

(Plan Your Career) Improve your prospects through better use of online networking sites

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Thursday, 11 June 2009 17:55

A quick phone conversation with candidate Leon this morning made me realize that not everyone is taking advantage of the fabulous online resources available right now for free. Leon and I looked at his computer presence together, and talked about a few points that might be the difference between Hired and Still Looking for this talented IT candidate. LinkedIn is a one good resource people are using effectively to find work, so let's look at that for some specifics.

Where are you from? Most web networking sites compartmentalize geographically. If, like many job seekers, you have moved around a few times in your career, check your LinkedIn profile to be sure you are part of the right network. Leon was living in Sioux Falls when he initiated his profile, which put him in a South Dakota area network. As a recruiter, if I am looking for candidates for a job in MN, I want to make the most of my time and my clients' relocation funds and will pass over out-of-state candidates, at least initially. By updating his address (click edit profile), he was automatically moved to the right network. An important first step.

Who do you know? The point of networking is not finding a job. It is connecting to other professionals, which will lead to a job if you need one, better sales if that matters to you, professional discourse if that is what you are after. Working or not, keep building your network. Leon had a handful of contacts, but needs to build that number if he is going to get hired. Starting with friends and former co-workers, and then moving on to former classmates, he should make an effort to invite others to join his network.

This is not an intrusion. Most people who are on LinkedIn want to connect to others for the variety of reasons already mentioned. He should compose a very short note, one line or two, or use the template provided on LinkedIn (it pops up – you can't miss it). When someone accepts, he should then follow up to say thank you, and to let them know he is currently available for full time work or projects.

Avoid longwinded emails on networking sites. People who want your life story will ask for it. What do you know? Joining groups on sites such as LinkedIn gives professionals the dual benefits of increased network capability and professional conversation. Stay in touch through professional organizations online, and through the Groups section of LinkedIn. Further, it helps others to know at a glance what your areas of interest are.

Who knows you? Referrals are an invaluable asset to networking sites. Get over your pride or shy side and ask people who know you to refer your work. Hint: You will have more luck soliciting referrals if you start out by referring others.

Hiring Managers look at LinkedIn. And Facebook. And they will Google your name for additional insights into who you are and how you will fit into their organization. Keep your computer presence up to date, active and clean and use it to move forward in your career.