key tip if you want to benefit from LinkedIn's search features when users look for someone like you. Ensure you include your key words (e.g., accountant, tax, and any specific niche or focus) in these five key elements of your profile:

1. Headline
2. Current work experience
3. Past work experience
4. Summary
5. Specialties

Think about what terms and words people might use to search for an accountant like you. The more often you include these in those five elements of your profile, the easier it will be for you to be found, which is the main idea (especially if you're not planning on using LinkedIn actively).

The second and third articles in this series will address the topics of connection requests, endorsements, recommendations, groups, and lead generation on LinkedIn. In the meantime, by all means connect with me there [2].

Also by Mark: LinkedIn: Six Common Misconceptions [3]

About the author:
Mark Lee is consultant practice editor of AccountingWEB and writes the BookMarkLee blog [4] for accountants who want to overcome the stereotype of the boring accountant – in practice, online, and in life. He is also chairman of the Tax Advice Network [5] of independent tax experts.

Tags
Technology [6]
Social Media [7]
Marketing [8]
Small Business [9]
LinkedIn [10]
Articles by Mark Lee [11]

Source URL: http://www.accountingweb.com/article/linkedin-tips-part-1-getting-your-profile-right/221140

Links:
[1] http://www.linkedin.com/
[2] http://uk.linkedin.com/in/bookmarklee
[3] http://www.accountingweb.co.uk/article/linkedin-common-misconceptions/523188
[4] http://www.bookmarklee.co.uk/blog
[5] http://www.taxadvicenetwork.co.uk/
[6] http://www.accountingweb.com/tags/technology
[7] http://www.accountingweb.com/tags/social-media
[8] http://www.accountingweb.com/tags/marketing
[9] http://www.accountingweb.com/tags/small-business
[10] http://www.accountingweb.com/tags/linkedin
[11] http://www.accountingweb.com/tags/articles-mark-lee

Published on *AccountingWEB* (http://www.accountingweb.com)

LinkedIn Tips Part 2: Getting Connected

Posted by Terri Eyden on Feb 22 2013 4077 printer friendly

By Mark Lee

If you want people to find you on LinkedIn, you need to do more than simply register your profile. LinkedIn is an online networking site, so you might as well use it to help you network.

To get started, I suggest you look to connect with people you know and also with people you would like to know. There are two reasons for this:

1. If you don't have any connections (or you have very few connections), you'll be less "attractive" on the site. Such people are generally brand new to the site, very odd and lonely, or they're spammers;
2. The more connections you have, within reason, the easier it is to get in touch with prospects and to source new potential clients (leads).

As a start-up practice, you could start by looking to connect with people you've worked with in the past, such as ex-colleagues and ex-clients. You can also connect with friends, family, friends of friends, business associates, and professional advisors.

LinkedIn's search facility is very useful here – as is the advanced search tool.

When you want to connect with someone, you're asked to indicate how you know the person. It's best to be truthful when you're choosing the reason.

Later in this series, I'll be talking about LinkedIn groups. For the moment, just note that you're allowed to use mutual membership of the same group to justify a connection request.

Personalizing connection requests
LinkedIn prompts you to send a standard message: "I'd like to add you to my professional network on LinkedIn." Delete it and write your own message. No one appreciates receiving that boring standard message.

If you're reaching out to people who don't know you, you'll generally get more positive responses to personalized connection requests. The same outcome follows if you send personalized e-mails or hard-copy letters rather than standard ones.

LinkedIn limits the length of your initial connection request so you need to be succinct. Try to incorporate three or four elements:

1. Why you reached out and would like to connect (e.g., "I saw your update . . . I read your comment on . . . and believe we may have an overlap of interests").
2. An indication that you understand that LinkedIn is about mutually beneficial networking. For instance, "I hope we can connect and please let me know how I can help."
3. What's in it for them (without trying to get salesy!).
4. A thank-you to the person for considering your request.

Basically, you want to demonstrate rapport and maybe a little flattery. You want to avoid coming across as just another boring accountant.

Bear in mind that many people who are new to LinkedIn or who don't really understand the system will ignore your connection requests. You can try to send a reminder, but don't worry if you get ignored. It happens sometimes and it's rarely personal.

People you may know
LinkedIn has a clever and spooky habit of highlighting on your home page "people you may know." Many of these suggestions will be correct, as the system spots connections and links derived from your profile and the people with whom you're already connected.

If you simply click on the "Connect" link offered by LinkedIn, the other person sometimes gets an impersonal standard message that says you claim to be a friend. If you're not a friend, this can be at best embarrassing, at worst annoying. The standard message tends to go out if you click the link when presented with a full page of people you may know.

I find it's better to click the person's name, if I know the person, and to then send a connection request in the normal way.

Connection requests you receive
At the top of the LinkedIn screen, you may see a figure in a red box on the small black envelope. This number is the aggregate of messages and invitations to connect that are awaiting your attention. You can click the red box or go to your LinkedIn inbox to manage these requests.

I very rarely receive spam requests to connect. I've found one way to avoid them is to avoid joining those groups that have tens of thousands of members – many of them are there solely for the purpose of sending spam connection requests.

Send a personal note

After you accept the connection there's a facility to send the other person a message. I do this whenever I agree to connect with someone. It helps make things more personal. Don't make your message salesy. That would be premature. Often you'll get a reply and can start a conversation. Often you'll be ignored as the other person isn't (yet) using LinkedIn effectively.

Be choosy

Some people think it's a worthwhile game to amass as many random connections as possible on LinkedIn. It isn't.

Be choosy. You need only connect with people you know or would like to know. It's just the same as face-to-face networking in this regard, except that online you don't even have to politely accept (the equivalent of) a business card from oddballs and strangers based in other countries – unless you have a business reason for wanting to do so.

If you receive connection requests from strangers, you can simply click "Ignore" to ignore the request.

Before deciding whether to ignore a request, you can easily check out the person's LinkedIn profile. I often do this and reply to the connection request with a short note. For instance, "Can you remind me how we know each other?" or "Can you let me know why you'd like to connect? I limit my network to people I know." If people are really interested in connecting, they'll write back with more information. If you never hear from them again, they probably wouldn't have been valuable contacts anyway.

I've already noted the importance of accepting that many people who are registered on LinkedIn don't understand much about how it works. This means they sometimes make mistakes simply by doing what the site seems to encourage.

I've learned NOT to judge those people who send me standard connection requests or who claim to be my friend.

If you accept a connection request and change your mind later, you can disconnect from anyone using LinkedIn's "Remove Connections" feature. The person won't be alerted.

Online networking

I'd encourage you to reply to every connection request you receive. I still do it and it's even more important when you're starting in practice.

As with face-to-face networking, you never know who the other person might know. So even if your first impression is that the person will never be a potential client, don't write the person off. The advantage of online networking is that you can start the communication process with many more people than you would have time to meet in person. You can then pick and choose those with whom you follow up with in real life. And that follow-up is crucial.

You'll probably generate more clients from new connections you meet in person than you will from those you simply engage with online.

Anyone and everyone
I'm not a fan of the LION strategy – to be a LinkedIn "Open Networker." These people connect with anyone and everyone. It can make sense for certain types of business people, but I doubt it's worthwhile for start-up practices. It's also likely to lead to receiving more spam messages from some of those random connections – many of whom will be all around the world.

Tagging your connections
As a start-up practice, one of your primary objectives will be to build your credibility and to generate new clients.

LinkedIn provides a facility to tag (categorize) your connections. You can do this from the main list of your connections, which you reach from the contacts top line menu link. You might, for example, have one tag for prospects, another for clients, and a third for introducers. You don't have to tag everyone.

You'll want to review the tagged lists regularly and to think about how to keep in touch with the individuals in each group – without spamming them. That would be quite easy to do, but inevitably ends up being counterproductive. After all, how often do you respond positively when someone does it to you?

In Part 3 of this series, I'll be looking at endorsements and recommendations, then groups, status updates, and lead generation.

Also by Mark:

- LinkedIn Tips Part 1: Getting Your Profile Right [1]
- LinkedIn: Six Common Misconceptions [2]

About the author:
Mark Lee is consultant practice editor of AccountingWEB UK and writes the BookMarkLee blog [3] for accountants who want to overcome the stereotype of the boring accountant – in practice, online, and in life. He is also chairman of the Tax Advice Network [4] of independent tax experts.

Tags
Technology [5]
Practice Development [6]
Social Media [7]
LinkedIn [8]
Articles by Mark Lee [9]

Published on *AccountingWEB* (http://www.accountingweb.com)

LinkedIn Tips Part 3: Your Status

Posted by Terri Eyden on Mar 8 2013 5049 printer friendly

By Mark Lee

Status updates are short messages that are typical of many social networking platforms. While posting updates on LinkedIn is similar to Facebook and Twitter, it's also different.

From your LinkedIn home page or your Edit My Profile page, you can change your status update as frequently as you like.

Some marketing-obsessed LinkedIn users advocate daily status updates, and some people post updates even more frequently. I'm not a fan of this approach, even though I write as someone who has been active on LinkedIn for years, with more than 2,600 connections, many of them UK-based accountants and tax advisers.

Who sees your status updates?
Your latest status update will be seen by anyone who looks at your profile.

Every time you update your status, the home page of all of your network connections is updated with your news. But don't get too caught up by this. It doesn't mean that all your connections will see all your status updates.

I regularly look at my LinkedIn home page, but reckon I'm in a minority. How often do you look at yours?

On my home page, I routinely choose to hide updates posted by certain people. They tend to be those I don't know well, who regularly post uninteresting updates, or who post too often for my taste. Once hidden, that's it. I rarely go back and make them visible again.

Your most recent status updates are also distributed to your network via e-mail when LinkedIn sends out updates – again, I don't know how many people read these updates. I have tailored mine using the Settings facility (see Part 1 [1] of this series).

Status updates to avoid
Many people make the mistake of posting overtly self-promotional status updates. I doubt these often have the desired impact.

This also is probably NOT the place to share Facebook-style frivolous updates of where you are, what you're doing, or what you've done.

As a start-up practice, you'll probably also want to avoid highlighting your relative inexperience. This is unlikely to be an attractive quality so far as prospective clients are concerned.

Avoid any reference to specific clients. Even if you're careful to avoid breaching confidences, your connections might worry that you might.

Finally, I encourage caution if you're inclined to follow any of the generic advice out there about what to post as status updates. Most such advice is quite simplistic, and few of the ideas will be helpful for start-up accountancy practices.

Status updates that could work for you
Make your updates professional and support the positive impression you're seeking to create as a start-up practice.

Try searching the profiles of other accountants and see what they're posting (if anything). You may be inspired to try something similar.

More specifically, quasi-promotional posts that also evidence your expertise, approach, and success may be useful. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- "Just back from a great new client meeting with a local store owner. Delighted to have showed him some tax planning opps at first meeting."
- "Today I'm setting up two new clients with a great online bookkeeping system that will help them (and me) keep on top of things."
- "Attending an update course today with hundreds of other accountants. It's important to keep on top of recent tax changes."

As with Twitter, you want to make it easy for anyone who sees your status updates to recognize you as someone who can help them. Your status updates should echo and reinforce rather than contradict your profile and stated experiences.

You may also find that some of your connections are posting interesting status updates. You can click the Share link beneath any such update. This will copy it and make clear who posted it originally and that you're sharing it as one of your updates.

It's worth doing this with updates that may be of interest to your connections. It's good to share useful information and links on LinkedIn, just as it is on other social networks.

Your status update is limited to 140 characters (just like on Twitter), so keep that in mind, particularly when cutting and pasting information you intend to share.

Commenting on others' status updates
Beyond sharing others' updates, you can alternatively simply Like them, add a comment, or send a message to the person who posted them.

It's a good idea to add thoughtful comments to the status updates of people in your network. You can do this simply by thanking them for sharing something you've found useful or perhaps by confirming their view or adding a further useful related insight.

Do be careful that your comment is helpful and positive. There's nothing to be gained by posting negative or controversial comments here (if anywhere).

A key tip
The amazing thing is, the more you help others on LinkedIn, the more they're likely to have a positive view of you and your new practice. This will ultimately be more beneficial than any blatant self-promotion could be.

Finally
For now, if you have questions, ideas, or views on anything above or in the earlier articles in this series, by all means, connect with me on LinkedIn [2].

Also by Mark:

- LinkedIn Tips Part 1: Getting Your Profile Right [1]
- LinkedIn Tips Part 2: Getting Connected [3]
- LinkedIn: Six Common Misconceptions [4]

About the author:
Mark Lee is consultant practice editor of AccountingWEB UK and writes the BookMarkLee blog [5] for accountants who want to overcome the stereotype of the boring accountant – in practice, online, and in life. He is also chairman of the Tax Advice Network [6] of independent tax experts.

Tags
Social Media [7]
Technology [8]
Practice Development [9]
LinkedIn [10]
Articles by Mark Lee [11]

Source URL: http://www.accountingweb.com/article/linkedin-tips-part-3-your-status/221321

Links:
[1] http://www.accountingweb.com/article/linkedin-tips-part-1-getting-your-profile-right/221140
[2] http://uk.linkedin.com/in/bookmarklee
[3] http://www.accountingweb.com/article/linkedin-tips-part-2-getting-connected/221170
[4] http://www.accountingweb.co.uk/article/linkedin-common-misconceptions/523188
[5] http://www.bookmarklee.co.uk/blog