

LINKED-IN <http://www.cba.org/practicelink/linked-in>

What kind of LinkedIn lawyer are you?

How both passive and active lawyers can raise their visibility, expand their connections and interact with clients and colleagues on the world's largest professional networking site.

By Michael Rappaport



Anyone can set up a profile on LinkedIn, the professional networking site that serves more than 50-million users worldwide. But for many lawyers the question, as author Jason Alba put it so succinctly in the title of his recent book, is: *"I'm On LinkedIn, Now What???"*

"LinkedIn is where email was 15 years ago," says Barry Leon, a partner at Perley-Robertson, Hill & McDougall in Ottawa, where he practises international arbitration. "Many lawyers have an account. But most haven't quite figured out how to use LinkedIn in a productive way."

For lawyers in Leon's position, the challenge is in figuring out how to use LinkedIn effectively to market their practice, which involves finding a strategy that works for your particular practice area and personality type.

Do you want to be a LION? In LinkedIn lingo, LION stands for "LinkedIn Open Networker," and refers to members who will accept invitations to connect from anyone and everyone. LIONS distinguish themselves by joining other LION groups on the networking site. They wear their badge with pride, sometimes by including the descriptive acronym after their names. Top alpha LIONS can have tens-of-thousands of connections.

LIONS, however, do not rule alone. They share the kingdom not with lambs but "Good Shepherds." Though they do not enjoy formal recognition, "Good Shepherds" are LinkedIn members who only connect to other members who they know as clients, colleagues or classmates. Good Shepherds interact with their connections on a regular basis, sending referrals, arranging introductions and offering recommendations; in essence, watching over and tending their flock online.

Would you rather have a passive profile or an active profile? Most LinkedIn members maintain passive profiles on the site, which simply involves posting their résumés with a punchy précis to summarize what they do in one paragraph. Members who have an active profile on LinkedIn are constantly uploading fresh content, soliciting recommendations, answering questions and using applications to increase their visibility and interact with other members.

Users can also sign up for a free account or upgrade to a paid subscription account on LinkedIn. The vast majority have opted for free accounts, but the paid subscription packages do offer a range of features, which might make it worthwhile to upgrade.

So, what kind of LinkedIn lawyer do you want to be?

• LION or Good Shepherd?

Erik Magraken is a LION, albeit a friendly one. A personal injury lawyer at Maclsaac & Company in Victoria, B.C., Magraken says that he chose to become a LinkedIn Open Networker and accept invitations to connect from any member, since he wanted to broadcast the message that he is "approachable and accessible."

However, Magraken does not aggressively pursue connections or seek to amass hundreds of connections. Having a presence on LinkedIn, he says, forms only a peripheral part of his online networking strategy, which revolves mainly around his blog:

<http://icbclaw.com/blog>. An avid blogger and twitterer, Magraken regularly posts commentaries on personal injury cases and legislation in B.C. By using the WordPress and Twitter feed applications on LinkedIn, he is able to automatically update new content to his profile while spending less than half-an-hour each week on LinkedIn. LinkedIn, he adds, serves as "a platform to echo" his other online activities and to give him "more Google juice."

Debra Forman's official title may be Certified Executive Coach at PinStripe Coaching, a firm which partners with executives and lawyers to help them reach their goals. But on LinkedIn, Forman is the epitome of the "Good Shepherd." Forman chooses

her connections carefully, valuing quality over quantity. She visits her LinkedIn homepage daily to keep track of her connections online. She belongs to a few career and professional development forums and has answered questions posted on those forums. She interacts with her connections on a regular basis, sending referrals arranging introductions and offering recommendations. "The whole point of LinkedIn is to build business relationships. It takes time to build relationships and trust. If I had 500 plus connections, I couldn't do it," Forman explains. She adds, "So many connections wouldn't be manageable."

Passive or ACTIVE profile?

The vast majority of LinkedIn users are passive. Still, it's worth putting your profile to good use.

The vast majority of LinkedIn members only update their profiles when they change jobs or accept an invitation to connect. In contrast active members are constantly giving and requesting recommendations from colleagues and clients, joining groups, answering questions and using applications to interact with other members or raise their profile.

Regardless, whether you opt to have a passive or an active profile on LinkedIn, lawyers should join,

since it will help clients find you and your website on Google. Profiles on LinkedIn rank extremely high on Google's search algorithm and will often appear on searches before your website. Here are a few ways to put your profile to good use:

1. Recommendations. A passive profile on LinkedIn need not be paltry. Beyond reiterating your resume you can solicit "recommendations" from your connections. "Many of my clients come from

word-of-mouth," Arshia Tabrizi, principal at Tabrizi Law Office PC, a boutique law firm. "To actually have your clients recommend you on your profile is great promotion." When requesting testimonials from clients or colleagues, avoid tit-for-tat recommendations (which tend to lack credibility) and touting, which may run afoul of law society rules on false or misleading advertising. "If someone I know asks me for a recommendation, I usually try to personalize it," says Barry Leon, a partner at Perley-Robertson, Hill & McDougall in Ottawa. "I'm not sold on generic recommendations."

2. Join or create groups in a wide range of categories, including alumni, professional, networking, corporate and conferences. If you have a free account on LinkedIn you can only send InMail messages to your connections or members of groups that you both belong to. So joining LinkedIn groups will increase the number of members you can message and expand your online network. In addition, joining LinkedIn groups can help highlight your expertise in a specific practice area.

3. Become an expert: Members may ask or answer questions either to or from their connections or in two-dozen different forums spanning a wide range of subjects, such as "Law and Legal." Lawyers should be careful about answering questions on LinkedIn, as they risk inadvertently creating a lawyer/client relationship and basing a legal opinion on an incomplete set of facts. "I once spent over an hour crafting an answer," says Debra Forman of PinStripe Coaching. "When your name and credibility is on the line, you want to take care." On the upside, if other members rate your answers favourably, your ranking in an area of will rise.

4. Applications: LinkedIn features a wide range of applications that enable users to create online surveys, share slide presentations, rebroadcast blog and Twitter posts, collaborate with other users, track online company news and arrange meetings and events. Check out how many people have viewed and shared your presentations. Figure out which topics people are especially interested in.

— Michael Rappaport



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