What is LinkedIn?

LinkedIn is the world’s largest online professional networking tool. The website’s specific professional focus makes it a more useful and appropriate venue for developing and maintaining professional contacts than social networking sites (i.e. Facebook, MySpace, etc…). The fact that it is free makes it a great tool for college students and recent graduates.

LinkedIn can connect you to business contacts within your field and help you exchange knowledge, ideas, and opportunities. Professionals from every industry are represented from non-profit organizations to Fortune 500 companies. A LinkedIn profile will include information very similar to the contents of a resume as well as additional information about career goals.

How can LinkedIn Aid my Professional Development?

Professional Image
Try searching for your own name online. What comes up? Many employers conduct internet searches to obtain additional information about job applicants, and whatever they happen to find will influence your professional image. Public LinkedIn profiles will typically come up first in internet searches. Creating a profile that will enhance your image, rather than damage it, is a great way to control how you are perceived on the internet. Because of privacy concerns, you will want to place restraints on the information that is available in your public profile.

Building your Professional Network
Adding connections to your network on LinkedIn is similar to adding friends on Facebook. Add connections to your network who you know in some capacity. It may be appropriate to add connections similar to these:

- Supervisor or colleagues at a job or internship
- Personal or family friends
- Professors
- Your duties on the job brought you into regular contact with them
- You conducted an informational interview with them or job shadowed them
- You have exchanged ideas with them in a LinkedIn group discussion

Once you have connections in your own network you can look through their connections and ask to be introduced to (via the website) anyone of relevance to your professional goals.

Career Exploration and Job Searching
A LinkedIn account will allow you to search for the profiles of professionals in your field of interest. This is a great way to find professionals to conduct informational interviews with as a method of learning more about your potential career path or to ask for career advice. Search for professionals with educational or work experience similar to yours and see where they are working. Or, search for people with a job title that you would like to have someday and see what kind of experiences have led them to their job. See the “Informational Interviews” handout for details.

You can also use your network connections to find job leads or potential internship opportunities, but it is important to do so tactfully. See the “Networking” handout for additional details.

Employer Research
Learning more about companies that you would like to work for can be done easily by searching for the profiles of their current employees. Their profiles can provide insight about the responsibilities that certain job titles have and the functions of the company as a whole. If you have an upcoming job interview and know the name of the interviewer you can search for their profile to learn more about their role in the company. You could also learn more about the health of a particular company or industry by conducting LinkedIn profile searches.
What Can I do to make a Great LinkedIn Profile?

1. Fill out all sections of your profile. Include unpaid experience such as volunteer work and extracurriculars. Be detailed and keep your purpose and your audience in mind.

2. Utilize white space and bullet points similarly to how you would on a resume. Incorporate keywords and verbs throughout. Proofread carefully.

3. Tailor your headline for your purpose. It will create a first impression by appearing below your name in profile searches.

4. Upload a photo of yourself that is professional, yet friendly looking. You should be the only person in the photo.

5. Use the “Summary” section to write a short blurb about who you are and what you do and/or hope to do. Note any professional interests or values that you have. Use the “Specialties” section to briefly state specific and relevant skills or experience that will make you stand out.

6. Add relevant website links to your profile, such as your online portfolio, current employer’s website or your professionally orientated blog or Twitter account. Do not add personal websites or blogs.

7. Earn great job references and ask them to “Recommend” you on your LinkedIn profile. Professors can also give recommendations based on your performance as a student. Your references must also have a LinkedIn profile to do this. Profiles with more recommendations will appear at the top of search results.

8. Update your status about once a week sharing any professionally relevant information. This may include what you are working on at your internship, a conference that you attended, or passing a certification exam. Occasional updates will help you stay on your network’s radar and can initiate communication.

9. Join LinkedIn groups and post appropriate questions in the discussion forums. There are groups for university alumni, honor societies, organizations, industries, etc…

10. Arrange the sections of your profile so that the most relevant and impressive components are toward the top.

Controlling Your Professional Image on the Internet

The likelihood that a potential employer will search for information about you online during your job search is quite high. It is to your advantage to control what information is available about you to the public in order to control your image as a professional. Be very careful about what you allow your name to be associated with online; search for your own name online and make changes to anything that may negatively impact the impression that others have of you.

Utilize the privacy settings on your social networking accounts. For example, Facebook allows you to put your friends into groups and you can control what information about yourself each individual group is allowed to see. Only allow information to be public if it will positively influence your professional image.

Additional Resources

- The LinkedIn Grad Guide
  http://grads.linkedin.com/