LinkedIn: Facebook for Professionals?

Abstract

Founded in 2003, LinkedIn claims to be the world's largest professional network with over 300 million members worldwide. It is a publicly held social networking site with a diversified business model; funded by member subscriptions, advertising sales and recruitment campaigns. Its mission is to *'connect the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful'* (LinkedIn, 2015a). The question is: Is this business-orientated social networking site a suitable platform for midwives to connect, collaborate, share best practice and disseminate research?

Keywords: LinkedIn, Social Media, Professional Networking, Online Communication

What is LinkedIn?

LinkedIn is a business-orientated social networking service which helps individuals create and maintain an online profile in order to build up a professional network. Its professional purpose is fundamentally different to those of Facebook and Twitter; with Facebook's mission statement being to allow people *'to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world and to share and express what matters to them.'* (Facebook, 2014) and Twitter's *'to give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers'* (Twitter, 2015).

How to join and create a profile

1. Go to https://www.linkedin.com/reg/join.
2. Type your first name, last name, email address and a password you will use.

   Note: You must use your true name when creating a profile. Company names and pseudonyms are not allowed, as we explain in our User Agreement.
3. Click **Join Now**.
4. Complete any additional steps as prompted.

LinkedIn (2015b)

LinkedIn offer live *Learning Webinars* or pre-recorded sessions to help you get started and learn about features and functionalities; examples of which are

Creating an Online Presence on LinkedIn and *Engaging with your LinkedIn Network*.   Other tools include a Blog, Help Centre and arguably the most important tool in the context of this series of articles (Power, 2014; Power 2015a; Power 2015b) a Safety Centre (LinkedIn, 2015c).

Creating your profile

As with other social networking sites, it is important to create a profile page you feel accurately represents you, as people will connect with you based on the information you share.   Make sure your professional headline emphasises any keywords you want to use to promote yourself; make your profile public; fill out the Summary field and Skills section of your profile with all of your skills and important career-related keywords.   By sharing your areas of interest and/or expertise you will attract people with similar interests.

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8 Tips for Optimising your LinkedIn Profile
(Peregrin, 2012:24)

● Edit your profile to highlight only relevant information
● Build a complete profile
● Always include a picture
● Develop guidelines for adding individuals
to your network
● Limit recommendations to people you trust
● Join groups
● Provide credible, research-based information when answering questions
● Maintain e-professionalism

How to make connections

Once you have joined you can then start to build up your network using the site's search tools; importing your email contacts; searching for people with shared groups or affiliations and using the *'people you may know'* feature.   The process of connecting differs from Facebook and Twitter in that in order to connect with another professional you must be affiliated with the same organisation or business; have the person's current email address or be introduced by a mutual contact.   The reason for this stringency is that once members have agreed to connect they have access to each other's full network and can then go on to connect with new people.   It is therefore important to carefully consider requests before deciding to accept, reject or ignore them as you are effectively opening your front door and inviting people into your private

space to meet all of your friends, albeit professional contacts rather than personal.

Who to connect with

As well as individuals, you can search for LinkedIn groups by selecting *Groups* from the dropdown list at the top of any page and typing in keywords or the name of the Group. Alternatively, you can move your cursor over *Interests* at the top of your homepage; select *Groups* and then select the *Find a Group* link on the right side of the page. You can follow people on LinkedIn, in fact you automatically follow and receive updates from 1st degree connections; however anyone can follow you, even if they are not in your network, unless you change your settings through the *Privacy & Settings* page.

Network and Degrees of Connection

1st degree	People you're directly connected to because you've accepted their invitation to connect, or they've accepted your invitation. You'll see a **1st** degree icon next to their name in search results and on their profile. You can contact them by sending a message on LinkedIn.
2nd degree	People who are connected to your 1st-degree connections. You'll see a **2nd** degree icon next to their name in search results and on their profile. You can send them an invitation by clicking **Connect** or contact them through an InMail.
3rd degree	People who are connected to your 2nd-degree connections. You'll see a **3rd** degree icon next to their name in search results and on their profile. 1. If their full first and last names are displayed, you can send them an invitation by clicking **Connect**. 2. If only the first letter of their last name is displayed, clicking **Connect** is not an option but you can still contact them through an InMail.
Fellow members of your LinkedIn Groups	These people are considered part of your network because you're members of the same group. You'll see a **Group** icon next to their name in search results and on their profile. You can contact them by sending a message on LinkedIn or using your group's discussion feature.
Out of Network	LinkedIn members who fall outside of the categories listed above. You can contact them through an InMail.

(LinkedIn, 2015c)

Groups to join

The Nursing and Midwifery Council	The nursing and midwifery regulator for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
Midwifery	Inspire each other and exchange ideas on midwifery. Connect researchers, innovators and teachers in midwifery around the world.
NHS Neonatal and Maternity Networking Forum	This forum is designed for NHS professionals working in all areas of midwifery, perinatal nursing and medicine.
ICM/Midwifery Association's communications Forum	A place for communication for midwives nationally, regionally and globally.
Midwives and Research	A group for midwives, midwifery leads and

	childbirth educators to share relevant research to inform evidence based practice.

Once you have joined a group you can start to engage in professional discourse, collaboration and networking with other members via discussions. As with contributing to Facebook groups or posting on Twitter, always bear in mind Chinn's (2014) 'talking to a room full of people' test and make sure you are happy to disclose this information to a virtual room full of strangers, albeit like-minded strangers, before clicking 'share'.

LinkedIn and e-professionalism

The revised Code (NMC, 2015:16) now specifically refers to online behaviours, stating the midwife should *use all forms of spoken, written and digital communication (including social media and networking sites) responsibly, respecting the right to privacy of others at all times'*. It could be argued that this standard is less likely to be breached on LinkedIn as individuals join specifically for professional networking and so there are not the same professional/personal boundary ambiguities as Facebook. That said, even in professional interactions it is important to maintain confidentiality and respect professional boundaries (NMC, 2012).

The Verdict

Does social media have potential for professional discourse, dissemination of research and sharing of best practice?

This series of articles (Power, 2014; Power, 2015a; Power, 2015b) has provided step by step guides on how to join Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. A theme running throughout the series has been the concept of 'e-professionalism' and how the accessibility and popularity of social media platforms have blurred the boundaries between professional and personal personas in an online environment. Midwives' professional responsibilities (NMC, 2015) have been regularly revisited and suggestions of ways to mitigate unwitting breaches of the Code have been provided by signposting readers to the Help and Privacy & Security Centres on all three platforms, which provide comprehensive information on how to use them safely.

Social media is here to stay: Fact. Hopefully this series of articles has at least pricked your interest, the rest is up to you – don't get left behind!

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