

Create a LinkedIn Profile

It's never too early to create a profile on LinkedIn – the social media site for professionals. Even if you've never held a job or volunteer position, you can outline courses you've taken, extra-curricular involvement, and skills you've developed. You can also solicit recommendations from teachers, coaches, or supervisors. This tip sheet walks through the steps of developing a profile and contact network on LinkedIn, the go-to social media site for career building.

Building Your Profile

- ✓ **Summary:** This is where you tell an employer who you are in a few short sentences. Focus on what you can offer to a team or workplace, not what you hope to get out of the experience.
DO: “Organized, energetic student with strong aptitudes in math and communication. Exceptional leadership skills developed through experience as a summer camp counselor and babysitter for children aged 4 to 10.”
DON'T: “I am seeking a job that will allow me to apply my skills while gaining valuable work experience.”
- ✓ **Education:** Here's where you tell your contacts what kind of education you're completing. Most likely in your case, that's an Ontario Secondary School Diploma or OSSD. Put the name of the school, program if applicable (such as a SHSM) and year you expect to graduate. Add any activities or clubs you've been involved with in the “Activities and Societies” section.
- ✓ **Experience:** If you've ever had a job, detail it here. Under the “Description” section, be sure to mention any improvements you implemented, recognition you received, or higher-level tasks your boss entrusted to you. Even if it was just solving a problem for an unhappy customer or coming up with your own system for entering or tracking daily data, these things say not just what the job required, but what *you* brought to the job.
- ✓ **Volunteer Experience:** Add any volunteer experience here. Whether you walked dogs for the humane society, served as a companion for a local senior citizen, or fundraised for a cause like Spread the Net or the 30 Hour Famine, it all shows how you take initiative. Just like the Experience section, focus as much as you can on anything unique to *your* participation, such as techniques you developed for handling a difficult dog, or your ranking among other fundraisers.

- ✓ **Skills and Expertise:** Add any skills you've developed at school, work, or through your extracurricular activities. Examples could include Writing, Programming, Data Entry, or Customer Service.
- ✓ **Extras:** LinkedIn has lots of sections that let you add depth to your profile and give your contacts a sense of who you are. Pick any that apply to your interests, talents, and experience including:
 - **Courses:** Include any courses you've taken inside or outside of school, especially those that are most relevant to the kind of work you're seeking.
 - **Languages:** Anyone with a language besides English should fill this in!
 - **Honours and Awards:** Any awards from school, camp, extracurricular activities, or the community would work here.
 - **Projects:** If you've ever done an intensive project for school such as shooting and editing a video, creating a website, or making a business pitch, outline the project, your role, and the results (including grades).

Building Your Network

- ✓ **Current or Former Supervisors:** Supervisors from a job or volunteer position are some of the best contacts to add to your new network. Not only can you add them as connections, you can also ask for recommendations if you're confident they were happy with your work. Their quote about you then becomes a reference highlight that lives on your LinkedIn profile.
- ✓ **Teachers, Club Leaders and Coaches:** Add the teachers, club leaders, and coaches you've worked with, even if it was only for one course or season. Once you're connected, you can view all their contacts and possibly find other people you know to add to your network. If you have a strong relationship with a teacher, club leader or coach, why not ask them for a brief recommendation?

An Important Note on Etiquette

LinkedIn wants to make sure its users don't annoy each other, so **when you try to add a connection, they'll ask you to specify how you know this person** because they'll be contacting him or her to approve your invitation to connect. Ensure you read each option carefully and pick the one most appropriate for your relationship with the person. If you select the option "Other," you will need the person's email address in order to connect with them. If you select the option "I don't know so-and-so," LinkedIn will simply not allow you to send an invitation. With that in mind, **don't bother adding anyone you've never met or had a conversation with** because if they don't know you, they won't accept your invitation to your network.

- ✓ **Current or Former Co-Workers:** Be sure to add anyone you worked alongside at a job or volunteer role. Even if they weren't on your team it's worth trying to add them to your network if you think they'd remember you.
- ✓ **Parents and Family Friends:** LinkedIn is one social network where it's cool to have your parents and their friends as connections, since it's unlikely you'd want to share anything with an employer that you wouldn't share with your parents. Connect with your parents, their friends and your friends' parents. Click the "Friends" box when LinkedIn asks you how you know this person.
- ✓ **Classmates and Friends:** Connect with any classmates from your current school and/or any other schools you've attended, as well as friends from outside school. Just be sure that you click the most appropriate option ("Classmate" or "Friend") when adding.
- ✓ **Stay Current:** Don't stop adding people after you've finished building your initial profile. While you don't want to add every single person you meet, if you have a conversation with somebody you find interesting, look them up on LinkedIn! You can also use the "People You May Know" function under "Add Connections" to connect with people that LinkedIn thinks you might know through work, school, or shared connections.

Expanding Your Network

- ✓ **Join Groups:** The interactive Groups function lets you join discussions, read articles, and connect with professionals who share your interests. Using the Groups Directory on LinkedIn, you can search for professional groups based on industry or interest. Want to work in retail? A quick search using the terms "retail" and "Canada" yields 81 results! Scroll through them and join the groups that sound interesting to you. But don't just join – participate by starting and chiming in on discussions. Look at this as an opportunity to demonstrate your initiative and ask for advice from people in the field.
- ✓ **Follow Companies:** Companies have their own profiles on LinkedIn, and if you're looking to score a co-op placement or part-time job, you can start learning about that company by following them on LinkedIn. Once you've filled in your profile, LinkedIn will recommend companies for you to follow, but you should do your own searches too. The next time you're walking through a neighbourhood with lots of businesses, take note of the signs you see and look up those companies on LinkedIn when you get home. Not every business will have a profile, but it's worth trying! Companies with active LinkedIn profiles often post their job opportunities there, and even if you don't apply you can learn about the kinds of skills they're looking for.

- ✓ **Social Media Connections:** LinkedIn allows you to link your profile with your other social media accounts to create a holistic picture of who you are. If you are very confident that your Facebook, Twitter, Google+ or Tumblr account would say positive things about you to an employer, you can add them to your profile. Steer clear of this option if your Facebook or Twitter accounts are just about fun social stuff like partying, inside jokes and hanging with friends. Unless you create a second social media account that you exclusively use for professional purposes, your other social networks sites won't project the kind of image you'll want to share with potential employers.

And there you have it - your own shiny new LinkedIn profile! Now you can share it with prospective employers and use it as a hub for building your professional network. Don't forget to keep it up-to-date with any new skills, courses, awards, jobs, languages, or anything else that will improve your professional image. Every time you update your profile, LinkedIn sends a notice of the change to your network of contacts so you'll stay on their radar for when you're ready to start looking for next summer's job or needing advice on choosing your future career.