

# Online Professional Networks Relationships Count

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## **ABSTRACT**

Online professional networks allow companies and business professionals to connect anywhere from another office to another country. Online networking companies cater to everyone from Fortune 500 recruiters to small business owners and their employees. With both free and fee based options, LinkedIn.com, a popular online networking organization, brings people closer to potential networking connections that share common interests and mutually beneficial business relationships. LinkedIn offers various opportunities including employment prospects, closing deals, finding potential clients, and posting recommendations at the click of a mouse. Professional online networking simplifies the process of visualizing professional networks in a more appealing and convenient technological means.

### **1.2 Keywords**

- **Professional Networks:** online social network where professionals can meet peers and make career contacts
- **Links:** The connecting mediums between nodes
- **Nodes:** Represent linked entities (in this case: users, interactions, databases).
- **Hub:** Person who links to many others in a network.
- **Broker:** Person who is the only connection between liaisons which establish opportunities for exchange amongst nodes.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Online professional networks serve as knowledge management systems that focus on linking emerging companies and people of interest together with an official organizational structure. Online professional networks enhance knowledge discovery and sharing by providing services that allow large companies and organizations to communicate through networks consisting of links and nodes. The objective of online professional networks is to become a convenient and recognizable environment for communication integrated into the everyday convention and activities of today's modern workers. Linked-In is a popular example of an online professional network that serves as a knowledge management system. With the aid of Linked-In, organizations and individuals are able to share vital information in and about companies and credentials.

The concept of online business-oriented networking came about relatively recently. In fact, it wasn't until 2006 that Linked-In even began claiming profits. However Linked-In is not the only professional networking system online. Career Change Network (CareerChangeNetwork.com), Ecademy Ltd. (Ecademy.com), ExecuNet Inc. (ExecuNet.com), OpenBC.com, Ryze and Tribe.net all pride themselves on hosting functions or offering online features where members can organize and/or advertise events.

People who utilize these online professional networks are given the opportunity to find updates and notifications re-

garding potential jobs, and can provide references, skills, and job-appropriate qualifications for others' viewing. This information, often found in the form of resumes or postings, allows companies to find employees, potential clients, and also establish mutually beneficial professional relationships [1, 3].

## 2.1 Linked In

Dubbed the “myspace-for-grown-ups” by Business 2.0 magazine, Reid Hoffman’s Business Networking brain-child, Linked-In ([www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)), is becoming a must among the corporate worlds of America. Respectively, Linked-In networks over nine million people among one hundred and thirty separate industries worldwide.

Three years in the making, the online network Linked-In has simplified the processes of making connections and accomplishing high traffic tasks. Upon joining the network, an individual simply has to create a profile that summarizes their professional status, which may include their current and past work environments or even their professional aspirations for the future. This profile is then made accessible to anyone in your network, which can, in turn, simplify the process of finding individuals that one can level with from a professional standpoint.

Furthermore, once people are included into your personal network, you are immediately connected with all of their specific links. This is paramount in that it facilitates the process of finding new clients, job-searching, and introducing yourself to other professionals that can potentially assist your professional work environment [2].

## 2.2 The Future of Online Professional Networks: Changing the ways we do Business

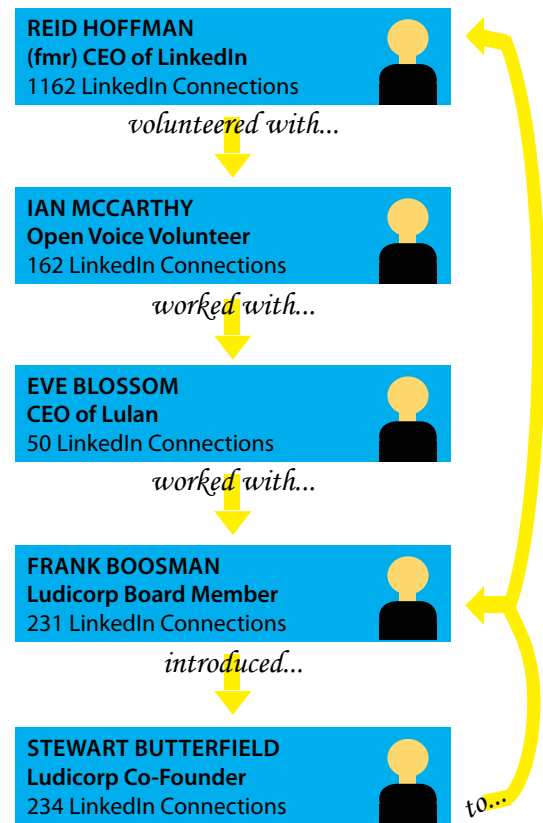
When user friendly Microsoft Windows was introduced in 1995, technology began rapidly spreading among the masses. However, not long following its release, technological, computer-oriented growth began to expand throughout the population exponentially. Soon after we all began managing our schedules through our palm pilots, and, eventually, checking our email through our cellular phone internet connection.

Conceptualized in 1997, and brought to life in 2002, Linked-In initially began with five people in charge and a shared 350 overall contacts. In 2004, Linked-In had gained around 5 million users (It was the same year that Mark Zuckerberg created Facebook on a whim). 30% of Linked-In users were members primarily for sales and development purposes. The other 50% of users were found to be job seekers and/or recruiters.

Linked-In initially began declaring profit in March 2006. Despite its slower start, at least compared to social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace; in the past

year membership on the business networking site has nearly doubled. As of right now, Linked-In is planning on sales of 100 million during the 2008 fiscal year.

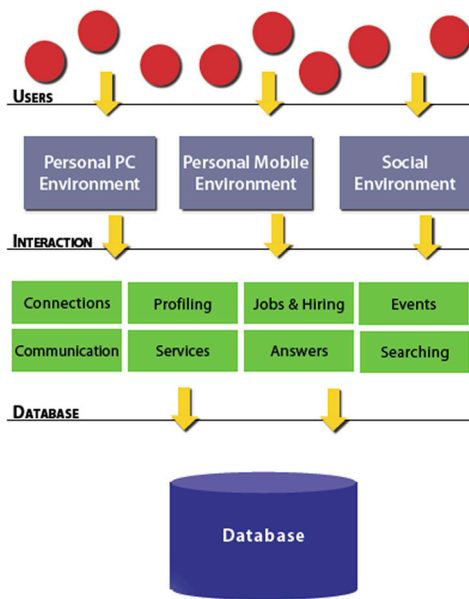
In years to come, more and more businesses are going to become integrated in these online professional networks. Linked-In is adding a feature which will allow its users to publish their profiles in instant messages. With the creation of features like this, professional networks will grow and they become more of a convenient source for job hunters.



**Figure 2.1**  
The Anatomy of a Business Relationship:  
Five Degrees of Separation

Former CEO of Linked-In, Reid Hoffman, met Ian McCarthy while volunteering at Open Voice together. Ian met Eve Blossom through her work with the organization, Envolved. Eve knows Frank Boosman through her own company, Lulan. Frank is on the board of directors at Ludicorp, whose parent company is Flickr. Frank introduced Ludicorp’s co-founder, Stewart Butterfield, to the Linked-In CEO at the time, Reid Hoffman.

“Here’s how: When Flickr co-founder Stewart Butterfield was looking for angel money for his photo-sharing site, he tracked down Hoffman on the site via Linked-In member Frank Boosman, one of Butterfield’s board members.[2]” (Copeland, 2006)



**Figure 2.2**

### Professional Networking Model

Professional Online Networks consist of a set of what we call links and nodes. The nodes represent entities such as users, interactions and/or the actual database, itself. Links can be directed in one way relationships or directed in mutual relationships, and they serve as the connecting medium between two nodes.

In online professional networks the individual known as the hub is a person who links to many others. The individual known as the broker is a person who is the only connection between liasons, whom establishes opportunities for exchange amongst the various nodes [3].

### 2.3 Business vs. Social Networking

When Mark Zuckerberg founded Facebook in 2004, online networking began drawing in a different crowd. People interested were older and more educated than what had been seen in most previous online networks. In less than three years, the operation moved from sublet apartments, to corporate office space with three catered meals a day and laundry services.

Linked-In's history followed a very different pattern. Linked-In found most of their success after the boom of online networking. It was one of the first networking sites out there that was able to draw in older generations who were less technologically savvy. In fact, one of Linked-In's most diversifying aspects is the fact that they draw such a wide variety of age groups.

While Facebook has done little for their networkers economics, professional networking has expanded its ability to cater to business professionals needs and desires. Reid Hoffman, the co-founder of Linked-In and former CEO was recently voted one of the fifty people who matter by Business 2.0 magazine. Since its startup, Linked-In has taken advantage of the Web 2.0 boom to race past its rivals.

### 2.4 Cons of Networking Online

- **Personality:** While networking online, it is impossible to truly get to know the person you are communicating with the same as if you were face to face. Lacking the personality aspect of a relationship can hinder the level of communication.
- **Security:** Personal information stored on network servers allows potential unauthorized access to files, user names, and even passwords. On Linked-In, many users put their email in their name for convenient contacting. However, many of these users have to designate a separate email account to prevent large amounts of bulk or junk email from overwhelming their usual email account.
- **Privacy:** Using online networks can potentially allow others to have access to personal or private information. This can encompass email and other contact means which can and often are used inappropriately.
- **Trust:** As many people already know through personal experience, the internet itself is an advantageous method for con-artists or criminals to take advantage of people. The benefits of face to face contact often make it easier to weed out potentially dangerous contacts [4].

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