



Using LinkedIn to Position Your Company as a Thought Leader

Published on March 29, 2017



Jim Lauria
Water Technology Executive



This blog is a summary of a presentation I gave at the Water Quality Association's annual convention in Orlando.

LinkedIn is a powerful tool not just to connect with potential customers, job seekers and peers, but to position yourself and your company as thought leaders in your industry. With more than 400 million members—including over 100 million active users—1 million specialty groups, and its powerful Pulse news aggregator, LinkedIn is a global conversation space and a forum for sharing great ideas whenever the mood strikes you, 24 hours a day.

Don't let the instant connectivity lure you into thinking LinkedIn is just another vehicle for status updates, kid pictures and tweetstorms. LinkedIn connects you to the central nodes in your professional network. LinkedIn founder Reid Hoffman and his co-author Ben Casnocha point out in *The Start-Up of You* that people equal opportunities. Those opportunities, and the professional, credible environment provided by LinkedIn, demand messages with more thought and foresight. Unlike other social media sites, LinkedIn is a professional atmosphere, not a social one.

Backyard BBQ vs. Business Lunch

Think of it this way. Presenting yourself on Facebook is like hanging out at a backyard barbecue. It's casual, after-hours, fun-loving. There are kids, dogs, hobbies, sports



It's professional. You can be personal, but not rowdy.

That difference should be reflected in how you present yourself on LinkedIn—after all, your profile is what new contacts will use to get to know you. Instead of a lighthearted vacation shot, your LinkedIn profile picture should be the sort of image you would want to present at a customer meeting. Your profile should include your title, at least three recommendations so viewers can get a sense of who you know and what they think of you, and an authentic statement that describes your unique value proposition. Why would someone want to do business with you, add you to their network, or pay attention to what you're saying?

Get Connected

LinkedIn profiles provide a look at the networks connected to members. Your first task as a thought leader on LinkedIn is to get connected. Send and accept invitations. Follow up with what I call “network lagniappe”—a little something extra to build the relationship. In replying to queries and comments, I added links to thought maps that many people find interesting, much like throwing in an extra donut to make a “baker's dozen” and add some extra value. A [post](#) on great TED talks was always a hit; so was [this one](#) on how to use LinkedIn more effectively.

Connect with subject matter experts and join LinkedIn groups for a chance to see what's being discussed and who tends to be leading the discussions. Don't just stick to people you already know. Treat this like a networking event at a big trade show—your chance to make new connections and talk to the top people in the business.

You're building what Seth Godin calls a tribe; as he defines it, “a group of people connected to one another, connected to a leader and connected to an idea.” As you affiliate with tribes, you are also developing your own—a tribe you can connect with your ideas.

You can even own a LinkedIn group assembled around concepts you feel are important. There are already great groups within the water industry, including a WQA group. But there's always room for more, creating more discussions, asking more questions of each other, sharing more perspectives. However, if you start a group, you take on the responsibility to moderate it, so don't take this step lightly.

Industry Reporter

As a blogger and thought leader, you become a reporter for our industry. You start finding yourself doing research, scouring the media, framing ideas in blog form, asking questions in informal polls of your contacts, and taking notes on books and conversations. You start seeking out dialogues that expose you to new ideas and help you hone your own concepts, connecting with people at industry events and in trade

nyro-luminaries,” people whose own inought leadership helps broaden and elevate your thinking.

Building on that foundation, you write and share.

I like to say that being connected on LinkedIn allows me to ask burning questions. Some have sparked great debates within my LinkedIn network and yielded a [feature article](#) in the July 2016 *Water Online* magazine and a [commentary](#) in *World Water*.

Trade organizations are a prime source for great insight. Last year, I met a leader of the Oklahoma Rural Water Association at a meeting, and was so inspired by his work I put my industry reporter hat on and wrote a LinkedIn Pulse blog titled “[Dancing Backwards and In High Heels](#).” That generated great feedback, but I realized I wasn’t finished with my idea yet, so I wrote “[An Independence Day Salute to Our American Heroes](#).” After it ran on LinkedIn, it was picked up by *Our Water Counts*, expanding both the message and the audience.

Incidentally, LinkedIn is an ideal platform for planting an idea and then spreading it to audiences of other industry media. (The crucial reason is that the content you publish on LinkedIn is all yours. You retain the copyright, and the right to share or republish it. It’s worth reading the [Publishing Platform Guidelines](#)—not just on LinkedIn, but on any platform on which you choose to publish, as those rights can vary dramatically from one site to another.)

For instance, a LinkedIn Pulse column I wrote on [how the growing cannabis industry will fuel water innovation](#) ended up on *The Water Network*, *Water Online*, *Our Water Counts* and *Water Deeply*. That’s a broad span of excellent sites, putting me in touch with a worldwide audience of committed readers...and maybe, someday, great sources for other articles and conversations.

Broad Perspectives

Blogging allows you to approach your ideas from multiple perspectives, often engaging different audiences with each one. For instance, I recently issued an [open letter to President Trump](#) asking him to make water infrastructure a national priority. I followed up with an [open letter to Michelle Obama](#) asking her to make water infrastructure a key part of her post-White House platform, a natural complement to the health initiatives she continues to champion. It’s no mistake that I used the same graphic to illustrate both letters—it ties them together into a non-partisan whole that is good for America, no matter who you are and who you voted for.

Of course, taking a thought leadership position can expose you to debate, dissent and a few potshots here and there. And presenting ideas to a broad audience can lead to missiles from both sides. Among the comments I received were one accusing me of



environmentalist...for the same post. You can learn from many comments, but you can't let yourself take attacks like those personally.

Cardinal Rule

I built my career in sales and marketing. I love connecting a customer with a great solution and I love bringing home a sale. But your blog is not the place for that. To be a thought leader—in fact, to even comply with LinkedIn's publishing guidelines, as with most industry media's guidelines—you can't use your blog to flog your product.

Of course, as you build your standing in the community and develop a reputation as a thought leader, people will want to talk about products and services and, ultimately, you're likely to sell more successfully. But don't use your blog as a commercial. Stick to the ideas and the conversations you want to lead, and save the selling for customer meetings.

With 400 million users, 1 million groups, and a nearly bottomless supply of great content, LinkedIn is already full of outstanding insights. But the great thing about it is there's always room for more...for *your* perspective.

Those of us in the water industry are always eager for new ideas, and people outside our industry need to hear informed voices speaking out and educating the public on important water issues. By becoming a thought leader, you help your company, you help your own career, and ultimately you help the water industry, too.



Tagged in: [water quality](#), [water](#), [linkedin marketing](#)

[Report this](#)



Jim Lauria
Water Technology Executive
[18 articles](#)

14 comments

Newest



Leave your thoughts here...



Brian Deagle
Licensing Executive at Microsoft

... 5d

As always, well said Jim. As a Microsoftie I appreciate you highlighting the benefits of LinkedIn.

Like Reply



James Dugger
General Pipeline Supervisor at East Bay Municipal Utility District

... 1w

Thanks Jim .. good insight and a bit of a kick start for me