



## Maximizing the Value of LinkedIn Groups

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LinkedIn is perhaps the most successful and widely used business-oriented social media website. LinkedIn offers users the ability to display their experience and qualifications, build a virtual network of contacts and join groups related to various professions. There are literally thousands of groups that users can join on LinkedIn, and the group aspect of this social media website is perhaps one of the most frequently overlooked elements available to users.

Belonging to LinkedIn groups can add credibility to a user's account profile and increase the likelihood of the user's account being viewed by those interested in the same types of groups, potentially leading to network or career opportunities. The downside is that the sheer number of groups on LinkedIn can make it difficult to identify those which offer the greatest potential benefit for users.

Below are some tips for making the best use of LinkedIn groups, including how to select the best groups and how to use groups to further networking and career building activities.

### **Finding Groups**

There are three primary ways to find groups on LinkedIn. The first and most basic is to use the groups directory on the LinkedIn homepage. The box on the top right-hand side of

the homepage allows users to search LinkedIn for groups as well as people, companies, jobs and updates. Users can use specific keywords to find the relevant subject matter and geographic location of groups they may be interested in.

The second way to find groups is through groups the user has already joined. Members of groups are provided with a list of similar groups that may be of interest to them. Once a user joins a particular group, she may find that there are several similar groups listed that are even more relevant to her interests.

Finally, a user can look at groups that their connections belong to. Many connections may be in similar industries or professional fields and may belong to groups focused on those areas. Not only does using connections to find groups make it easier to identify which groups to join; it also provides an opportunity to strengthen the user's relationships with her connections by creating yet another thing the two individuals have in common.

### **Selecting the Right Groups**

It is important to think of the groups a user belongs to as an integral part of their overall profile, just like past experience and education. The profile should contain key words and phrases that might come up frequently in searches by other LinkedIn users. For example, a user in the marketing industry might want to include phrases such as “develop marketing campaigns” or “increase sales” in her profile so that potential employers or networking partners will find that profile in a search for those terms.

Groups work the same way as key words and phrases. When searching for groups to join, users should focus on groups with names and descriptions most relevant to their preferred field of employment.

Additionally, the exclusivity of the group should be taken into consideration when deciding which ones to join. Some groups are open, meaning anyone can join, while others are restricted, meaning that a LinkedIn user must request permission to join the group. Membership in restricted groups are often more valuable than membership in open groups because restricted groups tend to lend more credibility to the members, as certain qualifications need to be present before one can join.

Another consideration for selecting groups is the size of the group. While larger groups may offer exposure to a larger member base, smaller groups tend to be more specifically tailored to member interests and often provide more useful updates and information to users, whereas larger groups often provide information that is primarily promotional or irrelevant. Users should focus on groups that have no more than a few thousand members.

### **The Benefit of LinkedIn Groups**

While many LinkedIn users neglect to join groups, there are many benefits to being a member of a group on the social networking site. These benefits include gaining exposure to potential networking partners, increasing overall LinkedIn connections and learning about job opportunities and other information relevant to group members.

#### Finding Connections

By joining groups related to a particular interest or career field, users can find a large number of individuals who share similar backgrounds, career paths and aspirations. This can be a great way to expand the number of contacts a user has in his network. For example, an attorney in Chicago might join a group for legal professionals in that city. The other members of the group would be those the group member might have worked with previously or might know from professional organizations. Alternatively, the other members of the group could be attorneys in a field the user would like to transition to at some point. Either way, belonging to the same group as these other Chicago attorneys is a great way to add them as LinkedIn connections.

#### Exposure

One of the most important aspects of LinkedIn is the search function. Potential business partners or employers might search for someone with a specific skill set, experience or educational background. What many LinkedIn users do not know is that search results are limited to the searcher's own circle of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> degree contacts. For this reason, joining groups and making connections within those groups is an important way to turn up in a

greater number of searches. To this end, it may be worthwhile for a LinkedIn user to join a large group that, while providing largely irrelevant information, offers access to a large number of potential contacts.

Furthermore, simply being in a relevant group could make a user more likely to appear in a particular search. For example, a member of a group focused on the New England nutrition industry might have a good chance of showing up in a search for Boston nutrition experts.

### Postings, Notifications and Conversations

Many groups act as a forum for discussions related to a particular industry or interest area. For example, a group for web developers might contain useful discussions about new developments in the industry. While it may be difficult to find a large group of knowledgeable web developers to discuss such issues in person, social media is a great way to achieve such a conversation virtually. It's generally a good idea for users to simply monitor conversations for a while to get a sense of the topics being discussed and the "etiquette" of group discussions. Once the user has a good feel for the group dynamic, she can start to actively participate and position herself as a knowledgeable member of the group community. Users can offer advice on particular topics and even include links to published work the user may have written discussing a particular issue.

Many LinkedIn groups also regularly send email notifications to members regarding information relevant to the online community. This could include new developments in the industry or job openings, for example. It is important to monitor these notifications, particularly in the early stages of group membership. Once the member has become familiar with the type and amount of information that is sent out, he can use the group's settings to regulate the types and amounts of emails being received from various groups. Remember that the more groups a user belongs to, the more emails he is likely to receive, and some groups will have more relevant and interesting information than others, so it is important to manage the type and amount of information being received to avoid being overwhelmed.

Social media has changed the way people communicate and connect with one another, and LinkedIn is perhaps the most important social media website for professional networking. There are a variety of useful tools for LinkedIn members and the ability to join groups is one of the most important. By taking advantage of the ability to join groups, LinkedIn users can expand their network, gain exposure and develop a greater insight into their field of interest.

Learn more about social media and how to build it into your overall marketing strategy at [www.stratcommunications.com](http://www.stratcommunications.com).

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