LEADERSHIP GUIDE

The Essential Guide to **Social (Distance) Selling on LinkedIn**

Outreach

Introduction

LinkedIn is the largest social networking platform for business professionals, and is a great way to continue connecting with folks before a meeting or after an in-person event. But when in-person networking isn't an option—during a global pandemic, for example—leveraging LinkedIn for sales, or **"social selling,"** is the next best thing.

With its 675 million active monthly users, LinkedIn is a "B2B gold mine," according to content marketing agency Foundation. 61 million of those users are senior level influencers, and 40 million are also in decision-making positions. With everyone working from home, **"44% of U.S. professionals report spending more time on social media because of the coronavirus"** *(LinkedIn Survey Data, U.S. professionals, March 11-17, 2020)*.

> "44% of U.S. professionals report ***spending more time on social media*** because of the coronavirus"

With everyone social distancing inside their homes, it's more important than ever for sales professionals to learn how to—or brush up on—using the platform to connect with fellow B2B professionals and research potential prospects and accounts.

In this *Essential Guide to Social Selling On LinkedIn*, we will help you begin to build your brand, establish your voice, and drive business and opportunity for yourself and your team. We will cover:

- COVID-19 Impact on LinkedIn Trends
- The need for both buyers and sellers to have a LinkedIn presence
- Optimizing your profile and posting strategy
- Integrating LinkedIn into your Outreach workflows

Establishing and maintaining an active presence on LinkedIn is one of the quickest ways to ***extend the value of your social strategies and establish a relationship with buyers when you don't have the option to meet them.***

COVID-19 Impact on LinkedIn Trends

- #COVID19 is the #1 trending hashtag (since April 2, 2020)
- Conversations around #coronavirus have grown 7x (since March 17, 2020)
- Newly trending hashtags also include #prevention, #safety, and #wellbeing
- Brands' organic activity has increased:
  - 8% increase in weekly posting in Pages
  - 78% increase in coronavirus-related videos
  - 13% increase in Thought Leadership by sharing news or articles
- 2196% increase in member engagement on coronavirus related articles (from Feb 1-March 23, 2020)

Source: LinkedIn

Establishing Your Presence Is a Two-Way Street

Now more than ever, people are active online, and this includes your potential prospects and accounts.

With the digital transformation of sales, buyers are actively researching products, solutions, and companies to learn more, and more independent in their purchasing decisions. For B2B buyers especially, LinkedIn has emerged as one of the first places buyers visit before they go to your website, let alone engage with a sales offer on your website. To maximize leads, it's critical that you are active on LinkedIn.

"Having a digital persona is becoming ***as important as your real one,*** and this is true for all leaders, especially executives."

Scott Barker

Head of Partnerships, Sales Hacker

Companies Need a LinkedIn Presence—and Strategy—Too

As much as salespeople need to be active on LinkedIn, companies do too. To be a leader in B2B sales, companies need to meet prospective customers and partners on the channels where they are most active, and from March 2019 to March 2020, there **has been a 55% year-over-year increase in conversations among connections on LinkedIn.** According to LinkedIn's own data, there has been a tremendous increase in people's activity in reacting, commenting, and resharing as people look to reconnect in this new work-from-home environment.

By including LinkedIn in branding and sales strategy, companies can better engage with the **millennial buyer,** as well as attract top talent to their teams.

Unlike previous generations, millennial buyers are invested in social buying, meaning that they are more likely to purchase from companies that share their values and demonstrate support for issues they care about. In fact, according to a Forrester Consumer Technographic study, nearly 7 out of 10 millennials actively consider a company's values when making a purchase.

LinkedIn offers companies a clear opportunity to engage with prospective customers by demonstrating how your core values extend throughout your company culture and mission.

Start With You

The first step to successful social selling is creating and maintaining an authentic brand that resonates with potential customers. Creating an authentic personal brand on LinkedIn doesn't just happen—it has to be genuine and maintained over time.

Start simple by starting with you. A picture is worth a thousand words, and this is true for LinkedIn too. Profiles with photos get 21x more views and 36x more messages, according to Foundation. If you want to connect with new people as a seller on LinkedIn, a professional profile picture and cover photo are essential.

Start by uploading a recent, high-quality headshot. If you don't have a professional portrait on hand, you can take one with your phone. Find bright and diffuse lighting, and use the selfie camera, a tripod, or ask someone you live with to take the photo. Once you've updated your profile picture, add a relevant cover photo – preferably a graphic specifically designed by your company for sales reps to use on LinkedIn.

Then fill out your profile as much as possible, focusing on keeping it recent and thorough. Add publications, certifications, experience, and more. The more comprehensive your profile is, the more likely your potential new connections (and any current connections that you haven't talked to since your ten-year reunion) are to relate to you and trust you.

A picture is worth a thousand words, and this is true for LinkedIn too.

This Expert's Recommendation? Get Recommendations.

Sam McKenna, sales leader and founder of #samsales, says that having recommendations can make all the difference for having a winning LinkedIn profile, especially if you're in sales. Sam advises to make a starting list of 12 people (existing clients, former supervisors and peers, clients who have purchased from you multiple times, etc.) and ask the first three for recommendations. Then, take each of the remaining three and put them on your calendar six weeks apart; these will serve as reminders to keep building your recommendations and will reflect well on you for receiving many recommendations over time versus just a few in bulk in the same week. The key is that you continue to build a base of recommendations over the years that reflect your individual brand consistently.

Follow Sam on LinkedIn for more tips and #samsales hacks.

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Think of your headline as your ***digital handshake*** — it matters and it makes a big impression.

Make Your Headline Stand Out

Think of your headline as your digital handshake — it matters and it makes a big impression. While most people use their headline to broadcast their current job position, there's room to get a bit more creative than that. A smart, snappy headline might pique someone's interest enough for them to click to your profile to learn more about you and what you're selling.

Take, for example, Rand Fishkin, Founder and former CEO of Moz, whose headline says "Wizard of Moz." If you don't have the name recognition the founder of Moz commands, think of a creative way to explain how your role helps others. At Outreach, we encourage our sales reps to use headlines like "We Help Companies Increase Revenue With Sales Engagement at Outreach.io."

Your first priority is to make sure your headline is clear and accurate, but after that, there's room to make it creative. Keep it true to your mission, personality, and perspective and you will attract the kind of connections and networking opportunities that you want.

Pursue Intentional Connections

Few things are worse than the dreaded "Invite All" LinkedIn connection. While you can use the platform to cast a broad net, you'll be much better off using it to connect intentionally.

As you build your LinkedIn network, think about connecting with people who can help you build your personal brand, or more importantly, connecting with people who you can help. This might include admired influencers, friends, former colleagues, and previous employers.

If you're reaching out to someone you don't know, be sure to include a thoughtful note that explains your intentions and your familiarity with their work or ideas. Be concise and direct, and if you're connecting with a new prospect, focus on what you can do for them, not the other way around.

If someone you don't know follows you first, before you follow back, make sure that their profile or business interests are relevant to your goals. You will want your LinkedIn newsfeed to be populated by businesses and people you can learn from, sell to, or help in your career growth. Conversely, you should help others fill their feeds with businesses and people that offer these same benefits.

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Focus on ***what you can do for them,*** not the other way around

Post Regularly

Regular and consistent posting is critical to maintaining your brand. Regular posting boosts your visibility and likelihood to show up in your followers' news feeds, and demonstrates that you can contribute to the conversation.

Here are some simple tips for posting regularly without using a lot of time or resources:

1. **Keep it simple:** You might be worried that each post has to be profound, but if you hold yourself to that standard, you'll never want to post. Instead, try sharing something that you found helpful and can pass along to someone else, such as advice or something you learned recently. It doesn't have to be new, but just new for you so people in your network will be able to get to know you and your interests better.

2. **Be authentic:** Talk about real challenges, solutions, or unsolved barriers that you've experienced. For example, sharing your personal journey with adjusting to working from home and social distancing will resonate with a lot of people.

3. **Diversify your posts:** Unless you're selling to a very niche market, diversifying the content of your posts and articles allows you to reach a wider audience and create more connections, which opens you up to more opportunities. Consider the following post categories to deliver a variety of content:

- **Megaphone:** Get your message to a large audience
- **Demand:** Create demand for your product via solution-forward content
- **Knowledge Share:** Share your learnings and tricks of the trade with your network to establish a community presence

According to a recent LinkedIn Survey, 30% of U.S. professionals are planning to use this new work-from-home time to learn new skills

- **Crowsdsource Feedback:** Ask your network to leave a comment or suggestion to improve your product or buyer experience

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Integrating Social Selling Into Your Outreach Workflows

Once your profile and posting schedule is up and running, sales reps will want to make sure that they are using LinkedIn in their Outreach workflows. By integrating into Outreach, sales reps will always have LinkedIn data at their fingertips when prospecting with the "Social Overview" Intelligence Tiles layout.

Here are 5 examples of LinkedIn tasks that sales teams can execute in Outreach:

1. Interact with Post

This is the MVP of LinkedIn tasks. Commenting on a prospect's post shows you are listening to their challenges or share the same interests either professionally or personally. Interacting with a post should go behind a transactional sale and to the heart of the post. For example, if your prospect posted about missing the marathon they trained for because it's been canceled, this is a perfect opportunity for you to note a similar experience or interest in running.

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David Plutschak, Sales Content Specialist at Outreach, says: "'Consume and interact with content' was my mantra when I was a SDR, and this is what I tell new SDRs about social selling. Before sending an Inmail or connect request, like or comment on content that the prospect has written or engaged with. This might not always be available, but take advantage of it when it is."

2. View Profile

Don't be intimidated by the fact that your prospects can see that you've viewed their profile. Instead, make that feature work for you! Researching prospects online is a great way to better understand your prospects and what they care about. Prospective customers, partners, mentors, and more share a lot of info about their interests, the professional groups they're a part of, or glimpses into their daily work lives and the pain points they encounter. The more you know, the more you can tailor your approach when reaching out and making a connection.

Additionally, logging profile views with your prospect helps establish an element of familiarity and name recognition. We recommend viewing a prospect's profile once or twice before sending the first cold email or connection request. By "visiting" before asking to connect, you give the prospect the opportunity to connect your name with your (profile) face, which should increase the likelihood of them accepting and responding.

With Outreach's social selling layout, it's easy to view a prospect's profile without any extra clicks. Simply loading the LinkedIn Sales Navigator tiles onto a prospect's profile will automatically log a profile view.

3. Send Direct Message

Direct messages, like cold emails, can seem like spam if not written mindfully. To help with messaging and timing, use Outreach's Icebreakers tab in the Leads tile to view mutual connections and recent activity, such as shared posts and recently published articles.

You can use these updates to see how active your prospect is on LinkedIn and gauge when it's a good time to reach out. We recommend leaving a voicemail or having at least one brief phone conversation before direct messaging a prospect on LinkedIn.

The more you know, the more you can ***tailor your approach*** when reaching out and making a connection.

Be Social, Not Spammy

Remember to use LinkedIn to sell socially by establishing and building authentic relationships, not to bombard strangers with meeting requests. In fact, just because LinkedIn members with Premium accounts can send direct messages to people they are not directly connected to, it doesn't mean that you should. But all too often, sellers use this feature as a replacement for a cold email, and buyers are stuck with connections that turn into an unwanted prospecting motion. Variations of this tactic include:

- **"Do you have 15-minutes to chat soon?"**
- **"I noticed your extensive experience in X could make a fit with Y solution."**
- **"I sent you an email last week but didn't hear back."**

If you're using LinkedIn Inmails to try to book meetings right away, you're doing it wrong. Every time you write a message, ask yourself: "Would I respond to this message?" If not, then reconsider what you're saying.

At Outreach, we typically utilize LinkedIn tasks in the middle of an ***outbound sales Sequence.***

Here are some suggestions for how to formulate a good direct message:

- **Be personal:** Opening with an acknowledgment of your prospect's recent LinkedIn activity ("I read your recent article..."), the current public health crisis ("Hope you're staying healthy!"), or a mutual interest is more authentic than jumping right in to ask for 15 minutes of their time. Sharing an Alma Mater is an easy in, but make sure your reference is specific, like mentioning you had the same major or extracurricular interests, or you risk blending in with all of the other alumni reaching out.
- **Be brief:** Assume that your prospect is reading this message on their phone, so make sure they can read your message in less than two vertical swipes.
- **Be consistent:** Follow up on these messages the same way you would for a regular email that doesn't get a response. Set a follow up task in Outreach three to four days after your initial message.

4. Send Connect

Connect requests can be tricky, especially with people you don't know. Your prospects are likely using some of the criteria mentioned above to evaluate whether they should accept your invite, so be sure to bring something to the table other than a pitch.

Here's what Gabe Villamizar, Global Sales Evangelist at Lucidchart, has to say:

> ***"Everything boils down to this five letter word: TRUST. First impressions on LinkedIn have a remarkable impact that most of us underestimate or simply don't understand. What this means is that within a matter of 1-3 seconds, buyers will unconsciously and immediately place a salesperson in one of two buckets: The 'trust' or 'don't trust' bucket."***

To earn a spot in the "trust" bucket, sales reps should take the following 4 steps:

1. Create a buyer-centric LinkedIn profile. Complete your profile 100% and make sure it communicates credibility, integrity, and authority. (see page 6)
2. Strategically **identify 7-10** potential buyers, influencers, and champions at each of their target accounts.
3. Follow each prospect on LinkedIn and learn as much as you can about each of those individuals (e.g. their business, industry, and/or personal/professional life) and interact with the content that they post by liking and commenting.
4. Craft a **hyper-relevant** and **personalized** LinkedIn connection request, and most important of all, don't pitch your product or service in this message! Keep it short (think read-on-a-smartphone short) and be yourself.

5. TeamLink

TeamLink is an additional LinkedIn Sales Navigator feature that allows you to tap into the networks of your organization, regardless of whether you're connected to them or not. Strategic frontline sales representatives use TeamLink to try and get an introduction to their prospective buyers through a mutual connection.

Additional Ways to Leverage LinkedIn

After you've created your personal brand, have an established schedule for posts or articles, and have integrated LinkedIn across your Outreach workflows, there are still more ways that you can use LinkedIn to amplify your message and generate demand for your business.

LinkedIn Takeovers

LinkedIn Takeovers involve amplifying a central message (such as promoting a webinar or product announcement) by having as many people in your network, such as employees, post it on their own LinkedIn profiles while also liking and commenting on the original post or announcement.

The key is to generate interest and generating authenticity at scale by letting people make the message personal and their own. A good way to do this is by providing a template that people can quickly personalize. The LinkedIn algorithm favors timely and quick engagement on new posts as well as trending topics, so Takeovers are particularly useful for garnering traction for your company's most important news or announcements. At Outreach, we leverage LinkedIn Takeovers for product announcements, company news, and our Unleash conferences in order to multiply impressions on LinkedIn and increase organic web traffic.

#LinkedInLove Slack channel

Our marketing team has always been remote at Outreach—which makes generating buzz for our favorite LinkedIn posts a little more challenging—so we created a #LinkedInLove Slack channel where employees can share their posts, as well as content from partners, customers, and people in the community. Similar to a LinkedIn Takeover, the Slack channel boosts individual posts in the Linkedin algorithm thanks to the immediate engagement from peers, generating more impressions and engagement through your network. This digital watercooler is a great channel for amplifying company announcements, customer testimonials, and posts that show (rather than tell) your company values and the people who work there.

Check who's viewed your profile

You already know to view your prospects' profiles to create name recognition, and on the flip side, you can also use who is viewing your profile to find new leads. It's wise to check on your profile views regularly and reach out to anyone who seems like a qualified prospect, or to see which of your prospects have, in fact, been receiving your messages.

Leverage your Network

Referrals are everything when it comes to establishing trust in a world where we can't meet new people face-to-face. The Get Introduced tab within the LinkedIn Leads tile can streamline your referral process by enabling you to ask a mutual connection for an introduction to your prospect all within Outreach.

You can also mention any mutual connections in your direct messages to your prospect. Once prospects see "mutual connection," they're more likely to respond and, at the very least, are more likely to read your note and investigate how you're connected.

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Referrals are everything when it comes to ***establishing trust.***

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Get Social Selling with LinkedIn + Outreach

With all of us working from home, LinkedIn is a great way to stay connected and learn more about your potential customers and their pain points. To truly elevate LinkedIn and social selling into your workflows, sales teams use Outreach to integrate all of their sales teams' activities—email, calls, LinkedIn, direct mail, video, chat, and more—into one single platform so reps can work more efficiently and sell easier.

Whether you're in office or remote, learn more about how Outreach + LinkedIn can power your outbound sales motions at Outreach.io.

**Your LinkedIn account subscription level determines how many direct messages you can send to 2nd-degree and 3rd-degree members. 2nd-degree connections means you have mutual connections, but are not yet directly connected to this person and 3rd-degree connections are people you have no mutual connections with and are not yet directly connected to.