

Foreword by Jeremiah Desmarais, Vice President, Marketing, Norvax

You know what the most common reply I get when I ask insurance brokers: “Are you on LinkedIn?”

“Linked What?”

If your answer sounds something like that, here’s the problem: There are already over 664,000 professionals with “insurance” in their profile on LinkedIn — and that means you’re already behind.

And a recent poll of Norvax University attendees (made up of health insurance brokers from twenty-two states) revealed only 37% had a LinkedIn account. Of those that had an account, over 90% had less than 100 connections.

Put the two together and you have a sea of insurance professionals who either
A) have not realized the marketing potential behind using this networking tool;
or
B) saw some potential, signed up, but have no clue how to harness it.

In this time of evolving consumer shopping patterns, brokers who don’t have a profile on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, or other hot social media tools are setting themselves up for serious competition at the hands of more savvy agents.

The reality is the Internet has a hand in over 80% of all health insurance purchases. Consumers research plans, look at doctor networks, and try to ‘figure it out’ on their own before they want to pick up the phone to talk to a broker.

It's like health insurance is being seen in the same eyes as buying an airline ticket online: "Put in my information. See prices. Compare. Click. Buy."

Only after the Internet shopping process begins does a consumer start to get overwhelmed with the dizzying array of health plan choices.

Enter the insurance agent.

When an agent initiates contact via email, that first impression has a powerful effect on the consumer. It sends one of two messages:

- 1) I'm connected and ready to serve you. Check out my profile here (link to LinkedIn), and see what others have said about me. I understand your problems. I can help you solve them. I won't waste your time. We can do this all online. It's **almost** painless.

OR

- 2) I'd like to sit down and chat with you. I've been selling insurance longer than I'd like to admit. I know all the carriers and plan options. This is going to take lots of time over the phone or in person, and there will definitely be lots of paperwork to sign. Let's sit and chat about insurance, but this is going to take a while.

It sounds silly, but it's exactly what people are thinking when they are contacted by an out-of-touch, offline broker. If you're not "wired," then you're completely missing a vital opportunity to build a compelling online presence, enhance your businesses' legitimacy and gain a buyer's confidence.

These days, things like BBB logos, testimonials from happy customers, a LinkedIn profile with 200+ connections & recommendations, and a 'non-creepy' Facebook profile can all help in building that consumer confidence before the sale.

Sean has assembled some powerful tools and tactics in this guide that will help brokers take the important first step into the world of LinkedIn. Using these strategies as part of an integrated marketing effort that includes leads, sales automation, SEM and SEO will surely empower insurance brokers to capture their share of this explosive industry.

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**While Jeremiah's comments are written in regards to health brokers they easily are applicable to all insurance brokers and any business person.

Introduction

Using social media to drive business is a process that takes time to develop. Direct sales pitches rarely work. You have to first build or identify existing communities. Then you have to introduce yourself and build recognition. As the community begins to recognize you, you need to be of service providing value, sharing information, and helping others. Over time your activities will lead to trust.

Before we get started with the action steps I'm going to lay out four principals that are a key to making LinkedIn work for you.

- Understanding your Purpose = Understanding the Right Activities to Take
- Expanding Your Reach = More Opportunity
- Know, Like, and Trust = Success
- More Participation = More Results

The first step is to understand why you're on LinkedIn. As a business professional I'm going to assume that you are looking for a way to identify and connect with prospects. LinkedIn can definitely help you do that. It can also help you identify potential referral or alliance partners. State specifically why you're on LinkedIn and then make sure every subsequent action supports that purpose.

Second, you need to have a significant enough network to make it relevant. The first network is your Direct Network. These are the people that you are directly connected to. If you're just starting out you probably have less than 100 direct connections. You need to begin developing your network with an initial goal of 500 direct connections.

It's said that the average person knows 250 people. That means that to reach 500 connections you're going to need to get to work meeting and connecting with more people.

As you're building your network you need to start building your credibility. This is the first step to getting to the point where enough people know you, like you, and trust you. There are specific actions you can take on LinkedIn that will help you accomplish this and we'll discuss these later.

Finally, to accomplish principles two and three you're going to have to participate. If you can't commit to a certain level of activity then you're better off saving your time and doing something else.

Let's get started.