'How To' Tips for LinkedIn

A starter guide to the popular online professional network

Do you want to find people with similar interests and ambitions from a professional standpoint? LinkedIn may be just the tool for you. LinkedIn, often thrown in the mix of social media outlets, prefers to tout itself as a multifaceted professional networking tool. LinkedIn allows you to connect with other like-minded individuals who study and work in pharmacology and other related scientific fields. Network with groups, find personal contacts, and explore the profiles of the people to whom your contacts' are connected. These days, you need more than just a resume in the job market, and LinkedIn adds tools to expand your professional presence and help you network.

The Basics of LinkedIn:
The sign-up screen on LinkedIn

Fill out your demographics.

Decide the type of account for which you want to sign up.

Import your email contacts to find people you know.

View lists and profiles of your first degree LinkedIn connections.

Explanations:
Go to www.linkedin.com on the Web. Type in your name, email address and a password on the screen, then click "Join Now." LinkedIn will send you an email confirming your account. Once you have clicked on the link in the email, you will be presented with several screens asking you to complete various aspects of your profile.

Among the items LinkedIn asks you to fill out upon joining the network is basic professional demographic information, such as where you live, your current job title, and your current employer.

Another item you must decide on is whether to sign up for a basic (free) account or pay for a premium account. (See the chart at left to compare the features of these types of accounts.) A premium account gives you greater access to search features, and you are allotted a certain number of "InMails" per month, which should be used to contact and connect with people outside of your network. You will also receive priority customer service as a paying customer, if you ever have a question to ask LinkedIn customer support. Paying for LinkedIn also allows you to see all names of your "3rd degree" and Group connections, some of which would otherwise appear with a first name and first letter of their last name.

LinkedIn contacts: Your "1st degree" connections are those people to whom you are directly connected. Your "2nd degree" connections are contacts of your "1st degree" connections, etc.

LinkedIn will ask you to find connections by importing your email contacts. If you choose to do this, you will be asked for the password for your email account so that LinkedIn can search it for contacts who already have LinkedIn profiles. LinkedIn is not able to access the password to your email account, so this is a safe feature. Another way to access this feature would be to go to the "Contacts" menu at the top of the page and click on "Add Connections." When you reach out to people with whom you wish to connect, LinkedIn will sometimes ask you how you know that person (e.g., as a friend or a colleague) and allow you to type a short note to them in your request to connect with them. The person you contacted will then receive an email stating that you want to connect with them. If they decide to accept your request to connect, the two of you will then become "1st degree" contacts.

Now that you have added some connections, feel free to check out information about them. Under the "Contacts" menu, select the top option, "Connections." This pulls up indexes of your contacts, allows you to see their email address, and provides you with a link to send them a message through LinkedIn. Also, you may be able to look at their list of contacts. To do this, you first need to click on a contact’s name from the "Connections" screen. This leads you to their profile page. Towards the top of your contact’s profile page, you will see listed the number of LinkedIn connections accumulated by that person. Click on that number, and depending on how your contact has set his or her LinkedIn profile preferences, a full list of their contacts may appear on the screen. This is a great way to meet new professional contacts (2nd degree connections) through your list of LinkedIn contacts (1st degree connections).
Adding your resume information to your profile

Join groups related to your professional interests.

Start a discussion or reply to one on the discussion boards.

Toggle your privacy settings.

You can set your profile so that you can view others’ profiles anonymously.

Now, it’s time to beef up your profile. The more information you have in your profile, the greater the chances are that others will look at it and want to connect with you. Go to the “Profile” menu atop the page and select “Edit Profile.” You have several different sections to fill out:

Add a Photo: A professional photo gives people a good visual of who you are.

Summary: Write a short, catchy, summary of your core skills and/or the strengths that you can bring to a business or academic setting.

Applications: LinkedIn has about 15 applications that you can add to your profile. These applications allow you to share presentations (SlideShare Presentations), poll your network (Polls), share your blog (Blog Link or WordPress), find professional events (Events), and more. Click “+ Add an application,” located at the top of the “Applications” section, if you wish to explore this feature.

Experience: Job summaries or resume bullet points from current and previous positions will appear in this section.

Education: Use this space to tout educational degrees or programs you have completed or are working towards completing.

Recommendations: You can ask current and former colleagues and supervisors to write recommendations for you. These recommendations will appear in your LinkedIn profile.

Having as much as possible of your profile information filled out improves the chances that other people will find you for professionally-related inquiries. This also helps LinkedIn group administrators decide whether or not to admit you to a group that you request to join.

The Groups are where the discussions really begin. Joining a group allows you to contribute to that group’s discussion board topics and send private messages to group members. LinkedIn allows you to join up to 50 groups. When you join a group, you can set your preferences to have group updates emailed to you on a daily or weekly basis. (Go to Settings > Email Preferences > Set the frequency of group digest emails.) To start searching for groups, in the search box, type in the name of a group such as “ASPET,” and hit the enter key. You will see a list of search results, of which the ASPET page will be at the top.

The Groups menu is where you can sign up for professional events (Events), and more. Click “+ Add an application,” located at the top of the “Applications” section, if you wish to explore this feature.

There are plenty of other features on LinkedIn. This guide is merely meant to brush the surface and help you get started on the site. Now that you’re familiar with the basics of LinkedIn, head to the ASPET page at http://www.linkedin.com/groups/American-Society-Pharmacology-Experimental-Therapeutics-3320218, join our group, and join the conversation.