

How Professional Services Marketers Can Play the LinkedIn Long Game



As marketers at professional services firms, we know that LinkedIn is a channel we need to activate. Everyone we want to reach is on there—more than 1 billion users as of this very second. Undoubtedly, your clients are there. They go there for information, inspiration and to stay up to speed on their specific industry.

LinkedIn likes to say it's a place where business gets done.

However, it's also in danger of becoming a swampy, smarmy, sycophantic forum of yuck. As we've seen on every social platform, when everyone has a microphone, things can get chaotic in a hurry. That can make it difficult for firms to find the balance between standing out from the pack and demonstrating value, showing some personality and staying true to your brand.

This post is intended to help you navigate this fine line and have demand generation success on LinkedIn.

Understanding the “LinkedIn Long Game”

A quick fix would be fantastic, but it just doesn't exist for professional services firms. You're not selling cheeseburgers; you're selling custom, big-ticket engagements that have complex sales cycles. Getting up in the grill of people you haven't even met yet and trying to set up a sales call is not cool. Only 5 percent of companies are actively in market at any given time, so trying to pitch business to all of the people you connect with is counterproductive at best, relationship-killing at worst. The rush to a sales call is like proposing marriage on a first date. And yet people do it every day.

Don't act desperate.

Show some confidence.

When you're working for a company that has a 6- to 12-month sales cycle, you're not going to make that sale today. Let it breathe a little.

Playing the LinkedIn long game is the right strategy for companies with a complex sales process. You (theoretically) got into the world of professional services because you liked the idea of exploring, learning and then leveraging the complexities of this world. It's a cool puzzle to try to solve.

When we play the long game, we're focused on sparking conversations that ultimately lead to trust-based relationships. Trust always comes before the sale, and relationships that are worthwhile always require work.

So, let's get crackin', and let's be patient!

Getting Everyone's LinkedIn Profile in Ship-Shape

First things first—every client-facing employee who's going to be active on behalf of the firm needs to have an up-to-date, professional LinkedIn profile. This means:

- ✓ Having a recent, professional profile picture
- ✓ Focusing on the headline and the summary section. This is all above-the-fold territory, so it's the first impression you're making
- ✓ Ensuring that their job titles, both past and present, are accurate
- ✓ Including education and volunteer work; often these things help to create a connection with someone you don't yet know
- ✓ Checking for typos



Rules of the Road for the LinkedIn Long Game

As a friend likes to say, “Quality and quantity are not opposites.” It is possible to do both, but it is work, and there is definitely tension between the two. Fact: Those who post more frequently are going to get higher levels of engagement and have more people involved in meaningful conversations. Caveat: Unless their posts are lame, or obvious, or obnoxious, or ... just not worthy of other people's attention.

So, post frequently, but focus on making every post the best that it can be. If you can, post three times a week. One Friend of Scribewise advocates posting more than once a day. Yes, really. But if your quality is slipping and you're starting to post things simply for the sake of posting, reassess.

Empower and incentivize employees to be active. It's not just you—every company struggles to get its employees active on LinkedIn. Only 3 percent of employees share content about their company, but those shares are responsible for driving a 30 percent increase

in engagement with the company. This is a puzzle worth solving! [Data from LinkedIn](#) furthers this case:

- **An employee's network is, on average, 10 times larger than a company's follower base**
- **When team members share a post, it's seen as 3x more authentic**
- **When employees share content they see a click-through rate that is 2x higher than what their company sees**

There is gold in them thar hills, but it is difficult to unearth it. Consider ways to incentivize team members—especially client-facing folks—to get more active on LinkedIn; some will willingly do it because they'll realize it's good for their personal brand, their career and, ultimately, their compensation. Others will need a nudge, so try to figure out a program that works for your culture.

Personal over corporate. One way to get employees to engage more on LinkedIn is to not dictate what they share. Don't try to exert too much control; after all, they own their own profile. One way to get them to be more active is to give them (relatively) free reign as to what they want to post—keep any guidelines loose. Steer them toward alignment with your firm's philosophy and POV, but otherwise, let them post about their specific area of expertise and interest.

But don't be too personal. This isn't Facebook or Instagram. Be human, but be a professional human. Occasionally, your kids or your mother might have done something that you can spin into a business lesson to be learned. But don't try too hard, and don't do it too often.

Lead with smart content. There's a lot of mediocre content filling up LinkedIn newsfeeds, something that is both a challenge and an opportunity for those of us trying to break through. We recommend focusing on consumable [thought leadership](#) and helpful advice.

Smart thinking about your industry or the latest trends showcases your smart thinking. Pro tip: Try to avoid the habit of simply posting one-line posts that link back to a blog post on your website; LinkedIn's algorithm prioritizes content that does not take the reader off the LinkedIn platform.

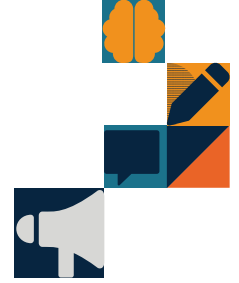
More and more, people are sharing about a problem they faced and going into significant detail about how they solved it. In the past, you may have been afraid to say you struggled with something, but your customers today appreciate the honesty it takes to admit a struggle, and the brains it takes to solve the problem.

Bring a helpful mindset. As in any other relationship or conversation in your life, if your focus is on your wants and needs, people won't be all that interested. If you're focused on helping others do their jobs or providing insight that assists them in some way, you're more likely to find some common ground. Start there, and don't worry about whether or not someone is going to buy from you this quarter—they're not.

Experiment with different content types. Short posts. Long posts. Video. Quizzes. Content curated from other trusted sources. Change it up and monitor it over time to see what resonates.

Chill out with the InMails. Every day, I get InMails from people I don't know. That's fine—but they're always, and I mean always, trying to sell me something. Please don't do this. It doesn't work. This entire post is about taking your time and not rushing to the sale, so don't turn into a rabid dog just because you get five free InMails per month with your LinkedIn subscription. If you're going to use InMail, treat it as a connection tool, not a sales tool, and follow all the rules of the road above.

A lot of LinkedIn's marketing is focused on helping people sell, and firm leaders get excited because they think it's some type of magic key that will unlock success. The truth is it isn't magical—it's a platform that you need to work in a smart way to build momentum over time.



How Marketers Should Adapt to The Rise of Social Selling and Dark Social



There is yet another dramatic shift happening in marketing for professional services. And two competing ideas are coming into focus for folks responsible for generating demand for their firms:

- For many businesses, connections with prospects and, more generally, audiences, are happening outside their websites on platforms like LinkedIn.
- “Dark social,” which is all the ways you might share content that’s untraceable through web analytics, is becoming increasingly popular.

These two ideas can throw a serious wrench into how you market to your audience and how you measure success. Here’s how to deal with it.

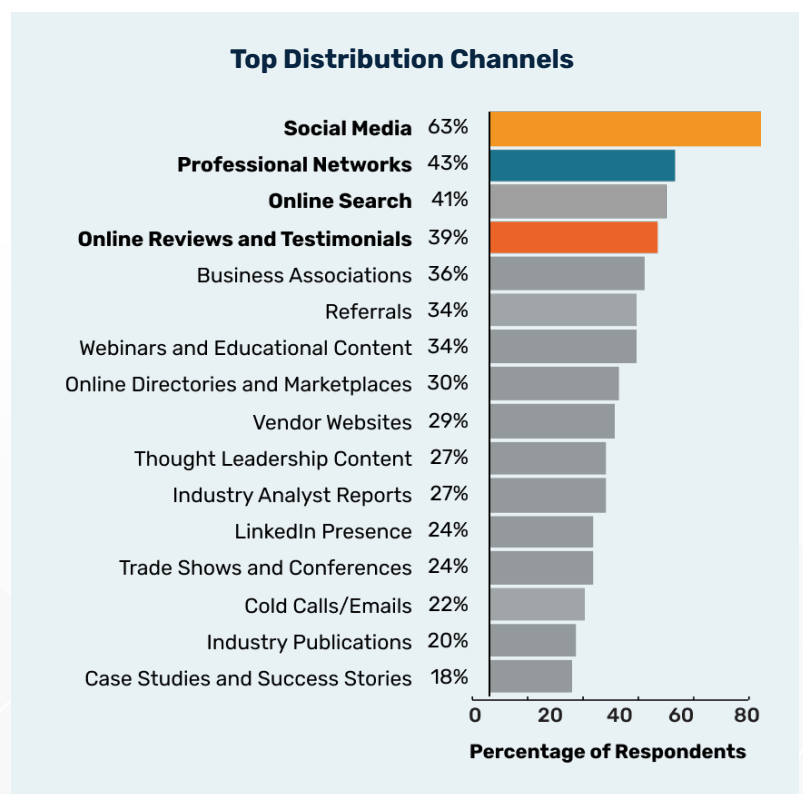
The Importance of Connecting and Selling on LinkedIn

The way buyers of professional services decide who to hire is changing. [Google has become less and less effective](#) at offering results that actually help prospective clients in their quest for answers. SERPs are dominated by listicles touting the best services or pages full of keywords rather than helpful content demonstrating a firm’s expertise.

B2C consumers are turning to Reddit, TikTok and other social media for answers—a sign that your prospect’s search habits are also shifting to places outside typical search results.

Our recent report, [“The State of B2B Buyer Preferences in 2024: The Great Content Marketing Disconnect.”](#) confirms that social media and professional networks have outpaced search for the top distribution areas.

But it’s not enough to post on LinkedIn haphazardly—consistency and timing is everything.



Only about [5% of your audience is “in market”](#) and on the verge of buying at any given time. Professional services marketers have to cast a wide net to help potential clients discover their service offering so that when they are ready to buy, they think of your firm.

Your website content should be updated regularly, but LinkedIn is increasingly important for marketing and sales. [Social selling](#) creates 45% more opportunities, and nearly 80% of people who engage in social selling outsell their peers.



The Rise of Dark Social

The term “dark social” was [coined in 2012](#), but if you work in professional services, you’re probably hearing it a lot more in 2024. It’s been around since we started DMing and emailing links, posting in Slack or Discord, sharing in closed social media groups, texting and generally sharing content in any way that’s not traceable by web analytics. (Though, if you want to get an idea of it, check out your “Direct” traffic in Google Analytics.)

There’s always been an incalculable side to distribution, brand awareness and attribution that gives marketers agita. It’s difficult to prove that a brand awareness campaign works, for example, when you’ve received modest engagement.

So, What Should We Do About It?

How should marketers market in the age where activity outside a website is equally as important (if not more important) and it’s becoming increasingly difficult to measure? Here are some tips.

Build Personal Brands For You and SMEs

Connection on LinkedIn and social selling takes place between individuals, not necessarily brands. Build up your own personal brand by updating your LinkedIn profile, as well as the profiles of your top SMEs. They need to look trustworthy and be accurate.

Try Executive Activation

Your SMEs and thought leaders need to be active on LinkedIn and other networks where your audience hangs out. [Executive Activation](#) is the process of writing (and sometimes posting) content on behalf of your SMEs to help them stay active and participate in LinkedIn.

Engage in Conversations

Actively participate in relevant LinkedIn groups and comment on posts to demonstrate your expertise. But don’t sell. Focus on building relationships over time.

Share Valuable Content

Create a Venn diagram (in your head or on paper) of what your expertise is in and what your audience is interested in. Post content where those two topics overlap.

Pick out blog posts or other content your team has developed and post all or part of them to get the conversation started. In my experience, it feels more natural to write part of a blog post into a more concise (and sometimes conversational) post just for LinkedIn. You can break up one blog into several posts that are a couple paragraphs long. Our [report](#) found that, even on social media, 51 percent of buyers preferred long-form content over short-form content (yes,

you can carefully use ChatGPT to help you do this). Finally, put full thoughts into your post without including a link to your website; LinkedIn penalizes users for linking to outside sites.

Use Sales Navigator

If it aligns with your strategy, consider using LinkedIn Sales Navigator to identify and connect with potential leads more effectively. Sales Navigator provides advanced search and targeting options to find prospects based on specific criteria.

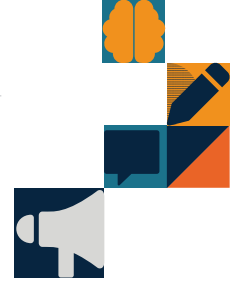
Use Analytics To Track What You Can

While dark social interactions may not be easily traceable, you can still use LinkedIn analytics to track impressions and engagement. Tracking website traffic with Google Analytics and email performance through your platform is also still important.

Whether you're just tracking performance within your marketing team or you report to other leaders at your company, it's important to understand that it's not as easy to figure out attribution or draw a straight line from an eBook to a closed deal anymore. This is a new reality, and we have to change the way we track and report on the work we do.



3 Tips (and a Bonus) for Writing a Better LinkedIn Profile



Competition in the professional services world is fierce, which makes any edge you gain extremely valuable. At this point in our collective marketing evolution, it's probably unnecessary to sell the value of LinkedIn for professional networking—after all, over a billion of us are using it in 2024.

However, LinkedIn's power as a sales tool is often underappreciated. In fact, LinkedIn reports that **78% of “social sellers”—people using social media for sales—outsell their peers who are less active on social.**

Before you dive in and get started, there are a few prerequisites you have to meet and essentials to put in place. Chief among them is a dynamic—and human—LinkedIn profile. A litany of your work accomplishments is great, but you should elevate it beyond an online resume.

Here are three tips to help you get started.

TIP #1

Start with the “Why” and Ask Yourself This Question

If you're a normal human being and not some egocentric sociopath, it can be hard to talk about yourself in glowing terms. This can make it hard to write a LinkedIn profile, which is why everyone defaults to thinking of it and using it as an online resume. But it can—and should—be so much more.

We've been using this question to help people identify their why, which helps everything on LinkedIn fall into place. Why do you do what you do, why are you motivated to pursue a certain career path, and why have you been successful?

Ask yourself this question: What has been the guiding philosophy throughout my career?

I'll give you an example. One executive I asked this question said he is very active with the Salvation Army. Their tagline is “Doing the Most Good,” and he said that idea really resonates with him, both personally and professionally. He tries to live his life by that guiding ethos, and also brings it to his interactions with clients. He challenges himself to do the most good for them and their organization. It's been the key to his success and helped him build a reputation as a trusted partner.

Those clients know he has their best interest at heart. They gave their business to him, not his organization.

Once you identify your own guiding philosophy, weave it into the storyline you develop about yourself on LinkedIn. Get stuck on how to describe something you've done? Go back to that one key point and rework it.

Additional questions to ask yourself to help round out your profile once you figure out your “why”:

- **What value do I bring to clients and my team?**
- **What’s my elevator pitch?**
- **What keywords are important to my role and my practice?**
- **Is all of my experience represented accurately?**
- **Is my education represented?**
- **Do I have honors and awards listed?**
- **Have I included thought leadership pieces and other media?**



The goal is to have your personality shine through. The best profiles open the door to further conversation. Like meeting someone at a networking event, you build a relationship before asking for business.

TIP #2

Make the Sale Above the Fold

We all do it. You have a conference call with someone new or you’re meeting a prospect for the first time. Checking out their LinkedIn profile is part of the research you do beforehand.

But how often do you dive into the fourth or fifth bullet of one of their jobs from 15 years ago on that profile? If you’re like me, pretty much never. You’ll read their headline, get an impression of what they do, scroll through the experience section to see where they’ve worked, and maybe glance at their schooling.

So, you really need to make the “sale” in your profile above the fold. This means focusing on your headline and the summary section.

A few best practices we’ve found help us create more effective LinkedIn profiles:

Write a headline that draws attention: Sure, you can default to your job title in the headline, but it’s not really a standout move. You’re leading with what you do instead of why you do it. A better approach is to offer a glimpse of yourself and frame it in terms that answer the question “what’s in it for me?” for your profile viewer. Think of this as a billboard on the highway ... you have about three seconds to get someone’s attention flying by at 70 m.p.h.

Spend time on the summary: The summary is where you tell the story of you. I like using a lead-in sentence (almost a “summary of the summary”) followed by a few short paragraphs that capture your value as a professional.

TIP #3

Humanize Yourself

Let's be clear. LinkedIn is still a professional network. I've seen a bunch of non-professional nonsense making its way into my newsfeed recently. It's not a dating site, it's not Reddit, or a place to talk about your latest medical mishap.

That being said, you can humanize yourself in your profile in a professional way. Volunteer to save dogs? Lead a Girls on the Run group? Sit on a corporate or non-profit board? Work that into your profile in the Volunteer section. Likely, whatever you're doing outside of work aligns in some way with your guiding philosophy, so it's perfectly appropriate for your profile.

Here's another practical tip for being a little more human. Check out your public profile URL. If it has a long random list of numbers at the end of it, there's an easy way to get rid of them and customize your URL. [Take a look at the simple instructions here.](#)

BONUS TIP

Control the Updates You Share with Your Network

Maybe you're revising your LinkedIn profile for the first time in years and realize you have a lot of updates to make. The worst thing you can do is notify your network of every single update you decide to make. They'll show up in your followers' newsfeeds if you're not careful.

To make sure you're not sharing each and every profile edit, click Notify my network to "No." When you're updating your profile, you'll find it at the top of the section you're editing, right above the Save button. Use it wisely!

I know updating your LinkedIn profile is laborious, and it's so easy to push it down the to-do list when things get busy. But it's important, because as they say, everyone is in sales. Even you.



Activating the C-Suite on LinkedIn: Dispelling Your Leadership's Myths and Misconceptions



Take a look at your LinkedIn feed right now. If it's anything like mine, the variety and volume of content you see is significantly different than it was just six months or a year ago. It's more creative, faster moving, keeps you on the platform vs. linking out, and demands deeper levels of personalization to attract attention. The days of writing two boring sentences and linking to your whitepaper are dead. Long live humanity, imperfection and true connection.

Yes, even for professional services firms. Maybe especially in professional services, where prospective clients have a difficult time figuring out which service provider is the best fit for them.

This new paradigm on LinkedIn can be offputting to many in the C-suite. It's messy, can feel less serious and riskier than we're used to, time-consuming, and difficult to measure. Many executives, especially in the higher echelons of an organization, simply opt out.

In our recent report, [“The State of B2B Buyer Preferences in 2024: The Great Content Marketing Disconnect.”](#) 63 percent of marketers agreed that social media is their most important distribution channel. And yet, most aren't able to pull one of the biggest levers they have—the voices of their executives—likely because the idea of participating feels daunting.

Here's what we hear most frequently when trying to activate the C-suite in these environments, and some of the counterpoints that have helped to open leadership's eyes to the value of their ongoing presence.

Objection: “I'm Too Busy and Focused on my'Real' Role to Spend Time on LinkedIn”

Reality: Reality: 45 Minutes of C-suite Time can Yield Months of High-Quality Content

Nothing about this objection is untrue. Your leaders should be moving a million miles a minute to help the organization meet its goals. And they're also correct in their understanding that social media and content creation take time ... time that they typically don't have available.

However, there's a disconnect in thinking that their lack of time means you, as the marketer, can't capture your leaders' voices on LinkedIn. If you can pin down a leader on a 30- to 45-minute call, you can capture a ton of great content.

The Solution

Create a discussion guide before the meeting: This should be 10 finely-tuned questions that get right to the crux of what you want to share on LinkedIn. Share it with them early.

Record the meeting: With permission from the leader, of course. Recording the meeting—both audio and video—gives you a ton of sound bites, clips and blog fodder that you can stretch out for months and reshare months later.

Butter up their executive assistant: You'll work more with them than you will the leaders themselves. This person may even have the keys to your leader's LinkedIn account, and the trust to be able to post your content on their behalf.

Objection: "I Posted Something this Week and the Leads are Weak."

Reality: Keep in Mind the Difference Between "Demand Gen" and "Lead Gen" on LinkedIn.

We hear this objection a lot. I had an executive call me the day after one of his LinkedIn posts went live, and we looked at the engagement and comments he received. One comment was from a friend of his, the other one was a vendor trying to sell him something, and all the rest were not quite right for one reason or another.

I get what he was feeling: We spent time creating the content together, and he wanted an immediate ROI on that time. However, social and LinkedIn don't work that way, and much of what happens through these channels is falling into the "dark social" realm now.

The Solution

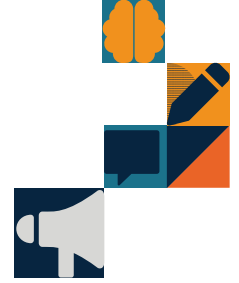
It's always helpful to have a few talking points ready to illustrate for the C-suite the difference between lead generation (converting brand-aware prospects into customers) and demand generation (generating brand awareness and interest in your products and services). LinkedIn, especially in the early stages of your leadership's activity, will be primarily a demand-gen activity. Remember, only 3 to 5 percent of your audience is actively shopping at any given time; an executive's social media presence is a play to the other 95 percent.

Few leaders understand or appreciate this nuance.



Objection: “Posting Once a Week Really Won’t Move the Dial—Let’s Go Bigger.”

Reality: Starting Small and Posting Regularly is More Important.



Last summer, I tried to grow tomatoes in the garden. We hit a dry spell and I didn’t water enough, and then we got a ton of rain. All of the tomatoes swelled and split their skins, ruining my hard work.

Many executives who agree to LinkedIn suffer this same fate. They come out of the gate strong, post every day or multiple times for a week or two, and then slide back into their radio-silence old habits. Like those split tomatoes, the end product is not great.

The Solution

We usually start with executives who are pursuing a beefed-up LinkedIn presence with a goal of one post a week. Even this cadence can be daunting when availability and the need for approval get in the way. You can mitigate some of the inevitable lag by:

Prioritizing engagement over original posts in the beginning: Commenting and sharing are much lower bars, especially for leaders who are establishing a bigger LinkedIn presence. Identify a list of B2B influencers in your industry and have your leader get in the mix (or do it for them). You’ll reap benefits with the humans involved, as well as the algorithms driving exposure on the platform.

Building out a quarterly calendar: This creates visibility into your plans and makes buy-in easier. Quarterly is ideal: Any shorter and you have to back to the thought-leadership well too soon; any longer and the leader’s insights may become too stale.

Creating and queuing more than one post: Ideally, you’ll have the entire next month built out before the first post goes live, giving you and the leader breathing room to create your next batch of content. It’s easy to get behind, and create gaps, if you don’t have some buffer.

The importance of LinkedIn and the relative dearth of consistent C-suite voices is just one of the challenges facing marketers this year. Check out [our report](#) to gain an understanding of what marketing activities align best with your future clients desires, and what activities are probably a waste of time.

If you’re interested in jumpstarting your thought leadership efforts, reach out to Scribewise for help with Executive Activation.



Learn more at www.scribewise.com