The Five Best Practices for Linkedin Profiles: Network ahead of Your Job Search

By Jennifer Hay

This headline should come as no surprise to you if you've been following Google's growth and expansion in the Northwest: ***Google plans 840-worker office in Bothell.*** This is a tremendous opportunity for those with the right skills to fit Google's technical needs and the right personality to fit Google's culture. Do you know if this is you? I'll bet that 'Google culture' hits the top ten in search results over the next 2 weeks.

Now here's the challenge: *How do you get noticed?* If you've been actively networking with colleagues using your LinkedIn profile and Twitter account then you're ahead of the crowd. You might even have a game plan for networking your way into Google. If so, stop reading and get started now!!

For those still with me, remember that LinkedIn is not just about finding jobs, it's about learning from others and sharing your expertise. It's not an instant answer—it's a balanced effort of promoting your own agenda (25%) and contributing to the community (75%).

In this article, I'll discuss the top 5 practices for creating a powerful LinkedIn profile that will get you noticed. Let's get right to it.

Best Practice #1 – Find Your Voice

One element that I frequently find missing in LinkedIn profiles is the voice and personality of the individual. Too often in summaries I see language that would be better suited for the career summary of a resume. I suspect that many copy and paste and leave it at that. After all, who has time for networking?

If you're not going to make the effort to create a compelling story in your LinkedIn profile, then you're probably wasting your time. I liken this to the job searcher who thinks submitting resumes online is somehow sufficient. Everyone knows that competition is fierce—consider that as of January 1, 2011 LinkedIn reported 90 million users and growing at the rate of one a second! After you finish this article, there will be 300 more users. How many of these people do you think you'll be competing against?

In your profile, you'll have two format choices. Assumed first person is the typical resume format where the word "I" is assumed and sentences start with action verbs such as 'delivered', 'exceeded' and 'increased.' Its purpose is to try to show the individual being actively involved in providing value to the organization. First person, on the other hand, uses 'I' which makes it a more personal approach and my preferred method. I heartily believe that people want to connect with personalities and passion, not action verbs.

Best Practice #2 – Create Your Brand

What is your professional brand, and how can you express it in 120 characters or fewer? In your headline you'll describe yourself as a unique and valuable IT professional and this message will follow you throughout your LinkedIn communications. When you have a brand that's not clear and concise then you'll confuse the reader and defeat the purpose of creating and marketing your profile.

I love to use the example of 'strategic' 'strategist', and 'strategy.' Behind 'results-oriented' these are probably the most common words I see in resumes and LinkedIn profiles. I wonder how so many people can list strategic as one of their primary characteristics. If everyone in your company is a strategist, then nothing would ever get done. True strategists need to hire skilled tacticians, and tacticians need to hire good operations people – those who execute day-to-day business and technical activities.

If your brand represents you as a strategist and a line manager sees your profile, it won't connect with him. He needs someone to actually do the work and you've sent a message that you work at a higher level than he does.

Think about your true qualities and the things you do best. Clearly understanding why and when you excel is as important as understanding why and when you fail.

Here is an example of a headline that perfectly fits a data management professional. This client's goal was to market herself to IT recruiters and hiring managers. She wanted her headline to be packed full of keywords that were important in her job search.

> Data and Information Management Specialist
> Data Analysis, Database Analysis, Report Design & Development, SQL Development

In another example, my client wanted to connect with other Business Analysts and share her expertise. She was on the International Institute of Business Analysis (IIBA) certification board and helped to create their newest certification. This was an important part of her brand.

> Certified Business Analysis Professional (CBAP) with 13+ years of agile development
> in multi-national team environments

My last example is for a BI professional. As a solutions strategist, he focuses on the current and future value from IT investments. As a disciplined Researcher with impeccable qualifications, he utilizes an objective, informed, and fact based strategy to drive architecture decisions.

> Senior BI Solution Strategist and Researcher
> Aligning business and technology for success, discovery, and innovation

Best Practice #3 – Document Your Professional Experience

If you have a well-crafted resume that does a great job of highlighting your accomplishments then creating the experience section in your LinkedIn profile will be a snap. When your resume describes your accomplishments in terms of the context in which they were achieved, a copy and paste from your resume to your profile is all you need, as long as you don't exceed the 1988 character limit for each job summary.

Remove those generic statements that are not directly linked to specific achievements. These are easy to spot because they're generic enough that they could belong to any individual with the same job title.

Including "context" information helps readers understand the circumstances in which you worked and the challenges you faced. Knowing that you implemented a new reporting environment using Business Objects is fine, but knowing that it was an on-schedule, in-house implementation after two failed consultant projects that wasted millions is an entirely different story! And the story gets even better if you collaborated with the SMEs to mutually contribute to a data dictionary that standardized data definitions across the organization!

Here are two examples of generic and boring.

- Built 'C' level relationships to achieve strategic business objectives through value propositions, sourcing options and facilitating cost effective delivery models.

- Drove business growth through a strategically aligned IT program including strategy, organizational structure, customer centric offerings, contracts with end users and suppliers, and account growth.

This bullet item may seem fine ...

- Conducted review of existing business systems and processes for acquired organization with very different and distinct infrastructures in each of its 17 international locations.

... until you consider the entire context, you can't see that it's a powerful description of a major achievement. Now that you can see the time constraints of this global initiative along with the

complexity of the integration, you can understand the true significance of this accomplishment. These combined statements tell an engaging story that was central to my client's career brand.

➢ Recruited by Chief Integration Officer to drive full absorption of newly acquired multi-million dollar global organization—North America, South America, Europe, and Asia—within accelerated time frame.
  • Conducted review of existing business systems and processes for acquired organization with very different and distinct infrastructures in each of its 17 international locations.
  • Achieved corporate goal within 6 months by completely absorbing organization after leading intensive business process alignment, system integrations, and massive data mitigations.

Not every story requires a lot of explanation—short and sweet can be extremely effective.

➢ Delivered exceptional growth in value across time and showed only modest increase in cost tracking during exponential growth while building Regional Data Center "from the ground up." 1700+ ArcGIS desktop end-users -> 70 member staff -> 80 physical servers -> 230 TB storage
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Best Practice #4– Write a Persuasive Summary (2000 character limit)

Your summary is like your cover letter with one significant exception. Unlike your cover letter, your LinkedIn summary gets read. In 2000 characters or less you have to attract the reader's attention, engage them in your story, and compel them to read further without boring them to tears. Know your audience and your goals so you can

➢ Connect what you've done in the past with what you want to do in the future
➢ Interweave your personality and characteristics into your message
➢ Tell just enough about your achievements to demonstrate your strengths. Please leave out the kitchen sink, it's overwhelming and too much information!

Remember, an unfocused summary will get unfocused results. A clear and concise message hits the target every time. As an example, let's bring back the Business Analyst who is a Certified Business Analysis Professional (CBAP). Her ultimate goal is to learn from others and share her expertise.

I'm fortunate to have found a career that captures my interest, drives my success, and matches my personality so well! My complementary mix of collaborative work style and independent thinking make me an ideal analyst. I take pride in my ability to bring fresh perspectives and challenge "group think" while fostering constructive teamwork. I am a Certified Business Analysis Professional (CBAP) with a master's degree in management and thirteen years of analysis and technical experience ranging from individual projects to multi-national teamwork.

I adapt to fit client needs, recognizing business analysis as a client-centric process. I'm skilled at overcoming challenges of varying expectations, perspectives, experience, knowledge, communication styles, and manners of working. I am uniquely talented at tailoring the requirements gathering process to meet my client's communication style, with the clear goal to produce consensus among stakeholders, deliver pragmatic and business-focused requirements, discover blind spots and opportunities to innovate, and provide clarity and completeness in requirements.

I share my knowledge, capabilities, and love of learning to contribute to the analytic community by volunteering my time and efforts to the International Institute of Business Analysis (IIBA). I'm a member of the Committee that maintains the integrity of the IIBA certification process for new and existing exams. I work as a key member of the committee to set the standards for the practice of business analysis.

Best Practice #5– Personalize Your Profile by Using Applications

Add depth and expression to your LinkedIn profile by using a combination of multimedia—images, text, audio and video to go beyond traditional, one-dimensional text to create a rich and expressive multi-media experience. Just as an artist or actor uses a portfolio of mixed media to present their work, an IT professional needs a mixture of multi-media to best highlight achievements.

Out of all your material you're almost certain to find some great visuals. Information technology is rich with visuals of all shapes, sizes and purposes. Charts, graphs, diagrams and models are all representative of IT deliverables. They have the ability to capture understanding with a minimum of confusion and misinterpretation; their primary purpose is to communicate clearly, succinctly and quickly. They are as necessary a communication tool as language. Among your images you'll find such things as system architectures, data models, business process models, database designs, and performance optimization techniques—whatever you visually illustrate when performing your job that demonstrates your ability to create unique, innovative and effective solutions.

Summary

A LinkedIn profile that describes your accomplishments in a bland and one-dimensional manner is a lost opportunity. There is too much competition for highly desirable IT jobs to rely on a standard copy and paste from your resume. Your profile should represent you in your entirety and give you the chance to shine. If you take the time and effort to create a multi-dimensional presentation of yourself as an IT professional and then market yourself. The benefits will follow.