3 Easy Steps for Sparking Engagement On LinkedIn



Insights from a seasoned expert on how to make the career-networking site work for you.

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In my experience, the one step product developers struggle with the most, by far, is getting in touch with the right people —people who can move their invention forward. The two classic paths to commercialization are venturing and licensing. My expertise is licensing, which you can think of like renting. Venturing gets all the glory, but licensing is far less risky. For years, I contacted and introduced myself to companies that I thought might want to license my product ideas using a landline. These days, savvy product developers

are making the most of social media, specifically LinkedIn.

LinkedIn can help stack the deck in your favor and greatly empower your business-networking endeavors, but only if you've adopted the correct approach. Benjamin Harrison, a lifelong entrepreneur with a background in product development and marketing in the home-craftsmanship industry, has been helping inventors leverage LinkedIn to get their product ideas into companies of all sizes over the last few years. (Full disclosure: I met Harrison when he joined inventRight, my coaching program, in 2016. He now teaches a course for inventRight about using LinkedIn to license your ideas called Smart Pitch.)

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When I asked what makes the difference in terms of getting a response versus hearing crickets when reaching out on LinkedIn, he explained that it entails looking at the platform differently from how most view it and taking the opposite approach that most users take. Most people still view LinkedIn as a job-searching site, he clarified. Meaning they build a resume for their profile that they never bother to update and crop their head shot out of a 10-year-old wedding photo. They blast out the same tired message to everyone they connect with, relying on a "spray and pray"-style marketing campaign, hoping something sticks.

In Harrison's experience, the worst offenders reach out to potential licensees with a tower of text that is much longer than any sane professional is willing to read. These messages often contain pictures, links and keyword-filled rants that leave the reader wondering what the call to action is, and more importantly, why they just wasted their time reading it in the first place.

"People with boring profiles who send out long-winded messages

blame LinkedIn and talk about how the platform doesn't work," Harrison says. "But truthfully, if that's your approach, you have no one to blame but yourself. You can't expect people to take the time to care specifically about your spam in a vast sea of it. Like all forms of communication right now, LinkedIn inboxes are crammed full of misguided attempts at marketing. You can't expect to get responses if your message and profile look like spam."

Don't be that kind of LinkedIn user. Instead, follow Harrison's simple tips for success.

First, get your profile right.

Having a killer profile is critical in achieving success when reaching out to companies looking for ideas on LinkedIn. More often than not, the people you message will view your profile to qualify you first. By including some simple personal branding on your profile, you can positively influence these brief qualifications, which often have long-lasting results.

Your profile actually lays the foundation of the perceived value of the marketing material you send and sets the tone for every interaction you have on the platform. How you present yourself either elevates the perceived value of your marketing material or ends up shooting you in the foot. In the latter case, your marketing material never even fully gets to sell for you.

People typically only spend about 20 seconds scanning a LinkedIn profile, so it's not as if you need a mountain of impressive information. That said, you do need to have a complete profile, one that showcases you as a professional and shows that you're in the game. The number-one mistake people make on LinkedIn is failing to complete their profiles, according to Harrison.

He's not wrong. I recently visited the LinkedIn profile of one

of my students who wasn’t receiving any replies when reaching out to potential licensees. The first thing I noticed was that her page felt generic. It didn’t communicate much, probably because she hadn’t selected any unique imagery to showcase. She was relying on the basic template LinkedIn provides everyone with.

That’s a mistake! That space should be used to help tell your story. Uploading a background photo that helps to tell your story, taking a better photo of yourself and rewriting your subject line so that it leverages your expertise are all simple improvements you can make quickly that are likely to have a profound impact

Second, make the right connections.

Harrison connects with anyone who works for a company he’s interested in, but for product licensing, he mainly targets sales and marketing employees. As a rule of thumb, salespeople are the quickest to respond. Marketing people are usually a little bit more helpful, but they’re not as active as sales professionals are on the platform. Some presidents and CEOs take a hands-on approach to LinkedIn. (That’s who he got my first no from, actually.) But as a general rule of thumb, they are the wrong tree to bark up.

Harrison recommends targeting users who are active on the platform specifically. Active users tend to not only respond more often, they also respond faster. (A user’s activity can be seen by viewing their profile.) “Don’t go into this process expecting a 100 percent connection-request acceptance rate,” Harrison advises. “Some users will accept your connection request quickly, some will take weeks, and some never will. This is normal.”

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Third, reach out the *right* way.

When reaching out to contacts on LinkedIn, the best strategy Harrison has found is to pose a simple question. In the case of product licensing, he asks whom within the company handles open innovation submissions. That's who he wants to direct my marketing material to, after all.

Hard linear sales pitches don't work on LinkedIn. You have to let your marketing material do the selling for you. Effective scripts for sparking engagement can be as simple as: "Hey Jane, is there someone at [company name] that takes care of open innovation submissions?" Messages that are short, specific and ask a reasonable question are infinitely more likely to spark engagement and elicit a response than long-winded self-important rants.

Never send your marketing material in your initial message. It's also a huge no-no to fire off a message as soon as someone accepts your connection request. This is frequently griped about on the platform, Harrison says, so fight the urge and wait a few days after connecting to reach out.

A recent addition to the LinkedIn repertoire is the ability to send an audio message that acts similar to a voicemail. Since very few spammers are using personalized audio messages as part of their strategy, you are less likely to be immediately dismissed as spam. Audio messages on LinkedIn are such a novelty, they almost demand to be played. You can use a similar script to a written message, such as, "Hey Susan, I'm curious if [company name] takes open innovation submissions, and if so, who they're sent to? I appreciate your time and hope you're having a good day." As of now, it's possible to send audio messages using your mobile device, but not on the desktop version of LinkedIn.

At the end of the day, it's important to manage your expectations when focusing on using LinkedIn to spark

engagement. “I’ve had people get back to me in less than five minutes,” Harrison reminds. “Others respond four months later. Realistically, I know the majority won’t. Understanding that there are going to be slow days and days where you don’t have time to get back to everyone is important.”

How have you used LinkedIn to further your product-licensing goals?

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