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EXTEND YOUR NETWORK ONLINE

BY BUD BILANICH

IN THESE UNCERTAIN TIMES, MANY PEOPLE ARE USING SOCIAL NETWORKING to build and maintain a strong contact base. This month I want to tell you how to get the most out of a LinkedIn account. In my new book coming out this summer (*42 Rules to Jumpstart Your Professional Success*), Rule 14 is: Become Active on LinkedIn,

The Best Social Networking Site for Professionals. There are over 35 million professionals on this site. It's a place to find people and for people to find you. It provides you with a communication tool to help create a platform for your success. In their book *42 Rules for 24-Hour Success on LinkedIn*, Chris Muccio, David Burns, and Peggy Murrah show you how to use this social networking site to create opportunities 24 hours a day.

Remember, the Internet Never Sleeps

Your LinkedIn profile is the place to begin round-the-clock brand building. A good profile will attract others, educate them about you, and influence their feelings toward you, even if you've never met in person. The book's co-authors note that you have three seconds to communicate your brand with your profile. Make those seconds count.

LinkedIn provides you with the space to post a professional description. Prior to speaking with Chris and Peggy, my description read "Bud Bilanich, The Common Sense Guy." Now it states, "Bud Bilanich: I help individuals, teams and entire organizations succeed by helping them apply their common sense." I don't know about you, but I think that the second description is much

reconnect with people you used to know. If you use Microsoft Outlook, download the Outlook toolbar, which will let you know the LinkedIn status of everyone from whom you receive an email. Ask your existing LinkedIn connections to introduce you to their connections. In this way, you can build a large network of people who will be exposed to your brand.

Chris, David, and Peggy showed me how the "What are you working on?" function can help build your brand. Update it regularly. Post all the interesting things you are doing—professionally and personally. This will let others get to know you better and it will showcase the depth and breadth of your experience. Think of it as a longer tweet. Twitter limits you to 140 characters per post. Here you can post three or four sentences and go into a little more detail. And just like Twitter, people can respond to your "What are you working on?" posts. This creates the chance to engage in dialogue with the people you meet on LinkedIn, strengthening your relationships.

Be a Joiner

Groups are another powerful way to leverage your LinkedIn account. You can use the search tool to find groups that people with interests similar to your own join. The authors suggest signing up for three groups to begin with. Spend some time in these groups. See if they appeal to you. If they do, become active by participating in conversations and sharing your thoughts, ideas, and links you find helpful. If you don't like a group, drop out and find another. Participating in LinkedIn groups can be time consuming. Set your default to receive emails from groups once a week, then set aside a specific period each week to read the recent posts and reply to relevant ones.

LinkedIn is a great social networking tool—if you leverage it correctly to build your brand and expand your Web presence. ○

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stronger, communicates better, and makes the most out of my three seconds.

Leverage Your Profile

You can leverage your profile in several ways. Invite everyone you know to connect with you on LinkedIn. Use the site's colleagues and classmates reconnect function. It can be a lot of fun to



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