READ ME IF YOU WANT TO EFFECTIVELY ENGAGE KEY DECISION MAKERS ON LINKEDIN

#5
in a series of 6

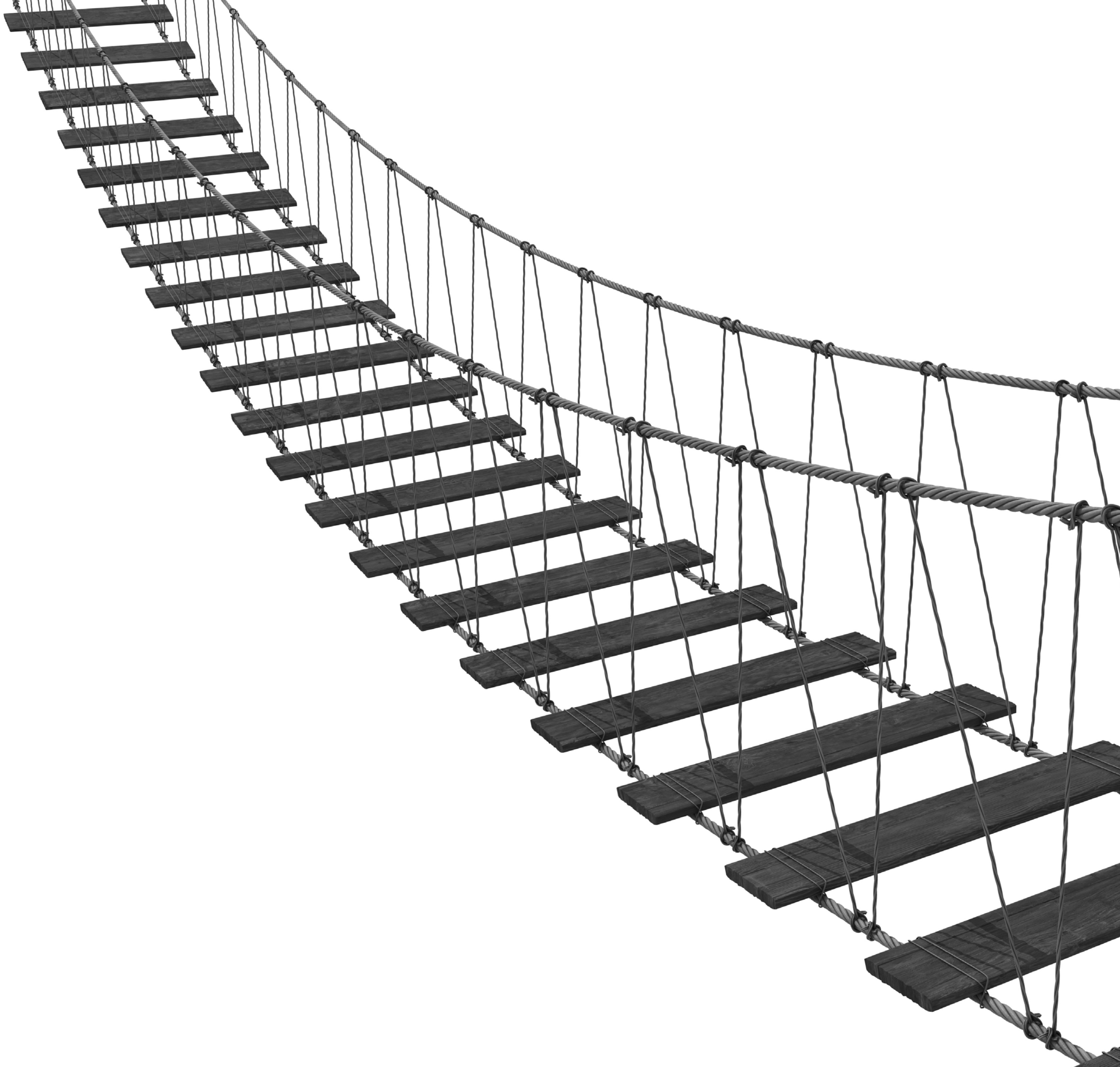
LinkedIn

Why it matters

If you or your sales reps need to connect with business decision makers, LinkedIn should be a prime destination. Half of all B2B buyers use LinkedIn as a resource when making purchase decisions. And they are open to interactions with sales professionals, given the professional context of LinkedIn.

You can bet every modern B2B seller seeks out and builds relationships by engaging with prospects who are active on LinkedIn. In fact, research proves this out. 62% of top salespeople — those who exceeded their projected target revenue by more than 25% — strongly attribute closing more deals to incorporating social networks into their sales strategy. Here's one of the key reasons why: 94% of salespeople who are familiar with social tech say it provides them with valuable insights for connecting with customers and prospects.

Sales managers can ensure their reps connect with the right people and sales professionals. They can make the most of their prospecting time by effectively engaging key decision makers on LinkedIn. Read on for six proven steps to doing just that.



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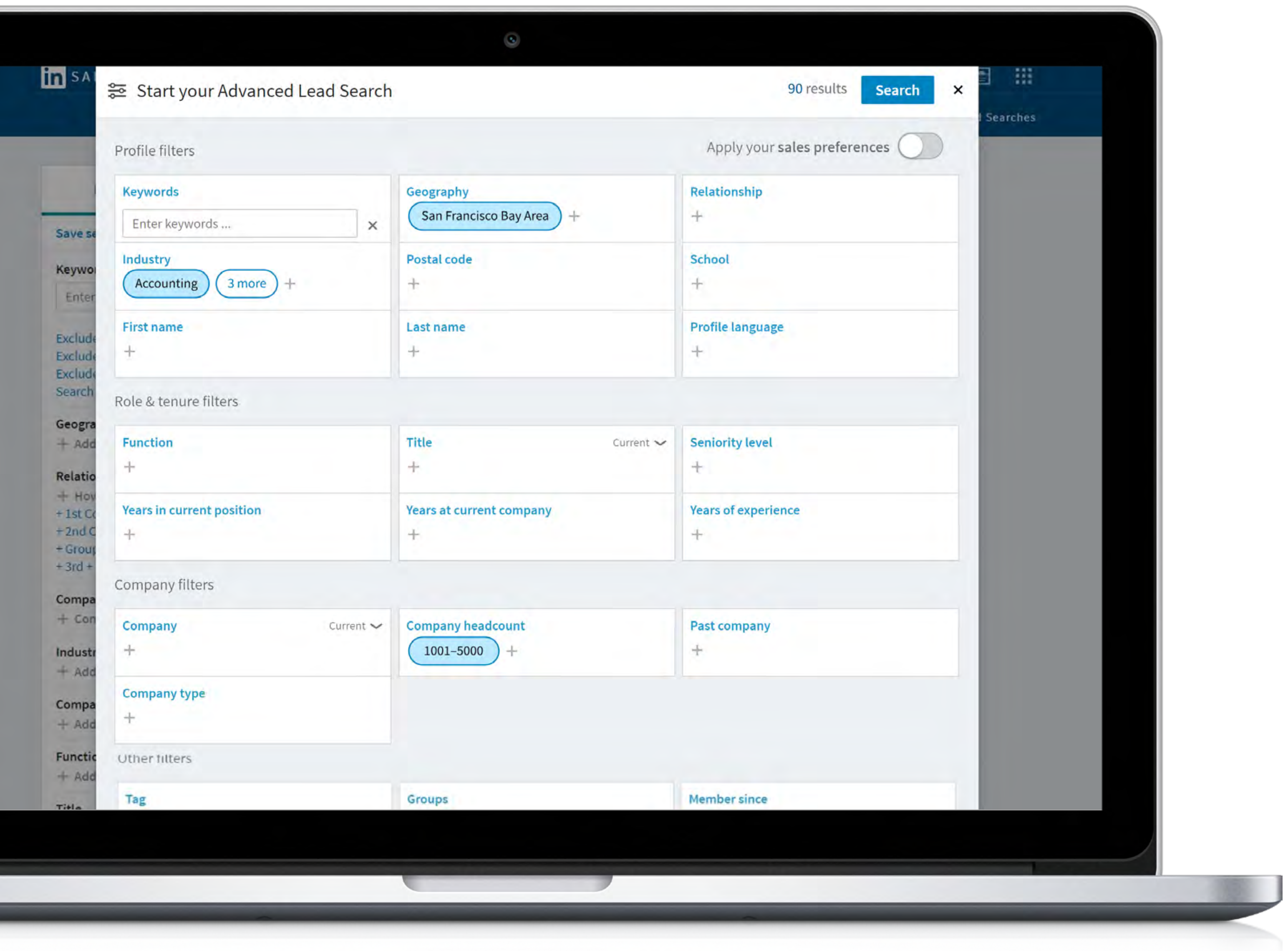
STEP 1

Target the right buyers and companies



Every closed deal starts with a solid relationship between a sales pro and the decision makers within an account. To zero in on the best prospects, pinpoint the intersection between your organization's ideal customer profile and your most recent top sales.

Your ideal customer profile can help you narrow in on top customers in relation to the metrics that indicate high sales value, such as revenue amount, contract renewals, or profitability. When reviewing your last top 20 deals, answer the following questions:

- What were the decision makers' job titles?
- What size company did they work for?
- In what industry?
- How long had they worked in their role?
- What else do they share in common?

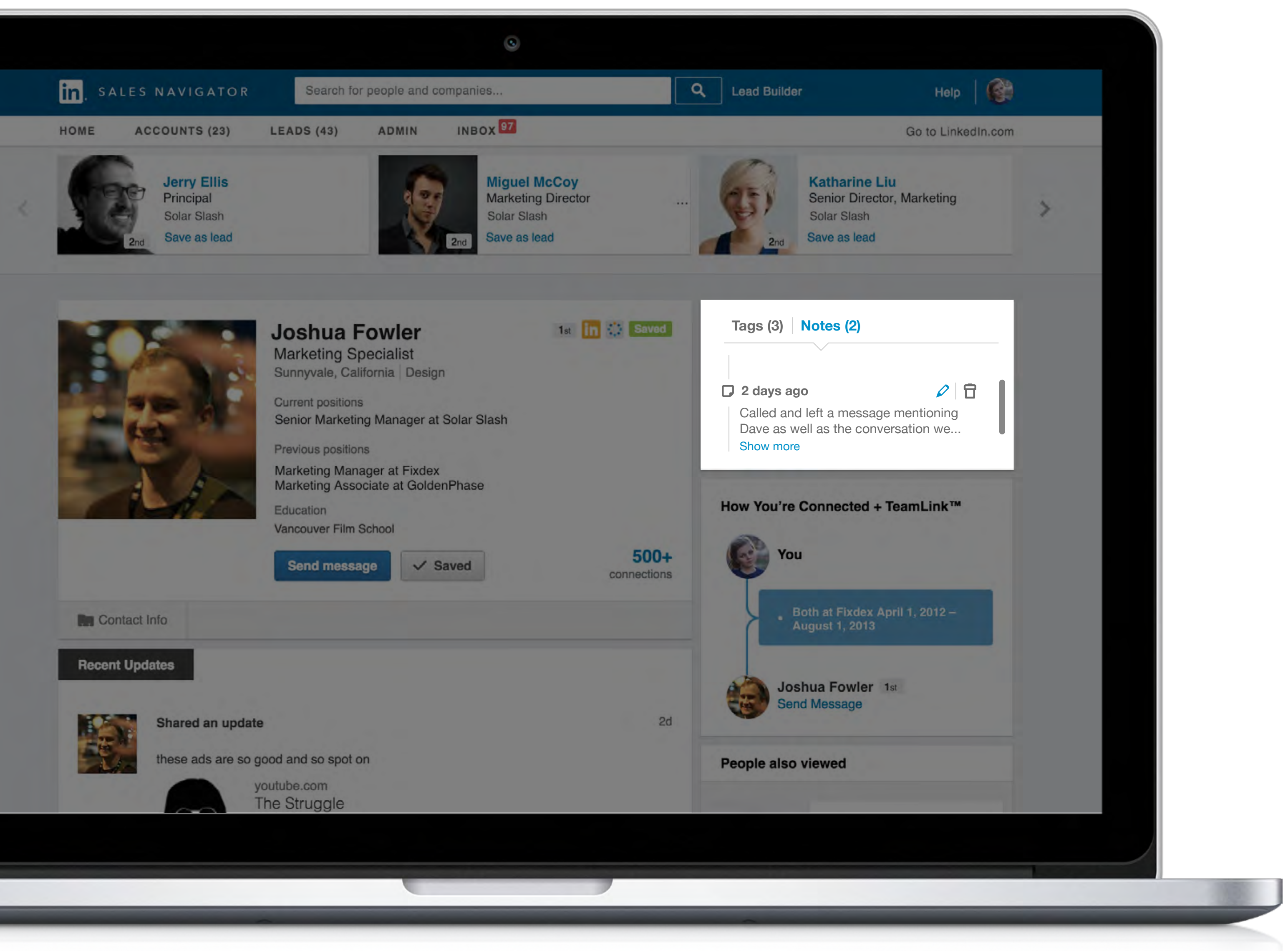
Understanding these details helps you prospect with purpose using Sales Navigator to search LinkedIn by title, position, and even seniority. For example, you might decide it makes sense to plug in terms like Account Manager, VP, and Product Manager.

Viewing decision makers by company of interest can help determine which ones are most active on LinkedIn. Those that post content and comment on or like others' posts clearly understand the value of social networks like LinkedIn. That means they are more likely to welcome interactions and invitations to connect via social media. That's your low-hanging fruit — start there.

STEP 2

Map the buying committee

In 2017, the average B2B buying committee included 6.8 people. The more headway you make engaging this buying committee and the more you invest in understanding each of their top priorities, the more likely you are to close a deal.



Despite this, our research found that 78% of sales professionals are connected to just one person (single-threaded) or not connected at all into accounts they are trying to close. Only 7% were multi-threaded, or connected to 6 or more people at their account.

Today, a rock-solid relationship with one top decision maker just isn't enough. Even if they're on board with your solution, they might be overruled or outflanked. To avoid this fate, you want to influence their associates so you can sway the buying committees from all sides.

Mapping the buying committee is far easier with LinkedIn at your fingertips. With just a few quick searches, you get a high-level picture of an account's organizational structure. Calling upon advanced search on LinkedIn, you can then identify the crucial decision makers at the account. As a bonus, these searches provide insight into top priorities and pertinent topics as you see what content the company and its employees share.

Expanding your visibility within a company on LinkedIn is a smart practice because buyers are five times more likely to engage someone with mutual connections on the platform. In fact, 44% of social buyers use shared connections on LinkedIn to find potential vendors. As your presence grows throughout the ranks of a target account, your outreach should lead to more interactions. Plus, you gain sway through your extended network. As buyers lean on their colleagues for recommendations, you can influence that peer advice.

Understand what buyers value

STEP 3

According to CEB, buyers “are increasingly overwhelmed and often more paralyzed than empowered.”

To gain the attention of empowered yet overwhelmed buyers, modern sales pros are doing more research than ever before. The goal is to present insights that get potential customers to take notice and move smoothly through the buyer journey.

Start by studying the prospect’s LinkedIn profile to identify key words and expressions that give insight into how they operate and what makes them tick. Scan for phrases that match your understanding of what drives your top customers, and signs that this person is directly responsible for purchase decisions. As you review the prospect’s experience section, look for hints into how they operate and their involvement with strategic projects and purchases.

Pair these findings with clues you clean from the target company’s website. To get a sense of key roles, peruse the company directory or leadership page. Review the most recent blog posts, press releases, and financial filings for an idea of the company’s strategic focus. The careers page can provide hints into priorities and initiatives by shedding light on upcoming projects. You might find a blog post authored by a key decision maker that outlines an important company priority, and then see that this person is hiring to support a top initiative. These insights position you to reach out with relevance and outdo the competition.

STEP 4

Become a go-to resource online

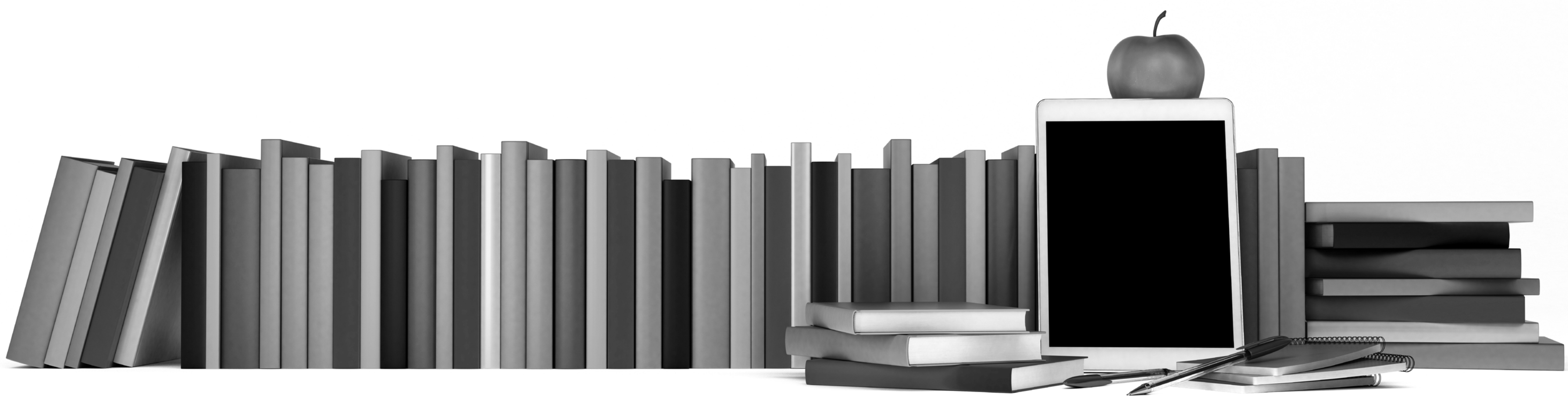
62% of business decision makers look for an informative LinkedIn profile when deciding whether to work with a sales professional. Yes, your prospective buyers are looking right back at you. Moreover, 69% of millennial buyers are more likely to speak with a sales professional who has a professional social media presence.

The key is to actively create opportunities with your online social presence. Remember: Buyers may seek advice from peers and join in online discussions, but they also consume content for ideas, inspiration, and validation. And they tend to think positively about the sources that provide the most helpful content.

Make yourself that source and a trustworthy ally by steadily posting thoughtful and thought-provoking content about your industry, a relevant niche, or a top-of-mind issue. Show potential clients that you're focused and committed by posting interesting, engaging updates to LinkedIn every day. Leverage industry data and news on LinkedIn by:

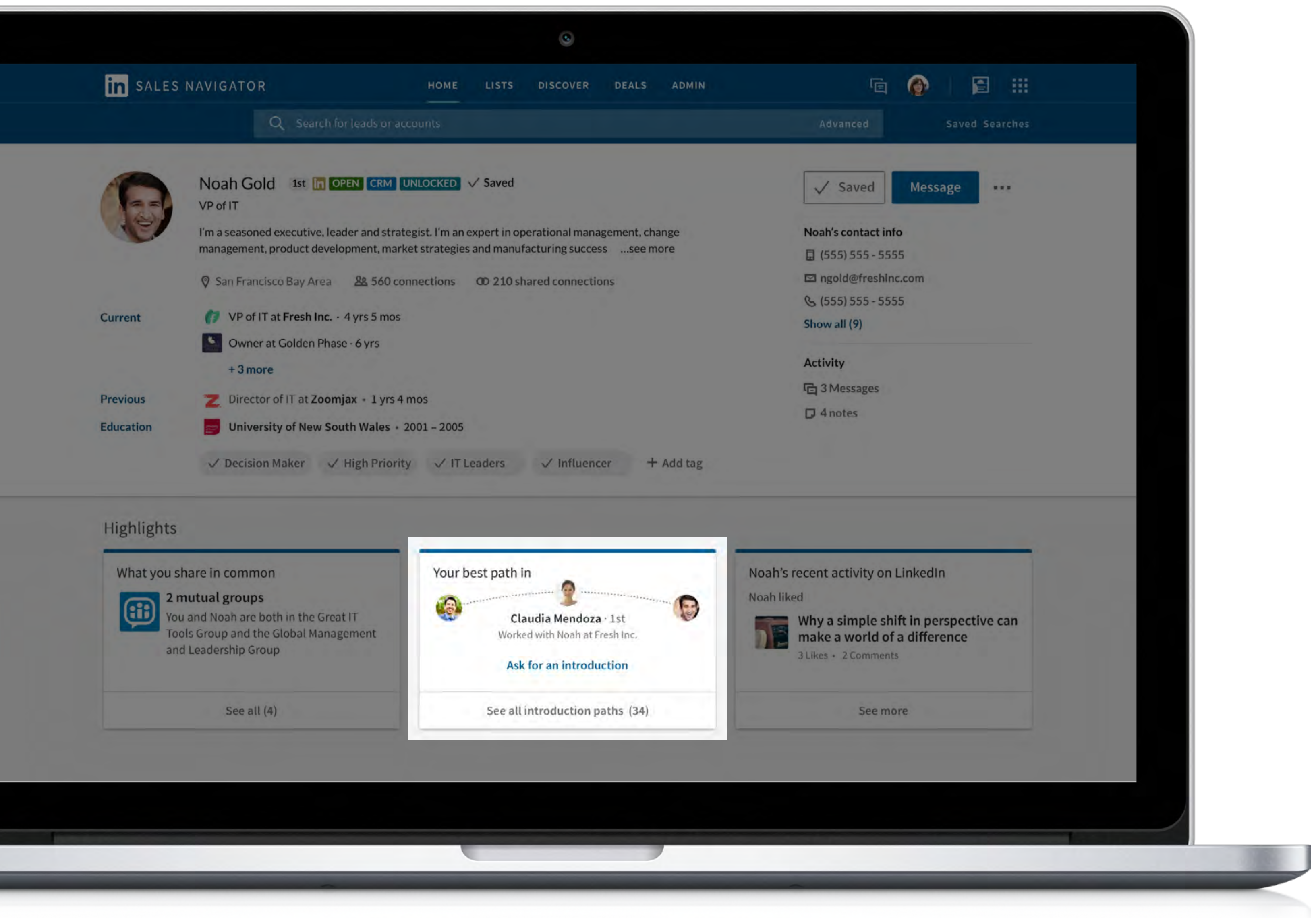
- Sharing links to interesting industry reports in your status updates
- Including data and statistics when commenting on prospects' status updates or in LinkedIn Group discussions
- Promoting your posts in multiple ways to drive plenty of views, such as by including a link in your professional email, and on other social sites, such as Twitter

Think of yourself as a teacher, and develop or curate content that can help buyers confidently make the best purchase decision for themselves and their companies.



STEP 5

Score a warm Introduction



Time-starved decision makers are too busy to respond to cold outreach. With sales content and messages bombarding them at every turn, buyers are increasingly selective about where to spend their time. To that end, they rely on relationships and personal connections during their research process.

An effective way to beat the odds is to warm up your outreach by asking a mutual LinkedIn connection for an introduction. And buyers are five times more likely to engage with a sales professional who shares mutual connections – even when those are 2nd and 3rd-degree connections.

LinkedIn Sales Navigator can illuminate connections between your teammates and colleagues and these decision makers. You'll see connections with everyone else on your sales team – even if you're directly not connected to those colleagues on LinkedIn.

The TeamLink feature also shows how you are connected to a contact. Through your LinkedIn network, you might find that an acquaintance, or former classmate or colleague is also connected to a decision maker. Tapping into these resources paves the way for warm introductions into an account.

Once you come across a match, send a friendly LinkedIn InMail message or email to your connection explaining how the prospect will potentially benefit by engaging with you. Include a message template they can use in their outreach to make it easy for them to follow through. Taking these steps boosts the likelihood of your connection making the introduction.

STEP 6

Engage with personalized outreach

Once you've scored an introduction, follow up with the new connection using your research to connect. Remember: Buyers no longer tolerate cold calls, discovery questions and standardized sales pitches. They see these as proof that you don't understand them.

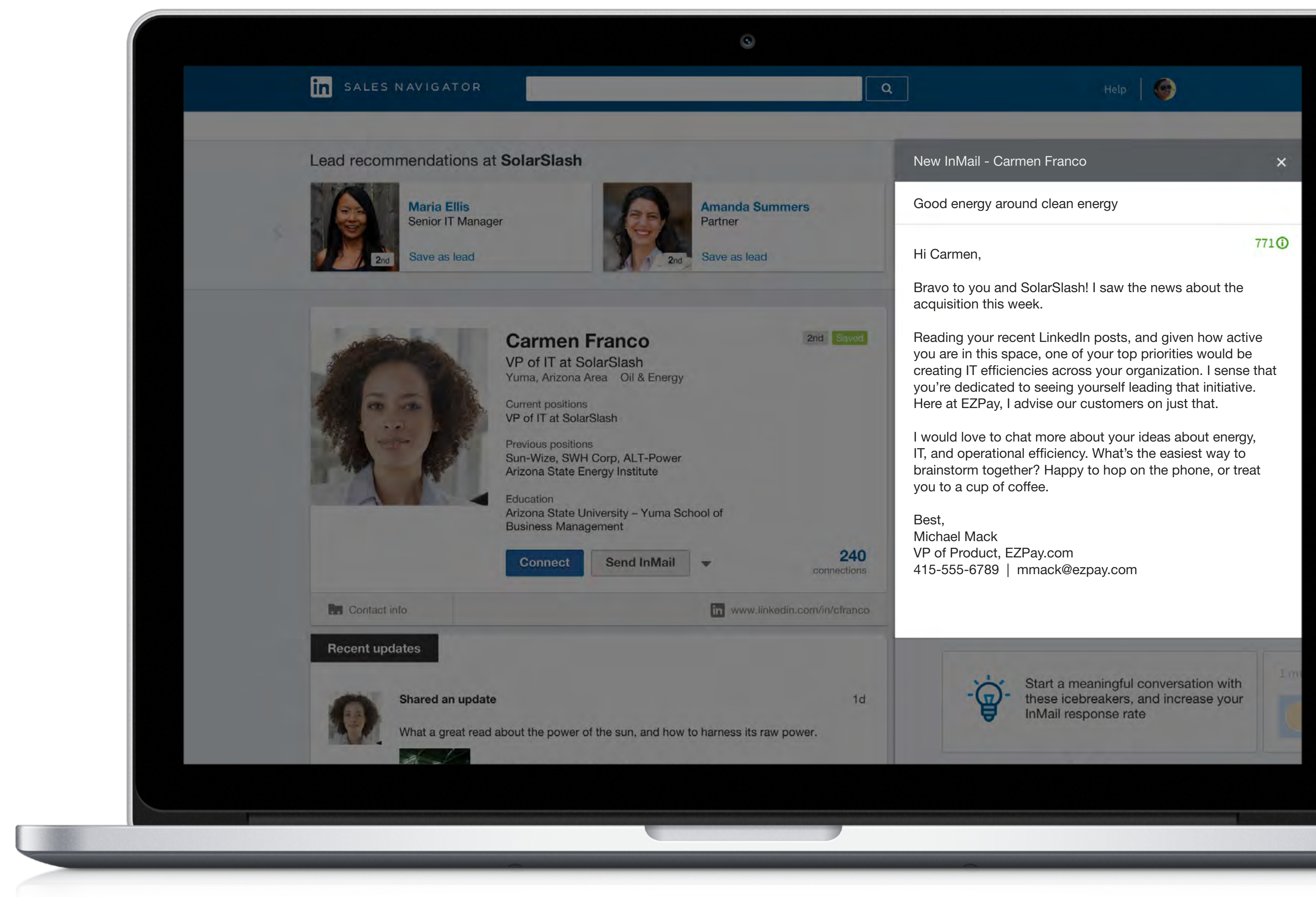
To get prospects to respond to your outreach, you need to communicate from the beginning that you understand their situation, needs and challenges. Delivering unique, relevant insights is among the most effective ways to personalize your outreach. It starts by studying the world from their perspective.

Pay attention to what LinkedIn members regularly post to their profiles. Look for digital clues such as the following to start conversations:

- **Company news:** Major organization-level changes like acquisitions, cutting costs, and a new strategic direction.
- **Job change:** When potential buyers change jobs, it might mean you need to find a new champion or sponsor for a purchase. Or it could open doors to new opportunities as you follow them into their new roles.
- **Status updates:** Updates reveal prospects' top concerns and priorities, providing invaluable insight into what can spark engaging discussions.
- **Blog posts:** Add insightful comments or link to a prospect's LinkedIn long-form post, or reference or comment on a prospect's ideas in your own posts.

Your target audience is interested in the latest and greatest industry developments, but they also want to see your unique take on what's happening. When you look for content to share with your prospects, focus on providing insights that will help them make more informed decisions about the challenges they face in their industry.

Once you've made contact with a buyer, use your knowledge of common interests or experiences to strengthen rapport and prompt additional conversations. Your research may have helped you identify which insights your prospect will find useful. Even if for a problem or project unrelated to your offering, connecting prospects with helpful resources is an excellent way to establish familiarity and trust.



Breaking it down

Here's how to apply these best practices step by step.

- [ ] Find decision makers and the colleagues and peers who influence them.
- [ ] Save these people as "Leads" in LinkedIn Sales Navigator.
- [ ] Find and follow them on LinkedIn to learn about their pains, challenges, motivations, and goals.
- [ ] Work your network to find a referral path.
- [ ] Begin engaging with potential buyers via LinkedIn.
- [ ] Identify and share content, information, and ideas that will provide value to these decision makers.
- [ ] Build a relationship of trust across the target account.

About us

LinkedIn Sales Navigator makes it simple to establish and grow relationships with prospects and customers by helping you tap into the power of LinkedIn, the world's largest professional network of 500+ million members. Designed for sales professionals, LinkedIn Sales Navigator combines LinkedIn's network data, relevant news sources, and your accounts, leads, and preferences to produce customized recommendations and insights.

With LinkedIn Sales Navigator, you can focus on the right people and companies, stay up-to-date on what's happening with your accounts, and build trust with your prospects and customers.

Looking to get LinkedIn Sales Navigator for your team? Request a free demo.

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