

LinkedIn and B2B Marketing: A Perfect Pair?

Marketing Experts Highlight Tactics To Leverage The Business Social Network

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Editor's Note: The following article is the first in a two-part series highlighting the nuances of B2B marketing on LinkedIn. Part two will be available in next week's edition of DemandGen Report as a complimentary download.

Over the past few years, **LinkedIn** has evolved into a major social media platform for B2B marketing. But just how does LinkedIn compare to other social media platforms, and how should marketers take advantage of its unique capabilities?

These are big questions, but many experts and B2B marketers are increasingly confident about the answers. As it turns out, LinkedIn is far more effective at generating leads than other social media sites, and it now offers an impressive arsenal of tools designed specifically for B2B marketing. At the same time, weak analytics and a conservative approach to third-party app support mean that marketers still face some challenges managing – and measuring – their LinkedIn activities.

LinkedIn and B2B Marketing: By The Numbers

LinkedIn can't match **Facebook** in terms of sheer scale, but it still boasts more than 100 million members in over 200 countries. And certainly for B2B marketing purposes, LinkedIn offers a quality audience – according to a company background document, the site's members include executives from every company in the Fortune 500.

At first glance, LinkedIn still competes against Facebook for B2B marketing attention in spite of its business-focused audience. According to a 2011 *BtoB Magazine* survey, LinkedIn is the most popular of the “big three” social media channels (including Facebook and **Twitter**) for B2B marketers. Yet it's a surprisingly close contest: while 72% say they use LinkedIn, 71% use Facebook and 67% use Twitter.

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- HubSpot 2012 State of Inbound Marketing Study

Dig a little deeper, however, and LinkedIn stands out from the crowd. According to HubSpot's 2012 *State of Inbound Marketing Study*, 65% of the B2B marketers surveyed said they had picked up at least one customer via LinkedIn, versus 43% who had picked up a customer via Facebook and just 40% via Twitter. HubSpot also found that traffic referred to a company's web site via LinkedIn generated a visitor-to-lead conversion rate of 2.74% -- three times higher than either Facebook or Twitter.

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- Ann Handley,
 Chief Content Officer,
 MarketingProfs

In spite of those results, said Ann Handley, Chief Content Officer of **MarketingProfs**, and author of the book "Content Rules," "LinkedIn is still the dark horse of B2B social media. It doesn't get nearly the credit it deserves - both as a lead generation tool and also, from a content perspective, as a platform for thought leadership."

Company Profiles, Discussions Take Center Stage

If LinkedIn today is shedding its "dark horse" image, it's probably because of changes to the site that make it far more powerful as a B2B marketing platform. LinkedIn has supported Company profile pages since 2008, but it has steadily expanded what those profiles can do. In early 2010, for example, it added a "Company Follow" feature, and in late 2011, added company status updates.

"The autonomy of the company profile pages is increasing. They now have the ability to speak and to have their own relationships" with LinkedIn members, said **LinkedInInfoBusiness.com** founder Viveka von Rosen. "The 'Products and Services' tabs on company profiles, the ability to add video, the ability to create free banner ads on profile pages - it's all combining to create a really powerful platform."

The key issue for many B2B marketers today, said von Rosen, is learning what tools are now available and how to use them: "Most people don't even realize what's available, and they're not making use of these tools the way they should."

At the same time, said Todd Wheatland, VP of Thought Leadership and Marketing for **Kelly Services**, LinkedIn has stepped up its game in terms of providing community-focused tools for communicating with members and sharing content. "In the last 12 months, the nature of the LinkedIn Groups has changed," he stated. "It used to be kind of lame, with no real sense of community."

Today, Wheatland said, "there's much better curation in well-managed groups. If you get the right people in a group into the conversations, and if you offer valuable content to them, you can really get good visibility."

Rebecca Corliss, Inbound Marketing Manager for **HubSpot**, said that creating and curating a LinkedIn discussion group might be "the best way a company can leverage LinkedIn for marketing." While contributing to other, existing groups can be useful, Corliss stated, "When an organization owns a group, it has full control of that group's reach. That control allows a business to decide how to best communicate with the group and drive members to its website in relevant, helpful ways."

"Think about what you might pay for customer leads from other sources. I get a couple of invitations a week to connect on LinkedIn, and the people I'm talking to are at the VP level or above in their companies. Those are really valuable leads, those contacts spread brand awareness for us, and it doesn't require a lot of maintenance."

- David Rice
CEO
New Home Star

Individual Profiles Still Play a Role

While company profiles and LinkedIn discussions earn high praise from B2B marketers, companies shouldn't ignore what is still the most basic and widely-used LinkedIn tool: the individual user profile. According to a 2011 LeadFormix study, user profiles still generate the highest number of leads to company web sites. In fact, the companies participating in the **LeadFormix** study reported 1,422 leads from individual employee profiles – more than twice the number of leads generated via company profile pages or LinkedIn Groups.

According to David Rice, CEO of **New Home Star**, a real estate sales and marketing firm, most of the company's initial success marketing to other firms on LinkedIn came via personal connections he and his senior managers made with their profiles.

"Think about what you might pay for customer leads from other sources," said Rice. "I get a couple of invitations a week to connect on LinkedIn, and the people I'm talking to are at the VP level or above in their companies. Those are really valuable leads, those contacts spread brand awareness for us, and it doesn't require a lot of maintenance."

Most B2B marketers, however, will want to adopt the full spectrum of LinkedIn tools to get the results they want. Rice said that New Home Star has now built a company profile page, and according to the LeadFormix study, leads referred from a company profile or a LinkedIn Group discussion are more likely to convert than those referred from an individual profile page.

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