

# LINKEDIN PROFILE OPTIMIZATION FOR ENTREPRENEURS



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## Introduction

You probably already know that LinkedIn is the single most powerful online platform for entrepreneurs. Yet, it comes with a caveat: since there are more than 377 million professionals who use the social network,<sup>1</sup> you need to stand out, and in a *good* way.

Most entrepreneurs know that they need to distinguish themselves from other business owners. It should be easy – you’ve built a unique company/brand with a specific target market in mind, and you have the skills and expertise that inherently set you apart from the sea of others, right? While that may be so, there’s no guarantee that possible customers or clients and other professionals will notice these aspects of your profile – unless you present them in the right way.

It goes without saying that we’re all short on time these days. So, your goal on LinkedIn is not just to make a powerful impression, but to do so as efficiently as possible so that you can get leads and network with industry connections as quickly as possible.

Not only will these tips boost your “Who’s Viewing Your Profile” metrics, but they’ll help you achieve results that matter. Whether that’s getting noticed by your target audience or opening doors for networking opportunities, the optimization of your LinkedIn profile can get you there.

Also, don’t worry if you’re not a professional writer. The reason these tips are so effective is because they use a specific formula to precisely target the audience you want to reach: customers who are looking for the exact services or products you provide. When you follow these tips, you can’t go wrong. You won’t find any intricate writing processes here; we’ll focus only on the most effective fundamentals that will catch the eyes of the individuals you want to get noticed by most. Besides, throughout this entire process, you’ll be writing about the subject you know best – your business!

We’ll take this process step-by-step, and with just a little time and thought, you’ll have a professional, attractive LinkedIn profile optimized to stand out to your target audience. As an entrepreneur, your unique product or service serves a specific purpose and provides a solution to a problem that many people are experiencing. That’s what makes your brand stand out and able to offer significant value for the right customers. Now, it’s just a matter of putting the spotlight on that unique value so that you can make a powerful, unforgettable first impression.

If you’re ready to get started, I recommend that you grab any information you might need, and set aside a few hours during which you’ll be able to work uninterrupted. Keep in mind that putting in the extra effort now is what can make the difference between getting powerful leads and developing relationships with long-term contacts through networking, versus scrambling to get any customers coming in at all.

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<sup>1</sup> Dougherty, Lisa. LinkedIn Pulse (Jul. 8 2014). Retrieved from <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20140708162049-7239647-16-tips-to-optimize-your-linkedin-profile-and-enhance-your-personal-brand> on Nov. 27 2015.

We'll start with the basics and move on from there, so that everything from your profile name to your status updates are optimized to best attract the people with whom you want to connect. If you're ready to begin, then let's get started!

## The Basics

When it comes to optimizing your LinkedIn profile, there's nothing that's off-limits. In other words, with every single aspect of your profile, there's an opportunity to capitalize on those seemingly insignificant character counts so that you can truly make your profile stand out. Let's take a look.

### Name

This step is as simple as it gets: your name has a 60-character maximum, and it's the most basic form of identification you can include. For this portion of your profile, keep it short and simple – include your first and last name, and avoid using any nicknames, contact information, or keywords in this area, as it could make you appear inauthentic.

### URL

Don't overlook the URL. Optimizing this portion of your profile gives it a neat appearance, and more importantly, makes it easier for others to share. Customize your URL so that it appears this way: `linkedin.com/[yourname]`. If your name is already taken, consider incorporating some other distinguishing characters, but don't include a ton of numbers, nicknames, or any other unprofessional content.

### Photo

Each day, it's estimated that 45 million profiles are viewed on LinkedIn. One way to ensure that your profile gets included in that number is to incorporate a professional photograph – this makes your profile seven times more likely to be viewed.<sup>2</sup> If you can, go for professional headshots; if not, make sure that the image of you is professional in appearance (business attire, plain background, and no selfies!).

### Background Photo

Part of having an eye-catching LinkedIn profile is making sure that you've achieved 100% completeness. While you might not consider the background photo (a feature that was added to LinkedIn in June 2014) to be of significant importance, this is an opportunity to personalize your page a bit more and gain the attention of your target audience. To really boost your brand visibility, why not choose some creative form of your logo as your background photo?

### Headline

In just 120 characters, you have to sell your expertise and your brand as the best possible solution available for anyone who might need your product/services. Essentially, your headline should reflect your personal promise of value – it should say who it is that you help, what value your product/services

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<sup>2</sup> Mauney, Brad. LinkedIn Blog. (Jul. 29 2013). Retrieved from <http://blog.linkedin.com/2013/07/29/five-simple-ways-to-boost-your-professional-brand-on-linkedin-infographic/> Nov. 26 2015.

can deliver, and why your company is the best choice (what makes it unique). Here's where you can include some SEO to attract your target audience through top keywords. What words do you hope to get found for when your potential customer or client does a search? Include those in your headline – but make sure that the verbiage still flows naturally. In other words, don't make it obvious that you planted those keywords in your headline; make sure that they fit into the overall message of your brand statement.

## Location

Like your name, this aspect of your profile is pretty straightforward. But before you move on so quickly, consider this: if your business is located on the outskirts of a big city, it may benefit you to list that city as your location. This can improve your odds in search results, and is especially beneficial if you live near a city with a large population of potential customers.

## Industry

In addition to optimizing your location, you need to tailor the industry section of your profile so that it effectively reflects your brand. To target potential customers and/or possible industry connections, ask yourself this: what would he or she search for in the "industry" section to find me? If you have a paid profile (and thus, have access to the "Who's Viewed Your Profile" insights), then you may want to experiment with incorporating different words into your "industry" section. After a few tries, you should be able to find out which phrase is resonating best with your target audience.

## Contact Information

You're on LinkedIn to make connections, so make sure it's super easy for anyone who views your profile to get in touch with you. If you're only a third-degree connection or beyond, it's likely that someone who's interested in connecting with you won't bother to send an introduction or buy an InMail to get in touch. You can still make it easy for people to reach you by optimizing your contact details. You can include up to three websites as well as a Twitter handle. Don't forget about the "Advice for Contacting" section, in which you can incorporate any information that makes you easy to reach, such as an email address or phone number.

## Brand Description

Here, you have 2,000 characters to describe your brand and significant accomplishments. Envision the key descriptions of expertise and features that would define your brand as the best in the industry. How can you illustrate the ways in which your brand has grown, achieved key wins, and provided unique value to previous or existing customers? Don't be afraid to incorporate numbers here. Most importantly, show, don't tell! If you can provide links to any blogs, websites, or reviews that really help your brand stand out, this is the place to do so. You can also include any eye-catching media such as videos, images, presentations, or documents to your experience section. Whenever possible, let your brand speak for itself. Also, be sure not to rattle off any of your company's accomplishments in a resume-like format. Your goal is to make your profile stand out and come to life. If you're questioning the readability of your Experience section, then run it by a couple of friends or family members to see if it needs any edits.

## Publications

Like the Experience section, Publications has a 2,000 character limit. Here, you should include any examples of work you've done – from blog posts to papers and any other published written content, any work-related content you've completed in the past will exhibit credibility in your industry for anyone who's viewing your profile.

## Summary

The LinkedIn Summary is of monumental importance when it comes to getting noticed, and optimizing it is what will give you an edge over your competition. Some people fail to bother with their LinkedIn Summary altogether, which is a big mistake.

Your LinkedIn Summary is so important – perhaps the most crucial element of your entire LinkedIn Profile – that I've dedicated an entire section of this eBook to it. Most likely, you'll spend the most time working on your profile summary. While it's only 2,000 characters, the part that can be most difficult is taking advantage of those characters and using them to your best ability so that your summary gives a well-rounded, captivating description of your brand without being overly-detailed, or conversely, too nondescript.

The summary has a 2,000 character limit, and it's in your best interest to use those characters up. Specifically, research suggests that profiles with summaries of 40 words or more are more likely to be featured in search results.<sup>3</sup> That's a great reason to put a little extra thought into your summary.

One of the easiest ways to get started on your LinkedIn Summary is to revisit your headline. Remember, your headline should reflect your promise of value. It indicates why (and how) your product or services could provide unique benefits that people couldn't find elsewhere. To create your summary, you'll simply build on that statement. Here are a few questions to consider when writing your summary:

- What would you like to communicate to potential customers and possible connections about your product/services?
- What type of impression do you want your brand to make on people who view your profile?
- What qualities is your brand best known for? Think of ways in which you can illustrate how your brand upholds its core values and distinct purpose.

Also, there are some words you may want to consider avoiding altogether. One of the most commonly over-used phrase (according to LinkedIn themselves!) is “motivated.”<sup>4</sup> While you likely won't use this word to describe yourself as an entrepreneur/business owner as it is more commonly used for job candidates, it is still a good idea to avoid it altogether, because there are so many individuals who include this word in their profiles. Instead of using this kind of adjective, focus on explaining the things

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<sup>3</sup> Cavazos, Nicole. ZipRecruiter. (2015). Retrieved from <https://www.ziprecruiter.com/blog/optimize-your-linkedin-profile-in-7-easy-steps/> Nov. 27 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Fisher, Catherine. LinkedIn Blog. (Jan. 21 2015). Retrieved from <http://blog.linkedin.com/2015/01/21/brand-you-year-how-to-brand-yourself-without-sounding-like-everyone-else/> Nov. 27, 2015.

that set your brand apart. *How* has your self-motivated nature led you to develop a successful start-up with a unique edge over its competition? Did you use your motivation to develop your product or service, which is now a creative solution to an ongoing dilemma? Remember the rule: show, don't tell!

As for some other words to avoid, the remaining list of “the most overused, underwhelming buzzwords” and phrases of 2014 according to LinkedIn includes: passionate, creative, driven, extensive experience, responsible, strategic, track record, organizational, and expert.<sup>5</sup> Keep in mind that these aren't necessarily “bad” words, they're simply overused. The reason they're overused is because nearly all customers want to use services from professionals and brands that fit this description; the secret is showing *how* your brand fits these descriptions (although you shouldn't pick all of them; target a few of these or other key adjectives that fit best with your brand), instead of just listing the qualities it exhibits.

Your summary should also have an organized structure. You shouldn't rattle off past accomplishments or try to woo potential customers by taking on an obvious salesy tone. The summary should have a logical flow that highlights a few specific accomplishments and features of your services/product. You can also discuss the things about which you are passionate (as long as they pertain to your industry) and any special skills or experiences you have that sets your brand apart. Your tone should be 100% genuine. Don't forget that you can always ask friends or family members to proof your work and provide any suggestions for improvement.

Essentially, the summary section affords you the opportunity to tell the story of you and the development of your brand. While it should be professional and the focus should be on your brand (avoid details about your personal life, of course), you don't have to make it sound too formal or forced. Be sure to write your summary in the first person, and always begin by building on your promise of value.

Here is an example of some feedback I recently provided for a client about optimizing the introduction of his LinkedIn Summary, or what I refer to as “the brand statement”:

“Helping [clients] do [role/deliverables] so that they can have [benefits/results]. I am especially good at [list differentiation] which is why I am known as the [ultimate brand position e.g., Career Happiness Coach]. I stand for/am committed to [values/things you and your brand to stand for 100% of the time].”

Please keep in mind that your brand statement needs to include the top keywords that are best optimized to attract employers from your target industry.

Some other details you might want to consider including in your summary are the amount of years for which you've worked in your industry or how long your business has been in existence.

If you are struggling to organize your summary, consider first making bullet points to address expertise, noteworthy accomplishments, and product features/services offered. You can always build upon these

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<sup>5</sup> Fisher, Catherine; see above.

points and draft a cohesive summary from there. Or, conversely, you may want to choose to keep some of your summary in bulleted format. For instance, I've found that listing key values/differentiations in a bulleted list is effective and helps draw the eye down the list. Remember, readability is an important part of having a LinkedIn profile that gets you noticed. So, you might want to include key values such as "Commitment to providing customers with 100% satisfaction and a guaranteed ROI" or "Career Coach who is passionate about helping her clients find jobs that are the best fit for their lifestyles" in a bulleted list.

Finally, don't forget to include a call-to-action at the end of your summary. You need to make profile visitors feel as if they should get in contact with you *now*. This is the part where you essentially "seal the deal" and do your best to convince potential leads that your product/service is the solution they've been looking for.

## Additional Profile Sections

Now that you've completed your most challenging profile section (your summary), completing the remaining portions of your profile will feel easy in comparison. Resist the urge to skip them altogether; though. Remember, a LinkedIn profile that's 100% complete is more likely to get noticed and picked up during search results.

### Skills

It's recommended that LinkedIn users list at least 10 core skills. You can receive endorsements from others, and in return, you can provide endorsements for them as well. Even without a premium profile, you can list up to 50 skills. I recommend listing as many as possible, but within a reasonable amount – this is one instance in which more is better. Think of it this way: the broader your skillset, the more likely you are to appeal to a potential customer who's searching for a very specific solution that your brand can offer. Don't forget to check off that you're interested in receiving endorsements for your skills; and, once you begin receiving them, be kind and return the favor for others. More than 10 million endorsements are given every day on LinkedIn, but the average user has only five endorsements.<sup>6</sup> This is one area in which you can easily surpass your competition by increasing your number of endorsements beyond the average.

### Education

Many LinkedIn users stick to the basics in this section, but the Education portion of your profile provides yet another opportunity to capitalize on your history to attract connections and potential customers. One thing to keep in mind when writing your education section is to expand on your degree so that it includes any relevant keywords. You have 100 characters for this section, so feel free to use them! Also, avoid listing information about your high school education. Even if you are a recent college graduate, most individuals simply don't look at this portion of your education. Keep in mind that you have 1,000

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<sup>6</sup> Schaffer, Neal. Maximize Social Business. (Aug. 28, 2015). Retrieved from <http://maximizesocialbusiness.com/professional-linkedin-profile-tips-checklist-9648/> Nov. 27, 2015.



additional characters to expand upon your education in the Education Description section – discuss, using keywords, how your schooling is relevant to your brand.

## Honors & Awards

Don't leave this 1,000 word section blank. Even if you feel as if you've "never won anything," there must be some point in time during which your efforts were recognized. Use this section to highlight superior performance, and if possible, tailor it to fit with skills and talents that support the unique value or mission of your brand.

## Volunteer Experience & Causes

If you can include any volunteer experience in your profile, it's a good idea to do so. Now more than ever, people are drawn to brands and companies that support a larger cause, so showing that your brand is committed to helping within the community can help attract more possible connections and/or leads.

## Connecting With Others

Once you've tailored your LinkedIn profile using the strategies discussed so far, you can begin optimizing your profile through the connections you make with others. Take a look:

### Connections

How many connections should you have on LinkedIn? While the simplest answer might be "the more, the better," here's one benchmark for which you can aim: multiply your age by 10, and try to achieve that many connections.<sup>7</sup> Having a low number of connections might not give you enough exposure on LinkedIn, so be sure to think back to past business relationships so to build up your network.

### Groups

LinkedIn Groups are an ideal way to get connected with other professionals in your industry, which can certainly include potential customers. When you join a group, other group members become able to contact you through the messenger (essentially bypassing the first-degree connection stage altogether). The majority (81%) of LinkedIn users belongs to at least one group,<sup>8</sup> so be sure to use this tool to your advantage and join as many groups as you can manage.

### Status Updates

Being an active user on LinkedIn is just as important as building a compelling profile. You can publish status updates to draw attention to your brand; just be sure that it's business-oriented. If you're feeling shy about sharing your thoughts, consider writing posts that are helpful and relevant in your industry, or even sharing articles that might be interesting to your target audience.

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<sup>7</sup> Schaffer, Neal; see above.

<sup>8</sup> Schaffer, Neal; see above.

## Staying Visible

Being active on LinkedIn increases your visibility. Updating your status once per weekday is recommended, and based on research, may help you connect with about 60% of your target audience.<sup>9</sup> It's also recommended that you continue to update your information regularly – only 42% of users do so, and it's one way that you can stand out against your competition.<sup>10</sup> You can also rearrange your profile sections and continue to monitor your profile activity to see what's most effective.

## Conclusion

The steps listed in this eBook serve as the fundamentals for how you can create an effective and compelling LinkedIn profile. Optimizing your LinkedIn profile is one of the best ways to grow your brand, as networking online is critical for getting noticed by potential customers and connections within your industry, among other professionals.

With that being said, it's only one of the ways in which you can optimize your visibility and expand your brand. In my experience as a career coach and brand strategist, I have come up with dozens of other ways in which you can take your skills, strengths, talents, and experiences and use them to your advantage to develop a successful brand. For more information on how you can expand your entrepreneur skills and develop a prosperous, sustainable brand, visit [www.InspiredWork.com](http://www.InspiredWork.com).

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<sup>9</sup> Knight, Warren. LinkedIn Pulse. (Sept. 26, 2014). Retrieved from <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20140926175351-938929-the-social-media-frequency-guide-how-often-should-you-post> Nov. 27, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Schaffer, Neal; see above.