

Transcript – GET to YES Podcast

E22: B2B Prospecting Using LinkedIn

Hi, Neil Osborne from The Sales Catalyst here. Can I ask you... Do you carry a business card? Always? In my early days, it was drummed into me that a business card was the tool you used to introduce yourself, offer someone your contact details, or better still be on their desk as a constant reminder of your visit.

I think lots of us still have a stack of business cards, somewhere on our desk. But now there's another tool that's far better than a business card – and it offers some amazing ways to get your name and offering out there.

Social Media is a very effective tool. In today's episode we going to chat about how you can use LinkedIn, as a business platform to not only get your name out there, but to also offer both your existing and potential clients, a lot of added value.

Let's cover some LinkedIn basics first. For those who aren't familiar with it, LinkedIn is a network specifically designed for career and business professionals to connect. I'll be covering it from the perspective of using LinkedIn to build connections for a customer base and/or potential business partners.

LinkedIn is the largest professional network in the world.

When people think of LinkedIn, they tend to only see one tiny piece of the puzzle – recruiters and job seekers. However, LinkedIn is also a goldmine for salespeople.

How? Most of the people on LinkedIn are professionals in their field. And I'm going to talk about how you can use LinkedIn as a business tool, to achieve a couple of specific things:

1. Build your industry profile around your expertise
2. Reach out and connect with high level operators in your field
3. Attract contacts – people reaching out requesting your connections – and ultimately start a business conversation

To get started, or to improve your existing LinkedIn presence there's a few basic things you need to do. When building your profile, there's a couple of critical things you need to focus on to get it fully optimised:

1. Spend some time to make sure that your profile is accurate and up to date. LinkedIn acts as a summary of your work experience, your education and your business interests. Another small but important tip is to upload a professional photo to your LinkedIn profile. The image should be different to the ones you use on other social media platforms. On Facebook, your photo may be more casual or reflect your non-work life. However, on LinkedIn you want your photo to reflect the person they'll see and meet at work. Also, endeavour to

have your face take up around 60% of the image – people buy into great images and ‘visual’ people will make a quick decision once they’ve land on your profile.

2. Your title/profile headline or what’s known as your ‘Headline Descriptor’ is very important. Which of these headlines do you think will attract potential clients?

- National Sales Manager Hair & Beauty
 - Helping clients expand their sales and profits in the Australian Beauty industry
- In most ‘headline descriptors,’ people use their job title. But potential clients won’t be attracted to your title – what will impress and attract them, is what you can do for them. Your current job title is listed below in your profile, so don’t waste one of the most important parts of your profile to talk about YOU... but instead, endeavour to be clear about what you can do for your connections. You’ve only got up to 120 characters, so think it through and remember it’s not a sales page. Don’t sell, but rather talk to your ideal clients’ needs, so they’re clear on what you can offer them.

Be mindful that potential clients will search LinkedIn and they’ll enter the solution they’re looking for, rather than a job title. Also remember that LinkedIn is a tool to build connections with your ideal client, so spend time getting clear on who it is you’re wanting to engage with – this is a vital step in your LinkedIn journey.

Other key areas worthy of some further research

- Think about a couple of people or clients that you’ve done work for and ask them for a testimonial (AKA ‘recommendation’), or better still... offer them one in return.
- Read up on how you can change the image behind your head shot – remembering that people make quick decisions based on images. Some research suggests that people decide in 7 seconds or less, whether to stay or click away.
- Think about how you want your profile to be seen, by researching some others and seeing how they do it. Two good profiles to visit are:
 - Di Mace
 - Kristy MortonSearch them on LinkedIn and see if there’s anything similar that you can do on your profile – your goal is to build your profile strength to the “ALL STAR” level.

The next step is building your connections and industry network.

There are two phases:

1. If you’re relatively new to LinkedIn, you’ll notice that your profile displays the number of connections you have. Your initial goal is to move beyond 500 connections, when your profile will show 500+
2. If you’re already at that stage (i.e. 500+), your goal remains the same – build you connections within your industry.

So, how do you do that? Well... before you jump in, beware that LinkedIn has some connection protocols. If you throw caution to the wind and start sending out heaps of basic non-personalised invitations to people that you don’t know, you may get your LinkedIn account suspended.

The best way to extend an invitation to connect, is to personalise your invitation. The way you do that, is on the 'My Network' tab, LinkedIn gives you some "More suggestions for you." If you click on the 'connect' button, a generic invitation will be sent out – this is not ideal.

Instead, select who you wish to connect with, click on their image (which will take you to their profile), then select 'connect'. Now the system offers you the option to 'Add a note'. Select that option and you have 300 characters to personalise your connection request.

Firstly, reach out to all your work colleagues and broader connections. The next rounds of requests should go to all your clients and current pipeline, and as you meet people through work, send them an invite to connect.

Lastly, there are those who are outside your immediate circle and those you'd like to meet. I set these up in a word document and simply cut and past the messages into the 'add a note' section of the connection request.

Here's three messages that I've found work for me:

Hi Jenny

Notice in your profile details, that you work in the Beauty and Aesthetic Industry. I have a genuine interest in this area of business and respect your industry experience. Although we've never met, I hope you don't mind me reaching out with a connection request.

Kind regards

Neil

Hi Jenny,

Came across your profile and noticed that we share the love of the salon-based industry. For networking purposes, I'd like to invite you to join my professional network.

Warmest regards

Neil

Hi Jenny,

Your profile just popped up and we seem to have much common ground. I'd be honoured to add you to my professional network.

Also, please let me know if I can be of assistance to you.

Warmest regards

Neil Osborne

Now that you've starting to build your connections and people are accepting your invitations, it's important to remember that it's NOT a sales platform. It's a networking platform. So, behave as if you were at a networking event.

Just because someone has accepted your connection (or for that matter said 'Hi' at a networking function) it doesn't mean you switch to sales mode – absolutely not. So, when somebody connects with you, you don't respond with a sales offering. Instead, you consider things that can build the relationship. Research suggests it's best to respond within 24hours – maybe with a thank you and/or a request of how you may be able to help them. You'll get some responses at this point, but it won't be huge, so be patient.

LinkedIn is a long-game strategy.

Now that you're building your network, you can start exploring ways to be more visible on LinkedIn. The first two ways are quick and easy.

1. Look at what people are posting and start to 'like' articles and updates that you find interesting or of value. Offering a 'like' adds that post to your feed.
2. The next is to start 'commenting' on select posts – again you're looking for posts that are relative to your business interests. These comments can sometimes expand into a conversation, if the originator replies and/or further people comment.
3. The third way is to start to post your own updates. The big message is 'think before you post.'

As with all Social Media, if you start selling it will not go down well. People are NOT there to be sold to. Instead, think about the type of information that your connections may want to hear about. (BTW that's NOT product info or what you sell.) Post articles on industry research, trends, new and innovative treatment protocols, new technology, or business articles that may offer your connections some new insights. In the education space, try posting training programs, business seminars, expos etc.

Your goal is to position yourself as the go-to person in your space. You want to be noticed as the knowledge base, not the know it all.

Positioning yourself as an information provider, will bring you the greatest status. And once your connections see what you can offer them, then perhaps they will reach out to you when they have the need.

FINAL THOUGHTS

LinkedIn is not a set-and-forget platform – but rather a work in progress – so mark out regular time in your week to participate, comment, post and interact. You will be rewarded.

In summary, the key points from today's podcast are:

1. Build your LinkedIn profile around what you do

Work on your profile and communicate as if you're talking to your client, especially in the 'headline descriptor'. Use a business image of yourself and study a few people's profiles that are working well – see what you can glean from those two examples I gave you.

2. Reach out and connect with high level operators in your field

Remember to personalise your invitations – that's where success lies. Monitor your acceptance rate and adjust your invitation formats accordingly. Remember to respond, with curiosity... not a sales pitch.

3. Attract contacts – people reaching out requesting your connections and ultimately a business conversation.

The way you 'attract' is connected to how you decide to conduct yourself – by posting valuable industry-based information. Leave the quirky quotes and photos for other Social Media platforms (nothing personal, this is a business platform.)

My final thought is that LinkedIn is just like every other platform or software you use. Most people only use 10-20% of the features it carries. If you spend time researching some of the finer points, you'll be highly rewarded.

If you or your company really want to embrace LinkedIn as a strategy, you need to find a company that's an authority in the space. I recommend Anthony McWhirter. Andrew and his team are the best in this space. Head over to: www.TheInfluencerProject.com and see what you can learn.

Until next time, enjoy your day.

