

How Fortune 100 Companies Use LinkedIn.com

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Many PR practitioners know LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com). They have their resumes and experience posted on it.

LinkedIn bills itself as a “professional network of trusted contacts.” As of Jan. 2011, the site had 90 million members in more than 200 countries and was available in six languages. LinkedIn says a new member joins the site every second. By comparison, Facebook (www.facebook.com) has more than 500 million active users who access that site at least once in every 30 days.

The difference with LinkedIn is focus. The site states its mission is “to connect the world’s professionals to make them more productive and successful.” There is no desire on the LinkedIn site to be a social networking site for the masses. The site is for managers, primarily middle managers and young professionals who want to build contacts and look for employment. This is both a negative and a positive. Some LinkedIn users connect to others indiscriminately and have little or no relationship with dozens or hundreds of individuals to whom they are joined. On the other hand, LinkedIn provides a valuable resource for maintaining contacts with professionals whom one has met and when handled well, for developing relationships with professionals whom one ought to know.

From PR perspective, LinkedIn might not seem to have communications value for a company. Even LinkedIn states its network benefits as follows:

- *Manage the information that’s publicly available about you as professional*
- *Find and be introduced to potential clients, service providers, and subject experts who come recommended*
- *Create and collaborate on projects, gather data, share files and solve problems*
- *Be found for business opportunities and find potential partners*
- *Gain new insights from discussions with likeminded professionals in private group settings*
- *Discover inside connections that can help you land jobs and close deals*

Source: <http://press.linkedin.com/about>

So, why, then are companies, including the largest businesses, present on LinkedIn? We examined the company LinkedIn sites of 20 randomly selected companies in the Fortune 100. We found 100 percent participation in the site, and some companies had multiple LinkedIn pages. There is either a perceived value in LinkedIn or “covering a social media bet” by being present. There appears to be a

bit of both approaches. One point became clear, however. While some companies actively use LinkedIn for recruiting, most do not. Their presence on the site appears to be for other unstated reasons.

To simplify the survey, we took the corporate page as the primary LinkedIn presence. We counted the followers for each company page and the number of employees on LinkedIn identified with the company. We averaged the number of followers and employees for all companies and calculated the median as well. We noted whether the companies featured blogs or tweets on their pages. As a point of comparison, we looked up each company on Facebook (www.facebook.com) to see how many fans each had there. (See tabular data at the end of this article.)

What we learned is that there is room for development of LinkedIn as a PR tool. Most companies in the Fortune 100 sample appear to be using LinkedIn in a minimum way. Only three companies in the sample – FedEx, Caterpillar and Citigroup -- featured blogs or tweets on their pages, and there is a wide disparity of presence on the site. For example, Microsoft had 92,960 listed employees and 165,808 followers. Sunoco had 1,278 listed employees and 1,485 followers. The average number of company followers is 22,013 and the average number of employees present on the site is 16,321. But, the median number of followers is 11,361 and the median number of employees is 10,381. The difference between the median and average indicates a wide variance among companies in their presence and usage of LinkedIn.

This holds true as well for presence on Facebook. Some companies have developed marketing strategies and others do not. Thus, for example, Sunoco has a Facebook page dedicated to it being the official fuel of NASCAR with 61,757 fans. Coca-Cola's Facebook page has 21,807,539 fans. Overall, the average of fans on Facebook pages is 1,501,569 but the median number of fans is 10,892. This disparity can be explained, at least partly, by the brand itself – whether the companies is a consumer or BtoB business but not totally. Citigroup, for example, with millions of customers had a Fan base of 2,793, indicating a lack of marketing presence on Facebook.

There was little relationship between the size or business of a company and its presence on LinkedIn. Walmart, the largest company in the Fortune 500 and the largest employer had only 23,967 employees on LinkedIn and 26,340 followers. Lowe's, a major home improvement retailer, had only 5,381 employees on LinkedIn and 5,229 followers. On the other hand, Caterpillar, a business to business company, had 10,327 employees and 11,808 followers.

LinkedIn is largely used for job postings and job hunting. The site encourages this approach in its publicity. (<http://press.linkedin.com/press-coverage>) On the other hand, LinkedIn presents a self-identified audience of employees and professional-level followers who are natural targets for company news and messages. These people are largely management employees who ensure that the company's strategy

and mission are carried out. They are also linked to millions of other managers inside and outside of the company whom they might influence. That is why it is interesting that only three companies in the sample appear to be making an effort to communicate actively through integrating blogs and Tweets with the site. It would seem to make sense for companies with a substantial presence on LinkedIn to exploit LinkedIn as a medium to reach both employees and followers.

PR practitioners should consider LinkedIn as a site for posting company news, for fostering a sense of community and for providing reasons for employees to feel proud of their company. LinkedIn may be viewed as an external-internal communications medium to managerial employees. It is a supplement to a company's web site and a useful outlet to reach professionals and managers who may be in the ranks but are essential to company operations. The cost of using LinkedIn is time. It is a matter of ensuring that posting done to Tweets, blogs and a company's web site also is referenced in LinkedIn.

The internet has created many communications vehicles and as a result, it has segmented even employee audiences of a company. The PR practitioner should be alert to the splintered segments and their preferred media for getting information. LinkedIn is increasingly a social medium for reaching professionals.

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Tabular data follows

**Linkedin and
Facebook
Survey
As of 1/12/11**

Company	Presence?	Followers	Employees	Blogs/ Tweets	Facebook	Fan Count
Sunoco	1	1,485	1,278		Official fuel of NASCAR	61,757
AmerisourceBergen	1	1,942	1,637		Corporate	153
Express Scripts	1	4,168	3,378		Corporate	299
TIAA-CREFF	1	4,887	4,359		Corporate	14,483
Freddie Mac	1	5,201	4,312		Corporate	280
Lowe's	1	5,229	5,381		Corporate	497,373
CVS Caremark	1	9,719	9,799		Corporate	155,465
ConocoPhillips	1	9,958	8,170		Corporate	224
McKesson	1	10,289	8,268		Corporate	863
Delta Air Lines	1	10,962	10,435		Corporate	5,021
FedEx	1	11,760	10,445	1	Corporate	33,888
Caterpillar	1	11,808	10,327	1	Corporate	7,301
Sears Holdings	1	12,844	11,214		Corporate	3,057
Coca-Cola	1	16,767	10,493		Corporate	21,807,539
ExxonMobil	1	18,121	13,997		Corporate	508
Ford Motor	1	24,816	20,729		Corporate	501,182
Walmart Stores	1	26,340	23,967		Corporate	2,925,987
Target	1	29,381	24,615		Corporate	3,651,717
Citigroup	1	58,766	50,661	1	Corporate HR	2,793
Microsoft	1	165,808	92,960		Corporate	361,486
Count	20	20	20	3		
Total Followers/Employees		440,251	326,425			30,031,376
Average Followers/Employees		22,013	16,321			1,501,569
Median Followers/Employees		11,361	10,381			10,892