



# **5 Simple Steps for Getting Started with LinkedIn**

**A brief guide**

**by**

**Des Walsh**

**Executive Leadership Coach  
Co-author, LinkedIn for Recruiting**

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# 5 Simple Steps for Getting Started with LinkedIn

## Introduction

With over 364 million members worldwide and still growing apace, LinkedIn™ is a key social platform for companies large and small and for individual professionals.

There is no shortage of information available about LinkedIn, on the LinkedIn corporate site, in blogs and books and in seminars.

But what I've observed is that the very fact of having so much information available can actually be overwhelming. Which can discourage people from taking the steps to use this powerful platform to help grow their business or career.

This short guide, with its **five simple steps**, has been written to meet that challenge. It is aimed squarely at helping busy professionals and company executives establish their profile and presence on LinkedIn and do that in a businesslike way.

## ***What if you have already joined?***

If you are already a LinkedIn member and using the platform actively, some or all of the content of this guide will be known to you already. At least this could be a refresher for you.

But if you are one of the many people who have opened a LinkedIn account but have not actually used LinkedIn actively, you will find plenty of material here to help you get value from being a member.

The five steps are:

1. Joining LinkedIn
2. Connecting Strategically
3. Setting Up Your Profile
4. Giving and Receiving Recommendations
5. Using LinkedIn Groups

## **Step 1. Joining LinkedIn**

There are two key steps in joining LinkedIn: signing up and registering

### ***Signing up***

Many people join LinkedIn because a friend or colleague invited them. You can join just as easily without receiving an invitation.

Membership is open to anyone 18 years or over – as long as they haven't been suspended or removed from the LinkedIn system. You can have **only one active account**.

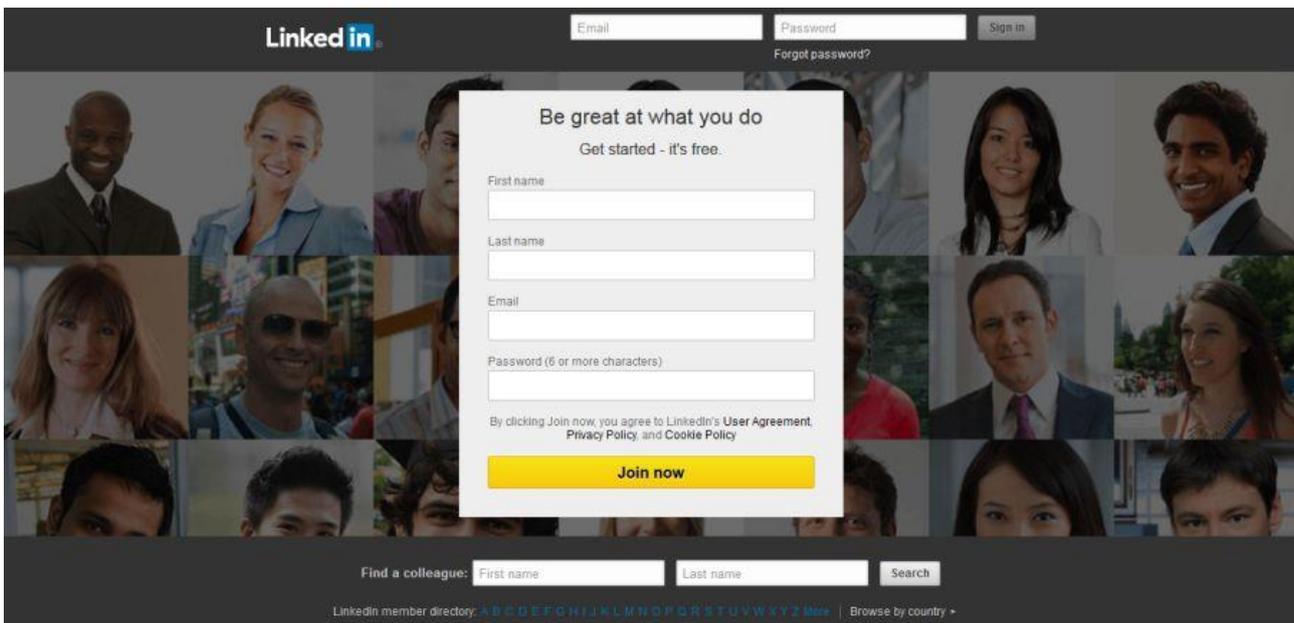
There are several levels of paid membership, but everyone joins at the basic level, which is free. That makes the signup process quite straightforward.

**If you are joining because a friend or colleague invited you**, then you will have received an email invitation. The alert in your email will clearly identify the sender and have the words "Invitation to connect on LinkedIn". Opening the message, you will see an invitation to join LinkedIn.

**You can also join LinkedIn directly**, without having to wait for an invitation from an existing user.

Open your web browser – Chrome, Firefox or other browser - and in the web address field type **http://www.linkedin.com**

You will see an initial welcoming screen with a simple form for joining, with a brightly colored **Join Now** button.



## **Registering**

Once you have signed up, LinkedIn steps you through a process of providing some basic information. The answers you provide will go to building out your LinkedIn profile (see section 3 below for more on completing and updating your profile).

**The layout of the registration process may vary**, depending on whether you signed in directly or acted on an invitation, and on whether LinkedIn has changed the format since this document was last updated, but the basic information you need to provide will be the same. Below are basic screenshots from a signup process in 2015.

**You may find it a challenge** to complete some items. The most practical suggestion I can make here is that you complete the details as well as you can, knowing **that you can come back later and edit the information** once you have more experience.

## Getting your country and zip/post code



Let's start with your profile  
This will set you up for success on LinkedIn

Country \*  
Australia

Postal code (e.g. 2000) \*

**Next** \* Required information

## Job title, company and industry

If you don't have an official title and/or are not actually employed by a company, you can give yourself whatever title you want and for the Company entry you can use or make up your own brand. Remember you can change all this later. Note that when you complete the two fields below, the form will expand to provide a space for your industry, with a dropdown menu of choices: again, you can edit this later if you don't like the first choice you made.

## Let's start with your profile

This will set you up for success on LinkedIn

Are you a student? \*  Yes  No

Job title \*

Company \*

[Create your profile](#)

\* Required information

### Your current purpose in being on LinkedIn

When you choose one of the options on this form, you will be taken to another form – see details below.

## What are you most interested in?

We'll use this info to personalize your experience. (Don't worry, we'll keep it private.)

Staying up-to-date with my industry >

Building my professional network >

Finding a job >

Keeping in touch with my contacts >

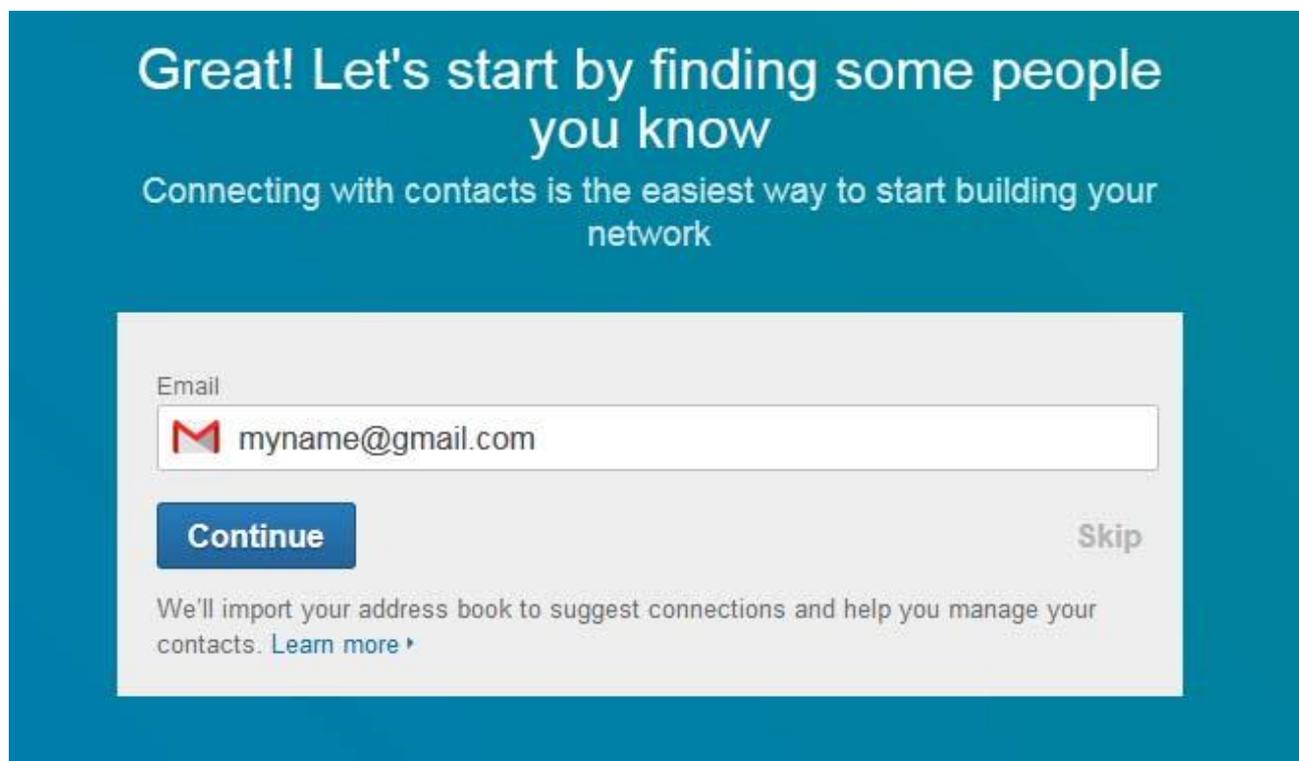
Not sure yet. I'm open! >

## Importing your contacts

This is a helpful step for building your network (see next section) but you need to understand what you are being asked to do here. LinkedIn is effectively asking you to let them into your contact list in your email application (Gmail address illustrated) and import all your contacts into LinkedIn. Then your addresses will be compared against the list of existing LinkedIn accounts so you can see who of your contacts are already there and invite them to connect with you.

So by all means let them import those contacts if you are ok with that, but then read what I have to say further on about how you let LinkedIn use that list on your behalf – you can control it!

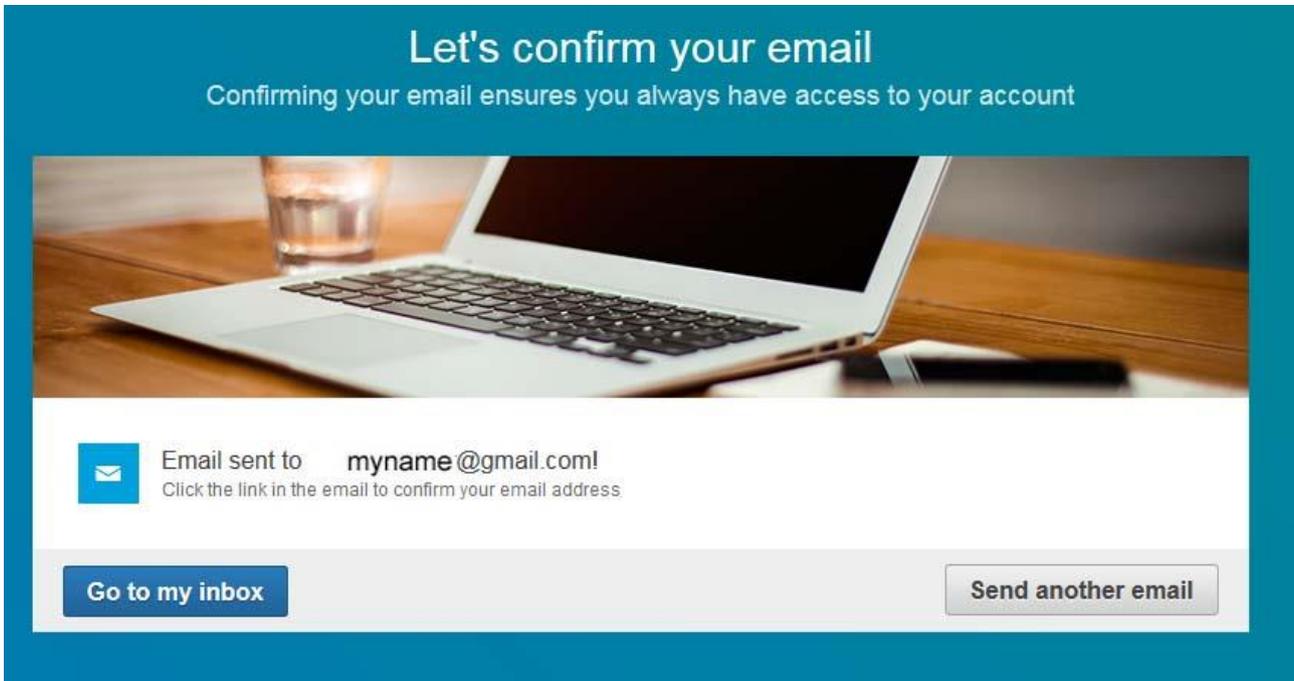
If you don't want to do that now, no problem: just click on Skip at the right hand side of the form. Note that if you hit Continue, that is giving your approval for LinkedIn to go ahead and import your contacts' details. It's a bit sneaky that they have the "Skip" option grayed out – but it will work and you can consider at your leisure whether you want LinkedIn to import your contacts.



The image shows a screenshot of a LinkedIn interface with a teal background. At the top, it says "Great! Let's start by finding some people you know" in white text. Below that, it says "Connecting with contacts is the easiest way to start building your network" in a smaller white font. In the center, there is a white rectangular form. Inside the form, the word "Email" is written in small gray text above a text input field. The input field contains a red and white Gmail icon followed by the text "myname@gmail.com". Below the input field, there are two buttons: a blue "Continue" button on the left and a grayed-out "Skip" button on the right. At the bottom of the form, there is a line of text: "We'll import your address book to suggest connections and help you manage your contacts. [Learn more](#) ▶".

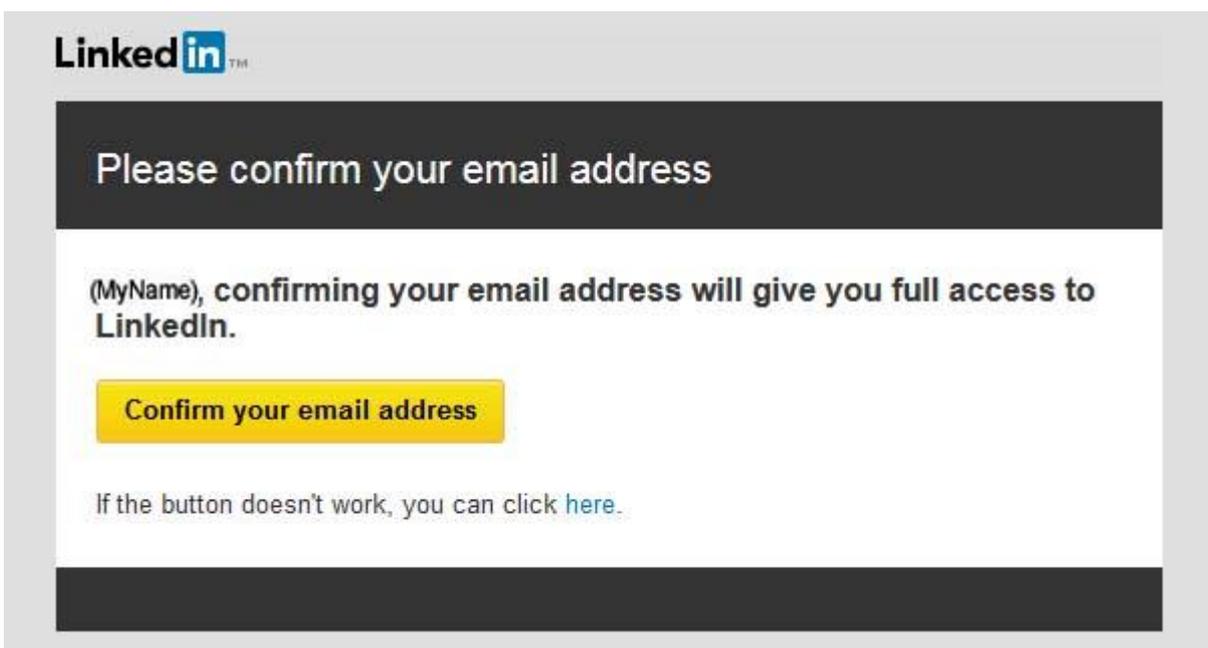
## Confirming your email

This next screen informs you that LinkedIn has sent you an email to confirm your email address.

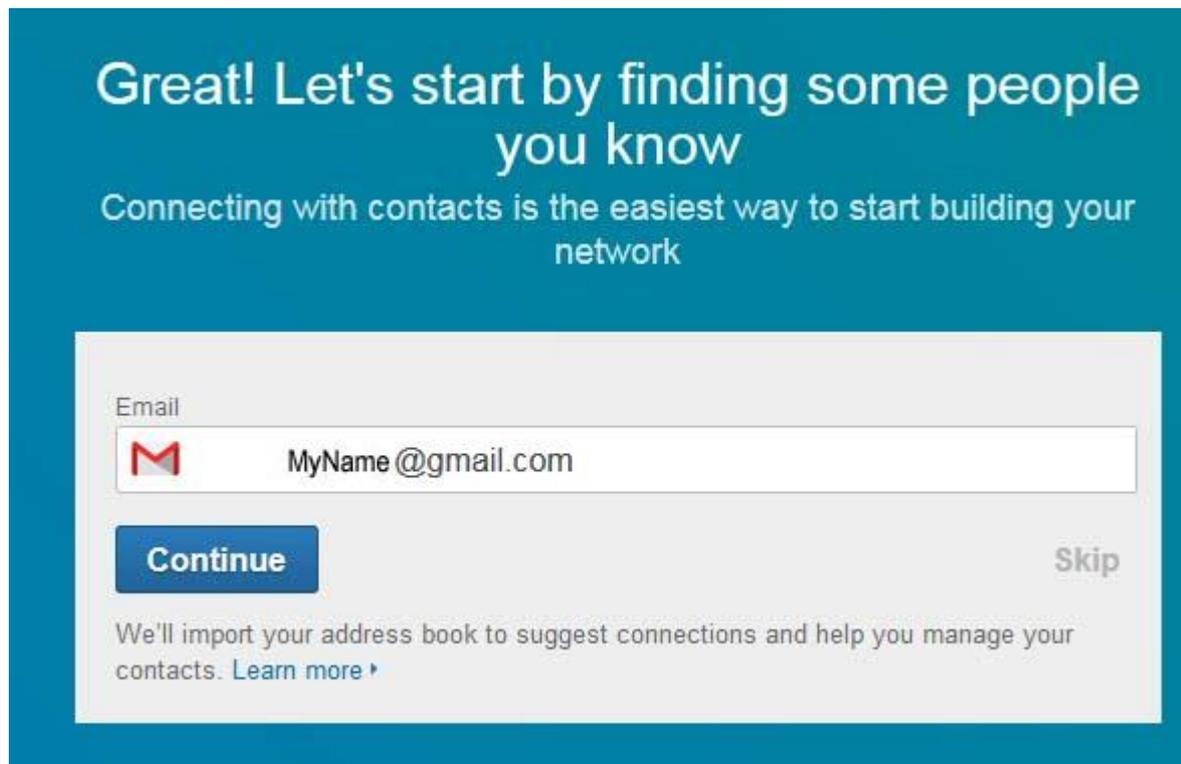


## Confirmation message

**Check your email** for a message like this. Click on the yellow button and you will then be able to access your LinkedIn account.



When you have confirmed your email address, the screen as in the following screenshot will open.



Again, you have the **option to skip** this step and then look later at getting LinkedIn to import your contacts and then do some matching with the email addresses of current members. In that regard, note that the match is made via email address lists, not by the names of your contacts, so if the address you have is not one a contact of yours is using for LinkedIn (or is in their list of other addresses they choose to share with LinkedIn, there will of course be no match).

If you hit the Continue button, LinkedIn will then set about helping you find contacts of yours already on LinkedIn.

## 2. Connecting Strategically

This second step is about **building your network**. As mentioned above, as soon as you have signed up and registered you are offered help from LinkedIn to start connecting with people you know and inviting them to join your network. In the common way of social networks, you are offered the facility of inviting anyone in your Gmail contact list, your Yahoo! email list and other lists to join you.

**I'm always concerned that people might move too fast here and send invitations they might later regret.** The underlying problem is that many of us will quite likely have a number of people on those lists whom we would not normally include in any real sense in our *professional* network. So we need to be selective.

In fact, LinkedIn's **official line** is that you should only connect (directly, in your first level of connections) with people you know and trust.

Some people basically ignore that official line and invite as many people as they possibly can. Others, including me, are more conservative and selective about whom we invite and whose invitations we accept.

And remember that LinkedIn will only allow you a maximum 3,000 invitations (i.e. a lifetime allowance): there are ways to get some alleviation of that, but it is a good idea not to waste invitations. 3,000 might seem like a lot, but if you use the LinkedIn option for bulk invitations (I don't recommend you do, by the way), you might be surprised at how your number of available invitations starts to dwindle.

I don't believe there is an absolutely correct course of action which would suit everyone's needs. But I do counsel the new user not to choose, without further thought and a bit more settling in with LinkedIn, to send an invitation to everyone in their mailing list or even to instantly invite all their former colleagues or classmates who are already on LinkedIn (note that, as I have indicated above, LinkedIn is *not* advising you to do that, but I do believe this phase of joining LinkedIn can be a bit confusing for new members).

So at this point I suggest that a new member of LinkedIn takes a deep breath and does some thinking about the whole business of using LinkedIn to organize and enhance her or his professional network.

If you decide that you want to go for a very big list of connections right away, I would still counsel you to think carefully before sending a general invitation to every address on your mailing list.

Once you have worked out your strategy, think about *the way* you invite people. Unless you are in the camp of those who just want all the numbers they can get, **I**

## **recommend not using the LinkedIn-supplied boilerplate invitation.**

Any of us who have been LinkedIn members for a while will have seen hundreds, maybe thousands, of these impersonal emails and many of us just choose to ignore or them.

Worse than that, there is the serious risk that someone will hit the option for "I don't know this person". If that happens too often LinkedIn could limit your ability to send invitations to anyone.

You don't need that: remember it's possible some of those people might just not remember sitting next to you in class or working with you at some company ten or twenty years ago.

The Help section on LinkedIn spells this out:

When you click the "I don't know this person" link after clicking **Ignore**, this prevents the person you don't know from reinviting you in the future. If someone receives an excessive number of "I don't know this person" responses, they could be restricted from sending invitations to connect to others.

It doesn't take much to personalize your message. That bit of personalization could be the difference between having a great connection and having someone ignore your invitation.

### **3. Setting up Your Profile**

How you represent yourself on your LinkedIn profile is becoming increasingly how people will learn about you and make judgments accordingly about whether they want to work with you or do business with you. You may never know just when someone will come looking for someone with your skills, so it is in your interest to have the profile set up in such a way as to tell your story the way you want it to be heard.

For some guidance on how to best to set up your LinkedIn profile, watch my 20 minutes and 15 seconds video LinkedIn Profile Walkthrough and the companion video

LinkedIn Profile Edit Mode (17 min 42 sec). (*Note that these videos were made early in 2014 and there have been quite a few changes to layout, but the basic principles remain the same. Time for some new videos!*)

And remember that you will need to check in from time to time and make sure your LinkedIn profile is up to date.

Remember that, as with other online sites, **what you put in your LinkedIn profile is not set in stone**. You can modify it whenever and as often as you wish. One suggestion I would make is to put yourself imaginatively in the shoes of a prospective customer or business partner and read your profile from their point of view. I did that recently with my own profile and re-worked completely the summary section to make it less stodgy and hopefully more appealing.

#### **4. Giving and Receiving Recommendations**

**Recommendations**, otherwise known as *testimonials*, are an excellent feature of LinkedIn. In practice, they vary in usefulness, from very bland to exceptional. If you have provided someone with real support or excellent service, you may find they will give you a LinkedIn recommendation which will be much more positive than anything you might have written about yourself.

Generally I favor the principle of not asking for a recommendation till I have given one, but I have made exceptions – in which cases my aim has been to reciprocate promptly. Of course it is easier to ask for a recommendation from someone for whom you have already provided one. The key thing to keep in mind at that point is to make the recommendation useful for that person at the point where she or he is now – even ask them what they would like you to say and highlight about them.

#### **5. Using LinkedIn Groups**

LinkedIn Groups have been around for years but have only relatively recently become one of the most dynamic features of the platform and potentially a great way of building rewarding, productive connections.

It's really the subject of another, longer guide, so for the purposes of this document I will basically provide a link to the relevant section on the LinkedIn corporate site and links to some blog posts I have written on the subject.

The corporate site link: LinkedIn Groups

There are at this writing **2,177,962 LinkedIn Groups**. You should be able to find some that interest you.

My key recommendation at this point is to see if you can find a few groups which are in your field of interest and expertise, join them and see if you get value.

So that you don't waste your time, I suggest you check to see how many members the group has before you join. And see how much real activity there is – as in, discussions – not just people posting links to their own websites or blog posts.

Some groups are open and for others there is an approval process.

If you don't find a group that meets your needs, you could think of starting one. It's very easy. But I recommend participating in some of the groups first, to get the feel of how things are done. Because LinkedIn is a professional networking site, some things will be done differently from other membership sites. Make sure you read the rules of each new group you join!

## **Conclusion**

When Bill Vick and I co-authored our book *LinkedIn for Recruiting* 10 years ago there was not a lot of reliable advice, in traditionally published form, for the new user wanting to use LinkedIn to good effect, although there were some very active LinkedIn-focused discussion groups online. Now there is a ton of information available, which of course means there is scope for enlightenment and guidance, but also for confusion. I hope you have found this short introduction clear and helpful.

My suggestion is to proceed systematically and develop your own strategy for how

LinkedIn is going to work for you and your business.

If you have a question about anything in this document, please send me an email at [deswalsh@webartsc.com](mailto:deswalsh@webartsc.com) and I will do my best to answer it or point you in a direction where hopefully you can get an answer.

Happy Linking!

## **Des Walsh**

PS: The intention is for the guide to be complemented in due course by additional guides to help with more advanced use of the platform. If you would like to be kept informed about additional guides and coaching programs and are not on my mailing list, just provide your **details at this link**.



### ***Des Walsh, Executive Leadership Coach***

Des Walsh is a **Certified Social Media Strategist** from the California-based S3 Academy. Des has been a blogger since 2003 and writes for the leading business site [Market Leadership Journal](#) and at his own [Des Walsh dot Com blog](#).

He has given **presentations** on blogging, LinkedIn and social media strategy in Australia, the USA and China. Des is passionate about helping business owners and other professionals cut through the social media hype, buzzwords and fear of "getting it wrong" and become confident, effective users of social media in its various forms.

**Co-author of LinkedIn for Recruiting**, one of the earliest books on LinkedIn, Des established the LinkedIn Bloggers Group in 2005, founded the not-for-profit, bi-annual project, the 30 Day Linking Blitz and the Linking Business Professionals Group on LinkedIn. His Twitter handle is @deswalsh, his LinkedIn profile is at <http://linkedin.com/in/deswalsh> and his website and blog are at Des Walsh dot Com.

In a former career he was a senior executive in the Australian Federal and New South Wales State Governments.

## ***How to deal with the many and frequent changes in LinkedIn™***

As you proceed to build your presence on LinkedIn, you will most likely find, as even seasoned LinkedIn users do, that the many and frequent changes can be disconcerting. To deal better with this, and generally to have a forum where you can get practical answers to questions about LinkedIn – and other social media – consider joining the Linking Business Professionals Group on LinkedIn.

The Linking Business Professionals Group provides a welcoming space for business professionals who aim to use LinkedIn more effectively for their professional growth and business success. It is a moderated, spam-free zone and the membership ranges from people just getting started on LinkedIn to LinkedIn experts. Just [click here](#) to apply for (free) membership.

### **Ready to take your LinkedIn presence and activity to the next level?**

Once you have the basics of LinkedIn clear, you will surely want to ramp up your engagement on this platform.

I provide a range of LinkedIn services, for individuals and companies, from helping you have a compelling profile to facilitating team workshops either inhouse or via video link. For details [click here](#).

Happy linking!

**Des**