

BACK STORY

LINKEDIN FOR LAWYERS: FIVE EASY STEPS

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Microsoft founder Bill Gates once said, “The most meaningful way to differentiate your company from your competition, the best way to put distance between you and the crowd, is to do an outstanding job with information: *“How you gather, manage, and use information will determine whether you win or lose.”*”

By helping users effectively “gather, manage and use information,” the social media platform for professionals known as LinkedIn.com helps professionals win in today’s hyper-competitive economy. LinkedIn provides members with free-to-low cost access to an impressive network of more than 150 million registered users worldwide. It’s a powerful tool for building a brand and growing a business and should definitely be a part of every attorney’s brand strategy.

If you are not already on LinkedIn, the steps below will help you get started. If you are already on LinkedIn, the article below will provide you with some tips on how to better use LinkedIn for professional success.

1. Register

Fire up your internet browser and type LinkedIn.com in the address bar. Once you have done that, click on the “Join Today” button to begin the registration process with LinkedIn.

2. Create a Profile

After registration, the next step is to create a profile. To get an idea where to start on your profile, you may want to identify lawyers and other professionals who are using LinkedIn effectively and use their profiles to spark ideas for your own profile. Also, it is a good idea to bookmark the profiles of these people for future reference.

By default, your profile headline (the text that displays below your name on your profile) will be displayed as the last job that you have held. Rather than having your job title as your headline, you may want to consider customizing your headline to reflect your particular type of work. You could even include language in the headline indicating that you are currently seeking job opportunities.

For your summary, include language that differentiates you from your competitors. Of course, you will want to highlight your strengths, your unique selling proposition and your competitive advantages. Additionally, you may want to include in your summary your practice area and some of the major cases you have handled. By including such information in your profile, you will be assisting prospective clients in their search for lawyers with experience in your particular area.

It is imperative that you have a professional headshot on your profile. People, particularly people who you have not actually met, may be reluctant to connect with you if you do not have a photo on your profile.

On your profile, you have the option to share copies of presentations you have given, provide links to articles you have written, and supply links to your websites. Being able to link to your content on your profile is a great way to increase visibility and demonstrate credibility.

Regarding visibility, it bears mentioning that LinkedIn profiles appear high in Google search rankings. In other words, your profile will be easily viewable, so make sure it is polished.

Finally, remember when crafting your profile to be careful to abide by advertising rules applicable to lawyers.

3. Connect

After you have created your profile, seek out connections. Send invites to your colleagues and clients asking them to connect with you; you can easily search for them using LinkedIn’s search feature. Another way for you to build up your network is, shortly after attending a business event, ask the people for whom you collected business cards to connect with you on LinkedIn. In your invitations to connect, consider crafting a message geared toward the specific person you are inviting to connect, rather than merely sending the generic, impersonal message that is by default sent with LinkedIn invitations. Finally, after people have connected with you, consider thanking them for connecting with you.

4. Use

Once you have made some connections on LinkedIn, you are ready to start using the platform. Here are some of the ways in which you can use LinkedIn:

- **Seek out and give recommendations.** Recommendations on your profile speak to the experience people had working with you. With more and more recruiters using LinkedIn to find employee candidates, recommendations can give you a definite edge over other candidates.
- You can **become a thought leader.** LinkedIn provides you with the ability to answer questions via a feature called Linked Answers. By supplying answers, you can position yourself as a thought leader in a particular area of the law. When answering certain questions, be cognizant as to whether or not you are creating an attorney-client relationship.
- You can use LinkedIn to **learn.** The converse of LinkedIn Answers is that LinkedIn allows you to post questions in order to obtain answers. This is an excellent way to expand your knowledge.
- You can use LinkedIn to **search for experts.** By performing a people search, you can locate experts, even in esoteric subject areas.
- You can **follow developments** at your employer and at companies that you would like to add as clients.
- Finally, and perhaps most importantly, you can use LinkedIn to **search for job opportunities.**

5. Update

After the above steps, an important and challenging step will be to keep your profile up to date with the changes that will naturally occur in your professional life.

Conclusion

By necessity, this article has only skimmed the surface of the many powerful features that LinkedIn has to offer. It is now up to you to dive into LinkedIn and experience the benefits of it for yourself. I wish you much success. ■

MICHAEL SAUNDERS’ biography can be found on page 5.