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Reaching out without creeping out: Your 101 guide to building your network online

Posted by [Alyson Weiss](#) on October 7, 2013 [inShare](#)10

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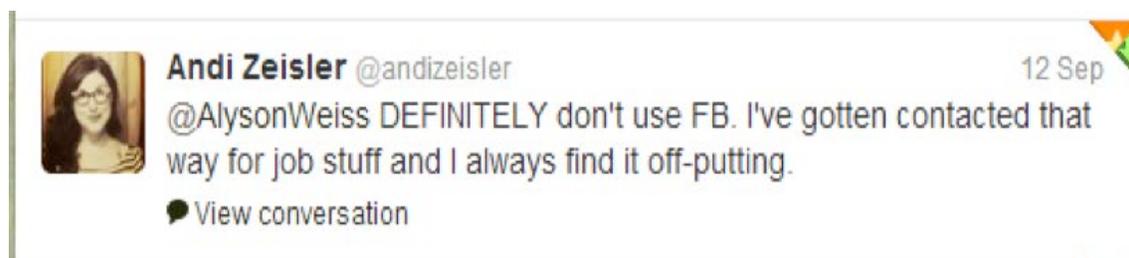
According to [a recent survey by Jobvite](#), 94% of all companies already use or plan to begin to use social recruiting in 2013. Although not all industries rely on recruiters, this speaks to the quickly-growing importance of social media and social networking. If the job search is a numbers game, job seekers would be remiss to ignore these numbers.

Yet, not all digital networking efforts are created equal. Although open social media platforms like Twitter and Tumblr may make it *feel* like you personally know industry role models, it is unlikely they share the same level of familiarity with you.

So how do you reach out to a potential networking contact on social media without creeping them out? I asked the people who would know best: contacts I “met” on social media. I must not have crept them out too much, because many of them replied! Here’s what they said.

[Note: This article deals only with breaches in etiquette and inadvertently creepy behavior, not stalking. [Social media stalking DOES happen](#) and is life-threatening and social media platforms ought to do more to protect its users.]

Use the most appropriate outreach method



~Andi Zeisler, cofounder of Bitch Magazine

There are [subtle differences](#) between social media platforms that should not be ignored. Just like you would use a slightly different tone and vocabulary with a colleague than a friend, each platform has its own dialect, use, and default privacy settings.

According to [Bullhorn Reach](#), 48% of recruiters use LinkedIn only, 19% use both LinkedIn and Twitter, and only 10% use both LinkedIn and Facebook. When in doubt, reach out on LinkedIn or email first, followed closely by any other public platform that the individual potential contact is active on (Twitter, Tumblr, WordPress, etc).

Likewise, public platforms like Twitter are too informal for other steps in the job search like asking for a reference, according to Alicia Johnson, the Advocacy and Communications Coordinator for Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts.

Think of it as a relationship. Take it slow.

Have you ever met someone who is overly-eager to develop a friendship or relationship? You meet them once, have better-than-average small talk, then suddenly they're texting you every 30 seconds until you're forced to resort to extreme measures of passive-aggressive avoidance. (That last bit may be just me.)

Although social media offers an amazing opportunity to directly communicate with industry thought leaders, you have to take it slow. Express appreciation of their public work in comments or through social shares and work your way up to individual contact.



~Wagatwe Wanjuki, Online Community Manager of RH Reality Check & 2013 Women's Media Center Social Media Award Nominee

If they do not share their work on a personal blog, look on LinkedIn to see if you have a mutual contact and ask them for an introduction. Mutual contacts allow you to speed up the process a little, just like you might allow a friend to set you up on a

blind date. Alternatively, explicitly tell them how you found them, i.e.: “Your *Huffington Post* article appeared when I Googled event planning.”

It can be difficult for job seekers to think of potential networking contacts as long-term relationships instead of just-add-water-insta-job-creators, but taking it slow will create *stronger* relationships that are more likely to produce job opportunities.

Write a concise message with an explicit ask

Once you have determined the best platform to make the initial contact and you have gotten on their radar in a small way, it is time to craft a short but unforgettable message.

In 2-3 sentences, try to work in:

- **A statement of commonality.** People tend to be more likely to help out people they relate to. Your statement of commonality can be as broad as “we’re both communications professionals interested in issue x” or as specific as “we’re both x alumni.”
- **The answer to “why them”?** The number one complaint I hear from people who receive a lot of messages on social media from job seekers is that they seem “random.” An easy way to avoid Random Purgatory is to explicitly tell them why you have chosen them out of all the communications professionals interested in issue x. As Communications Officer at the Connecticut Health Foundation and blogging expert Jenn Whinnem put it, “I’m always impressed when an ambitious person knows something about me before they try to hustle me.”
- **A clear call to action.** What is it that you *want* from them? Resources? References? An informational interview? Whatever you hope to get out of the conversation, ask them on a separate line with a question mark at the end to make the ask clear and easy to see if they are skimming. According to Lindsey Kirchoff, a millennial marketing expert who [got her job at the infamously competitive software company HubSpot through social networking](#), this technique distinguishes you from “vague admiring messages from strangers.” Note: Do *NOT* ask for a job the first time you contact someone.
- **Gratitude.** This may seem obvious, but many job seekers forget to explicitly thank new contacts in their initial messages out of nervousness.

When in doubt, use the real life/*New York Times* rule

All of these unspoken rules may seem intimidating to a novice job seeker or social media user, but the answer is not to stick your head in the social recruiting sand. The trick to using social networking, according to Jaime-Alexis Fowler, Deputy Director at Exhale, is to utilize the *New York Times*/real life rule: Before posting

something to social media, ask yourself, “Would you want it to be on the front page of the NYT?” If not, don’t post it, or ask it.

The second is, “Real world rules apply to social media. Would you ever walk up to a stranger on the street and ask for a job? Unlikely, or at least, unlikely to be successful!” Along those lines, she suggests job seekers not post about their job interviews or applications; instead, share interesting content target companies produce and tag them, “It’s a subtle tip that you’re paying attention and are interested in the company.”

When job seekers use the best contact method, take the relationship slow, write a concise but compelling message, and use the *New York Times* rule, the social networking world becomes their oyster. The [hidden job market](#) opens up and amazing long-term professional relationships are established.

How have you built your network online? Share your tips and tactics in the comments.

This article is part of a partnership between the Young Nonprofit Professionals Network and Idealist. [Read more about it here.](#)

LinkedIn 101 for Workforce Professionals

<http://www.micheleemartin.com/wfdsm/linkedin-101-for-workforce-professionals.html>

Most workforce professionals have at least heard of [LinkedIn](#) , the premiere online networking opportunity for job seekers to connect with businesses and employment opportunities.

What Is It?

LinkedIn is an online professional social network that allows business and professional colleagues to connect with one another.

Unlike [Facebook](#), **LinkedIn is geared toward professional interactions**, so it's features and tools focus on allowing people to present themselves professionally and to work on building their work-related networks. As a result, the "culture" of LinkedIn is more formal and professional than the culture you will find on Facebook.

How Does It Work?

On LinkedIn there are *individual profiles* and *company pages*, with both free and paid features. (Note that we will focus on the free features, as paid features are generally not necessary for the work that we do).

Users can access their accounts and most features through their personal computers, smart phones and other mobile devices like the iPad.

LinkedIn for Individuals

Once individuals have signed up for their LinkedIn account, they create their *professional profile*. The platform asks users a series of questions about their work history, their educational credentials, their skills, etc. and compiles this information into a sort of online resume. Users have the option of adding links to any of their other online sites, such as their Twitter account, their blog, their online portfolio, etc.

As with all social networks, the heart of the platform is the ability of the user to make connections to other LinkedIn users. After their profiles are set up, individuals can request to make a *connection* with another LinkedIn user. If that connection request is accepted, the users now have a *1st level connection* to one another and can communicate directly through *LinkedIn Inmail*. They are also able to see each other's *status updates* in their *newsfeeds*.

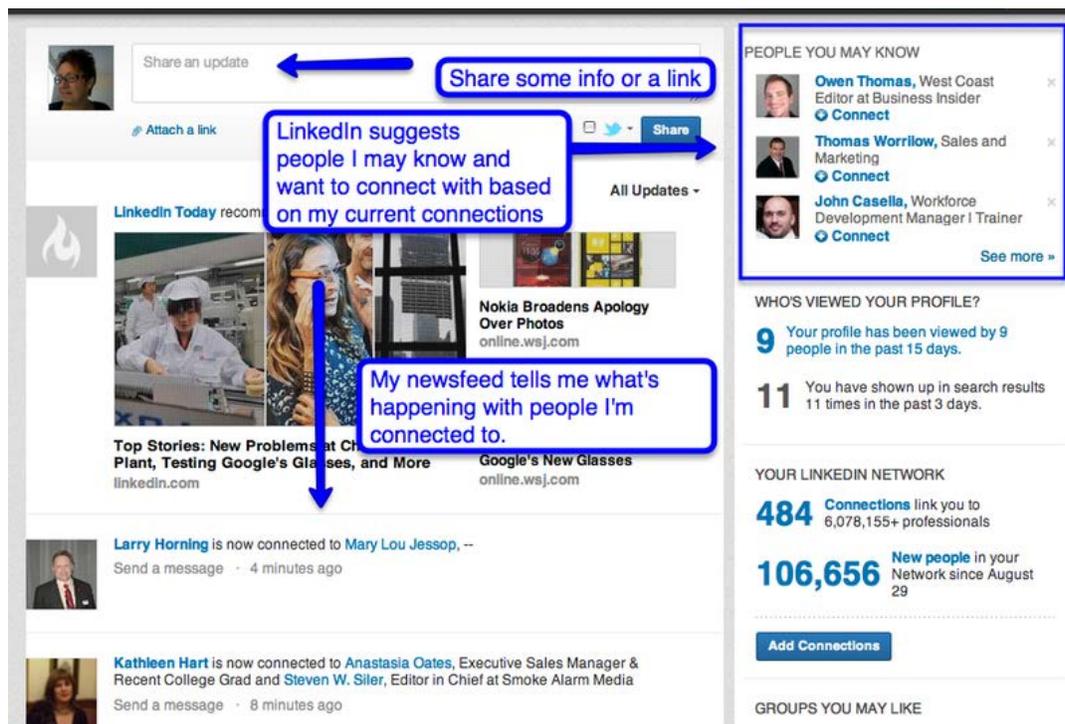
Users can also obtain *recommendations* from colleagues, supervisors and clients who are on LinkedIn. These recommendations can then be posted as part of the professional profile. Users can also give their connections recommendations.

Related to the recommendation is the *endorsement*. Users add *skills* to their profiles and then their connections can endorse their proficiency in those skills.

One of the most interesting features of LinkedIn is the way that it helps people develop additional networking connections. Once you are connected with someone as a 1st level direct connection, you can then see the other people your connections have in THEIR networks--known as *2nd level connections*. The platform will also suggest potential connections to you so that you can further expand your LinkedIn network.

The screenshot shows the 'People You May Know' section on LinkedIn. At the top, there is a search bar with the text 'See people from different parts of your professional life'. Below this, there are several university logos: Temple University, Rutgers, The State University of, Penn State University, New York University, University of Pennsylv..., University of Pittsburgh, Georgetown University, and University of Maryland College Park. The main content area displays a list of suggested connections. Each entry includes a profile picture, name, job title, location, and a 'Connect' button. Annotations with blue boxes and arrows explain connection levels: 'Richard E Furlong (2nd)' is annotated with 'This means I'm connected to someone who is directly connected to this person.' and 'If I want to connect, I can click here' pointing to the 'Connect' button. 'Kneal Veronica (3rd)' is annotated with 'A "3rd level" connection means I know someone who knows someone who knows this person.' 'Anmarie Roy (2nd)' is annotated with 'To learn about how I might be connected to this person, I can click here' pointing to the 'Connect' button. Other visible entries include 'Jacqueline Archer-Kennedy (2nd)' and 'Michael Piomelli (2nd)'.

You keep up-to-date on what's happening with your connections through your *newsfeed* on your homepage. This is where you can see any new connections your connections they've made, links they may be sharing, promotions, recommendations they've received, etc.



Since LinkedIn is a professional network, clearly one of its key features for individuals is the ability to find job postings. The search features are fairly robust, even for free users. **But be aware that many employers aren't even bothering to post job openings on LinkedIn. Instead, they are searching for people who have the skills they want and then reaching out to them directly to invite them to apply to the company.**

LinkedIn Company Pages

Companies and organizations also have the ability to create *Company Pages*. This not only gives a company or organization an online platform for connecting with other professionals, it also can provide workforce professionals and job seekers with valuable information about what's happening within that organization.
