

Minding your social-media manners

If you're using LinkedIn, use proper etiquette

By Fiona Collie – November 4, 2011

Minding your manners when using LinkedIn can help you maintain a professional image.

Social media is very public, anything you post online can be forwarded and copied anywhere, says Linda Allan, a certified management consultant in Toronto who specializes in business behaviour. "So, you have to be very careful about what you say and how you say it."

Follow Allan's tips to help you mind your p's and q's when using LinkedIn:

> **Once is enough**

Respect a person's decision to decline your invitation to connect.

One request is sufficient, says Allan. LinkedIn automatically reminds people of any invitation you send, so there's no need to bombard them with message after message.

> **Make it personal**

Send a personal invitation to people you know well or work with frequently.

LinkedIn provides a default invitation request you can send, Allan says. It also lets you add a message of your own. So if you know the person, it's more polite and personable to craft a unique message.

> **Be honest**

Never misrepresent yourself, exaggerate your qualifications or fake an acquaintance.

Sometimes people might say in an invitation to someone they have never met: "It's great to be able to re-connect."

Instead, Allan says, state plainly in the invitation how you know the person — whether through a networking event or a LinkedIn group. As well, resist the temptation to embellish credentials on your profile, Allan says. Not many people lie, but there is a growing tendency to exaggerate on LinkedIn and social media — which is not a good idea.

> **Dot the "I"s and cross the "T"s**

Take time to create the right message for your updates on LinkedIn.

Even though social media is a fast and sometimes casual medium, Allan says, you still need to take the time to ensure your message will be well understood. Make sure you use proper spelling and punctuation when posting online, she says, and remember to proofread.

> **Save the sales pitch**

LinkedIn is for staying connected with people — not making a sale.

Sometimes, once you've accepted an invitation, people start sending flyers or promotions, says Allan, or they add your personal email to a distribution list. That's a definite no-no. Instead, use your LinkedIn profile and status updates to stay in contact with clients and to maintain a profile for your business.

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