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The ongoing confusion within the profession about how social media effectively supports marketing and sales efforts is valid. While there is ample high-level educational content on the topic of social media, there are few *strategies* that are proven and tested. And even for those programs that do exist, it's likely that practitioners are not aware of them.

So, with the dedicated mission of educating the profession on all things marketing,

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Kristy: Why is LinkedIn considered the #1 social media channel? And why should accounting professionals be part of this channel?

Josh: Every business has to assess where their prospects can be reached. That's what matters. For B2B companies, such as accounting firms, LinkedIn has proven to be one of the key places where prospects hang out. A [study](#) in late 2012 by Ipsos, a global market research company, found the following:

- LinkedIn reaches more business elite and c-suite monthly than any other international news and business website measured.
- LinkedIn attracts the highest number of business elite purchase decision makers with high net worth and big purchasing budgets.

For accounting firms that want to generate leads through new online channels, LinkedIn is a must.

Sculpting Your LinkedIn Profile

Don't expect to get much attention on LinkedIn if you just throw together a basic profile. There are common rules to creating a profile that will make you more visible and attract the right folks.

Kristy: What are the basics of setting up a profile on LinkedIn?

Josh: We don't put too much emphasis on the profile as a selling tool, but it is a key part of the foundation for any successful LinkedIn lead generation campaign. What should be understood is that when reaching out to hundreds of new prospects on LinkedIn, many of these prospects will size you up by looking at your profile. It is at this point that you must put your best foot forward. Doing so requires these critical components:

- A professional photo.

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Once you are set up properly on LinkedIn, that's when the real strategy for capturing leads begins. Josh Turner has worked long and hard to develop a program that gets results.

Kristy: What is the best way to reach small-business decision makers through LinkedIn—CEOs, presidents, owners etc.?

Josh: First, you need to be where they're at. If you're trying to reach a top decision maker, you need to be where they are on LinkedIn, not where your competitors are hanging out. This might seem like a given, but I often see people involved in only profession-specific groups. A CPA, for example, will be in accounting-related and finance groups, where all their peers and competitors are. The CEOs and SMB owners [those they really want to connect with] are not going to be in the accounting-based groups. Practitioners have got to join groups where their prospects and clients are, not their competitors.

Kristy: So then, a big part of the strategy is to join the right groups. Can you offer more insight on what groups practitioners should join?

Josh: A lot of CPAs are working on a local or a regional level. So, say a CPA from St. Louis wants to find local business owners they can target; there are all sorts of St. Louis-focused groups. This is a great place to start because there's going to be a lot of business owners in those groups. The local Chamber of Commerce will often have a group that you can join. If the CPA specializes in certain niche markets, they should join those groups; for example, manufacturing, restaurants, retail, or medical. These groups cater to c-level professionals and business owners who are in those industries.

Kristy: What is your advice on reaching out to individuals (in addition to groups) on LinkedIn to help build a 'contact database' (the people you will be marketing to via LinkedIn)?

Josh: The first step is clearly defining your prospect profile (who you want to do

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Moreover, we typically add 50 to 100 new connections (targeted prospects). This gives our customers a constantly growing database of new potential clients to market to.

Kristy: Once you are in the right groups and have connected with the right people, how do you start to communicate with contacts?

Josh: First, it's important to identify the two common mistakes people make as they begin marketing on LinkedIn. 1) They come out of the gate with marketing pitches and trying to sell too soon. 2) They try to connect with the person right away. These tactics don't usually work because people don't like being pitched to when they've never heard of you and they generally aren't open to connecting with people that they don't know.

The best way to reach decision makers is to use a referral or connect through a shared group. Find a second-degree connection that the two of you share and leverage that connection to meet the CEO. Mention the mutual connection's name when you reach out. This will increase the chances of making the connection.

Connecting through a shared group is another good tactic. From within the shared group, send a *message* to the decision maker instead of a connection request. A message is more personal. You can simply say, "Hi Mark. I came across your profile here in the St. Louis business owner group. I saw that we're both friends with John Simon and I think it would be beneficial to connect and perhaps meet in person." Whatever your angle—to simply connect or to secure an initial meeting—a little name dropping and a personal message will increase your hit rate.

Kristy: What are the next steps to build the relationship? Offer educational material, an article, etc.?

Josh: Many over-eager people will reach out directly to new connections, and try to "go for the kill." This is the worst approach. Yes, it can lead to some short-term

results, but it sacrifices an even greater potential of long-term results. The key is to

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Bringing it All Together

Social media can be a powerful marketing tool if used properly...and consistently. Following the basics of marketing, that is, building awareness of who you are and what you offer and nurturing relationships from cold leads to clients can be applied to marketing in the social media space, but you must have a good strategy in place. The information provided in this article offers a sound roadmap to getting started with your marketing efforts using LinkedIn. Now, go forth and prosper in the social media space.

Kristy Short, Ed.D, is president of rwc360, LLC (rwc360.com)—a firm dedicated to providing marketing and public relations services to the accounting profession. She is also a professor of English and marketing. Reach her at kristy.short@cpapracticeadvisor.com or kristy@rwc360.com.

Josh Turner is a globally recognized leading expert on leveraging LinkedIn to grow business and has helped clients generate sales as high as \$5 million. He is the founder of Linked Selling, a B2B marketing firm specializing in fully outsourced LinkedIn marketing and lead generation campaigns, and the founder of LinkedUniversity.com, an online training program for LinkedIn marketing and sales. Reach him at joshturner@linkedselling.com.

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