

Social Networks are a kind of online community, whose growth has simply soared in recent years, and they are especially useful for small businesses. Social networking sites enable you to create a profile, available to members of the network, and sometimes to everyone.

For the purpose of this tool kit I am going to focus on social networks used in business. Perhaps, the best known of these online social networks for business or professionals is [LinkedIn](#), where users can network to find new business, partners, or employees. For an excellent intro to the company go [here](#).



LinkedIn is a wonderful place to bring visibility to your business or service or your own particular area of expertise. Everyone can see the public part of your profile. In fact, LinkedIn is so popular, if you are a member, when others Google you, they will often see your LinkedIn profile listed ahead of your business website.

LinkedIn offers a great many ways to network and to use your network to grow your business. First, by building your profile and providing it in an easily accessible place, and then by moving all of your contacts online which LinkedIn. This has the advantage of putting your contact information in one place AND where it is automatically updated by the contact. Now when Sarah, a work colleague, moves to another company, you won't have to run into Sarah to know that she is somewhere else. If she is a member of LinkedIn, her contact information and professional profile will be updated by Sarah automatically.

Moreover, LinkedIn will help you find others you used to work or went to school with. How often have you wondered what ever happened to good old Raoul, Mary or Pierre? Now you can find them in moments.

The other great thing about social networks is the fact you are notified when your contacts on LinkedIn do something such as get a new job or title, move, or add new contacts. For good networkers this news is heaven sent. Now, you not only know about the change, but have a reason to contact the person, to wish her well, and remind her about your line of business.

LinkedIn also offers [groups](#) you can join or create. In the latter category, there are groups of everyone from the CIO forum (people affiliated with CIO magazine), to the eMarketing Association Network, to alumni at the Haas School of Business at the University of California at Berkeley. Which means you can find others like you who may be in a position to help you. Or better yet, that you can help.

The hidden power of social networks lies not in what you might get from a contact, but in putting you in line to do something for someone else. For example, there is a place to both ask and

answer questions on LinkedIn. Effective WOM marketers know that by operating out of a spirit of generosity, they will make a strong contact AND raise their own visibility and credibility. Now when someone else comes on line with the same question, they will find your answer AND you.

There are other more targeted business networks. Examples include: [Ryze](#) (business social networking site for the entrepreneur), [Classmates](#) (schools and colleges), and [Black Planet](#) (for African-Americans).

facebook

[Facebook](#) and [MySpace](#), are the most popular generic social networks but they can also be very good business social networks. Facebook started out as a social network for college students, and exploded into the world's largest social network with some 140 million users around the world.

Like LinkedIn, Facebook has a place to write a personal (or business) profile that people you