

GETTING STARTED

WITH

LINKEDIN GROUPS

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This guide will help you start using LinkedIn Groups to find and engage prospects for your business. It follows a strategy with three major components:

Shaping the Conversation: You can't control the conversation on the web, but you can, and should, shape it so prospects are talking about the things you're best equipped to help them with,

Workflow Relevance: People place more value on conversations that help them get their work done than on big picture or general discussions, and

Inbound Marketing: Your marketing strategy should be based on offering value (answers to questions, white papers, etc) as a way to bring prospects into your marketing orbit, where you educate them about how you can help them and consistently offer them opportunities to take the next step in the sales process.

Here's a step by step approach to using LinkedIn as an integral part of that strategy. As you think about these ideas, browse LinkedIn to see how other groups address them.

DEFINE GOALS CONSISTENT WITH CUSTOMER DEMAND AND YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY

The prospect is a person who is interested in the realm in which your organization has a competitive advantage. They're interested in learning more, gaining visibility and meeting valuable business contacts.

Your organization's goal is to

Increase interest in your company and its products and create a better understanding by the market of how your company's expertise can help,

Get Referrals: Even if your products are not for this person, you want them to think about you when others are looking for things that you provide,

Help interested group members connect with the right people in the company, and

Create an interesting and vibrant group which will continue to attract prospects. So even if someone is not a prospect for products, they can be valuable if they contribute to the group.

WHAT DOES QUALITY LOOK LIKE?

LinkedIn Groups have various components. Think about what each should be like

Discussions:

The topics should be the areas in which you have expertise, a competitive advantage and an articulate value proposition because this will increase curiosity about your company.

Set a goal for the number of substantive comment posts each week.

How much promotion should you allow in your group?

Have strict limits on self promotion. This is a discussion group.

The jobs section

This can attract a lot of people

What kind of jobs would appeal to your target market?

Offer general job search tips for your target market.

News

Set a weekly goal

Sources: Where will you get it?

Topics: The areas in which you can help people

What kind of people should be part of the group?

External: Who are your best prospects?

Industries

Functional Levels

Geographic locations

Other demographics

Within your organization: What level? What expertise? Writing skills?

Industry experts: Suppliers, bloggers, reporters

Other LinkedIn participation will highlight your expertise and give you credibility (Your group is not an island).

In what other groups should you be participating and at what level?

How should you participate in the general “answers” section?

Related outreach:

Create a newsletter that's sent to group members and others on your mailing list:

Talking about what's going on in the group and with some general information as well as links to your inbound marketing web assets

With sponsorship opportunities, and

Information about employment and other business opportunities.

Put on webinars about areas of interest to the group.

PREPARATION

Here's all the information LinkedIn will need when you set up a group:

Create a large and small logo

What website do you want linked to the group?

Write a Summary and a Description.

The Summary is shorter (about 290 characters) and appears in the directory. It's more of the marketing piece.

Keywords so it shows up in searches

A value proposition:

It should describe a practical, work related benefit people will get.

'You'll learn about marketing strategies for lawyers'

A plug for your company: "Although many people find this group through their work with (your company's name) it's open to anyone and we welcome new ideas and perspectives"

You have about 2,000 characters for the description.

It articulates a vision for the group

Keywords aren't necessary

More value proposition

Create templates(these are emails that are sent automatically)

The welcoming template

Request to join

Decline Message

Identify Managers and Moderators

Set up an Account

It should be in the name of someone fairly high up in the organization.

Make sure the summary and areas of expertise relate to the group themes

The Box.net application will also let this serve as a repository for white papers

IMPLEMENTATION

Logistics of setting up a group

Group Information

Upload logos

Group type: This is not a widely used LinkedIn feature so don't worry about "getting it right"

Summary

Description

Website

Group settings

Enable the discussion, news and job features

Don't display subgroups at this time

Access: Request to join (although you may decide to approve everyone, this option lets you get their email address when you approve them.) This is very important because you can send them newsletters and other information this way.

Display the group in the groups directory

Allow group members to display the logo on their profiles

Do not pre-approve members

Not based in a single location

Owner email: make sure this is a frequently checked address so you can respond quickly.

Create a "please introduce yourself discussion" and make it featured

INITIAL MARKETING

Send an invitation through LinkedIn to your customer list. Include a message about why you're starting the group. You can only invite them once through LinkedIn, but since you have their email addresses, you can do follow up through external email.

NEVER SEND AN INVITATION TO SOMEONE FOR WHOM YOU DO NOT HAVE AN EXTERNAL EMAIL ADDRESS, such as a LinkedIn Contact. You can send them a message asking them to request to join because that way you'll get their external address.

When people join who you haven't invited, be sure to capture their email address.

ONGOING ACTIVITY

Create discussions:

The best conversations are those that are related to the web assets being added to the web site as part of the inbound marketing strategy.

Actively look at people's profile to discern interests of theirs which coincide with the forum's goals. Contact them and encourage their participation.

Solicit new members:

Search LinkedIn for people who are good prospects. You can usually send them a message if you share a group with them. Join the largest groups and you probably will be in a group with them.

Monitor and participate in conversations in your other LinkedIn Groups (always in the areas of expertise) Invite people to join your group. These could be prospects as well as people who are generally active and will increase the quality of your group.

When people join, review their profile and send a personal email that relates to their situation and explain how you think the group can help them.

Go to the answers section and start answering questions.

The group owner/manager should be working with the creators of these web assets that are part of the inbound marketing strategy

It will make the content relevant to what's going on in the group , and

The group owner will know what's coming and can plan how to use those web assets once they're ready.

Communicate with the other platforms(twitter, facebook et al)

So you can tweet about interesting things going on in the group.

Publish the Newsletter

Encourage Internal Participation: Get top people to post and follow it. Get visibility within the company

Send announcements

Conduct Polls

List Jobs

REVIEW PROGRESS

Consider this an experiment. Different approaches work for different people. Evaluate your progress toward your goal (more good prospects) and change anything as necessary