



Exceptional Prospecting &

# Social Media

**With social networking sites and the plethora of online data available, 2011 presents us with better quality prospecting and more qualified prospects.**

'Prospecting and Social Media' was voted as the Number 4 Sales Trends for 2011. Business networking sites such as LinkedIn and Plaxo, and the emergence of Facebook and Twitter as business destinations, give the discerning business or sales person access to quality data where they can research key contacts with an organisation, as well as business activity. Then, when appropriate, they

can use this data to make professional connections.

Smart business leaders and sales people are using social networking sites as tools to engage in better quality prospecting and improve conversion rates rather than just using them to make a list of prospects. These sites potentially make redundant, the concept of Cold Calling and the fear of prospecting and can help people become

exceptional prospectors. So how do you get the best out of Social Networking sites when prospecting? Let's look at the business phenomenon that is LinkedIn.

### LinkedIn

For Business to Business prospecting, LinkedIn is proving to be a rich source of information, contacts, suppliers, prospects, referrals and clients. It has exploded in connections and content, and usage has skyrocketed in the last 18 months through its many features helping you get connected to the right people. It is the largest B2B social media networking group in the world. For instance my own LinkedIn profile and network currently can connect me with over 5,200,000+ contacts, imagine how we could all harness the power of these connections. So how do you use LinkedIn to help you prospect more

effectively?

#### *Step 1: Develop a sales plan, clear message and profile*

Before you set up your LinkedIn profile make sure you have a clear sales plan which identifies who you need to be connecting with i.e. types of clients, suppliers, peers, industry sources and groups. Think about what you want to present by way of image, message and purpose i.e. what do you stand for? What do you do for people? Look at how you would like to position yourself as a business professional. Like websites, your LinkedIn profile is your professional resume online; it represents your professional brand. This is why you need to be clear about who you are, what you do and what you want to communicate to a broad audience. What you do, what your company does, what you represent, people are likely to make up their mind about you based on

what they see and read about you.

Your LinkedIn profile should form part of your sales and marketing strategy.

#### *Step 2: Join LinkedIn*

Get your profile up and live. It's easy and it's free – go to [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com) and get started. There are also various levels you can subscribe to enhance your profile and get you better connected with search features and other options. These extras come with a monthly fee attached. Begin by using the free access option and try it out before committing to upgrades.

#### *Step 3: Join LinkedIn Groups*

There are many and varied LinkedIn Groups you can join. These groups provide people with forums to discuss and exchange ideas and opinion, as well as keep up to date on the latest trends, ideas, innovations, etc. It's also where buyers are increasingly looking to

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research suppliers before they buy. They are looking for what others say about you and your products or your industry. They can compare you with your competitors' offerings. In these groups you can listen to what your customers are saying before they even decide to talk to you. Your sales strategy should guide you as to who you should be in contact with. What types of groups would be useful for you to belong to? For instance if you are a Learning and Development specialist, Engineering sales professional, Environmentalist or Procurement Manager then there are groups focusing in these spaces and many more. But do not limit yourself to the narrow bandwidth of your own expertise. Often looking outside your comfort zone can give you access to new ideas and contacts as well. These groups allow you to listen to

your community, suppliers, clients and other interested parties. This gives you access to a wide range of people. See Barrett Consulting Group LinkedIn group as an example. A word of caution: Do not blatantly self promote or advertise your wares in these groups; it will not



go down well. If you try to blatantly self promote and prospect in these groups you will be shunned and often kicked off the group.

#### Step 4: Start to connect

The best way to build up your network of contacts is to invite people you know to connect with you. This way you can begin to build up direct connections who, in turn, can then give you access to people outside of your direct network. You can often look at your contacts list of connections and you can see who might be good to make contact with. It's advised that you don't contact someone you do not know directly without some form of personal connection or link; instead, you can seek an introduction through one of your direct contacts. Sending out LinkedIn requests to people at random will not be seen as good business and will be deemed inappropriate or spam by many and may affect your reputation. It is also wise to be discerning about which connections you accept as



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STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



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- Laquer Black CT BP S20051751

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- Laquer Black BP S20051561
- Silver CT BP S20051562
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well. Don't just accept invitations from anyone, make sure you find out why they want to connect with and how you can be of best service to each other.

### *Step 5: Identify and Research Your Prospects*

If you are already connected on LinkedIn and you know what types of people you need to prospect to you can look through your contacts lists to see who is there. You can also develop a list of names of people who are in your target market via business websites which often have names of key contacts or business news sites and industry magazines which often feature key decision makers. Your own CRM or client database should have lots of names you need to speak to. And of course you can buy lists once you are on LinkedIn and begin to research your prospects. In the upper right hand corner, there is a search box with a pull down menu. Click on that and you'll see six options (people, jobs, companies, answers, inbox, groups). Click on "people" and enter the prospect's name. You can see a lot of information about prospects, the groups they belong to, what they are interested in, their experience and knowledge, etc. You can use a

prospect's background to develop questions that relate to their area of responsibility. It will help you to develop very clear Valid Business Reasons (VBR's) when calling them. Make sure you know how to get prospects to talk to you.

### *Step 6: Start Prospecting*

Develop a list of 20 to 40 prospects per week and then make contact via the telephone as you would normally do. Use relevant VBR's to help you connect. Pretty soon you will be making contact with the



viable prospects and on your way to making more sales. If you are still not comfortable calling people via the phone you can use LinkedIn as a prospecting option however make sure that you still use a VBR in your message or invitation to them.

### *Summary*

Does this mean you will learn everything about a person via their profile or that you take a carte blanche approach to prospecting? NO. We will need to be mindful about how we go about making contact as we will still need to engage in skillful prospecting activities to position ourselves effectively. Remember information is not POWER it is potential power. LinkedIn and other social media networks are not the only sources for prospecting but they certainly can help you achieve peak

performance in prospecting.

With clear sales plans and well defined prospect profiles there's no excuse NOT to prospect effectively. 2011 will be about a Total Quality Prospecting environment.

Remember everybody lives by selling something.

*Sue Barrett endorses the proposition that 'everybody lives by selling something' and people buy from people they trust. Sue is founder and managing director of BARRETT (est. 1995), specialists in 21st-century Sales Culture, Capability and Continuous Learning. Sue is one of the few prominent female voices commenting on sales today. Sue and her team take the guess work out of selling and help people from many different careers be effective and productive when it comes to selling, sales coaching or sales leadership. You don't have to be a sales person to benefit from her knowledge and insight. If you have an idea, capability, product, service or opportunity that you want to take to market then Sue says you need to be able to sell - ethically, honourably and effectively. Sue practices as a coach, advisor, speaker, facilitator, consultant and writer and works across all market segments with her skilful team at BARRETT. She is also the lead sales writer for [www.smartcompany.com.au](http://www.smartcompany.com.au), mother of two and keen practitioner of yoga and meditation. To hone your sales skills or learn how to sell go to [www.barrett.com.au](http://www.barrett.com.au).*

