

Ten Tips on Building a Strong Profile

LinkedIn is all about connecting, but before we connect, we look for what we have in common. That's the key to putting together a profile that jump-starts conversation. Think of your profile as a way to promote your brand—a professional permalink, a fixed point on the web to promote your skills, your knowledge, your personality. Brands build trust by using an authentic voice and telling a credible story. Here are ten tips to help you do the same:

1 Don't cut and paste your resume.

LinkedIn hooks you into a network, not just a human resources department. You wouldn't hand out your resume before introducing yourself, so don't do it here. Instead, describe your experience and abilities as you would to someone you just met. And write for the screen, in short blocks of copy with visual or textual signposts.

2 Borrow from the best marketers.

Light up your profile with your voice. Use specific adjectives, colorful verbs, active construction (managed project team, not responsible for project team management). Act natural: don't write in the third person unless that formality suits your brand. Picture yourself at a conference or client meeting. How do you introduce yourself (with visual or text)?

8 Ask and answer questions.

Thoughtful questions and useful answers build our credibility. The best ones give people a reason to look at our profile. Make a point of answering questions in our field, to establish our expertise, raise our visibility, and most important, to build social capital with people in our network. You may need answers to a question of your own down the road.

9 Improve your Google PageRank.

Pat our own back and others'. Get recommendations from colleagues, clients, and employers who can speak credibly about our abilities or performance. (Think quality, not quantity.) Ask them to focus on a specific skill or personality trait that drives their opinion of you. Make meaningful comments when you recommend others. And mention it up-variety makes our recommendations feel authentic.

10 Build your connections.

Connections are one of the most important aspects of our brand: the company you keep reflects the quality of our brand. What happens when you scan a profile and see that you know someone in common? That profilee's stock with you soars. The value of that commonality works both ways. So identify connections that will add to our credibility and pursue those.

A final note: As you add connections and recommendations, your profile develops into a peer-reviewed picture of you, of your personal brand. Make sure it's in focus, well composed—and easy to find. Remember that permalink? Edit your public profile's URL to reflect your name or tagline, then put it to work: add it to your blog, link to it from your website, include it in your e-mail signature. Then go start a conversation.