

21 Ways To Master LinkedIn

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Hey there . . .

Thanks for stopping by to check out these tips to help you leverage LinkedIn.

As with everything I do on Sales Playbook, there are no strings attached, no catch, no hidden agenda.

If you like the tips, feel free to pass them along to your network and if you don't, then this E-Book deserves a trip to the round file.

Thanks again and happy selling!

With respect & appreciation,

Paul Castain

Aspiring Rock Star

In the spring of 2008 I addressed the Consolidated Graphics national sales force and told them they needed to get LinkedIn! I told them it was the best thing since sliced bread and how their personal brand depended on a venue like LI. A month later, I scratched my head, clueless, wondering what all the fuss was about. 2 months later, I thought it sucked, wrote it off and moved on!

After some serious soul searching in November 2008, I had to face the hard, cold reality that I basically showed up to LinkedIn, sat on the sidelines and expected the world to beat a path to my computer. I don't think I'm the only one, who went about it all wrong and offer the following 21 tips for you to leverage this powerful venue to enhance your personal brand.

1) Change your expectation of Social Networking. There is no quick fix, instant gratification or get rich quick. This is a long term strategy to say the least. Kind of sucks, huh? I tend to look at it like a courtship vs a "Hi, how are ya . . . will you marry me"

2) Put some thought into your profile and make sure it does justice to the wonderful brand we call "YOU"!

Slow down and give thought to your profile. What do you want it say about you? What image do you want to present. Speaking of image, get a freakin picture. It's not overly "social" to social network with the invisible man/woman. And please make it a real pic (of you) and not your dog (you get a serious WTF on that one) a logo of your company (not only does it seem odd that I'm connecting with the only living, talking logo, I think it violates some linkedin law or something) Also, pics of you swimming in the ocean, partying or partying in the ocean might need to be rethought.

Want to improve your "Googleability"? Then by all means make your profile public by clicking here <http://www.linkedin.com/myprofile?editwp>= By the way, you Google potential clients, don't you? Think they Google you? This will give you at least one good result that comes back. Consider using the privacy settings if you don't want people to know that you viewed their profile. This way you can check out a potential client without them thinking you're a stalker.

Thought: Do you want your connections visible to everyone in your network? Do you have some clients that may get a tad pissed if they find out you are doing work for their competitors? Then click here and change that bad boy

<https://www.linkedin.com/secure/settings?browse=&goback=%2Eaas>

3) Use a cool tagline to help set you apart from the masses. Examples: Craig Wilson is the Chief Appreciation Officer of his Sendout Cards business. Mi Amigo Hank Trisler isn't the President of The Trisler Companies . . . He's the Supreme Commander! My favorite is John Hudson who is The Dark Lord of Staffing. Our biggest challenge these days folks is being memorable. These people get it!

4) Join Groups: The biggest mistake many people make is joining groups in their industry exclusively. I think that's great, but you better branch out. I mean how many widgets do you think other widget dudes are gonna buy from ya Gomer?

Here are 5 types of groups you need to belong to

Industry Groups (don't over indulge) . Always good to know what's going on, perhaps you want to bounce things off of peers etc. Just know that at times, this can be like that familiar face you cling to at a networking event. It's safe and can become a convenient excuse for you not to branch out. Don't spend all your time here!

Vertical Groups you want to own. A Vertical Group is an industry that you are targeting. For example: If I am targeting IT, I would want to join a group from that industry. Tip: Go where the money is! There are certain industries that are thriving right now such as education, healthcare, consumer food products etc. By joining these groups you learn lingo, challenges, opportunities etc. You also begin to position yourself as an authority to your target audience.

Local Groups & Groups in areas you want to build up. For example, I live in NY so it would probably make sense that I belong to a few local groups. At the same time, I travel quite a bit to Houston, hence my membership in the InHouston group. Easy enough!

Professional Groups that help you hone your craft. As an aspiring sales rock star I belong to numerous sales groups, my recruiter friends belong to recruiting and HR related groups. Make sure you surround yourself with other professionals in your chosen line of work!

A Note About Sales Groups: Important on many levels. First, it will help you keep your finger on the pulse right now since sales people are pretty much out there on the front line. Second, you will pick up some good best practices and lastly, sales people can be a point of entry often overlooked in getting in the door.

Parallel Groups: These are groups that share the same target audience as you but are in different industries. Example: When I owned my sales training business, I networked with recruiters who placed high level senior sales leaders. I benefited because I had a newly anointed sales maverick who was open to my Jedi ways. My recruiter friends benefited because I knew sales leaders who needed talented sales Jedi. You can do the same in building your network through the various parallel groups!

Did you know?: You can join up to 50 groups. When you share a group with someone you can usually send them a direct email without paying for inmails.

Did you know that (according to a study published by Epsilon) emails sent through social networks have a 24% higher open rate than traditional email? **Can you leverage that as a sales rep? Damn right you can!**

5) Get off the sidelines! This is where I screwed up big time. I joined groups but didn't participate. Get the feel of your group. Contribute! Add value. By the way, doesn't this help make you more visible and help with the whole branding thing? If you do it right it does! Start your own discussions in those groups. This is how you stand out! What are some thought provoking, appropriate discussions you could start in your group(s)?

6) Want to look like a Grade A, Ahole? Then spam the discussions with ridiculous infomercials on your company or start discussions that are blatant self promotions. That's how you build a brand as a jackass real quick.

Do you belong to a group that is littered with spam and self promotion? Tell the group manager and if that doesn't work, then put your efforts in elsewhere. They aren't worth your time!

7) Facilitate your discussions for God's sake! This is by far one of my biggest pet peeves on LI. If you start a discussion and then disappear, you are an idiot! You not only display bad manners in doing the disappearing act, you allow your discussion to go inactive, sooner. Why wouldn't you want your discussion up at the top of the first page of discussions? Isn't that a great visibility position?

Tip: Don't be so quick to start new discussions that you don't give your existing discussion an opportunity to bloom.

8) Show appreciation for those who contribute to your discussions 2 ways. First, you should always thank people in the discussion with a simple "Thank you for your input (insert name here)" By the way, do we all enjoy being acknowledged in front of our peers? Do you think acknowledging contributions encourages additional contributions as well as folks following you to other discussions and groups? Worked for me. The other way I show appreciation is by sending a TY in a quick email. It's a great door opener and helps me differentiate from the masses!

9) Avoid ninjas like your online life depended on it. It amazes me how many otherwise intelligent adults will attack someone online in front of thousands. Trust me, when I tell you it will happen to you and if you are like me you will want to stick your virtual foot up their virtual assets. In a word, DON'T! You won't change ignorant people and you will damage your brand in the process. Doesn't mean you have to like it folks!

Tip: Always be mindful of your "Main Thing" that is, what you want to be known for. Now if online ninja is your main thing, then by all means rock on bro chocho!

10) Use a hyperlink in your signature when you contribute to a discussion. If all you do

is put the old "www" it would read as a link. Here's how ya do it the right way: Put a handy dandy <http://> in front of your domain and viola. Check out how I do it.

Respectfully,
Paul Castain
<http://yoursalesplaybook.com>

Caution: Be careful with this one. It borders self promotion. I've seen some people really get carried away and stick every freakin bit of contact info they have in that signature. Go light on this one folks.

11) Don't use the automated invites, they are lame and you will sound like every other clueless person. Take a moment to make your invite personal. Think about the power of first impressions and more importantly, the power of being memorable. Reference something you have observed about them in the groups, a point they made, their company, some common ground or simply:

Dear Jake:

I would be honored if you would join my network.

12) Confucius Say "Just because clueless dude/dudette send you lame invite doesn't mean you can't be social" We'll talk more about that one later! Meanwhile, reflect and discuss that one amongst yourselves. I'll wait for you right here!

13) Start your own group: One bit of advice I always give in conventional networking is to get on a board in a leadership position. The same can be said for LI. I waited until I had enough involvement in the groups and started The Sales Playbook group. Its grown by more than 16,000 members and it has dramatically enhanced my brand. I'm also happy to say that I have done so by enhancing other people's brands. There's some serious food for thought in that last statement if you care to embrace it.

Come join our LinkedIn Sales Playbook community by clicking here:
http://www.linkedin.com/groups?about=&gid=1832739&trk=anet_ug_grppro

14) Add value to your network: One of the best ways you can do this is to be a matchmaker. Introduce them to people they want and need to meet. With so many displaced workers in these challenging times keep your eyes and ears open for

opportunities. Not a bad idea to have a recruiter or three in your network while we are at it. Neil Wood replied to me privately when I asked for advice on some good branding books. He told me he had an extra copy of a really good book and sent it to me. I try to give of my time, unconditionally, whenever I can. When you do these types of things ladies and gentlemen, you don't create followers, you create evangelists spreading the good news of your brand!

Tip: Do you think its more powerful when you promote yourself or when you have people who dig you so much they do it for you. Ponder that sista!

15) Use LI as part of your meticulous pre call planning. I think its an incredible way for me to get inside my prospect's head by getting a feel for how they think in the groups, perhaps they link to a blog etc. You can follow companies and the handy dandy RSS feed is a way cool way for you to organize your data via a reader! This is a great way for you to get the inside track!

16) Let people get inside your head by using the applications such as amazon bookshelf, slideshare and links to your blog.

Tip: People buy from people they trust. One of the first steps towards trust is familiarity. Make sure you give your network every opportunity to experience "Brand YOU"

17) Cross pollinate your efforts by putting a link to your LI profile in your email auto signature.

Tip: Whenever you connect with someone always do your best to immediately connect with them on the other venues where you participate! Example: When I connect with someone on LI I immediately check their profile for their Twitter info and bring that freakin party over there as well!

18) Status updates: This is a great way for you to stay on your network's radar screen. Donna Highfill puts inspirational quotes in her status updates. Others will put a link to a timely article, links to articles and blogs you have written. The key here is to stay on the radar screen by continuing to add value and avoidance of over saturation and taking it easy on the self promotion. You also need to use your head. Trust me when I tell you that your network doesn't find value in a status update that informs us that a bottle of Cuervo has your name on it or that you are having a meltdown. I can't make this stuff up! Make sure you comment on status updates from your network. Example: someone in your network just mentioned that they started working at ABC company this week. Leave a congratulatory comment etc.

Tip: Scan the home page daily. There are tons of opportunities for you there but you have to remember . . .

Everyone has a story and wants to be heard!

Your mission from this point on is to leverage that simple little phrase!

19) Be consistent: You won't build your brand worth a damn if you show up two days in a row, take two weeks off, come back for a day or two. This needs to be a daily investment. Remember, this is a long term investment. Don't ever forget that Grasshopper!

20) Recommendations: Use your head on this one. Please! One of the quickest ways for me to yell Jackass is when someone I barely know, hits me up for a recommendation. When I call them out on it, I'm usually given an explanation that they used the automated send to all feature which is just plain stupid if you ask me. Be selective who you ask and be selective who you give recommendation's to. Remember, its your credibility dude!

21) Ask and answer questions to further position you as a thought leader by clicking here:http://www.linkedin.com/answers?trk=hb_tab_ayn

Did You Know: That when you answer a question on LinkedIn Q & A it allows you to share up to 3 links? Might be a cool opportunity to gently guide someone by the hand to some cool content you have written. You're welcome!

Cool Tip: Want to get a better response and greater visibility when you ask a question? Choose the option to send the question out to up to 200 people in your network.

Hook a fellow Jedi up: by suggesting someone from your network as an expert to a question. This is a nice way for you to continue to add value to your network and encourage a really cool thing called reciprocation!

How To Transition Your LinkedIn Relationships To “Real Time”!

As many of you know, one of my social networking strategies is to transition at least 5 of my “virtual” relationships to “real” time each week. Needless to say, the relationship is worth more, once I move it off the computer screen.

Let’s start with a quick statement of what I don’t do.

“The LinkedIn Two Step”: This is when you’ve either agreed to connect with me or you commented on one of my posts and I take that as a buying signal. You immediately get an email from me in “Pimpmaster” mode giving you my best infomercial.

And just to get this one out in the open, I don’t like to have a virtual handshake with someone and immediately suggest a phone call. I’m sure its just me but that has way too much of a “Hi, Wanna screw?” vibe to it!

So What’s An Aspiring LinkedIn Rock Star To Do?

1) **Get Social From “Hello”** I never send someone one of those invitation templates. Seriously, could you get any F’n lazier. Take the 30 seconds and write a two sentence note. This positions you as different from the get go because apparently the rest of the world has gotten lazy too. When someone sends you an invite, take a minute to write an actual response (even when you get a template invite) Doing this inspires someone to not only remember you, but shoot you a note back. At that point you’re starting to get “social” and that puts you one step closer to real time!

2) **Get On Their Radar Screen:** Update your status update daily (no play by play por favor) More importantly than your status update is theirs. You might want to circle this next sentence: Everyone has a story and wants to be heard. Seems like we’ve all gotten used to the world not having the time to hear what we have to say. That aint how Uncle Paul rolls! I make it a point to comment on status updates where appropriate. Sometimes I’m congratulating someone, other times I will agree with a statement publicly, if they shared a resource that I found useful, I let them know with a “like” and a comment. You can also get on their radar screen by commenting on their discussions. How about inviting them into one of yours? If they contribute to one of your discussions, acknowledge them publicly and with an offline “thank you”. **Here’s a freakin cool idea:** When you see a discussion where someone in your network has the expertise to really shine, hook them up! I have this odd feeling that people really dig people who have their best interests in mind!

3) **Take Advantage Of “Social” Clues:** I make it a point to see if my contacts use the amazon.com feature where they list what they are reading. If I read the book or want to, that gives us something to talk about. If they use the tripit feature, I might wish them a

safe trip or get real jealous that they are off to Europe. I might even compare notes with them about cool places we've both been to!

Time Out! Are you spotting a trend yet? I basically get "Social" before I transition to "real time". Isn't that more of a natural progression?

OK, I could go on and on about how to get "Social" but I still haven't told you how to transition.

Once we've had some communication, I will do one of a few things:

- Shoot them a quick email, suggesting a brief "get to know you" call. I tell them I would like to find out more about them and their business. **Note:** When I get on the phone with them, I rarely talk about my business which is rather counterintuitive for a sales professional. I don't talk about my business because quite frankly, most people as so busy trying to network their business that they aren't ready to hear about mine. I could get ultra competitive and try to dominate our conversation, but it kind of goes back to my statement earlier "everyone has a story and wants to be heard" My mission on this phone call is to not only understand my "friend" its to think about how I can be a "matchmaker" for this person and leverage my network.
- Get Embarrassed. Sometimes I will send someone an email telling them that I'm embarrassed that I haven't reached out sooner. Note: Doesn't work so well if they just accepted your invite 10 mins earlier! 😊
- When someone asks you a question via email, suggest a quick call instead. Nice way to move it to real time girlfriend!
- I'll use tripit to see if anyone is visiting my area and offer to meet for coffee or a shots of Tequila (wanted to see if you were paying attention)
- I'll search my network for local contacts when traveling. The "I'm visiting your neck of the woods" thing is an easy way to transition.
- I host ["Virtual Mixers"](#) once to twice a month.

So how long should this all take? Well let me ask you this. In a relationship, how long does it take for love to happen? Is it the 7th date, 7th week, 7th year? Why the hell don't we have a definitive answer? Probably, because it happens, when it happens.

Think "courtship"!

Don't screw with the sanctity of social networking by thinking this is a short term strategy. Take the time to get "social" and actually have a courtship and then watch how freakin cool the marriage becomes.

Confessions Of A Social Networking Snob!

So there you are minding your own business and low and behold someone sends you a request to connect , be “friends” or for the Twitterati, you’ve been “followed”.

Do you accept, “friend” or go off the deep and “follow back”?

Before we continue, you need to know something about me and its not easy for me to say so here goes . . .

My name is Paul (Hi Paul) and I’m a recovering Social Networking Snob.

And like anyone else who kicked a bad habit, I’m back, complete with some annoying self righteousness to point out 3 big mistakes I see when it comes to the burning question . . .

To connect or not to connect?

Mistake #1: You are engaged in a line of worked that has nothing to do with my line of work, so . . . See Ya!

I think this is a huge mistake for many reasons:

- They might not be a part of my target audience, but they may know someone who is. They might also be able to get me in front of someone in their company who is my ideal prospect.
- They might be someone I can connect to someone else in my network to further enhance my virtual real estate.
- And what’s with the freakin selfish “What can you do for me” attitude? Would it bankrupt us to help someone unconditionally?

To All The Thought Leaders Out There (the rest of you earmuffs)

You’re screwing yourself!

Seriously . . . you’re screwing yourself. Think about it.

You want to be visible. You write articles, blogs, perhaps a book or two. Someone approaches you and then you give them a virtual middle finger all because . . .

They basically aren’t relevant to you or (everyone else take your earmuffs off) there is a judgment that the person is just haphazardly collecting connections.

For those of you who feel that accepting a “stranger” is a possible security risk, think privacy settings but with a caveat: This idea of selfishly guarding our network like the Holy Grail goes against the grain of **Social** Networking. Note: I have over 2100 LinkedIn connections and I’ve never had one person write me and tell me that some rogue member of my network defiled the freakin sanctity of their network.

Mistake #2: You approached me the wrong way so I won’t connect. This one has “Uncle Paul” written all over it because I hate, and I mean really hate those LinkedIn invite templates. You know . . .

Joe Numbnuts wants to connect with you or

Because you are a person I value I’d like to connect

Because I’m mindless I’m sending you this template to show I’m a tool

I thinks its lazy and will be the first to tell you that you are so much better than that. I mean the only way we could get lazier would be if LinkedIn had a template for a sound like a grunt or a high pitched “over here”.

So then we get mad and decide to fix the glitch by ignoring them.

Suggestion: Instead of taking this as a deliberate insult to your virtual ego, I would suggest that you look at it this way.

They just don’t understand the nuances of social networking yet and to that end, perhaps you could accept the invite and show them how a true professional rolls. Here’s how . . .

“Hi Mr Numbnuts (Awesome name by the way, bet you grew up tough) Thank you so much for the invite. Wishing you an awesome Wednesday or Wishing you continued success or rock on my social networking brother from a virtual mother!

The point is to be **sociable!**

Oh, and congratulate yourself because hardly anyone does this!

Here’s what happens next about 80% of the time. They then write you back with a sort of thank you and a few kind words and viola, you are connected and communicating thanks to your awesome lead!

Mistake #3: “I don’t see this going anywhere so I shall ‘un-friend’ that MOFO” In other words “What have you done for me lately” Wrong attitude! In fact, I’m curious as to what they were supposed to do for you? How quickly were you expecting this and What have you done for them?

Short of getting complaint emails that one of my connections approached the rest of my network and gave them all wedgies, I don't see the point in parting ways just because we haven't gotten anywhere.

Methinks building an army of evangelists takes time!

Let's concern ourselves with how we are going to provide value to them and stop being so selfish. And let's lose that scorecard while we're at!

Oh and let's remember that the irony of this whole limited mindset is that we're supposed to be engaging in

Social Networking

Today, you are cordially invited to learn from my mistakes and become more **Social** in your **Social** Networking!

I want to leave you with a bit of a challenge. One that I wish someone told me about when I left LinkedIn after only 60 days of half assed effort. Try these things that I mentioned for 90 days. Give it your all. Be consistent and do something daily to enhance your online brand. Give value to people unconditionally and don't keep a scorecard. Learn everything you can and if at the end of 90 days of you getting off the sidelines you feel it was a waste of time, then move on.

I, for one am quite pleased with my results. The Castain brand is alive and ticking and as a bonus, I've made some wonderful friends along the way. Also been talking to a few publishers so its nice to be moving toward that important milestone in my life!

I want you to think about something else that many people don't realize. Your linkedin experience is about community. All human beings want to belong to or be a part of something. Can you leverage that?

There's your million dollar question to chew on!

Some Cool Next Steps If You Like This E-Book

Go to my website <http://yoursalesplaybook.com> and click on the “Free Stuff From Uncle Paul” tab. I have lots of free downloads for you. You’re welcome! 😊

Sign up for my [free sales tips](#). I never give out your information and you won’t get any sales pitches from me because this is my way of giving back!

Come check out the [Sales Playbook Podcast](#) on I-Tunes!

Join our [Linkedin Group Sales Playbook](#). We have over 16,000 members and 500, spam free discussions. We don’t allow any of the shameless self promotion you see in the other groups . . . just pure discussion the way these groups were meant to be.

Finally, please pass this along to your network and pay it forward!

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