

Is LinkedIn All It Was Cracked Up to Be?

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Our friend and colleague Bob Ambrogi thinks LinkedIn is losing its luster – and we agree. He wrote a blog post recently on this subject. So we tip our hat to Bob before we begin.

Author Simek isn't active on any social media other than LinkedIn, largely because he is a professional testifying expert on IT and digital forensics topics – and he didn't want to risk being hung by his own petard because of something he had posted on other kinds of social media. But LinkedIn, in its original incarnation in 2002, was pretty much a resume site and seemed fairly safe. Lawyers and others joined in hordes – and it now has more than 380 million members.

Lawyers like the idea of connecting with others on a resume driven site and many lawyers who were dismayed by Facebook felt comfortable on LinkedIn. As we write, author Nelson has 2407 connections and author Simek has 562 (slacker).

Like many people, we experimented with belonging to LinkedIn groups. Sadly, we found most of them dominated by marketers. The noise ratio was high, some posts were indistinguishable from spam and we pretty much gave up on those, finding legal listserve discussions to be far more useful.

We find ourselves occupied, on a daily basis, with trying to figure out if we want to accept connection invitations. This is annoying. More annoying is the number of people in marketing, sales, business development, etc. We NEVER accept such invitations because we know we'll get pummeled with marketing spam in short order if we connect. And ditto for the folks who buy and sell businesses, commercial real estate brokers and wealth advisers. A river of spam will follow any connection with them. Website designers and SEO experts – don't even get us started.

Once you make the mistake of connecting with someone who wants to sell you something and effectively spams you, you have to go to the time and trouble to disconnect from them.

Recently, we've seen an increasing number of what we can only call "odd" requests – someone we don't know in India, a private in the U.S. Army, a waitress in Chicago, etc. There seems no reason to connect but it takes time to screen the requests. And if there's anything lawyers are loathe to give, it's their time.

Overall, we still find LinkedIn somewhat useful, giving us an easy way to search for colleagues, companies, etc. of interest to us for one reason or another. Since we organize conferences and host podcasts, we frequently connect with people via LinkedIn because we may not be able to easily find their e-mail address or other contact information.

It is useful enough that we will probably remain on LinkedIn but we are somewhat disenchanted by recent developments and some of our colleagues (like Bob Ambrogi) seem to be suffering from the disenchantment syndrome as well.

Endorsements have been particularly annoying on LinkedIn, because lawyers are ethically required to review them and make sure they are accurate and not misleading. All too often, LinkedIn simply suggest endorsements for those you are connected to and it seems that people tend to willy-nilly click on "endorse all." And some people engage in quid pro quo endorsements – hardly in keeping with our ethical duties.

It is annoying to have to review and hide endorsements. Another black mark.

This does not bode well for LinkedIn, which hasn't seemed to find as many ways as Facebook to monetize its product. You can upgrade to the Premium version, but how many people think they need the Premium version? Most of our friends do not. You can buy ads, but not many people seem to do that. When it comes to monetizing social media, Facebook is a runaway champion.

LinkedIn isn't exactly on its way to the poorhouse. In 2014, 61% of LinkedIn's third-quarter revenue, totaling \$345 million, came from recruitment services sold to both professional recruiters and employers. Marketing accounted for 19% of total revenue, or \$109 million, from a combination of advertising sold to online marketers and the sale of "sponsored updates" posted to a target audience of members in the LinkedIn feed. They also annoy us.

The remaining 20% of revenue, or \$114 million, was generated through premium subscriptions. Premium subscriptions allow members to increase their search

results significantly, send messages on LinkedIn's e-mail system rather than just receive them, contact members outside of their networks and see information about people who have viewed their profiles. Only 15.1% of total users had premium subscriptions as of May 2014. Glad we looked that up – we always wondered about the number, which is actually higher than we would have expected.

We ask people all the time to tell us their LinkedIn success stories – we hear a few, but not many. They generally are from people who knew each other at school or work, lost touch and then reconnected through LinkedIn. Happily they are now in a position to help one another on the business front.

We have sent notifications to connections about CLEs in which we were presenting. We can't say we noted any difference in attendance. We suspect the notifications mildly annoyed our connections and our belief that it might lead to people disconnecting led us to stop the practice of sending such notifications. And indeed, many people don't elect to have their LinkedIn notifications and messages sent to their e-mail – and don't read them when they visit the site. We suspect that for most people those notifications and messages are a graveyard of unread messages.

We have asked people about LinkedIn Pulse – a fairly new development. Pulse had been around since 2013 and got a major redesign in June of 2015. You can read more about it at <http://www.theverge.com/2015/6/17/8793547/linkedin-pulse-news-reader-app-update>. While there are those who trumpet it, we have yet to see much in the way of people crossing over to post their work on Pulse. It sure doesn't strike us as a runaway success. There are simply too many sources of data coming at us and people have to choose.

Like all sites, it has gotten more complicated, offering a Chinese menu of services, largely of no interest to us. So our current assessment of LinkedIn is simply "meh."

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