Professional networking isn’t just a handshake at a career fair anymore. An online presence on LinkedIn is critical.

Of all the tools that exist for professional networking and personal branding related to the job search, the most important one is—by far—LinkedIn.

While it does serve, partly, as an online resume, it is much more than just that. LinkedIn is a social media tool built specifically for professionally oriented networking. It allows you to proactively seek out people in your extended network who can help you and it is a chance for you to present yourself professionally to recruiters who might be searching for people like you.

Some say up to 80% of jobs are never advertised through traditional outlets like corporate websites or job boards like CareerBuilder and Indeed. These positions are typically filled through referrals and direct sourcing by recruiters, and LinkedIn is their preferred tool.

More than 94% of recruiters and hiring managers in a recent survey indicated they use it to find or research candidates—often before you get to speak with them directly. What they see on LinkedIn can often be their first—and only—impression of you, so you need to make it count.

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**Why Should You Use LinkedIn?**

LinkedIn is becoming almost a requirement among recruiters and hiring managers. As mentioned earlier, more than 94% of recruiters use LinkedIn to help evaluate candidates and a complete absence from the platform can present you as someone unwilling to use, or uncomfortable with, technology. This is not a great message to send to recruiters. The head of global recruiting for a major Fortune 100 firm said recently that, as far as he and his recruiters were concerned, “If you aren’t on LinkedIn, you don’t exist”.

**More than 80% of recruiters indicate that they are using social media to help gauge candidate interest in the industry, including searching for industry related posts on LinkedIn**

There is almost no industry you could be headed into where there is no value in having a presence on LinkedIn.

LinkedIn serves two major functions. First, it creates a professional online presence for you that positions you to be found by others. It is the most widely used platform for professional networking in the world, so it makes sense to participate where everyone else is already.

**111 million users in the USA, 340 million worldwide**

**54% of adults in the USA have an account**

LinkedIn adds 2 new users per second

Career professionals and recruiters often talk about the “hidden job market”. This refers to all the positions that are routinely created and filled without ever being posted anywhere online or those which are posted long after the search, and review of candidates, has already begun. Some say this is up to 80% of all jobs. Most will be filled through referrals from employees already working in the company or from direct recruiter contact, both of which are what make LinkedIn indispensable.

The second major function of LinkedIn is to allow you to build a professional network that allows you to proactively reach out to your professional connections, as well as their connections (2nd degree), and their connections, connections (3rd degree). Having as few as 50 first-degree contacts (your friends) can connect you with millions of people who are 3rd degree “friends of your friends” and to whom you could reasonably expect to be introduced. You can only directly message your 1st degree connections. 2nd degree connections must be introduced through your mutual 1st degree friend, and yet another round of referral (from 1st to 2nd to 3rd then back to you) comes into play for a 3rd degree introduction.

**One word of caution:** LinkedIn is very much into the idea of continuous improvement. They often make feature changes and upgrades with no warning. You will just login one day and everything looks different. Bear that in mind as you read this guide. Some features—or the directions on how to find them and use them—may be slightly different by the time you are reading this. If you need additional help, LinkedIn has some great student resources of their own which they keep pretty up to date. You can find them at: [https://university.linkedin.com/linkedin-for-students](https://university.linkedin.com/linkedin-for-students)
CREATE A COMPLETE PROFILE

Having a complete profile, or what LinkedIn currently calls “All Star” level is an important part of the process. Not only is it important for you to use all the available options within LinkedIn to best represent yourself, but also when recruiters search for you having a complete profile helps you come up higher in search results.

A complete profile consists of AT LEAST the following items: “professional” photo, custom URL, professional headline, summary section matched to goals, work experience details to match resume, recommendations, endorsements, and activities. If you have it, study abroad experience, volunteer work, and academic/research projects should be added as well.

As you create your profile you will see that LinkedIn has created several special sections for things like projects or volunteer work. While you could include those things within, for example, your education section, don’t do it. A big part of making LinkedIn work for you is to ensure your profile is search optimized. The algorithm that makes LinkedIn work looks for keywords in certain places and is aligned with LinkedIn’s pre-existing categories. So, using the Projects section to talk about your project work will help you come up better in a recruiter’s search than simply writing in that experience as text somewhere else.

System Settings

In the toolbar at the very top of the screen, off to the right you will see a smaller version of your profile picture. Click on that to access the privacy settings menu. There are lots of different options there to look through and decide what is best for you. A few tips as you get started:

• Be sure to connect your preferred email address to your LinkedIn profile so that any messages sent to you through LinkedIn get directly to you without you having to login to LinkedIn. You don’t want to get the contact you’ve been waiting for from a recruiter and then not see it for a week because you forgot to check LinkedIn.

• When you initially create your account your profile will be public. Change the setting to private until you have your profile mostly complete. You want it to be ready before you share it with the world.

• After you have created your profile, you will want to edit or add more to it over time. On your profile page there is a button that says, “Notify your network?” If you leave this button set to “on” every individual change you make will be sent out as a new update to all your connections. If you just started a new job, this is a great feature. However, if you are going into your profile to make 50 different edits in one day, this will really annoy, and confuse, your network. Turn that button to the “off” position during major edits!

• There are a number of different privacy settings available to you, some of which will be discussed later in relation to specific sections. Choose whatever level of openness with which you are most comfortable. However, unless there is a compelling reason to maintain a high level of privacy, you should keep your LinkedIn profile completely visible to everyone. The platform is designed for sharing information and being accessible. Creating a profile, only to hide it from the world, defeats the main purpose of establishing an account in the first place.
Professional Photo

You don’t need to pay a professional photographer to take a picture of you, however you do need to make sure your photograph looks professional. One recent study found that LinkedIn profiles with a picture are seven times more likely to be reviewed and another eye-tracking study found that some recruiters spend up to 19 seconds on your picture alone, so making sure it is solid is important!

- **Take a picture specifically for LinkedIn.** Don’t re-use a picture from a special event where you looked nice. While you want to look your best, it's not about how great you looked at that wedding last year, it’s about presenting a polished, professional image appropriate for your intended field. Update the photo every few years so it is a current reflection of you.

- **Dress appropriately.** If you are going into a very formal field where you would be dressing in a suit every day, you should dress that way for your photo. However, even if you are going into an extremely casual environment where you will wear shorts and a t-shirt to work, you should still dress “up” for this photo. That doesn’t mean you have to wear a suit, but a collared shirt for men or blouse for women is appropriate. Keep it to solid colors; avoid bold patterns and colors. No hats, sunglasses, or big jewelry.

- **Indoors or outdoors?** Indoors is generally better. You can usually control both the background and lighting better indoors.

- **How do I stand?** You want to end up with a nice professional photo, not something that could be mistaken for a police mug shot! Stand about 6 feet away from your background (so you don’t cast a shadow on the background). Stand with your shoulders at a 45-degree angle to the camera and turn your head to face the camera.

- **Lighting** should be even and come from the front. This will ensure you don’t have any dark shadows under your eyes (from too much overhead light) and will help define the features of your face to create a more pleasing image. Ideally the main source of light will be slightly higher than shoulder height, parallel to your shoulders and aimed straight at your chest. When you turn your head to face the camera, this should place the light at the right angle to illuminate you properly and place something called a “catchlight” in your eye. That’s the tiny reflection of your light source that puts the little twinkle in your eye and helps bring the image to life.

- **Ideally, you should use a white background.** The color scheme of LinkedIn is white, so having a white background helps your image blend into the page in a natural way. Getting a bright, pure white background can be difficult for non-professionals without really great lighting and usually some processing software. If you, or a friend, are good with Photoshop or something similar, this will help. If you can’t get a pure white, any plain color background is certainly fine and will look better than a “not quite white” white. The goal is for the focus of the picture to be on your face, not the background, bad lighting, clothing choice, etc.

- **The photo should be reasonably close up, focused on only your head and shoulders.** Make sure it is in crisp focus! Leave some room around your head, remembering the photo will be cropped to both round and square formats in different parts of LinkedIn and in the mobile app.
**Custom URL**

When you first create your account, it will assign a random URL which points to your page. It starts as a combination of your name along with a string of random letters and numbers. This is your first opportunity to customize your profile in a way that can help your search significantly.

- From the edit profile page, click on the little gear icon next to your URL (under your picture).
- On the right side of the next screen you will see your URL again. Click on the pencil to edit it.
- Try to reserve something as close to your name as you can. If you have a somewhat common name, someone else may have beaten you to it already. If that happens try using a middle initial or some other abbreviation of your first or last names to stay as close as you can to your actual name. It will end up looking like [www.linkedin.com/in/firstnamelastname](http://www.linkedin.com/in/firstnamelastname)

**Professional Headline**

In LinkedIn your “professional headline” is the text that appears directly below your name. It is one of the most important parts of LinkedIn because it is the one thing that almost everyone who looks at your profile will see. It is your first chance to establish your “brand” on LinkedIn. If you don’t edit it, it will default to your most recent job title, or simply “student at Quinnipiac University” none of which are probably the best choice to promote you to future employers.

- Edit your headline to reflect your current job title (if it is related to what you want to do) but also to highlight a few things at which you excel.
- Use keywords relevant to the type of industry or job you are after.
- If you are in an entirely unrelated situation right now, use the space to announce what you are after. Something like, “Junior biology major with previous lab experience seeking summer research opportunity”.

**Location and Industry**

Be sure to fill out both of these options in your header section. These are key parts of your profile that are searched by recruiters. Match the location and industry choices to your goals. If you live in New York but want to work in California, list a California location but make it clear in your summary section that you are relocating there in the near future. Also, in addition to these two spots, be sure to list your address in the area provided. At a minimum, you must list a city, state and zip code since the zip code is how most filters narrow the search on the recruiting side.

**Contact Information**

Be sure that your profile includes a professional email address and your phone number so people who find you on LinkedIn can reach you. Depending on how you set up your profile security, this information may not be seen by everyone if it is only in the contact information section. To ensure everyone can get in touch with you, also include your contact info in the “Advice for Contacting…” section.

If you have a personal (and professionally oriented) website or Twitter account you can also list those here. You should only do this if the content is appropriate for potential recruiters to see and if it is somewhat relevant to your professional goals. Recruiters do like to see some of your personal side, but that shouldn’t happen at the expense of representing yourself professionally.
Summary Section

The summary is one of the most important parts of any LinkedIn profile. If you have experience, it is the perfect spot to organize some of the highlights of your background. Regardless of your level of experience, talk about things you did well, skills that are well developed as well as ones you would like to improve in the future. If you are actively seeking a job or internship, the summary should be a little bit about what you have already done and a little about what you want to do next. Keep the focus on what you have to offer a future employer and the skills and accomplishments that distinguish you from others. You have 2,000 characters here to help define yourself. Use them well!

- Be sure to review job descriptions from your target job title or industry and use the same keywords you see used most often. For example, you may have in your resume that you have excellent “communication skills”. If all the job descriptions in your industry use the term “interpersonal skills” (which is really the same skill) be sure to mimic the language you know they are using in your industry.

- If you are in a technical field, this is also a good place to list some of your strongest technical skills, even though there is another section for that later.

- If you have some accomplishments you really want to highlight, you can use a combination of paragraphs and bullets to break up the content visually.

- Unlike your resume where recruiters still expect to see a more impersonal representation of facts, with LinkedIn you can present yourself a little more personally and make it more of a narrative. For example, it is fine in LinkedIn to include first person narrative: “I have strong technical skills in...”

- All of LinkedIn is highly keyword indexed, but the most important areas for you to ensure are keyword rich are: the Summary, within the content of your Experience section, and in the Skills section. If each of these three areas are loaded with keywords, and your profile is complete, you are much more likely to come up in a recruiter’s search.

Experience

The experience section offers you several different ways to present your work experience.

The content on your resume is the starting point for this, but with your LinkedIn profile you have more room than with your resume, where in most cases you will want to stick to one page. There are no pages here, so add whatever experience might be of help to you. Remember, even unrelated older work experience may demonstrate a transferable skill or significant accomplishment that a future employer might find valuable.

- You can’t change the order the experience appears in (it will show the most recent first) so if you have something really recent that is unrelated you might consider not listing it so it doesn’t crowd out something more important.

- If you are past your sophomore year, any work experience from high school can be eliminated, unless it is strongly related to the field in which you want to work.
• Within each piece of your experience you also have the option to supplement the text with multimedia content, documents, hyperlinks, etc. If you have samples of your work from specific positions (presentations you created, links to websites you worked on, articles you wrote, etc.) this is a great way to showcase them within the context of the experience.

• You can look at the Projects section as well to decide which way is best to represent the experience you have. The Projects section allows you to “tag” other people on LinkedIn as contributors to your project, which can be a great way to demonstrate teamwork. Each item in the Projects section can be tied back to a work experience as well and will show up as a link at the bottom of that position.

• In terms of the content of your experience, the bullet points you have in your resume should appear word for word in LinkedIn. This isn’t to say that every job that is on your resume needs to be on LinkedIn—or vice versa—but wherever there is overlap between the two tools, the bulleted content should be identical. Some recruiters look at these areas for discrepancies in how you represent yourself.

**Education**

This section is pretty straightforward. Simply enter the basic information for QU and your program. If you also attended another school before coming here you only need to list it if you earned a degree there. You don’t need to list your high school unless the school has some value to the search (great reputation in the geographic area where you are looking, or has its own well developed alumni network). You will see this section offers options to include lots of other information. In most cases, you may not want to right now. There are lots of other information sections for education related items like test scores, courses, activities and organizations, etc. In most cases you are going to be better off entering those experiences in the special sections created for them. As you gain more and more experience, you may want to consolidate some of the experience that happened while in school back into the Education section so you can use the special sections to focus on newly acquired professional experience, but at least initially for current students this won’t be necessary.

**Skills**

Use this section to enter *all* your skills. Unlike your resume, where it is usually best to confine listed skills to “hard” skills like language or technical skills, in LinkedIn you can also list “soft” skills like communication skills, leadership, etc. Put it all in here. You can edit the order the skills appear, which also impacts how you get endorsements (more on that in a moment). Be sure to make your top ten skills the ones that might be most important to your target industry/job.
While these two terms sound very similar, they are very different in LinkedIn.

A recommendation in LinkedIn is a lot like a letter of recommendation you might ask for from a past employer. In LinkedIn, however, it is acceptable to have a recommendation from anyone who can speak to your professional experience. In addition to former supervisors you might ask for recommendations from former co-workers who can describe what is what like to have you as a team member, or even “outsiders” like vendors and clients who worked with you as a representative of your former employer.

- **You can ask** other people who are already on LinkedIn to give you a recommendation, or they can do it on their own.

- You will get to **review** all recommendations before they show up on your page.

- If you get a recommendation from someone **be sure it supports the story you want told** about you. A former co-worker might say great things about working with you in general, but maybe it would be more helpful if they could also say something specific about your technical skills? If so, don’t be afraid to explain that to them and ask them to modify it.

- You can **change the visibility** of recommendations without deleting them, so if you are seeking a job where a certain recommendation might detract from the brand you are trying to project, you can hide it temporarily.

- You should have **at least one recommendation** for every job you have listed, especially for your positions in the last five years. Ideally, you have more than one for each position but don’t go overboard. It is highly unlikely recruiters will read more than the first few, so having 20 for each job probably won’t help much more than having three.

One of the best ways to get a recommendation is to give one yourself to someone you know. If you do, make it a good one! Here are six easy steps to writing a good professional recommendation:

- **Open with a hook.** Start with a statement about the person that might make someone want to read more, e.g., “Susan was my favorite colleague because, no matter what challenge she was facing, she always had a smile on her face.”

- **Describe the relationship:** “I worked with Susan for three months on the web content team at Time Magazine. She and I collaborated on several successful projects that were recognized by upper management.”

- **Share a standout trait:** “She has the ability to write really inspiring content even under strict deadlines...”

- **Discuss a time they did that well in the past:** “…such as the blog series she did on app development that required her to do research, interview guests and write three blog posts all within a two day timeframe.”

- **Include something personal/funny** about the person: Be careful with this. Humor can be a very subjective thing. Play it safe and stick to non-controversial things. “She’s also great at minigolf!”

- **Recommend the person be hired:** “She would be a great addition to any team.”
Now, string it all together:

“Susan was my favorite colleague at XYZ Company because, no matter what challenge she was facing, she would always have a smile on her face. I worked with Susan for three months on the web content team at Time Magazine and she and I collaborated on several successful projects that were recognized by upper management. She always impressed me with her ability to write really inspiring content even under strict deadlines, such as the blog series she wrote on app development that required her to do research, interview experts and write three blog posts all within a two day time frame. She's also really good at mini-golf! It was my pleasure to work with Susan and I would do so again in a heartbeat. She would be a great addition to any team!”

**Endorsements are different.** When you create your profile, you will add in a section for the skills that you have to offer. As your connections use their LinkedIn profiles they will occasionally be prompted to “endorse” you for some of your listed skills. When they do your “count” for those skills goes up and their photo will show up next to that skills. Over time, this becomes a kind of “crowd sourced” validation of the skills you claim to have. Once you start using the system you will see that sometimes you will be asked to endorse others for a skill you have no idea of they actually have (and you will see others do this for you). The system actually has an algorithm built in to account for some of the randomness of this feature. It looks for the strength of your connection to the person you are endorsing and provides greater weight to some endorsements than others (in the background). So, while every endorsement increases your endorsement count by one, not every endorsement is equal.

Without intervention, your skills will organize in the order of the most endorsed skill first. However, in some cases this may not be what you want to represent to the world. LinkedIn allows you to re-order your skills, or hide them, as well. If you choose to hide a skill it will still retain any previous endorsements in case you want to make it visible later, but it will no longer be active to receive new endorsements.

**OTHER SECTIONS**

Beyond these basics, sections exist for many other specific elements of your background. In most cases, if you have experience that fits in a specific section you should add it in there. As mentioned earlier, if a recruiter is searching for a specific thing LinkedIn will index that search to the specific section that is supposed to house that information. So, for example, while it is beneficial to have your strongest and most related skills mentioned in your Summary section, they also MUST be in the Skills section to ensure you get noticed. The same holds true for the other unique sections created to help organize your profile like: Volunteering Experience, Languages, Honors and Awards, Courses, etc.
GET CONNECTED

The goal of LinkedIn is to use it to help connect you to people you don’t know through the ones you do know. You never know where a valuable referral will come from. The goal is to connect only to people you know well, but to connect to everyone you know well. Connect to friends, family, professors/QU staff, former employers and co-workers. You should never try to connect to someone you don’t already know.

- You need at least 50 connections to get good results from a search and have a complete profile.
- Strive for 50 as quickly as possible, and aim for at least 150 by the time you graduate.

Keep in mind; LinkedIn is helping you leverage the power of your full network, three degrees removed from yourself. So, it isn’t about only connecting to people in the publishing industry if that is your target industry. You never know whom your connections might know. In fact, often they themselves won’t know until you tell them.
Many people have hundreds, if not thousands, of 1st degree connections on LinkedIn and millions in their overall network.

When requesting a connection to someone, you should do it with a personal touch.

If you are using the full site on your computer, on your home page, LinkedIn offers a “People You May Know” section. If you see someone in that list that you want to connect with, if you simply hit “connect” you will send that person a generic “I would like to connect with you on LinkedIn” email. Unless you already know this person really well and are frequently in touch with them you should not do this. Even if you just finished talking with the person in real life and talked about connecting on LinkedIn, it’s still not a great idea. Why? Because LinkedIn is about networking and networking is about building relationships with people not just playing a game to see who can get the most connections. A connection request is an opportunity to officially establish or reinforce a relationship and it should have a personal touch.

- Instead of clicking the “connect” button, click on the person’s name to access their full profile. Once you are on their profile page, hitting connect will open a new screen rather than sending an automatic message. On that screen you can identify your relationship to the person and customize the note they will receive.

- In the mobile app you can’t customize invitations from the “People You May Know” screen, but you can customize them using the directions below:

  Personalizing invitations on iPhone:
  - Go to the member profile
  - To the right of the search box, tap More.
  - Tap Customize Invite.
  - Write your message and tap Send.

  Personalizing invitations on Android:
  - Go to the member profile
  - Tap either Menu or the More button
  - Tap Customize Invite.
  - Write your message and tap Send.

While some people refer to themselves in their professional headlines as “LIONS” (LinkedIn Open Networkers) and will accept any request, most people only want to connect with people they know. In some cases, it might be someone you just met but typically you should at least have met or interacted with the person prior to requesting a connection. If you try to connect with a complete stranger they have the option to not only deny your request but also to report you to LinkedIn as a spammer. If enough people report you (and no one knows what the number is) LinkedIn can delete your account.
JOIN GROUPS

There are thousands of groups in LinkedIn created to help connect people with similar interests and backgrounds. There are several QU groups, including the QU College of Arts & Sciences group. Join any group where you have an affiliation. If you are in a fraternity or sorority, look for the national chapter as well. Heading for a certain industry? Look for industry organizations or interest groups. Joining a group expands your network rapidly and gives you access to information about some target industries or companies that might help your search. Just type the appropriate keyword into the search bar at the top of the screen. Results will come back in several categories, one of which will be groups.

When you join a group, you are able to directly message anyone in that group, even if they are not a direct connection of yours since the group itself serves as your connection. You can use shared membership in a group as a great conversation starter with other group members as you reach out to them for informational interviews or questions about their industry or employer.

Another great way to separate yourself from other job seekers is not just to join the groups to expand your network, but also to participate in them to establish credibility in your field. Comment on existing discussions where you can add some interesting perspective or advice, and if you don’t believe you are advanced enough to do that yet, ask questions. Other group members, especially in groups where you have some pre-existing affinity like alumni groups or social organizations, typically love to offer advice to those just starting out. Before asking a question or participating in conversations in a group, spend some time reading what is already there to get a feel for how people in the group interact and what they are interested in discussing.

• Groups can be open (anyone can join) or locked (someone reviews your request to join and you must meet specific criteria such as experience in a certain industry or membership in an organization).

• Groups offer the option of daily or weekly email updates about the activities within the groups. You can also turn this feature off entirely. Weekly updates are a good idea, at least for the groups that are most strongly related to your goals or in which you are most active. You might consider using some of the organizational tools in your email client of choice to push them all into one folder to keep them from becoming overwhelming while still keeping them active.

• You can also choose whether or not the logo of the group is visible on your profile page. You may have some groups that you belong to for personal reasons that you prefer not to share with your professional contacts. If so, hiding the logo is a great way to manage that but remember you can’t be in a group anonymously, so others in the group with you will still see you are there.

• Most groups also have a “Jobs” section within them. Since many groups are organized around certain industries, or even specific functions within industries, these can be a great resource for “unpublished” jobs. Someone hiring in the category represented by that group knows that the members of the group would be most likely to be qualified. Many times jobs will be posted in these groups before they are posted in other places like corporate websites or third-party sites like CareerBuilder.
FOLLOW COMPANIES

Many companies recruit directly through LinkedIn. Some use the job posting feature you can access through the “Jobs” tab, but others simply send out job opportunities as “updates” from their corporate LinkedIn page. By “following” a company, these updates will show up in your news feed on your home page allowing you to see and react to them quickly.

Even without job opportunities, following a company can be valuable. Many companies scan your LinkedIn profile before they even contact you. Maybe a current staff member suggested your name to them, or maybe you came up in their search based on your profile, or they are following up on your online application for a position by researching you on LinkedIn before calling you. There are many reasons why they might see you on LinkedIn before talking with you. Who do you imagine they will be most impressed with? Someone who has a good profile, but nothing else or someone who has been following them and their largest competitors and has participated using comments on their previous corporate posts?

WHO’S VIEWED YOUR PROFILE

One of the most interesting features of LinkedIn is that it offers you the ability to modify your “visibility” as you use the system. If you want to check out a bunch of profiles of people you might want to talk to but don’t want them to know you did, you can adjust your profile visibility to “Anonymous”. However, LinkedIn prefers you not be anonymous and penalizes you for doing so. When you set yourself to anonymous, what you can see in other people’s profiles also gets limited, often making your research less effective.

While it might be tempting to look around a lot without anyone knowing it was you, as a job seeker, this could be a mistake.

I’ve had several candidates in the past use LinkedIn to research potential employers by reading profiles of key employees in the division or department where they wanted to work. A high percentage of the time, when the person being researched realized that their profile had been viewed by someone they didn’t know, that person would then click right back to view the candidate’s profile! So, without doing anything or making any direct contact to the hiring manager, the candidate had their profile reviewed and the hiring manager then contacted several.

SEND UPDATES

Once you have built up a personal network, use it to stay on the radar. Share articles about your area of professional interest. Participate in discussions in the groups you have joined. This is a great way to stay in contact with people in your network without having to find a reason to directly message individuals on a regular basis. Commenting on your industry through article sharing and commenting on updates also helps establish you as someone who is passionate enough about the industry to spend personal time contributing to the industry.

More than 80% of recruiters indicate that they are using LinkedIn to help gauge candidate interest in the industry (searching for industry related posts) and looking for examples of written or design work to help evaluate ability.
USING LINKEDIN FOR REFERRALS

LinkedIn is built for referrals. While the tool itself makes the process easier, you still need to put in some effort in advance to make the most of it.

• **Be specific.** As you begin your job search, you should have already put in a lot of time and effort to identify and craft your personal brand (which is now expressed in your LinkedIn profile), and find companies that might be a good fit for you (if you need additional help, please refer to the *CAS Job Search Guide*). Keep those targets, and your message, in mind. Use LinkedIn to research your potential companies and people who work there. Without LinkedIn you might resort to calling your Uncle and saying, “I’m looking for a job. Do you know of anything?” Almost no one can effectively assist you from that vantage point, unless they themselves are hiring or they just heard about a job ten minutes ago. Beyond that, the request is so vague as to be overwhelming. It also goes against all the effort you have already put in to the process. You don’t want a job doing “anything”. **You want a job doing a specific function, for a specific industry, in a specific place.**

• **Do the work for them.** Being specific to the point of the ideal companies is great, and certainly a big step forward from “I’ll do anything”. Instead of having to say, as we saw in the last example, “I want to work for Random House; do you know anyone?” You can instead say, “Uncle Joe, I saw on LinkedIn that you are connected to Bob Smith at Random House. Do you know him well enough to introduce me? He doesn’t work in the exact department where I want to work, but I’d love to talk with him about what it is like to work there and see if he might be able to introduce me to some other people in the editing area.”

How do you do find this information?

Once you have a network of at least 50 connections on LinkedIn, go to the search bar on the homepage and type in the name of a company where you would like to work. This will feed back to you the results of where your target company overlaps your network. You will see a list of names of people connected with that organization and, somehow, connected to you. If they are 2nd or 3rd degree connections, you won’t even recognize their names in many cases. Click on their name to see their profile and how you are connected to them (on the right hand side of the page, then scroll down).

If they are 2nd degree connections, you will see a name of one (or sometimes more) of your friends. You can contact your friend and ask them to introduce you. Since you are directly connected to your friend, it is generally better to email or call them directly (not using LinkedIn). Not everyone checks their LinkedIn messages every day or has their LinkedIn messages sent to their personal email, so taking the initial contact outside the LinkedIn system can speed things up.

• **Give it time.** Repeat this process over and over with anyone you know reasonably well and then be patient. Since you are going through your friend you need to give them time to respond to your request, and even more time for their friend to respond to them. Following up too quickly with your friend (which then forces them to do the same) can become annoying quickly. Every time you ask for an introduction, give both parties at least a week (two weeks total wait for you) to reply. If you haven’t heard back from your friend or the referral by that time, follow up with your friend.

Ideally, you can use this referral process to speak with people in your target company before positions become publicly available and develop a relationship with them that puts you “top of mind” for upcoming opportunities.
However, if you see a current opportunity posted online, apply for it. After you apply, use LinkedIn to try to find a connection at the company that you can follow up with and let them know that you recently applied. This kind of follow up not only starts a relationship but will also hopefully get your connection at the company to reach out to the hiring manager and get you a closer look. Some job postings get thousands of applicants and having a real person suggest your name can help you get pulled out of the electronic “pile”.

**USING LINKEDIN FOR DIRECT OUTREACH**

While referrals into your extended network are the main reason LinkedIn is so valuable, it also gives you the resources to engage in direct outreach to certain people using the Groups feature.

**Search Alumni and Your Groups**

Look at the QU alumni using LinkedIn (click on “Education”, then “Find Alumni”). Sort the list and find alumni who work in your target industry or who majored in the same thing you did. Check out their career paths. This is a great way to open up some ideas about different possibilities if you aren’t sure of a path. It is also a great way to identify some target companies to add to your list of potential employers.

If you find an alumnus who is also in a group with you, liked the CAS Group, you can find them in that group and reach out to them directly within the group. Go to the group, click on members, search for the person by last name and then click on “Send Message” to contact them. Repeat this process with any other group of which you are a member, especially if it is strongly related to your target industry.

**If you are reaching out to a contact at a target company that you found through a LinkedIn group you should add even more of an element of advice-seeking to the request.** What would the initial contact look like? Something like this:

“I found your information through the QU College of Arts & Sciences group on LinkedIn. I’m graduating from QU in May with a degree in Political Science and I’m very interested in XYZ Corp. I’m especially drawn to your programs regarding growing youth participation in national elections. I know you are very busy but would it be possible to set up a time for a quick 10-minute phone call? I’d love to get your opinion on what it is like to work there and what hiring managers there look for in candidates. My LinkedIn profile is up to date but I was hoping you might also be able to provide some advice on how to customize it more for XYZ. Please let me know a time that might work for you and I look forward to the chance to speak with you briefly”.

While fellow group members (especially alumni) will generally be willing to talk with you, they also don’t know you personally. People, in general, won’t recommend you to a friend or boss to be considered for a job until they know you a little and can trust you. After all, to refer you is to endorse you personally and put their reputation on the line for you. This is why referrals are so powerful.

If you start, instead, by asking for some help and advice as someone looking to get into the industry you can begin to establish a bond that may eventually lead to a referral.