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Stay up to date with LinkedIn

By Dan Naumovich

Correspondent

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LinkedIn is often seen as Facebook for the career-minded — a place professionals can go to catch up with former colleagues, keep up with current trends and look for opportunities for advancement.

Last year the California-based company, which was launched in 2003, introduced company profiles. The profiles can be edited wiki-style and include a company overview and contact information, as well as aggregate information taken from the profiles of its employees who are LinkedIn members.

Today, employers from across the globe are starting to understand how to harness the power of the site's 47 million members to enhance their marketing and recruiting efforts. Laurie King, a consulting manager for Springfield-based MSF&W, logs on to LinkedIn daily.

The information systems consulting firm encourages its employees to create accounts, and King said there are marketing benefits to doing so. If someone is looking for a consultant with a certain proficiency, their search may turn up one of their employees whose page will then link them to MSF&W's company profile. She said that the firm's Web accessibility group has received inquiries in this way.

Of course, there is a down side to having your staff and their qualifications out on public display.

"There's always the chance that headhunters or other companies are going to see them and contact them and try to lure them away," King said.

In recruiting for MSF&W, King mainly uses LinkedIn to research applicants and verify data on their resumes.

When Omni Communications Group was looking for a new graphic and Web designer, it decided to use LinkedIn to solicit referrals. Its staff sent InMails (LinkedIn's internal message system) to all of its contacts asking if they knew anyone who might be qualified and interested in the position.

"We got several qualified leads that way," said Kathy Wheeler, Omni's media director.

In addition to employee recruitment, the advertising and public relations experts at Omni believe that social networking sites such as LinkedIn are an essential part of a company's marketing mix.

"I recommend for all of our clients to have profiles there," Wheeler said.

Wheeler started using LinkedIn about a year and a half ago. She's found that its industry-specific forums are a good source of information on a countless number of topics, including how businesses can use social media to their benefit.

“I try to log on every morning, and I just look at the discussions mostly because I find it’s good research for what we do,” she said.

Along with being Omni’s media director, Wheeler also serves as the search engine marketing manager. It’s in this role that she sees the most value in connecting to social networking sites.

“It’s a really good SEO (search engine optimization) tool for link building to our Web site,” she said.

When completing a company profile, LinkedIn provides a space where a company can insert its business Web address. Having an incoming link from such a heavy-traffic site (LinkedIn registered more than 14.2 million unique visitors in August) can have a measurable effect on a site’s page ranking. She demonstrated a Web search using her firm’s name and their LinkedIn page came in just behind their Web site in the results.

Although sites such as LinkedIn provide an almost endless supply of information and networking opportunities, the experience can become overwhelming.

“With all of the different social networking applications, it’s just time consuming,” King said, mentioning that she can access LinkedIn from her iPhone.

“It’s easy. It’s accessible. You always have it with you. But then you can never get away from it. I think one of our biggest challenges is deciding just how much information do we want.”

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