

How to make LinkedIn work for you

Whether you're a recent college graduate or a veteran of the fats and oils industry, LinkedIn is a great tool to advance your career. The popular online networking tool lets you know about job openings and tells potential employers, friends, and colleagues about your qualifications and career aspirations. It's an excellent way to reach recruiters and employers, who frequently check LinkedIn when they are seeking employees. It can also help you learn more about your field and build professional relationships. The basic service is free (although you can select and pay for an upgraded plan), but whatever plan you choose will take some time and thinking on your part.

MARKET YOURSELF WELL

Start with a professional photo. The photo is the front door of your profile, and you want it to make a good first impression. Choose one that makes you look alert and confident, preferably with a smile on your face. Studies consistently show that a photo convinces more



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viewers to read your profile and to be more open to you. No photo, no click. Your LinkedIn profile is a marketing piece that tells your story. Maximize the impact by choosing a professional headline that describes what you do. Keep the headline short and succinct, such as: "Three Years' Experience in Palm Oils," "Personal Care Formulation Expert," or "Specialist in Vegetable Oil Processing." Your professional headline will be displayed each time people search for you, and it should reveal what you do in clear, understandable language.

Make sure to back up the message of your headline with facts by listing relevant documentation in the education and experience categories. Complete the entire profile; the more information you post, the more likely people will find you through searches. The most effective profile is a well-written marketing piece about you, your talents, your experiences, and skills. Have friends proof-read it to ensure it is easy to read and free of embarrassing typos or misspellings.

The Status Update lets you note accomplishments and highlight recent activities. Perhaps you completed the AOCS Laboratory Proficiency Program, attended a short course on edible fats, or are working on a special project involving soap manufacturing technology. Mention it. If possible, use the Status Update to thank someone who helped you or mention how this activity adds to your expertise.

ENHANCE YOUR LINKEDIN PAGES FOR BEST RESULTS

Use key words to help search engines find you. Don't overuse them, but be sure that you include important keywords related to what you do—or want to do.

Make it easier for people to find you by completing the Summary section, which allows up to 2,000 characters. But don't fake it; regular LinkedIn readers can tell when you're over-reaching.

A word about wordiness: Readers have limited time, so be concise. Focus on key points. Explain why you like working with edible oleogels or what you learned about contaminants, chromatography, or lipid oxidation.

MAKE NEW CONTACTS, RENEW OLD CONTACTS

One of LinkedIn's most powerful features is its power to help you make contacts, whether you're searching for a new job or seeking clients for your business. Keep expanding your list of contacts so searches will turn up your name and qualifications. The more connections you have, the more likely you will draw searches. A significant number of relevant connections shows that you are active in the industry.

Spend some time every week looking for potential contacts—both people in the industry and people you previously worked with or went to school with. (More about this later.) In addition, your ability to network with people demonstrates that you are someone who can communicate and work well with others.

These are skills that employers prize. Check LinkedIn regularly not only for your own profile but also for information about your industry and your colleagues. If a respected colleague is on LinkedIn, endorse her or offer to write a recommendation. Hopefully, she will reciprocate.

LinkedIn also is a good source of information about companies that are hiring. The open positions may not appeal to you, but perhaps you know someone who would be interested.

Help others. Comment on others' posts when you have something relevant to say. If people comment on your posts, thank them and look for ways to keep the dialogue flowing.

Remember your old contacts, too.

Ian Brodie, a marketing expert in England, got 256 responses when he asked LinkedIn users how they gained new business. The largest number of respondents said that new contacts brought new business, but the second-largest number reported gaining new business by reconnecting with old contacts. Obviously, making connections—both new and old— is the key to using LinkedIn to the best advantage.

BE PROACTIVE REGARDING YOUR EMPLOYMENT

Join LinkedIn Groups relevant to your career and your hobbies. LinkedIn offers many groups for professionals in various specialties to exchange information and career help. There are more than a dozen groups related to soybeans alone; such groups can provide valuable information for your work.

You can build your personal brand by periodically posting valuable or interesting information. Others who see your posts may turn to you for business or advice.

Be proactive. Look up companies by name and develop lists of their employees. This may lead to connections you can develop over time—although, as Lindsey Pollak writes in LinkedIn's blog, you must know a person on LinkedIn, or at least know someone who knows that person before you make contact.

Other ways to build your personal brand include:

- allowing incoming mail;
- obtaining a personalized URL;
- adding Webpage links with good descriptions; and
- asking colleagues to write recommendations to be posted on your page.

Finally, LinkedIn is constantly evolving, as are other social media. Stay current on new ways to use LinkedIn and show potential employers that you are a modern communicator.