

Why 50 is the magic number for job-hunting



By Peter Bowes BBC News, Los Angeles

Can the people you already know get you your dream job?

"It's not what you know but who you know," is an old saying about job-hunting.

In the world of social networks we "know" more people than ever and we can be connected to the people they know as well, making it easier to find work and hear about people using our personal networks.

'Understanding your audience'

There are many ways to socialise online and increasingly many of the leading sites, such as Facebook, are being used by companies to engage and recruit employees.

"It comes down to understanding your audience," says Michael Weiss, social media expert and managing director at figure18, a company that coaches people to be better story-tellers.

LinkedIn is probably the most important site when you are looking for a job. But if you're creative, Pinterest and Instagram are useful. If you're a writer or you want to be more in the public eye then Twitter makes sense.

Secrets of success on social networks



Tips from Sachin Rekhi, from LinkedIn, on how to stand out from the crowd.

- Make sure you have the best professional photo on your profile. You'll find that on LinkedIn you're 11 times more likely to get views if you have a photo.
- It's really important to make sure you have your entire profile history listed. Not only your current position, but previous positions that you've had as they give a great insight into your career history.
- Have a summary section about your career and what it is that you ultimately aspire to do.
- Add recommendations and endorsements from your friends and colleagues. People like to see not only what you have done but what other people think of your work.
- Add video, photos or articles you have written to your profile. It allows you to show off the various work products that you've created. You definitely see a significantly increased amount of engagement if you do.

LinkedIn has become the go-to platform in the corporate world and the primary site employers use for professional recruiting.

"For professional-level positions, applicants are expected to have a robust LinkedIn profile that will clearly show a prospective employer their qualifications and expertise," says Alison Doyle, job search expert for About.com.

"Networking sites have made it easier than ever to connect and to network using a computer, tablet or smartphone."

LinkedIn secrets

Based in Silicon Valley, California, LinkedIn has just turned 10 years old. It has more than 259 million members, two-thirds of whom are outside the United States.

So what have they learnt about how to social-network your way into a job?

"Business networking online is really about using your network and using the online tools to become better at what you do," says Caroline Gaffney, who manages the LinkedIn homepage and newsfeed.

"It includes building a good profile so that people can find you if they are looking for someone who has your background. It includes developing a good network of people who you could reach out to for future jobs and it includes sharing and participating."

The site has a distinctly different culture to most other social networking platforms, where people engage with their friends and family, sharing photos and personal news.

"A site like LinkedIn is all about being better at what you do in your job or potentially setting yourself up for the next job," says Ms Gaffney.

Peter Bowes goes to LinkedIn in Silicon Valley to find out how to make social networks work for an effective job hunt

Networking, at its most basic, is about making professional connections with people who could be useful to you. It is also about extending your circle of contacts so that you appear on the radar of your connections' connections.

The magic number

"We know that the secret number of connections is 50," says Erran Berger, a LinkedIn engineer who is responsible for building the site.

Mr Berger says achieving the magic figure of 50 is crucial for the ripple effect to occur.

"I start with my first degree connections. So let's say Anna is somebody I know because she works with me and Anna has tens of connections and she's connected to Jim and all of a sudden my second degree network here is actually quite large," he says.

"Jim may work at a company that I'm really interested in and has my dream job. I can ask for an introduction to him through Anna and I can ask him, 'What will it take for me to get a job at your company?'"

Digital etiquette

The process of making new contacts online raises questions about the etiquette of networking. It used to be the case that it was inappropriate to cold-call strangers, even if they are contacts of our business colleagues, to pick their brains about a new job.

"The general rule of thumb for connecting with people on LinkedIn is that you connect with people who you know or who you may meet at a future date, like a conference or at an event," says Ms Gaffney.

But the nature of digital networking means that connections can be nurtured much more easily than when new contacts ended up as a stack of business cards in a bottom drawer.

"Interactions are much more fluid now and people are more open to receiving messages from someone who they may not know as long as it has some context," says Ms Gaffney.

It is an approach that still makes some people feel uncomfortable. Not everyone wants to be so "out there" with their online resume or adopt such a cavalier attitude to tapping up strangers, in the hope of getting a foot in the door at a new company. It is possible to be shy online, as well as in person.

"There are lightweight ways you can interact if you don't want to do a big broadcast and you don't want to be a very active member in a group," says Ms Gaffney.

"You can like or comment on someone else's share. So let's say someone you work with shares an article about a new product, you can like it and that's all, it's one click. It reminds them of you. A like is very lightweight.

"As you get more confidence and you see that it's not as daunting, you can then maybe create a comment on someone else's article and then graduate towards eventually sharing your own articles as you get more comfortable with it. You'll see that it leads to valuable benefits and it leads to future connections with people who create opportunities for you."