



6 Steps to a More Marketable LinkedIn Profile

Somewhere along the line you started treating it more like a resume. It's time to fix that.

By Jeff Haden | Dec 7, 2011

Overall, [LinkedIn](#) is the best social media platform for entrepreneurs, business owners, and professionals. Unfortunately, your LinkedIn profile may not be helping you to create those connections.

So let's tune yours up with six simple steps:

Step 1. Revisit your goals. At its most basic level LinkedIn is about marketing: marketing your company or marketing yourself. But that focus probably got lost as you worked through the mechanics of completing your profile, and what started as a marketing effort turned into a resume completion task. Who you are isn't as important as what you hope to accomplish, so think about your goals and convert your goals into keywords, because keywords are how people find you on LinkedIn.

But don't just whip out the [Google AdWords Keyword Tool](#) and identify popular keywords. It's useful but everyone uses it—and that means, for example, that every Web designer has shoehorned six- and seven-digit searches-per-month keywords like “build a website,” “website templates,” “designing a website,” and “webmaster” into their profile. It's hard to stand out when you're one of millions.

Go a step further and think about words that have meaning in your industry. Some are process-related; others are terms only used in your field; others might be names of equipment, products, software, or companies.

Use a keyword tool to find general terms that could attract a broader audience, and then dig deeper to target your niche by identifying keywords industry insiders might search for.

Then sense-check your keywords against your goals. If you're a Web designer but you don't provide training, the 7 million monthly Google searches for “how to Web design” don't matter.

Step 2. Layer in your keywords. The headline is a key factor in search results, so pick your most important keyword and make sure it appears in your headline. “Most important” doesn't mean most searched, though; if you provide services to a highly targeted market the keyword in your headline should reflect that niche. Then work through the rest of your profile and replace some of the vague descriptions of skills, experience, and educational background with keywords. Your profile isn't a term paper so don't worry about a little repetition. A LinkedIn search scans for keywords, and once on the page, so do people.

Step 3. Strip out the clutter. If you're the average person you changed jobs six or eight times before you reached age 30. That experience is only relevant when it relates to your current goals. Sift through your profile and weed out or streamline everything that doesn't support your business or professional goals. If you're currently a Web designer but were an accountant in a previous life, a comprehensive listing of your accounting background is distracting. Keep previous jobs in your work history, but limit each to job title, company, and a brief description of duties.

Step 4. Reintroduce your personality. Focusing on keywords and eliminating clutter is important, but in the process your individuality probably got lost. Now you can put it back and add a little enthusiasm and flair. Describing yourself as, “A process improvement consultant with a Six Sigma black belt,” is specific and targeted but also says nothing about you as a person—and doesn't make me think, “Hey, she would be great to work with.”

Share why you love what you do in your profile. Share what you hope to accomplish. Describe companies you worked for or projects you completed. Share your best or worst experience. Keep your keywords in place, leave out what doesn't support your goals, and then be yourself.

Keywords are important but are primarily just a way to help potential clients find you. No one hires keywords; they hire people.

Step 5. Take a hard look at your profile photo. Say someone follows you on Twitter. What's the first thing you do? Check out their photo.

A photo is a little like a logo: On its own an awesome photo won't win business, but a bad photo can definitely lose business.

Take a look at your current photo. Does it reflect who you are as a professional or does it reflect a hobby or outside interest? Does it look like a real estate agent's headshot? A good photo flatters but doesn't mislead. Eventually you'll meet some of your customers in person and the inevitable disconnect between Photoshop and life will be jarring.

The goal is for your photo to reflect how you will look when you meet a customer, not how you looked at that killer party in Key West four years ago. The best profile photo isn't necessarily your favorite photo. The best photo strikes a balance between professionalism and approachability, making you look good but also real.

Step 6. Get recommendations. Most of us can't resist reading testimonials, even when we know those testimonials were probably solicited. Recommendations add color and depth to a LinkedIn profile, fleshing it out while avoiding any, "Oh jeez will this guy ever shut up about himself?" reactions. So ask for recommendations, and offer to provide recommendations before you're asked.

The best way to build great connections is to always be the one who gives first.

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