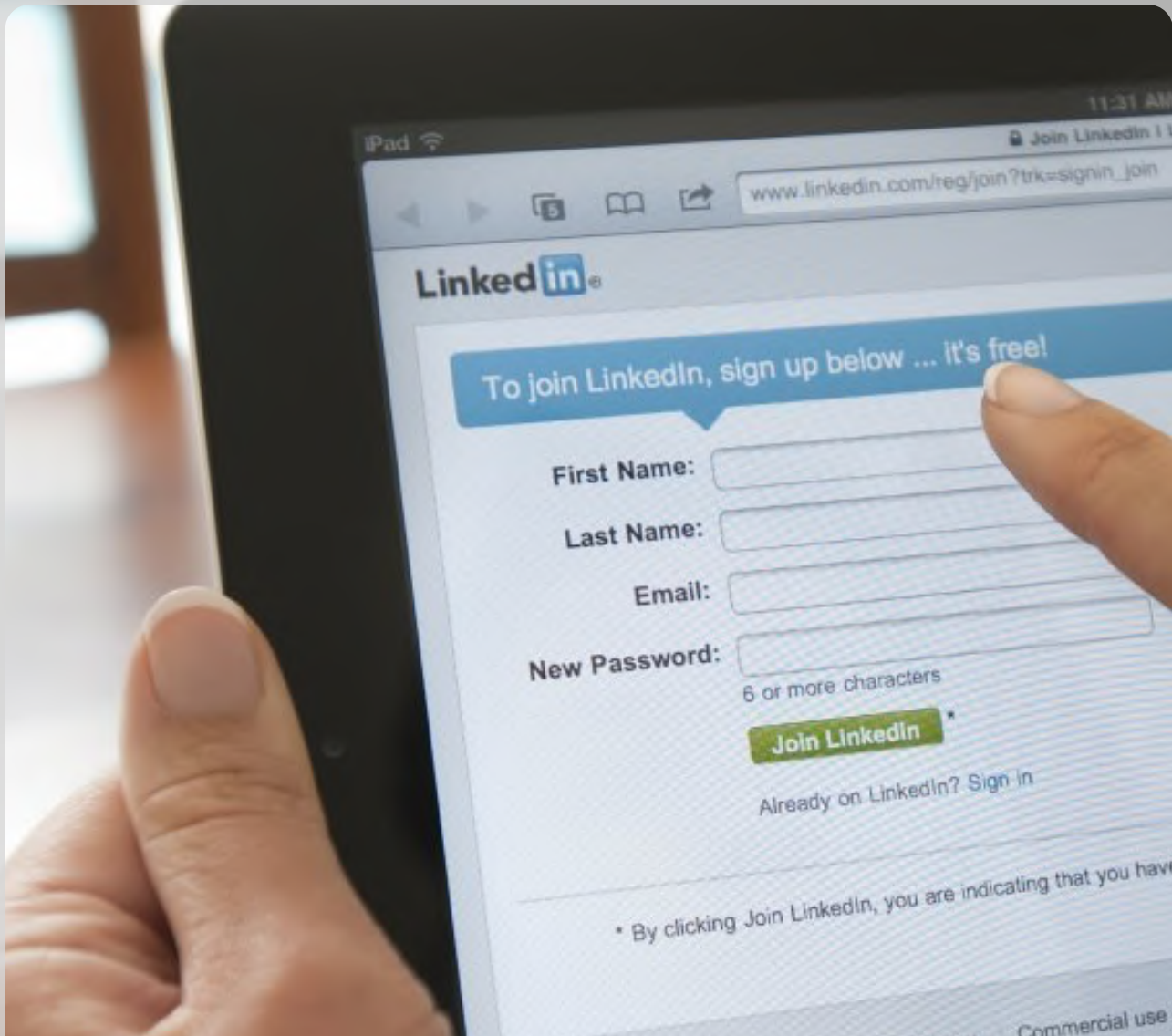




# EXECUTIVE CONNEXIONS

Accelerate your career success



## LINKEDIN GUIDE FOR EXECUTIVES

*From extract taken from Executive Connexions  
MD Steve Nicholls' book Reverse Headhunting.*

Over the past few years LinkedIn has become much more prevalent as a networking tool with a sophisticated, highly remunerated membership numbering in the hundreds of millions. Nevertheless, I'm convinced that most senior level candidates are not using the platform to best effect. Make no mistake, if you're not using LinkedIn as a serious job-hunting tool, and when in your next role, as a networking tool, you are missing a massive trick! Take a deep breath, perhaps also take a 'brave pill' as one of my clients used to describe it and start to allocate some regular time to LinkedIn specifically using it as a networking and marketing tool.

There are literally a virtual 'ton' of articles written about LinkedIn; how to optimise your profile, attract more visitors etc., so what I intend doing in this chapter is to focus on how senior level candidates specifically can gain benefits from taking a bit of time to not only get their profile right, but to get to the real 'juice'; proactive, but often subtle (read non pushy) marketing.

Yes, for LinkedIn to really work for you, an investment of your time is highly recommended, and is really the only way that you will achieve the results that are possible. I suggest an hour or two a day will suffice.

That piece of advice will hopefully remain relevant as the years roll on, as one thing is sure, LinkedIn does like to change things, and 'move the goal posts' from time to time, making it difficult for the average user to keep abreast of the menu systems, and how to really make the best use of the service. We train people on how to get the best out of LinkedIn, and still have problems keeping up from time to time!

## **YOUR LINKEDIN PROFILE**

Let's get some of the basics covered, enabling you to build a profile that will attract the attention of a recruiter who might be searching for a candidate with your background and experience. Putting in an hour or two to this activity can make a significant difference to your networking efforts. This section cannot cover everything there is to know about LinkedIn; one LinkedIn employee told me that he could "talk for days" about the various features of LinkedIn, so I intend focussing on the bits that are going to support your job search the most.

## **CV IMPORTING**

I don't advocate uploading your CV to your profile, a feature which is of course available. The reason I advise this is that a CV can change and evolve over time, and you want to concentrate your efforts on nurturing relationships and starting conversations; then submitting your CV. What I suggest is to extract the key career bullet points and slot those into the main career history section in your LinkedIn profile, while appreciating that some information will be confidential, but you may still allude to specific improvements or achievements.

## PHOTO

I've seen some poor examples of LinkedIn profile photos. Perhaps some downright funny or odd ones too. Rather than listing some strange examples I've seen examples for comic effect, can I just say a standard business headshot, head and shoulders, in business attire is the safest and for senior level the most appropriate to go for. LinkedIn lets you use a decent resolution photograph nowadays also, so take advantage of this and use as high a quality shot as you can.



## HEADLINE

There are a couple of popular approaches with creating the headline, which gives you quite a few characters to play with incidentally, at the time of writing.

The first approach is to state that you're seeking a new role, e.g. 'Finance Director with significant experience in xyz sector now seeking fresh challenge' or similar. This does a couple of things: first it clearly states your role / discipline and sector experience, which is what a recruiter seeking candidates will be typing into the search box (among other terms dependant on the role in question). Yes, there's another view which sees this approach as looking 'desperate'. For me, it must be comfortable for you and reflect how you want to be presented to the virtual world.

The second approach is if you are perhaps still in a role, and hence your job search needs to be a discrete one. You can still essentially put the title and sector that you're in without creating an obvious message, e.g. 'CEO with significant PE experience, currently working in xyz sector'. This approach still means you can be found by a recruiter seeking someone with your background and expertise.

## SUMMARY SECTION

Think of this section as being like the executive summary on your CV, but not exactly... What some people miss is that you can afford to be a bit more personable. Show a bit more of your brand, if you will, which your CV would not allow you to do. I would add to the general summary a few of the 'knockout punch' bullet points from your CV, but again I understand that this is only possible if you're engaged in an open search rather than a discrete one.

Keywords are a crucial element of being found on LinkedIn, and most people ignore them. I advocate ensuring that any keywords that are important to you, are listed in your headline, most recent role, and that your skills and endorsements section is also strong; it's all about getting found over and above your peers through selective keyword placement.

## CAREER HISTORY AND MOST RECENT ROLE

I usually advise people to mention that they are seeking a new role if this is possible, following a redundancy situation or 'garden leave' perhaps (i.e. date it accordingly as a new 'role'). It gives one less thing to have to explain to a recruiter or potential employer. Part of your confident personal brand elevator pitch would be to explain the circumstances, and that you're taking your time, seeking the right role, without rushing into it.

Now I know that this may appear to be bullishness over reason, but I'd prefer you to be confident, bordering on bullish, than being the eager puppy, so to speak. So, if you've been seeking a new role for 6 months, say so. It's quite common for a senior level role to take 6 months and sometimes much longer for some very senior roles.





## SKILLS & ENDORSEMENTS

I remember feeling fairly put out when LinkedIn introduced endorsements. All of a sudden there we all were, having to create a list of seemingly random “skills” with various connections (whether they know we can deliver on any given skill or not) randomly “ticking” skills, and so over time a top ten would appear, and it’s difficult to influence the order of that top ten and beyond, aside from actively asking contacts to endorse you for certain skills, in order to influence the top ten into something resembling your actual skills. But this section is here to stay by all accounts, so we must work with it, but it’s debatable if this section influences how “findable” you are for each specific key word you’ve listed, although most of my sources indicate it is an influencer in your search rankings.

*This is LinkedIn’s official take on Skills and Endorsements:*

**Make your endorsements count:** It’s important to be thoughtful about what skill you endorse. We encourage you to focus on skills and expertise you can personally attest to or have experienced first-hand. If you think your connection is being too humble for their own good, suggest a skill they may not have listed yet on their profile. Just remember, the endorsee must accept the suggested skill before it appears on their profile.

**Reach out and reconnect:** Use this as an opportunity to keep in touch with your network. When you visit a connection’s profile page, you may see a module up top suggesting relevant skills you can endorse. Use this as an opportunity to reconnect with an old connection by endorsing them for work you’ve done together at your last company. Don’t see the skill you had in mind? Just “X” out the suggested one and type in the skill you’d like to recommend.

**Show off your best assets:** You have full control of what endorsements and endorsers show up on your profile. Perhaps you want to show only notable connections in your industry who’ve endorsed you for a particular skill. Simply go to “manage endorsements” to select specific endorsements or endorsers you’d like shown or not shown. We’ve also added the ability to hide all your Endorsements if you prefer not to have any endorsements on your profile.

**Make your endorsements work for you:** Say you’re making a career switch or looking for specific kinds of business opportunities. You have the ability to show off select skills and endorsements on your profile by simply going to “edit” mode on your profile. Click on the pencil icon next to the skills and expertise section, and quickly add or remove skills from your profile. Voila! Only the skills and endorsements you think best represent who you are or want to be professionally will be shown on your LinkedIn profile (Author’s note: You can now ‘re-order’ your endorsements, if you think that certain skills that you want to promote more are not getting the ‘clicks’ you’d like).

So that’s what LinkedIn says. For now, Skills and Endorsement are here to stay, but I would not ignore them or be too cynical about them. Imagine what a recruiter or employer might think if you had no endorsements and a competitor for a role had lots of them? Sounds like a bit of a guessing game? Yes, it is, but we have to play the game, so I suggest watching this space re endorsements.



## VOLUNTARY WORK SECTION

People that you connect with as well as potential employers often like the fact that you are involved in some form of charitable efforts. If you are, then outline your work in this section.

But whatever you do, perhaps LinkedIn just isn't working for you? Read on for tips on how to gain more traction:

### Possible reasons why LinkedIn is not working for you

#### **The goal posts are always being moved**

There are times when I log into LinkedIn only to find that, "Hello, they've changed that menu, or this option, or that service has now become a premium option...etc". Hence, it's tough for the casual user to keep tabs on how the changes can benefit or hinder a job search. We train people in using LinkedIn, and we sometimes struggle to keep pace, so I appreciate what it can be like to the average user!

#### **Most candidates see LinkedIn as a passive tool**

You can do your bit to attract more profile views by raising your own profile and visibility by being proactive within groups or via your own feed if groups aren't your thing (but you're missing out if you take this approach) - "liking" a post, commenting on someone else's post, posting something of interest yourself. Do these things and you will see more visits to your profile.

## So, into the meat of getting LinkedIn groups to work for you...

How to decide which groups to use? – This is KEY, as it's the main way that you will gain access to the Hidden Jobs Market...

At the time of writing (remember LinkedIn likes to change things) on every group there is an italicized i (information & settings) to the top right-hand side. Click on that and you will see a black panel with blue/white text. Under the ABOUT heading click on statistics... You will see headings for:

- *Summary*
- *Demographics*
- *Growth*
- *Activity*

I suggest you have a look around at these various stats, have a play, and see if the membership is aligned with what you're looking for – Demographics is a good one to begin with, which you will then see it gives you access to further data: SENIORITY, FUNCTION, LOCATION, INDUSTRY. So, I think you'll see there's a bit of research you can do to establish whether a group is likely to be potentially interesting or useful before you jump in.

## After you've taken the plunge and joined a few (or a few more) groups

1. **Observe** – even though you've done a bit of due diligence... (*See what's being posted / discussed*)
2. **"Like"** – this will appear in your feed and others you're connected to
3. **Comment** – e.g. "Hi John, I found what you said interesting. Have you heard of... etc. (*Ask a question. This is good for generating a discussion*)
4. **Post something** of interest yourself (and add your views, then ask a question)

Let's look at why you're doing all of these things: you will discover that more people – it could be peers, ex colleagues, recruiters – doesn't really matter who it is for now – will start to check you out. If a recruiter looks at your profile though, what would you normally do? Well, if you're not all over it like a rash, I would suggest that's the best action; either pick up the phone or email them immediately. They may have looked at your profile, not seen what they were looking for, and moved on... a call can help explain that perhaps you DO have what they were looking for. This pro-activity and fast action are called for, or you could easily miss the boat as far as that particular potential role is concerned.

Returning to group activity, if you just cannot bring yourself to start posting, commenting or engaging within groups, then there's another strategy which might suit you:

## CONNECT STRATEGICALLY

Most senior executives have taken a careful and measured approach to their career and can be extremely cautious when it comes to self-promotion or networking of any sort. I understand this completely, so what I'm advocating is a systematized method for joining the "right" groups, and then starting to "dip your toe in the waters" of participation within those groups.

So, I think you'll see there's a bit of research you can do to establish whether a group is likely to be potentially interesting or appropriate before you jump in. Just ensure that you do the due diligence exercise I suggested a couple of pages ago.

The next step would be to observe what the interactions are like in the group. Who are the movers and shakers? Is it a "spammy" type of group? (Endless promotional postings with no real engagement or interaction among members) I used to say at this stage "Get out!" if it is a spammy group, but before you go down this route perhaps it's worth having a look at the 2nd degree connections? There could be plenty of people, like you, you have joined a group and not bothered to leave. These could be useful connections for your job search or future networking.





## ONCE YOU'VE DECIDED A LINKEDIN GROUP IS RIGHT FOR YOU

If it seems like a good group for you to be involved in, start by clicking “like” on one or two posts of interest, then progress to leaving an answer or two to a suitable post. The final step here would be to post an article of interest (you can link to it), or open with a question of potential interest to peers, or other senior professionals (do you notice I’m not talking just about recruiters here). Now imagine this new activity replicated across several groups. Can you see how this might generate interest in you? But only if you take action and continue to act until your objectives are achieved.

These strategies are for leveraging LinkedIn rather than just being passive about the whole process. It will require effort, and a plan, so I suggest you commit to an hour a day initially to get things running, then you can also focus on some face to face networking (a whole other subject, but an important one).

Since the introduction of the publishing platform, those that I have suggested use it via [our unique Be Found programme](#) seem to be getting more shares and ‘likes’ than promoting their own blog for example, so it seems like a powerful feature, and I’d suggest giving it a try.

I hope this guide has been helpful

If you’d like to find out more about how we can help you land your next role faster, [get in touch](#).

*We are not affiliated in any way with LinkedIn and this guide is intended as an impartial take on LinkedIn and some of its benefits.*

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