



Essential LinkedIn dos and don'ts for law students

With over 500 million users in more than 200 countries (including at least a million lawyers) and web traffic that ranks it one of the most visited sites on the planet, LinkedIn is the social networking tool of choice for professionals.

LinkedIn (LI) can also be useful to law students in a number of ways. First, it can help with your job search. A LI network can be helpful for finding people you (or your contacts) know at law firms or companies you are interested in. Second, it gives you some online profile. Potential employers are likely to Google you and look at what you have posted in social media circles. They will also look to see your online connections and friends.

If you aren't on LI, you should take the plunge. It is very easy to create and maintain a presence on LI. And, when one considers ethical obligations and other practical dangers, LI is the safest social media tool for lawyers to use.

In this article I share my thoughts on the basic do's and don'ts of how a law student can create and build a presence on LI.

Creating a profile

Your profile is the foundation of your LI presence. Here are some tips for creating an impressive LI profile:

X Don't list every job you ever had: Some of you were lucky enough to have really interesting, exciting or unusual summer jobs. Good for you, but will it really impress the firm where you want a job (or a potential client when you are

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a lawyer)? In many cases, probably not. Include a reasonable level of detail about your pre-law school work experience if you think it will impress a potential employer.

✓ **Do list other relevant or interesting background:**

You should include other relevant background information in your profile. The LI profile page outlines what you should include. Give details about your college or university degrees; affiliations, articles or books you have written; awards you have won; volunteer experience and so on. Note that you can change the order of the sections on the profiles page – put the sections that highlight your strengths at the top of your profile.

✗ **Don't use formal and dry CV-speak:**

Inject a little personality to let people know more about you. Ask yourself what prospective employers really want to learn about you.

✓ **Do make your profile public:** While your LI contacts will always see your full profile, LI allows you to selectively hide details of your profile from other LI users on the Settings & Privacy page. This defeats the purpose of being on LI. Most of you should share all or most of your profile with everyone.

✓ **Do create a LI vanity URL:** By default, your LI URL will be alpha-numeric gibberish. A LI URL that includes your name is far more friendly. You can personalize your LI URL by clicking Settings & Privacy > Privacy > Edit URL. I suggest you use the following: [linkedin.com/in/FirstNameLastName](https://www.linkedin.com/in/FirstNameLastName).

Collecting contacts

Collecting a network of contacts is the very essence of LI. Here are some tips for building a good collection of LI contacts.

✓ **Do consider the quality, not the quantity, of your LI contacts:**

We all want to be popular but ultimately, the quality of your contacts is more important than the quantity. While a high number of LI contacts may look impressive at first, potential clients will dig deeper and judge you by the details in your profile and the quality of the people in your network.

✓ **Do make it easy for people to connect with you:**

LI allows you to limit invitations to connect to people in a contact list or people that already know your email address (Settings & Privacy > Communications > Preferences). Don't make it hard for people to connect with you. Configure LI so that anyone can send you an invitation to connect.

✗ **Don't accept LI connection requests from people you don't like, respect or know:**

Politely say “no thanks” or just ignore the invite. This can be awkward, especially when people are pesky and keep extending invites to you. Protect your reputation by making sure you like and respect the people you connect with. Don't accept connections from total strangers.

✓ **Do be careful about conflicts of interest:**

You may need to be cautious about connecting with the judges, experts or opposing counsel that might be involved with matters a potential employer is handling. Having such people as contacts could help you get a job, but they could also create a conflict of interest for a firm that wants to hire you.

✓ **Do send personalized contact requests:**

Generic connection requests are cold and impersonal. Few things will make a stronger positive first impression than a personalized invitation to connect. This is especially helpful if the invitee may not be sure of or recall their connection to you.

✓ **Do use the “My Network” feature:**

Look for My Network on the top bar, and click on it to see contacts “Recommended for you.” It generates this list by using keywords and by looking at the contacts of your contacts. It does a good job of finding people that you will know.

✓ **Do mine the contacts lists of people you know:**

Once you connect with someone in LI, you can see their list of contacts. As many of us work and socialize with the same smallish group of people, looking at the friends of your friends will help you find other people you know. The “Invite accepted” email is a great reminder to do this.

✓ **Do use lists of other groups of people you know:**

I have had great success adding contacts by reviewing lists of names from some of the organizations I participate in (e.g. members of the Ontario Bar Association).

This works well, as many LI users do not list the different groups they belong to or the activities they participate in.

✓ **Do use the “Search” feature to find other contacts:**

Enter the names of companies or other entities where you know people to add people to your contacts list.

✓ **Do remember to invite people you are connecting with in other social media channels to LI:**

While you will not want to add everyone you connect with in other social media tools, this will get you a few extra contacts.

✓ **Do cross-market your LI presence:**

Let people know you are on LI by adding the LI logo or your LI URL to your email signature (make it a link), and anywhere else it will be visible to people that might want to connect with you.

Posting updates

Most LI users are in a mad dash to collect contacts, and they are watching other LI users do the same thing. Unfortunately, they are missing out on one of the key benefits of LI: Being visible to your contacts by sharing information with them.

✓ **Do post regular updates**, but don't overdo it. Do what is right and works for you. At the start, that might be one update a week. Over time it might grow to a single daily update or even three daily updates. Get on a regular schedule, and stick to it. Even better, post longer updates (click on "write an article") as they get more exposure from LI.

✓ **Do share interesting ideas, news, links or information**: Strive to post updates your contacts will feel are worthy of reading. Send information that is practical, helpful, interesting or informative. On occasion, even funny things are fine.

✗ **Don't blast all your updates out at once**: It's great to be efficient and work on your updates at one time (e.g. first thing in the morning over your coffee), but remember that not everyone is online all the time. To give yourself greater visibility, use tools like HootSuite or TweetDeck, which allow you to schedule your LI updates for a later point in time.

✓ **Do be professional**: What goes around comes around, and it doesn't matter if it's in person, in print or online. Be professional at all times, because everyone is connected to everyone on the web. When using LI you must comply with the *Rules of Professional Conduct* at all times.

✗ **Don't use LI messages for lawyer/client communications (a tip for when you are working)**: You can't assume messages sent through LI

are private. Don't use it for lawyer/client communications.

✓ **Do inject some personal info, but not too much**: Social media connections are built on personal relationships. You need to share some personal information so your contacts can learn more about you. But always remember that LI is a professional network and most things that happen in Vegas, the bedroom or the kitchen are not appropriate for posting on LI.

✗ **Don't automatically blast all your other social media updates to your LI contacts**: You can and should mention content that you post on your blog or in other social media channels, but don't bore us all by blasting everything through LI. As a filter, note that you can configure your LI account to display only tweets with the #in or #li hashtags.

How to be more visible

As I stated above, posting regular updates is key to getting value from LI. But there are other simple things that you can do to give yourself greater visibility with your contacts.

✓ **Do comment on the updates your contacts post**: If you like, agree, or even disagree with something one of your contacts has posted, share your two cents by posting a comment on the original post. For reputation building, try to post comments on the updates of respected or well-connected contacts.

✓ **Do ask questions**: Social media is all about two-way communication and interactions. Asking a question in an update is a great way to engage your contacts in a discussion. And if you ask a question, make sure you read and comment on the answers!

✓ **Do tweak your profile**: By default, LI will automatically post an update every time you change your profile. You can turn this off, but I don't think you should. Make it a habit of tweaking your profile once or twice a month.

✓ **Do join a LI group**: LI has a groups feature. Groups help people that are interested in a particular topic, entity or event find each other. There are also groups for events, associations and other entities. I guarantee there are groups on many topics relevant to your area of practice. Click on "My Network > Recommended for you > Groups" and enter some keywords to search for groups that are of interest to you. But be warned: Some groups have far too many consultants and vendors aggressively marketing themselves.

Power user tip

For those of you that are already using LI and want to take it to a higher level, I offer the following tip:

✓ **Do look at and tweak your LI settings**: I have mentioned the LI Profile configuration page several times. Visit this page and look at the various settings you can change. Most of you will want to go with the default settings, but you may find there are configuration options that will make LI operate in ways that are better suited to your personal preferences.

So there you have it: Some simple rules to govern your use of LinkedIn. Start building your LinkedIn network now. Not only might it help you find a job, it will be a useful professional networking tool for marketing when you become a lawyer. ■

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