

“I Have a LinkedIn Account, But What Do I Actually SAY To Get Through, and Sell?”

By Art Sobczak

So you have a LinkedIn account, just like its 280 million other users. And you've gotten business from how many people? 10? 5 or less. None? Well, you're not alone. Most people don't get squat from LinkedIn. I'm going to show you why, and what you can do to take advantage of one of the most potentially valuable tools available to sales professionals.

Let me put you at ease here first. This is not going to be a tutorial on how to set up your LinkedIn profile, or how to use all of the very cool features LinkedIn has available. If you are looking for that, just do a Google search and you will find all kinds of useful free information. Better yet, I've partnered with a LinkedIn expert and we're soon releasing a comprehensive LinkedIn course just for salespeople, that also incorporates the sales messaging part of it. I'll give you a link to that later.

What we will do in the next 14 minutes is cover the main reason that salespeople don't realize the value LinkedIn has to offer.

And what's that?

It's thinking that LI is this magical site where you can set up an account, flip a switch, and then wait for eager buyers to come knocking on your door.

Or thinking that just because you have a LI connection with someone that means they want to buy from you. They might not know you, recognize you, or even want anything to do with you. Yet many salespeople do just that. They call someone and say, "Hey, we're connected on LI, I'd like to talk to you about being one of your vendors." That's really a crazy notion, isn't it. I haven't done the online dating thing, but it would be similar to someone who just made an initial connection with someone online, got their number, called and said, hey, we met on Match. Let's have a committed relationship. How about next Friday?"

Here are the real keys to success to selling on LinkedIn.

1. You need to bring possible value to the table.
AND,
2. You need to call people.

Wow, there's some sales rocket science brain surgery secrets, right?

No, just human nature. Yes, you must still give someone a reason to communicate with you. In my sales training workshops all over the world, I often pull out my camera, take a shot of the

audience, and then tell them I'll be posting that on my company Facebook page. And when they look at it, who will they look for first? That's right, themselves. Why? Because we all pretty much care about, ourselves.

No problem, it's natural. But wait. The people we want to sell to... do they care about us as much as we do. Not at all. They care about themselves. SO, if we want to be effective using LinkedIn, and selling, we must take off our group photo mentality hat, and put theirs on. Sure, we can and should use LinkedIn to find prospects, connect with them, and then use the information we find, but that must be in tandem with the possible value we might be able to deliver to them. I am going to give you examples of exactly what to say, or what to customize, and very importantly, what to avoid.

And the very important second part of this equation is, you still need to pick up the phone and talk to someone. I know that this will upset the social media and Calling is Dead crowd that believes you can Tweet and blog and Facebook and share content and that is the new way to sell because people seek you out in droves. In reality, those are all great complements to actually **talking** to people. But if you rely on them solely, following the advice of some of the gurus selling their social media courses, you'll go broke. Take it from Brian Switzer who wrote this comment on my Smart Calling blog about exchanging calling for the social media route. He said he followed one of those guru's methods to a T. No doing it his own way, which was calling. And his result?

"Crickets. Upfront I told myself to give it a full year to pay off. It (was) one calendar year on October 1, and it's been by far the worst year of my career. A total disaster. Sales are running at about an 80 percent decline, and it has been a huge blow to my financial situation."

Ok, back to LinkedIn. Bottom line, LinkedIn is a tool. A great tool, like a thermonuclear Swiss Army knife on steroids. But like any tool, success relies on the skill of the user.

I'm the least handy guy you'll ever meet. My friends tease me that my best tool for fixing something is the telephone so I can call someone to fix things for me. And not hurt myself. I am not skilled using tools. Many salespeople are not skilled at selling. Therefore, with LinkedIn, they still will not be skilled.

In fact, here is a great quote from Ralf VonSosen, head of Marketing, LinkedIn Sales Solutions, "If you suck, you will suck more tremendously using LinkedIn."

I couldn't have said it more bluntly than that.

OK, let's cover how you can deliver value, and place meaningful calls using LinkedIn, so you can be that person who DOES get business using LinkedIn.

1. Get Good at the Art and Science of LinkedIn

I promised you this wouldn't be a LinkedIn tutorial and it's not. But, the first step in being effective using the tool is to use it correctly. Again, there's lots of free info on how to do this available to you. As an overview, it means having your profile set up completely, in the right way. It means having a professional headshot, not the Facebook profile shot of you and your car. It means getting involved in groups where your prospects hang out. And very importantly it means building your network of connections, since one of the real valuable aspects of LinkedIn is mining your second degree connections. One brief tip here, PLEASE, under no circumstances can you use one of the generic LinkedIn connection requests, "Since you are a person I trust ...". That shows ignorance of how LinkedIn works, it shows a lack of creativity, and laziness. And it is impersonal. It's like addressing a letter to Occupant and asking them for business.

Again, we will be releasing the comprehensive Linked In for Sales Success course soon, and will be offering a series of free training videos as part of the launch that will cover many of the LinkedIn mistakes you need to avoid, what to do instead, as well as a lot more of the sales messaging part I'm about to cover. You can get on the list to receive those, and an entire written transcript of this presentation at

businessbyphone.com/summit2014/

2. Do Your Other Research

The more quickly you can communicate with a listener by phone, live, or on voice mail, the greater the likelihood they will engage with and be interested in your message. As opposed to quickly shifting into a negative, "This is a time-wasting, self-interested salesperson" frame of mind. Which is what happens on most calls, by the way. So, the way to do this is by customizing your possible value to them as much as possible. This is the difference between that direct mail form letter, and a handwritten personalized note. You grab attention, create curiosity, and generate interest when you deliver a one-to-one message that is all about the individual hearing it. As all good advertising copywriters know, we want to enter "...the conversation that is already going on in prospects' minds."

You do this by of course studying whatever info is available on LinkedIn, and there's a lot. Their professional and educational background, what they say about themselves, their interests, awards, memberships, anything they've published. Then do your other online research. Go to Google for sure. For the best source of how to most effectively research prospects online, check out another presentation in this Summit, by Sam Richter, author of the great book you should own, *Take the Cold Out of Cold Calling*. You'll be amazed at what you can find out about your prospects.

And I also want you to use the best source for real time, accurate intelligence, and that is from people within your prospect's company. That means doing Social Engineering, which is simply calling into your prospect's organization and asking questions of people other than your decision maker. That's right. For example, I like to call into the sales department—because we all know they like to talk, right?—and I ask questions about their prospecting efforts, how they do it, how they are trained, quotas for prospecting

calls, if they are successful, why they are not, and more. This gives me very useful information I can use when I call into the actual decision maker, because now I already know some of their problems and challenges. You can do the same thing. The process is to first identify yourself and company, ask for their help, justify the reason for asking questions—this by the way, is PROVEN to get you more and better info, and then let them know you will be asking questions. For example, “Hi, I’m Art Sobczak with Business By Phone... I’m going to be speaking with Dale Scott, and I want to be sure that what I have is going to be of value to him...I’d like to ask you a few questions.” Then, go into the questions. You will be amazed at what you get. Trust me on this. Try it.

3. Define Your Possible Value Proposition

As I point out in my book, Smart Calling, and in my training workshops, we must have a Possible Value Proposition in our call openings. Some people call it an elevator speech, or simply a value prop. I call it Possible value proposition because we are speculating it will be of interest. Granted it should be very educated speculation, but we don’t know for sure until we speak with them. This is critical and I suggest you write it down. Your Possible value is not the thing or the stuff you sell. It is always the result. It is the picture of the end result with them in the picture.

This might seem like Sales 101 for some of you... wait, what am I apologizing for, sure it’s the basics and common sense, but from my experience of listening to tens of thousands of sales calls, and doing over 1500 training programs, it’s an area where sales reps are the weakest.

So, define what you might be able to do for your listeners. Just briefly, this can take the form of,

- ...making it easier for companies/individuals to_____.
- ...cutting down the amount of time it takes to_____.
- ...eliminate the dreaded tasks of_____.
- ...cut down on the hassle of_____.
- ...cutting the costs of_____ ...
- ...reduce expenses on _____...
- ...increasing the return on investment of_____...
- ... helping companies to get_____...

And a couple of brief tips here. Quantify the result whenever you can, in terms or dollars and or time. And, whenever you can use Social Proof, meaning what you’ve done for someone else, that adds credibility.

Ok, let’s pull this all together and I’ll give you some specific messaging scenarios using LinkedIn, both mistakes to avoid, and what to do to grab interest and connect.

Calling Connections

Here is what you don't want to say:

"I'm Pat Seller with Infinite Industrial. We're connected on LinkedIn and I'd like to meet with you so I could show you our line of market-leading bearing and fittings..."

Instead, using everything we've talked about, a much better alternative is, "Hi Mike, I'm Pat Seller with Infinite Industrial. Thanks for accepting my LinkedIn connection request. As I mentioned in the request, I understand that you are tooling up for a new release and uptime is a top concern. With a couple of other component manufacturers in the same situation we were able to help them ensure..." Notice, we're using our intelligence, and talking about the result of what we can do, not the THING.

Contacting a Fellow Group Member

What NOT to say: "Karen, I'm Bill Bland with Superior Software. Hey, we're both members of the Quality Software Testing LinkedIn group. Since you're in that group, I'm sure you'd be interested in our performance testing software. I'd like to schedule a time with you for a demo..."

Whoa. Again, just because you both are in the same club doesn't mean they would want to marry you.

Here's an alternative:

"Hi Karen, I'm Bill Bland with Superior Software. I liked your response to the redundancy question the other day in the Quality Software Testing discussion group on LinkedIn. I also saw your question about what people are doing to test specific elements of their shopping cart. We've done a whitepaper on that, showing some unique methods that cut down on abandonments that have resulted in millions in increased sales that otherwise might have been lost... and I'd be happy to share that with you..."

Again, the group membership is used, but not as the sole basis for a conversation, much less buying.

Common Affiliation or Interest

There are likely hundreds of thousands of graduates of your alma mater. They can't, and wouldn't do business with all of them. In fact, there are lots of people you and I didn't even like in school. You wouldn't want to open with...

"Hi Doug, Brad Stevens here with Mercury Transportation. Hey, I see on your LinkedIn profile that we both went to Arizona State. Class of 94 here. Go Devils. I think we're finally on the right track with the football program. Anyway, I see you're Logistics Manager there and I sell trucking services. So I'm thinking a fellow ASU grad would want to work with another..."

Ouch. I've actually heard that.

Instead, if there is some common bond there, touch on it briefly, but then move quickly to the value. If they want to discuss it later, that's great.

"Hi Doug, I'm Brad Stevens with Mercury Transportation. We're actually both ASU grads. I'm calling because in speaking with one your shipping managers I hear that an initiative you have this year is cutting your overall costs on your LTL loads. We've done that with eight other shippers in the past month, already showing an average of 15% savings...I'd like to ask a few questions and see if I can provide some information..."

So, again, the affiliation or interest is a quick-mention way to get them to listen and not immediately put you in the smiling and dialing cold caller category. Then you hit them with the value, just like all of my examples.

OK, so, we've covered the problem with users not getting business from LinkedIn. To really use LinkedIn, the tool, like the skilled craftsman you can become, you need to hint at possible value on every connection, and, be proactive in placing those phone calls. In the right way.

Again, I have a couple of things for you. I have the written transcript of this presentation so you can take the word-for-word examples I've given you, and use them in any way you like. It's my permission for legally stealing them. Be my guest.

And, I'll also let you know the moment we release the free LinkedIn training videos before we launch the major LinkedIn for Sales Success training program. These videos will cover, in lots more detail the common mistakes salespeople make that prevent them from using it effectively, and what you need to do instead. And I will also share more word-for word examples just like I've done here. Right now please go to businessbyphone.com/summit2014/

Thank you for joining me and investing your valuable time in this session. I'm confident that when you follow these ideas you will use LinkedIn to find, connect with, get through to, and sell to more buyers who need what you sell. I'm Art Sobczak.