

## How to Make **LinkedIn** a Career-Building Tool

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Although it may seem like an unsolvable mystery and the constant changes are maddening, LinkedIn is a great way to find clients or a job and to build a strong network. This article highlights recent changes that medical communicators should know about and the 3 steps to making LinkedIn a career-building tool: (1) develop a complete, relevant, compelling profile; (2) build a big, relevant network; and (3) be active.

With 58 million companies on LinkedIn and 774 million members (as of September 2021),<sup>1</sup> LinkedIn is a great way to find clients or a job and to build a strong network. Every minute of the day, 3 people are hired through LinkedIn and 4 out of 5 people on LinkedIn are decision-makers for their businesses.<sup>2</sup>

That's why medical communicators need to know how to use LinkedIn, even if it seems like an unsolvable mystery and the constant changes, like the recent new look, feel, and features, are maddening. To make LinkedIn a career-building tool, you need to

1. develop a complete, relevant, compelling profile,
2. build a big, relevant network, and
3. be active.

These 3 things help you rank higher when LinkedIn generates search results so more clients or employers will find you. Also, you can strengthen your network and gain knowledge, advice, and support from colleagues. This article highlights how to make LinkedIn a career-building tool and the recent changes—some good and some not so good—that medical communicators need to know about.

### Develop a Complete, Relevant, Compelling Profile

Profile completeness and relevant keywords in your head-

line are at the top of LinkedIn's search algorithm criteria.

A complete profile includes

- the industry and location,
- a profile photo,
- the current position (under Experience),
- 2 past positions,
- education,
- at least 3 skills, and
- at least 50 connections (not technically part of your profile, but this is part of LinkedIn's criteria for a complete profile).<sup>3,4</sup>

### How Strong Is Your LinkedIn Profile?

- Click on your profile.
- Scroll down to your dashboard (only you can see this).
- Move your cursor over your profile strength meter to see what you've already done.
- Follow LinkedIn prompts to complete your profile.

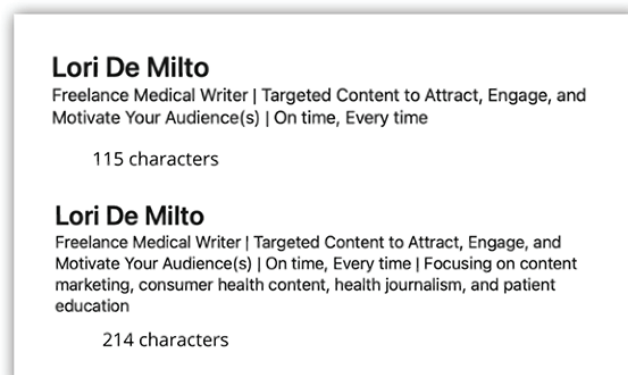
### Write a Clear, Compelling Headline With Relevant Keywords

Your headline is the most important part of your profile, followed by the About section. LinkedIn's recent changes increased the number of characters you can use for both.

- Headline: from 120 to 220 characters
- About: from 2,200 to 2,600 characters

Having more space for your headline and About section can be helpful, but you don't need to use all of it. You only have 3 seconds to capture attention with your LinkedIn

profile.<sup>5</sup> Headlines at or close to 220 characters are too crowded to create a good first impression (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** A clear, concise headline vs a too-long headline.

In your headline, clearly say what you do and how you help your clients or employers. Include relevant keywords, such as “freelancer,” or your job title. Here is a simple headline formula:

- For freelancers:  
Freelancer medical writer [or editor, etc.] | Helping X do Y
- For employees:  
[Job title] | Helping X do Y

Use a professional, high-resolution head and shoulders shot, and if you create a custom banner, make sure it's professional and clear. The OpenToWork photo frame around a headshot is a new feature that I think makes freelancers and job seekers look desperate. If you have a complete, relevant, compelling profile, clients or employers will find you through their searches. Also, the use of the OpenToWork frame can lead to scams and spam.<sup>6</sup>

### Make Your About Section Compelling and Relevant

Once clients or employers click on your profile, keep their attention by making your About section compelling and relevant. The first 220 to 270 characters with spaces count most. That's what shows before people must click “see more.” On mobile devices, about 102 to 167 characters show.

Make sure the first 220 to 270 characters build on your headline and offer a clear, client- or employer-focused message. Attract clients viewing your profile on a smart phone or tablet by putting as much of your key message as possible in the first 102 to 167 characters.

In the rest of the About section, include just enough content to show clients and employers that you're a good choice for them. Briefly summarize your relevant experience, including services if you're a freelancer, and your background. Make sure your profile is public.

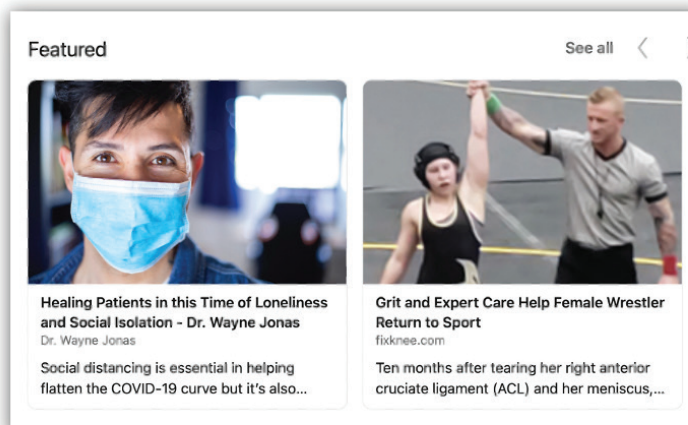
Your LinkedIn profile isn't a resume

- Be interesting and conversational.
- Write short sentences and short paragraphs.
- Use bulleted lists for anything else that works well in a list.
- Include a call to action (eg, contact me to [benefit to client or employer]) at the end, and include your contact information again.

The new Featured section is very useful for medical communicators (Figure 2). The Featured section lets you display your best work to anyone who looks at your profile. It's prime LinkedIn real estate: below the About section and above the Activity section. You can include many types of content in the Featured section, such as

- media files, such as documents, presentations, and videos;
- links to external blogs or work samples; and
- your website (for freelancers) or your resume (for employees).

If you had any media in your About section before, LinkedIn moved it to the Featured section. Check your Featured section and customize it to highlight your best work. If you didn't have media before, it's easy to add a Featured section. If you have at least 2 pieces of relevant (to clients or employers) content, you should have a Featured section. It's easy to add, delete, and move content in the Featured section.



**Figure 2.** Sample Featured Section: Lori De Milto.

### Build a Big, Relevant Network

Even if you have a complete, relevant, compelling profile, you won't show up in search results unless the searcher is connected to you. LinkedIn has 3 types of connections:

- First-degree connections: your direct connections

- Second-degree connections: people who are connected to your first-degree connections
- Third-degree connections: people who are connected to your second-degree connections

The closer the searcher is to you (first- or second-degree vs third-degree connection), the more likely you'll show up in search results.

Having at least 500 first-degree connections gives you a powerful network. Say that you're connected to 500 relevant people, other medical communicators and people doing related work. If each of your connections has 500 connections, you now have access to 250,000 people, many of whom are also medical communicators. It looks good on your profile when you have at least 500 first-degree connections because after 500, LinkedIn just notes "500+ connections."

It's easy to build a relevant network of 500+. Invite

- colleagues from professional associations,
- people you're working with now (colleagues, clients, and employers),
- people you've worked with in the past, and
- friends and colleagues from school.

You can also build your network through your LinkedIn activity.

When you invite someone to connect with you, always add a personal note. Mention what you have in common or why you want to connect. For example,

"Hi Lori. I see that we're both members of AMWA. Please join my LinkedIn network."

Accept connection requests from people you don't know as long as they are also medical communicators or are relevant to you in another way. Don't accept connection requests from people you don't know who aren't relevant to your career.

### **Be Active**

Being active means engaging with other people on their content and posting your own content. Along with ranking higher in search results, being active helps you build relationships that can lead to referrals for freelance work or jobs. You can strengthen relationships with people you know and build relationships with people you meet on LinkedIn. Once you learn what to do, being active doesn't take much time or effort.

Review your LinkedIn feed—the content that shows up when you click on your LinkedIn Home page—about twice a day. Look for relevant posts by relevant people. LinkedIn offers 4 ways to respond: like, comment, share, or send.

Liking is lazy and won't help you build relationships with

people. Responding under "like" with an emoji is a new feature. The only time I think this is acceptable is if you've already made a meaningful comment, the person who posted the content has responded, and you just need to acknowledge that response. But be careful which emoji you use; the 2 emojis with a heart aren't professional, and the emoji of a face is questionable.

Commenting is the gold standard on LinkedIn. Each comment is a way to boost your career because your name and the beginning of your headline are visible along with your comment. Also, commenting allows you to actively engage with the person who wrote the post and with other people who comment on the post.

Write a meaningful comment. For example, if the post highlights an article with 10 tips for being productive, comment on which tip you want to try or what you've already learned from the article. Make sure the person who wrote the post sees your comment by tagging them. To tag someone

- type the @ symbol,
- type the beginning of the person's name, and
- choose their name from the list that LinkedIn provides.

If you comment on the post of someone you're not connected to, that person is likely to accept a connection request from you, as are other people who comment on the same post. Your invitation could be something such as,

"Hi Lori. I really liked your post on XYZ. Please join my LinkedIn network."

*or*

"Hi Lori. I see we both commented on Lisa's post on XYZ. Please join my LinkedIn network."

Sharing means you can share the post with anyone, your connections, or groups. Reshares get fewer views than other content and people are less likely to comment on a shared post than on an original post. Sending, a new feature, lets you send posts to a specific person or people you choose.

Once you get comfortable commenting on other people's posts about once or twice a week, do your own post. You can post about medical communication news and updates; useful free content like blog posts, podcasts, and webinars; and much more. Include about 2 to 5 sentences about the content, with a link to the full content (news, blog post, etc). Increase the number of views and engagement by using an image. If the full content has an image, LinkedIn will automatically use this image after you add the link. Easily find content to post through AMWA and other professional associations and email newsletters (eg, Smart Briefs).

Whether you're engaging with other people on their content or posting your own content, always be professional

on LinkedIn. Ignore anything that is controversial or disrespectful.

### Know LinkedIn's Limitations

When used as described in this article, LinkedIn is a career-building tool for medical communicators. Like all social media, however, it is easy to waste time on LinkedIn. It is important to be strategic about building your network and your LinkedIn activity. Also, certain features, such as Stories, can be risky. LinkedIn says that the Stories feature is like a virtual water cooler in an office. But in an office, you know the people you are talking to, and can say the right things to the right people. On LinkedIn, your connections and followers can see your stories, and they can share them with anyone. In addition, the stories are only visible for 24 hours. Writing a relevant post is a much more efficient way to use LinkedIn to build your career than posting a story.

### Make LinkedIn a Career-Building Tool

With the tips in this article and a little effort, you can more easily get clients or a job and build a strong network. Just follow these 3 steps

1. develop a complete, relevant, compelling profile,
2. build a big, relevant network, and
3. be active.

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