

How to Create Success with LinkedIn Groups

Sean Nelson

The image shows a screenshot of a LinkedIn group page for "Georgia Open Networkers". The page includes a header with the group name, navigation tabs for "Overview", "Discussions", and "Manage", and a "About this Group" section. A large green circular graphic with a pattern of overlapping circles is overlaid on the page, containing the text "LINKED INTUITION" in a bold, black, slanted font. Below the graphic, a "Featured Discussion" is visible, titled "Group Member Agreement" with a warning about the consequences of not connecting. The discussion is posted by Sean Nelson, who is also the group owner.

Georgia Open Networkers

Overview Discussions Manage

Georgia Open Networkers

About this Group

Created: June 21, 2009

Type: Networking Group

Owner: Sean Nelson

Discussions:

Featured Discussion

Group Member Agreement As a member of the group you agree to never choose the "I don't know this person" option when choosing to not connect. Doing so will result in termination of your membership.

Posted 14 days ago by Sean Nelson, ★Helping individuals and small businesses in Atlanta save up to 60% on their health insurance and employee benefits★

From the author of the Linked Intuition blog and the "LinkedIn MBA" and "LinkedIn Marketing Secret Formula"

About the Author

Sean Nelson is the author of the Social Media Sonar blog (www.socialmediasonar.com) and has been blogging about LinkedIn since January, 2008. He has written three LinkedIn books – “LinkedIn 101”, “The LinkedIn MBA”, and “LinkedIn Marketing Secret Formula”. He also created a companion workbook, the “LinkedIn MBA Workbook”. (Books are available at <http://socialmediasonar.com/resources/books>)

Sean continues to manage social media strategies for a number of clients and is a founding partner in Surge Labs, a Conversion Rate Optimization company. “When I started using social media my primary thought was how do I use these new tools to grow my network to drive new business. Next I moved to using these tools to communicate to my target market through the sharing of relevant content. With Surge Labs we’re focussing on improving what happens when your target market responds and clicks through to your home page or landing page and then enters the purchase path. Its amazing that by tweaking a headline or changing the color of your action button you can significantly increase revenue”.

Sean shares much of what he learns at the Social Media Sonar and the Surge Labs blogs.

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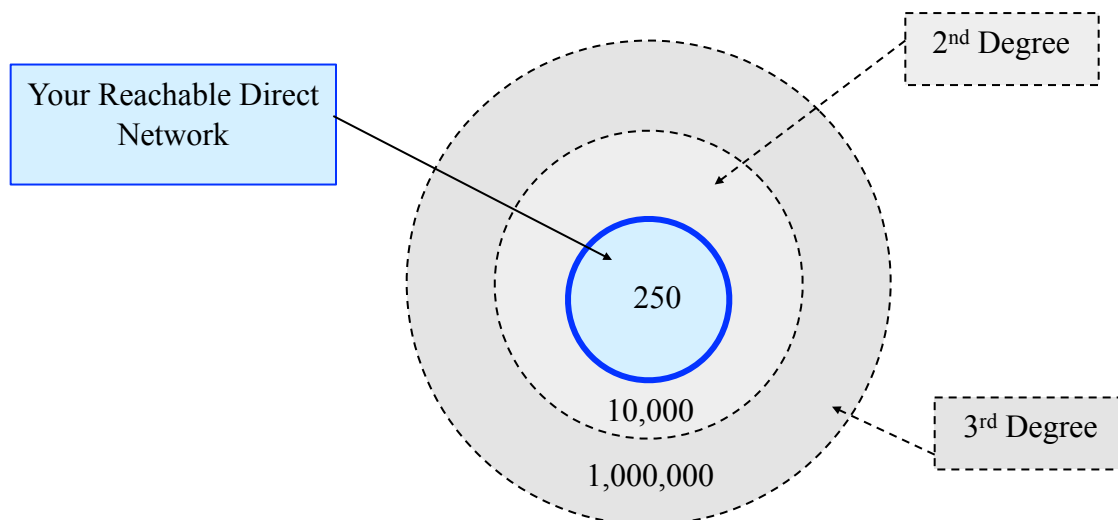
<http://www.socialmediasonar.com> | the blog

<http://www.surgelabs.com>

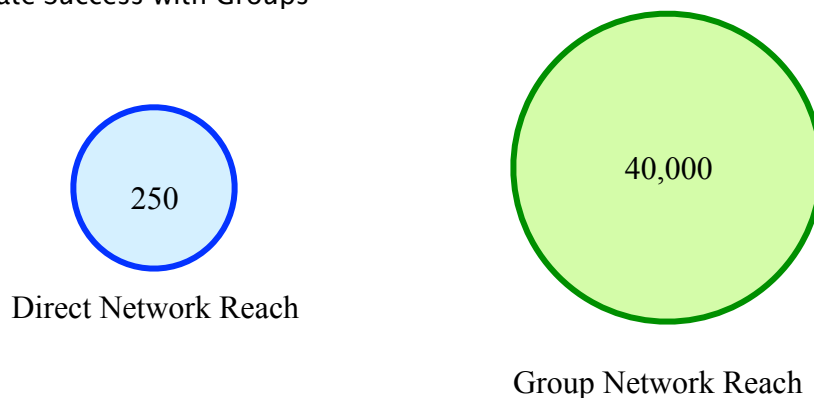
Introduction

Since its start the primary value in LinkedIn has been the ability to connect and build a professional network. While many people have been able to do this they have not been as successful in using LinkedIn to drive business.

On LinkedIn you can communicate directly with your 1st degree connections, but not with your 2nd or 3rd degree networks. While you may have 10,000 2nd degree connections and over 1 million 3rd degree connections, you have no way to communicate directly with them. If you have 250 1st degree connections then your effective reach is only 250 people.



A second network that has developed on LinkedIn is the Group network. Your group network is made up of those individuals who belong to the same groups that you do. If you belong to the top 50 groups on LinkedIn then you have access to 1.75 million people. If you belong to the top 50 groups in Georgia, for example, you would have access to over 40,000 people.



As recently as the 4th quarter of 2008 LinkedIn groups provided little value. There was no way to search groups to see what was available to join (Most people only became aware of particular groups by stumbling on to their existence when viewing another member's profile that belonged to the group). Once you were a member of the group you could view other members and communicate with them one on one, but there was not means to interact with them en masse.

During the first quarter of 2009 LinkedIn added some important functionality to Groups which changed the value of Groups. You can now search the Groups directory to find relevant groups to join. You can interact on the group discussion board, post articles or press release in the News Articles section, and post Jobs available or wanted.

These new components of groups allow you to interact with and communicate to fellow group members, a larger network than your Direct Network.

The Numbers

Think about this. If you are well connected you maybe have 500 direct connections. On any day you can contact any of these connections directly one at a time. You can use the Status Update tool to communicate information... much like with Twitter. They will see when you ask or answer a question and they see when you give or receive a Recommendation.

Be sure to check out the Social Media Sonar blog for more tips and strategies

Now consider groups. You can join up to 50 groups and which groups you join will determine how many LinkedIn members you can communicate with. I currently belong to 50 groups which combined have over 1.8 million members. At any point I can engage these members on the discussion boards and I can share information through News articles.

So, from a communications perspective which is better?

- A) The ability to get your message across to 500 people; or
- B) The ability to get your message across to 1.8 million people.

A major advantage to groups is the ability to target the groups you join based on who you would like to communicate with. Maybe it's fellow alumni members or maybe folks in a particular geographic area.

Your Approach

There are two ways to approach Groups: 1) As a member, 2) as an Owner

Most people are simply members of a group. Membership allows you to post discussions, jobs, and promotions, as well as contact other members directly.

As the owner of the Group you have the additional ability to designate a Featured Post which keeps them at the top of the discussion board, approve and remove members, and send out a weekly announcement. Group owners often can influence the direction of a group since they are seen as the group leader by members.

You can be a manager or an owner of up to 10 groups. Starting a group is easy. You simply create a name, create a large and small group logo, and write a

description of the purpose of the group. The hardest part of starting a group is growing the membership. Groups rarely grow on their own, and to get to a point where members seek out your group you need to have at least 1,000 members. There are 1,000's of groups on LinkedIn with less than 5 members.

The value in creating a group is that if the group grows large enough you increase your exposure to other LinkedIn members. The more value your group provides the more likely you are to receive positive benefits from starting and managing the group.

If you choose to start a group, first look to see if there are any similar groups in existence. Competing groups could impact your ability to grow the group and you might be better served by simply joining the existing group.

Second, you want to make sure the group will be of interest to a significant number of people. A group such as a BNI networking chapter may only be able to add 20 to 30 members based on the chapters size, where a group for all BNI members would have the ability to grow tremendously.

The final part of the puzzle is to invite a large number of people, at least 150 to 200 initially, to join the group. This is where having a large direct network will help you grow your group. Not everyone will join and your goal should be to at least add 100 members.

Next you can use your other groups to post invitations on the discussion board to join your group. Some groups specifically ask that you not post "Group Building" discussions. If that is the case do not post an announcement to your group on that group's discussion board.

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I've seen a lot of group announcements on Twitter which is a great way to go outside of your network to find potential members.

So now that you have a good idea of what groups are let's talk about the value they offer and how you can use them to your benefit.

Growing Your Network

While I find that groups provide more value than your direct network, it's still important to continue building a large network. A large network simply equates to more opportunity. There are many perspectives on just how large your direct network should be, and that's an individual decision.

But let me just say this. You never know where the next opportunity is going to develop. I find that often the opportunities I encounter present themselves regardless of whether I know the connection or not. Many times the person has simply seen my name enough times that when they need assistance of what I offer, they think of me.

Another point to consider is "how do you know whether or not someone in your network might benefit from a direct connection that you've never met". You don't. Your goal should be to become a Hub of resources that your network can tap into. Some of these resources you will be able to provide value by endorsing, some you will provide value by simply being a point of connection.

With groups you have the ability to connect directly with most members. This allows you to extend invitations to others who share a common interest. In the first year and half of active participation on LinkedIn I grew my network to about 350 people. Using a single group, I increased my connections to over 500 in a single week. This was a Georgia based group so the 200 connections

that I added are local people. That's added a tremendous amount of value to my local network.

I sent out approximately 250 invitations and more than 75% of them have been accepted. I received numerous thanks for reaching out to connect. There is a formula that I use in sending connection invitations within groups:

1. Introduce myself as a fellow group member
2. State that the purpose of the group is to network, so in that spirit I am extending an invitation to connect
3. Add a value statement...how I can help them
4. Include my full name

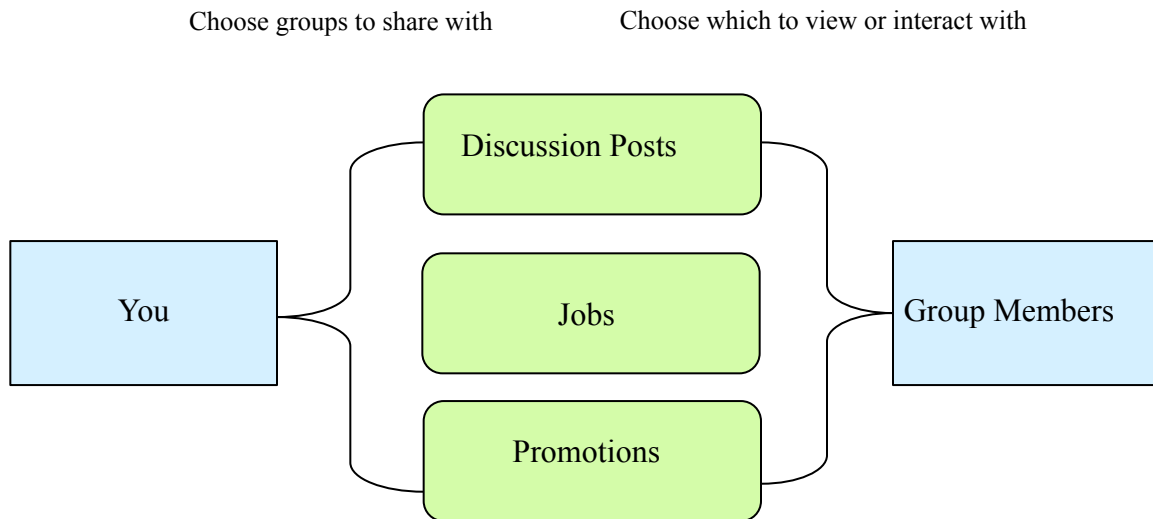
When you send an invitation you have several factors working in your favor.

1. People are open to connecting when there is common ground
2. People are looking to build their own networks
3. Membership in the same Group and having common connections establishes a baseline of credibility
4. By writing a LinkedIn blog and offering to help them I'm providing value.

You just need to identify the value you bring to the table and offer to help others.

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Interact With the Community



The availability of a group discussion board allows you to create a conversation with fellow members. The board of any group is dependent upon group participation and upon members posting interesting thoughts, comments, or questions. Groups with thought provoking discussions and high levels of participation generate a significant amount of value. It builds upon itself. It's similar to growing a group and as momentum grows the board will suddenly flourish with activity.

Discussions can be a great way to solicit information from fellow members. They can be a way to generate awareness. They can even be used to generate business. A large part of your success is dependent upon how you ask your question or phrase your statement.

Consider the following two posts:

1. Mortgage rates dropped to 4.5%, call me if you are looking to refinance;
or
2. With mortgage rates dropping to 4.5%, how do you determine if it's a good idea to refinance your loan?

Both statements pretty much say the same thing, but while statement two will not be seen as a spam post, statement one would be considered spam. If you master the art of posting discussions you can deliver any message in a manner not considered spam.

Timing your posts is important as well. Each day a group announcement is sent out with all of the day's posts. The last post received is included in the subject line. You want to make sure that your post is the last one posted before the email is sent out. One way to do this is to look at your daily message to see when the last post was made. For example if the email digest was received at 6:00 PM and the last post made at 5 PM, then you know to time your posts around 5PM.

Even if you don't succeed in adding the last post, you still want to be one of the last 3 posts. In the daily digest email posts will be listed one after another. Those listed first will tend to receive the most clicks. Even more so if there are 15 or 20 posts. People's attention only lasts so long. If you're the first post of the day (last listed in the email) you'll be lucky to receive any additional traffic.

Sharing the News

Over the last year LinkedIn chose to combine the Discussion board and the News board. Typically news post which often linked to blog posts were placed

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in the News Board which kept these posts from cluttering the discussion board. Since the boards have been combined some groups no longer allow you to post links to blog posts.

In my opinion this was a mistake on LinkedIn's part and many groups compound the error by creating rules to prevent adding blog posts to the discussion board. I discovered many valuable blogs through news articles and gained many new blog readers (which I discuss later)

You will have to check each of your groups to see if they allow blog posts in the discussion board. If not you can add them to the Promotions board. Either way if you write articles or press releases and include them anywhere online you can link to them to share with the group.

The Answer to the Question Many People Are Asking

Since 2008 I've written the Social Media Sonar blog – <http://www.socialmediasonar.com>. I started this blog to document my quest to find relevance in connecting on LinkedIn. Over time it's evolved into a valuable resource with commentary, tips, strategies and thoughts on how to use LinkedIn and social media to enhance your network and grow your business. The only problem was that not many people were aware of the site.

In March of 2009, after averaging about 400 unique visitors and 2,200 total visitors to the blog I decided to go for broke and committed to publishing three new posts per week. I also committed to finding a way to market the site. I researched driving blog traffic, read hundreds of site and blogs, and searched for other blogs to post comments. Here is my traffic from the previous six months:

	Unique visitors	Total Visitors
September 08	362	1,074
October 08	517	1,212
November 08	385	1,081
December 08	339	1,097
January 09	447	1,186
February 09	782	1,627

The numbers are not that remarkable. Throughout the period I posted a couple of articles to a membership site that I had. I also added a few posts to discussion questions, which likely accounted for the increase in February. None of this activity was conducted on a continuous basis.

In March of 09 I started using King Ping and Ping-o-Matic. I noticed a slight increase in March.

	Unique visitors	Total Visitors
March 09	825	2,209

The first part of April I continued to see traffic growing at a consistently slow pace. After the first week I estimated that I was on pace to probably have 1,200 unique visitors and about 3,300 total visitors. A positive projection because it meant the site was slowly gaining a small amount of attention and traffic.

During the first part of April I also started focusing on building my membership in groups. As I researched and tested out groups I started thinking about using groups to increase traffic to my site. I started by adding my blog posts as news articles in a few groups.

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Here is my traffic for the month.

Day	Number of visits	Pages	
01 Apr 2009	121	419	
02 Apr 2009	124	258	
03 Apr 2009	117	392	
04 Apr 2009	76	151	
05 Apr 2009	66	107	
06 Apr 2009	123	238	
07 Apr 2009	94	198	
08 Apr 2009	144	303	
09 Apr 2009	83	122	
10 Apr 2009	98	159	
11 Apr 2009	104	278	
12 Apr 2009	83	1174	
13 Apr 2009	173	1014	
14 Apr 2009	150	502	
15 Apr 2009	158	820	
16 Apr 2009	186	990	
17 Apr 2009	336	1238	
18 Apr 2009	166	278	
19 Apr 2009	116	185	
20 Apr 2009	341	822	
21 Apr 2009	401	1303	
13 Apr 2009	173	1014	---Started testing out groups
14 Apr 2009	150	502	
15 Apr 2009	158	820	
16 Apr 2009	186	990	
17 Apr 2009	336	1238	---Started posting in all groups
18 Apr 2009	166	278	
19 Apr 2009	116	185	
20 Apr 2009	341	822	
21 Apr 2009	459	1417	
22 Apr 2009	393	1186	
23 Apr 2009	346	902	
24 Apr 2009	469	1885	
25 Apr 2009	414	907	
26 Apr 2009	222	441	
27 Apr 2009	565	1307	
28 Apr 2009	526	1606	
29 Apr 2009	466	1151	
30 Apr 2009	464	1530	
Average	238.53	729.17	

For the first part of the month (up to April 12) traffic ranged from a low of 66 visits to a high of 144. On April 13 I added a blog post as an article in several groups and traffic jumped to 174 visits that day. Traffic remained high for the next two days and then on the 16th I added another post.

In between these posts I joined about 15 additional groups and on the 16th I posted the blog post as a news article in every group. This was done late in the afternoon and while traffic grew some on the 16th, the real response showed on the 17th. If you look at the 18th (Saturday) and 19th (Sunday) traffic dropped, but compare it to the two previous Saturdays (104 and 76 visits) and Sundays (83 and 66) and this was a positive outcome.

On the 20th I posted again after having joined a couple of more groups and the results are amazing. There were 341 visits on the 20th and this carried over to 459 on the 21st. The statistics from the rest of April continue to show similar results.

Another number not shown above is the actual increase in unique visitors. These are people that visited the site for the first time during April. Between the 16th and the 30 the number of unique visitors increased from 762 to 3,414...an increase of 2,652 new people viewing the blog.

I also saw an increase in the number of people who signed up to receive alerts whenever a new post is added.

By the end of June 2009 the site reached 25,000 unique visitors and close to 50,000 total visits. All primarily from sharing blog posts within LinkedIn groups.

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Duplicating these results would be much more difficult in LinkedIn groups as they exist today. First because LinkedIn eliminated the News Board there does not seem to be one place that is acceptable across groups to post links to blog articles. Second, a lot more people have caught on to the idea. But, using LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and other tools provides an opportunity to grow traffic to those who are willing to invest the time.

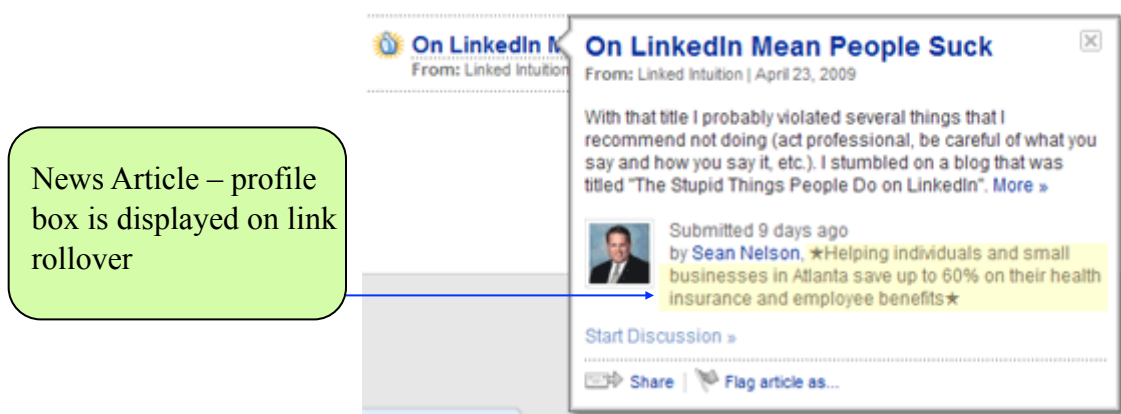
Another Benefit

Another benefit that I have seen is an increase in members contacting me to help them with their online marketing needs. There are several factors leading to people reaching out to me for help. In order for someone to choose to seek your help or buy your product or service they must:

1. **Know You** – The blog articles keep my name in front of a large number of people. Also in my job title I use “Helping individuals and small businesses in Atlanta save up to 60% on their health insurance and employee benefits” rather than the generic “Insurance Broker”. This is my basic elevator pitch so it is delivered each time I post a new discussion or a news article.



Discussion Post-
displays photo and
job title on board



2. **Like You** – The articles I write in my blog help other people use LinkedIn more effectively. I'm sharing my time and knowledge with other people while not asking for anything in return. People will naturally like those who are willing to provide value with no strings attached,

3. **Trust You** – If people know you, not necessarily on a personal basis but even from continued exposure, and they like you, you are well on your way to them trusting you. Other ways that I build credibility and trust is through having a well defined profile, sharing information on LinkedIn Answers, and by having client written recommendation.

Participation in Groups has allowed me to communicate with fellow group members in a non-intrusive manner and provides a tremendous value in terms of exposure.

Wrap Up

Groups are quietly becoming the most active part of LinkedIn. Eventually everyone will discover their value and you will likely see an increase in discussions and news articles. The time to master groups is now, while people are still trying to figure out how to use groups.

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You have an opportunity to get a head start on promoting yourself, your business, your products and services, and your blog. Along with this comes the opportunity to help others as well.

Finally, as a group's size grows it becomes more valuable. Each additional member is a potential pair of eyeballs to view your profile, see what your offer, engage with in discussion, and read your blog.

One final thought. There are some who feel that using LinkedIn to promote yourself or your business is a negative activity. I couldn't disagree more. LinkedIn is a social business network with the emphasis on business.

The best way to promote your business is by sharing content that is valuable to your connections, helping others as often as possible, and participating in groups and answers sharing your knowledge and experience. Doing this is not spam.

Make it Happen!

Sean Nelson

Linked Intuition

<http://www.socialmediasonar.com>

Atlanta, GA

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