

Transcript: The LinkedIn teleportation machine: Take your business anywhere

Welcome to another episode of our Digital Master Class Series on the importance of going digital in the post-COVID world. For today's topic I'll be talking about LinkedIn: LinkedIn is a teleportation machine that can take your business anywhere. Today's agenda: I'll go through where LinkedIn might be relevant to your business; what is LinkedIn and how it's different to Facebook; why you might want to use LinkedIn; the audience purpose and possible objectives; and I'll give you three key recommendations and my top tips on how to build traction.

The focus of this session will be on how to use LinkedIn for yourself, as a business owner, and how you can create your own personal brand. And then: how to leverage LinkedIn for your business, and how to create your company brand that works alongside your personal brand.

If we go back to sales in the old days, you may be in a business where in the past (or you may even still do it now) you may have a sales force, or you may be the person who does the business development for your business. You may have a collection of business cards; or even have business cards yourself, where you go out and meet prospective customers; or, you may go and attend conferences and then spend some time each week on the telephone, contacting prospects and customers, making appointments. And then, on Monday, you would probably hop into the car and start visiting your customers or prospects, to sell whatever products or services that you have. But sales has changed in the current world and this has accelerated somewhat during COVID. Sales today is often done in a business-to-business environment from a desktop, before you even know who your prospective customers are. It is most likely that they've done some research about you; they may know you already, or they may have looked online at solving whatever the business problem that they have.

According to LinkedIn research, in the business-to-business space, most people will read about 10 pieces of content before they make a purchase. The bigger the purchase, the more likely they'll ask for a reference point opinion. The size of the purchase may not necessarily be in relation to the value (in other words, the dollars spent) but it may be in reference to the perceived risk. You may be selling them something that requires a change in their processes, or a significant amount of time in training and development, or installation.

LinkedIn is a perfect platform for business-to-business. It's a perfect platform where you can share content you've created yourself, or other published content, and that content that you create yourself may be content that's existing on your website. It could be an article that you've written; it may be an opinion piece; or it may be other published content from peers or suppliers; or even from mainstream media, where you may comment about it.

LinkedIn is also about social networking word of mouth. A lot of people use it to ask for endorsements and recommendations. Prospective customers, or even existing customers, can see what people or businesses do business with you.

So: a little bit about LinkedIn. It started back in 2003 and was bought by Microsoft in 2016. Why this is important? Microsoft spends a lot of money on continual research on user experience, and on setting up strategic partnerships. If you use, for example, a platform for customer relationship management, like Hubspot, as soon as you type in your customer or prospects email address, it automatically searches on LinkedIn for information about that company, and puts that information into your CRM.

At the moment there are 11 million Australian registered users and the statistics show that over half

log in each month and they spend a significant amount of time on it (about 10 minutes 4 seconds per session). This is quite a long period of time in comparison to other social media sites, and even in comparison to website visits. That is because most users go on to LinkedIn expecting to see discussions centred around business-related topics. They're more likely to read long-form content (in other words, articles) and engage in some sort of online conversation with comments and likes, and read other people's comments.

LinkedIn is a global platform. There are 706 million members in over 200 countries and regions worldwide. You might be thinking, "you know, that doesn't really matter to me, I'm only a small company based here in the city of Glen Eira, and I'm not going global". But if you think about it – let's think about the old sales model where you may have made phone calls, and made appointments, and hopped into your car – it may mean that you can target areas outside of a driving distance. Taking small steps, you might say "well, there are other customers on the other side of town, which I wouldn't have gone across to because it would take too long to drive", or even regional Victoria (or even other states like New South Wales or Queensland). It opens a door for you to expand your business, perhaps into other English-speaking countries, like New Zealand or other Commonwealth countries like the United Kingdom or Canada.

LinkedIn is the dominant site for business-to-business, and I'm looking at some research from a company called Hubspot: it has a 2.74% conversion rate for visit-to-lead conversions. In other words, 2.74% of visitors to LinkedIn are more likely to become a lead, as opposed to the other social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter. It is actually a much higher conversion compared to a website, which sits often at under 1%. If we look at LinkedIn versus Facebook as a social networking site, LinkedIn is primarily targeting professionals. It's for professional networking; brand-building; business profile-building; and businesses who use LinkedIn, who are primarily targeting other businesses. There are instances where businesses do target consumers, but those customers are more likely to be professional people, whereas if you look at Facebook, it has more of a social networking side.

People go on Facebook with no specific agenda, they're going onto it for a bit of escapism. In the business context, businesses who ordinarily go on to Facebook are targeting consumers. We look at the headspace, when people go on to LinkedIn, they're usually hopping onto LinkedIn for a business need.

They may be researching, or even doing business development, which is what you might be doing, whereas if people go onto Facebook, they're looking to escape work. They're not in a headspace of looking for work-related topics, nor are they usually in the headspace for reading very heavy topics that that you may want to share as a business-to-business company.

The importance of LinkedIn for businesses is, number one: there are no geographic boundaries. Business networking, as we've talked about before, means you can engage with anyone, anywhere. In marketing, we use a term called "birds of a feather tend to flock together". That means people with similar interests, or similar backgrounds, tend to congregate in networks and groups together, or professions, or even where they went to university together. It's also a great tool to demonstrate your knowledge and engage with an audience with a common business interest. It's a great vehicle to position your company brand.

As I mentioned before, LinkedIn works very well alongside your company website. Here are a couple of recommendations:

My number one recommendation before you start: be very clear before you begin. Identify your

audience, and be very specific about that. You might say, “well look, I’m going to target suppliers, I need some more suppliers” or “I may be looking for more customers or looking for more strategic partners”.

Be specific about the geographic regions or geographies and perhaps a job role as well. As an example: you might say, “I am a software developer” and you may be targeting international airlines. You might say, “okay, I’m going to target airlines that are in Commonwealth countries, and I’m going to be targeting engineers that work for those airlines”.

Your purpose: why is it that you want to use LinkedIn at this point in time? It may be for brand awareness, community or audience engagement, content promotion, or you may be quite advanced, and you’ve been using LinkedIn for a while and you may be looking at launching or developing a new product.

You could use a platform for market research. Some of the possible objectives could be to increase sales in a specific geography, as I mentioned before; to launch a new product or service to attract new investors or strategic partners; better engagement with existing clients or customers; or to build a new audience. If you’re brand new to LinkedIn, you may say “okay, well here’s a really easy step, I’m going to engage with my existing customers as well as a community”.

So, with community engagement there’s very little risk, and I’m going to engage better with my existing customers. In the past, you may have sent them an email randomly, once a quarter or once a year, but by connecting with them you can engage with them more frequently.

So, let’s dive into LinkedIn. This is the page that you’ll see on a desktop, if you already have a LinkedIn profile. It’s very simple to set one up. It’s quite intuitive, but this is what you’ll see on your desktop. I’m going to ask you a question and that is: have you googled yourself lately? And the reason why I asked that is that, if you google your name, more than likely (unless you share a name with a famous person, or you’ve been in the media), LinkedIn is likely to be the first one of the first search results. That is because LinkedIn has a high authority on Google, and the reason for that is that LinkedIn has high repeatable traffic. As I mentioned before, most people will spend over 10 minutes on LinkedIn.

Google sees repeat visits to the same website (and a long duration on that website) as having higher authority, so that is why LinkedIn is, more than likely, going to come up as one of the top search results if you google your name. If you’re going to be on LinkedIn, invest some time in updating your profile, and I’m going to show you an example.

My number two recommendation is: maximising your profile. Here’s my profile, and here are a couple of tips, starting from the top to the bottom. The first thing is: the URL, you can actually customise that when you set up your profile. Even if you’ve got an existing profile now, LinkedIn will come up with a combination of letters and numbers as your URL. You can customise this and change it to whatever letters you want, as long as that hasn’t been taken by somebody else.

Why I recommend you do that is: you can use it as a friendly-looking URL, if you wanted to, at the bottom of your electronic signatures, or even on your business card. It just makes it easier for people to type in proper words, rather than letters, numbers and characters. I’d also invest in putting a background image. See the word “Melbourne” there? I’ve used the word Melbourne because I used to live interstate and overseas, and I just wanted to position myself as I’m based in Melbourne now. LinkedIn will give you recommendations on the dimensions of that image. You can use whatever image you want. You can hop onto a free site called [canva.com](https://www.canva.com), and it’ll help you get the dimensions right, so you can pop that straight in there.

The other thing you want to invest in is your profile photo. You see how my photo shows my face, and it's from the shoulders up? It's important to do that, so that anybody looking for you, who you may not have connected to (for example, they could be your customer or a supplier. That makes it easy for them to see you.

I'm not actually logged into LinkedIn with this result – this is my public profile – you see that there are four other people with the same name as myself. If you take a look at their profile photos, three out of the four are not recognisable. The two at the bottom, the photographs are too far away. It's very difficult to see the ladies' faces. The very top one, that person hasn't bothered to put a photo up at all.

Let's see photo number two: the other person with the same name as myself. She's a fairly high-rate professional, she's a vice president within BMO Capital Markets, and you can see that she's fairly high up in in her profession and she has taken a professional photo, and that's of her head and shoulders and just her face. With the other two photos below the two profiles, the photos are too far away. It's very difficult for anybody to identify who they are. This is important in that you want to be easily found by your customers, your suppliers, your prospects, who may know of you. They may have met you at a conference, for example, and they may be looking for you. They may type your name in and it makes it much easier for them to assume, "oh, yes I've found the right person and I'm going to connect to that person".

Invest a bit of time into your positioning statement. LinkedIn will prompt you to put in details of where you study, a link to your company website, etc. I'd also then invest a bit of time in writing an introduction paragraph. Don't write just about what you do, but perhaps do a why too. It'll be very clear as to what you do, as they delve further into your profile; but why you do it is often something that is more compelling to someone reading your profile for the first time.

I've written mine from a third person. I haven't written "this is why I do it". I've written it in a way that somebody else might have written this about me. If you're not very strong in writing, perhaps you could ask someone to help you with that. It is worthwhile investing a bit of time in that. As a business owner, your profile is a reflection of your personal brand. It provides an opportunity for you to demonstrate your knowledge, your background, your education, and where you are a member of professional associations, etc. Use that, not only because it's there, but it positions you a bit better. Top tip: LinkedIn is also on mobile. If you have the mobile app (if you don't, I would highly recommend that you download it), you can use it to replace your business card. If you hop onto the mobile app, you will see in the search bar there is this funny square, which I've circled on the screen. Click on that and it will show your QR code on your phone. You can download and save it as an image; you can share it; you could use it on any printed collateral; or even on your website if you wanted to.

How I use it: let's say I'm at a business lunch or a conference. What I tell my clients to do is, if they're at a conference and they're a speaker, whip out that QR code when you're doing your professional networking. Rather spending a lot of time collecting business cards, and then having to key them in, whip out your code, scan each other's codes, and you can connect that way. It makes it very simple, and it saves you a lot of administration when you get back to the office.

There is also an app within your (Android) mobile phone that you can download called Nearby Share. If you turn on the location and turn on Nearby Share (let's say, again, I'm at that business lunch, or I'm at that conference), it automatically allows anybody looking for me (that's also got their Nearby Share on) to identify each other, even though we may not be within a meter or two of each other. We're in the proximity of the same room, and we can find each other again. It's very good for time

saving, and it's a really easy way to connect to other people.

You can also use LinkedIn to expand your professional network. Number one thing I would do, especially if you're starting out for the first time (and you know times are quiet): grab out your pile of business cards, or your email contact list, and start looking for those people on LinkedIn. Connect with them and send an intro email. I always find that if I send a little personal message (explaining the context of how I know that person) they're more than likely to connect to me.

You can also join interest groups and start to follow companies. I would start making it a habit to engage. If you look on interest groups, for example, I'll go back to my example of the software client that's looking for aviation commercial airline engineers. He joined a number of aviation groups and started to make it a habit to participate in those conversations. By having comments and commenting on other people's posts, he got to meet more people online. I would engage with your contacts via their feeds regularly because, just like Facebook and other social networking sites, the more you engage with somebody's profile or what they're posting, the more likely that will also come up on their wall as well.

Just a note with LinkedIn: it's the quality of your network, not the quantity, that's important. I would also recommend: don't just connect with anybody, be quite targeted. I wouldn't necessarily connect with my neighbour just because I know him or her. But if they were somebody that was in a similar profession, or they were one of my target markets as a supplier or customer or a partner, then I might connect to him. It's not the same as being friends on Facebook, so you can choose to be very targeted.

Third recommendation: set up your company profile. I would set a company profile up, even if my company was small, if I had employees. Let's say you're a business consultancy or financial planner, and you've got a handful of employees (even if it's five or six employees), it's worthwhile doing. That's because it's another way that your prospects can easily research your company. They can see the employees that work for your company and, for all you know, they could be connected, either first or second degree to your employees. It's also an opportunity to identify any, as I mentioned, common connections. Common connections could be even within the groups that you're members of, with associations that you are members of, etc.

LinkedIn is also, as I mentioned before, a high authoritative link to your website. This is what we call off-page search engine optimisation. If you have your own company website and you have a LinkedIn profile, you will link your company profile from LinkedIn to your website. It actually helps with your search results. It's an opportunity to showcase your news, videos, and other content; and it's also a professional landing spot for prospective employees. I hear a lot of small companies say "oh, it's very difficult to get good quality employees".

If you have a professional landing spot like LinkedIn, most prospective employees like to do a little bit of research before they take on a job, especially if they get down to that pointy end of the interview. They want to know: what sort of people work here? Are they people that I know? Do people have the same education that I do? This is a very good way for them to be able to research your company and your staff. LinkedIn for your company, when you set up your company page, also gives you analysis. It gives you statistics that you would not be able to get on something like Google. When you have Google Analytics on your website, it tells you the number of visits or visitors, and the geographies, but it doesn't tell you the job function of the people visiting your site.

This is an example: I'm showing you an administrative view of a company page. You can see that between November to December, 60% of these visitors to the company page here were in the

business development area, and 40% in operations. These are very low stats for this company, but this shows you the types of visitors to your company page. This is very good when you're wanting to run experiments like market research. You pose a question to your audience and you take them to your company page and you can see what sort of people are engaging.

Here's a top tip about building engagement: I highly recommend you start liking, commenting, and regularly sharing posts from your LinkedIn connections, from interest groups, and from companies that you follow. Why should you do that regularly? If you don't want to make comments, that's fine, but liking means that your profile is not a dormant profile. The more active you are, the better it is. You may decide to block out 15 to 30 minutes a week in your diary. Do that, and before you know it, it may actually become a habit, and you're on it more regularly.

As mentioned before, you can create articles, so I create content. You can write articles, and ideally, link them to your website. As an example: you may write a long blog article on your website, and then write an introduction article, which is just an abridged version on your LinkedIn profile, with a "read more" hyperlink to your website. This is a very good way to build traffic to your website, where they're more likely to take action. In other words, hit the contact button, or request a quote, or pick a meeting, etc.

The other way to build engagement is to share content. I understand that not everybody is very good at writing content, or don't have the time to do it, but you might be reading content on media sites. That's interesting, that could affect your profession. That would be interesting to your audience and a way to do it is to take that article, share that content on LinkedIn, add your own comment and ask for an opinion.

An opinion is what I would call the call to action. I wouldn't just share the content and say nothing. I'd say something like "oh, I read this, this was very interesting, what has your experience been?" That's an open-ended question and you're inviting comment and engagement. The objective in doing these things is to position yourself as a specialist in your area, or somebody that's knowledgeable about your profession. It also demonstrates a level of interest. Obviously, you're not just selling something, you're genuinely interested in that particular area.

So, here's an engagement example: this is an article that one of my contacts has shared. She's done a couple of really good things that I would highly encourage you to do. She's used links hyperlinks – all the blue fonts there, they're hyperlinks – she's tagged actual people, and tagged a government website.

She's used hashtags, she addresses a specific audience with a call to action, she has posed a question to the audience – but, it's not her own content. She's leveraging off her connections, she's leveraging off the content, she gives a very clear call to action. This would bubble up on the feed of her connections who she's tagged, who have perhaps liked or commented. When somebody tags you, you're more than likely to have a look at it. And if it's somebody that you are connected to, you're more than likely to engage. If you don't want to make a comment, you wouldn't like her to just like it and that would come up on your connections. It's a very smart way of engagement.

Here's another one: this is a CEO of a tech start-up, and he tags his own company. He's got his own company page on LinkedIn, and he shouts out some recent activity that his team will have created. He makes a statement about how well his team or the company is doing. He's positioning his brand and he tags his staff, so he leverages off their connections, and he uses the hashtags as well. Anybody clicking on any of those hashtags are more than likely to uncover his content that he's just shared.

So, what can you do today?

- Number one: you can refine your professional profile. Get connecting, grab that stack of business cards, email lists, and client lists, and start connecting. I probably wouldn't do it in one big hit because it would just be overwhelming. As they connect to you, you wouldn't have time to reply back. Perhaps, do a handful. You might just do business cards today, and do your email lists later on in the week, your client list a couple of days after that, etc.
- What I like to do when I connect to someone (and you may want to do that too) is: when they connect back to you, LinkedIn prompts you to drop them a message. I drop them a message and say "hi, it's been a while".
- The third thing is: create your business page, especially if you have employees, as mentioned before.
- And number four: join special interest groups, start to follow companies, listen and start engaging.
- And number five: experiment. You can experiment to see if you get any engagement. If you're posting a bit and you're not getting any engagement, perhaps look around at other people's posts that are getting engagement. See if you can cookie cut and perhaps even copy some of the terms that they use. See how that works for you.

Thank you very much, I hope you enjoyed today's webinar, and if there are any questions please contact us at cityfutures@gleneira.vic.gov.au. Thank you.