

Turn leads into sales with social selling

Learn about using social selling to develop customer-centric approaches that create trusted relationships and greater sales opportunities.

In this ebook, you'll learn:

- The power of getting social with sales.
- How to understand your customer, their business and industry to underpin social selling approaches.
- How to transform social insights into sales success.



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Getting social with sales

The game of selling has changed.

Today, buyers want more from their sales professionals than a slick pitch. Instead, they want sales reps who truly understand what they do and who can build mutually beneficial relationships.

To address this shift, sales reps can harness social media tools to reach out to customers in more personal ways. This is known as the strategy of social selling, where salespeople use social media to create trusted relationships that go beyond one-off transactions.

According to Salesforce, “The success behind social selling rests in the bedrock of the community network and the trust that is built off the back of it.”¹

In this ebook, we’ll walk you through the mechanics of establishing a social selling strategy. We’ll cover:

- Implementing social selling approaches.
- Gleaning information relevant to a customer’s role and challenges.
- Learning about a customer’s business.
- Understanding a customer’s industry.

1. Henderson, Carl, Social Sells – The Mini-Guide to Social Selling, 3 November 2016

A close-up, side-profile shot of a person with light-colored hair, wearing a grey ribbed sweater, looking down at a smartphone held in both hands. The person's face is partially visible, showing a slight smile. The background is a blurred indoor setting with a white table and chairs, suggesting a cafe or office environment. The lighting is soft and natural, coming from a window on the left. Two thin white vertical lines are present: one on the left side of the image, starting from the top and ending near the text, and another on the left side, starting from the bottom and extending upwards.

Why get social
about selling?

Social selling is about creating a personal connection between sales professionals and their customers to convert more leads into actual sales. And social selling works.

Research conducted by sales productivity platform provider KiteDesk uncovered a relationship between social media ‘prowess’ and meeting sales quotas. The survey found that social sellers were around six times more likely to exceed their quota than peers with limited or no social media skills.²

Consider LinkedIn’s own findings. Social selling leaders create 45% more sales opportunities and are 51% more likely to reach their quota than their non-socially active peers.³

At present, selling strategies are ripe for change. Forrester found that more and more buyers are bypassing sales professionals during the sales process. If organisations do not change their selling approaches, Forrester warns that one million B2B salespeople could lose their jobs to self-service e-commerce by 2020.⁴

Major companies are already harnessing the power of social selling to address such shifts. Guardian Life states that 2500 of the 3000 advisers in the life insurance company’s network use social selling to connect with prospects and mine referrals on LinkedIn and occasionally Facebook.⁵

2. Biro, Meghan M, ‘Study: Skilled social media users are six times more likely to exceed quota’, Forbes, 22 May 2015

3. LinkedIn Sales Solutions

4. Minsky, Laurence and Quesenberry, Keith A, ‘How B2B sales can benefit from social selling’, Harvard Business Review, 8 November 2016

5. Clancy, Heather, ‘Social selling success isn’t limited to millennials’, Fortune, 9 May 2016

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a silver smartphone. The hand has bright pink nail polish and a gold ring on the ring finger. The phone is held over a laptop keyboard, which is partially visible in the foreground. The background is blurred, showing another person's hand and a laptop screen. The overall lighting is warm and slightly dim, creating a professional yet approachable atmosphere.

Where to start on social selling?

The foundation of social selling is obtaining information about a prospect or existing customer to create a professional relationship. The starting point is to have an active, professional and up-to-date LinkedIn profile. This will allow you to undertake a range of information-gathering activities.

Top tips for a LinkedIn profile

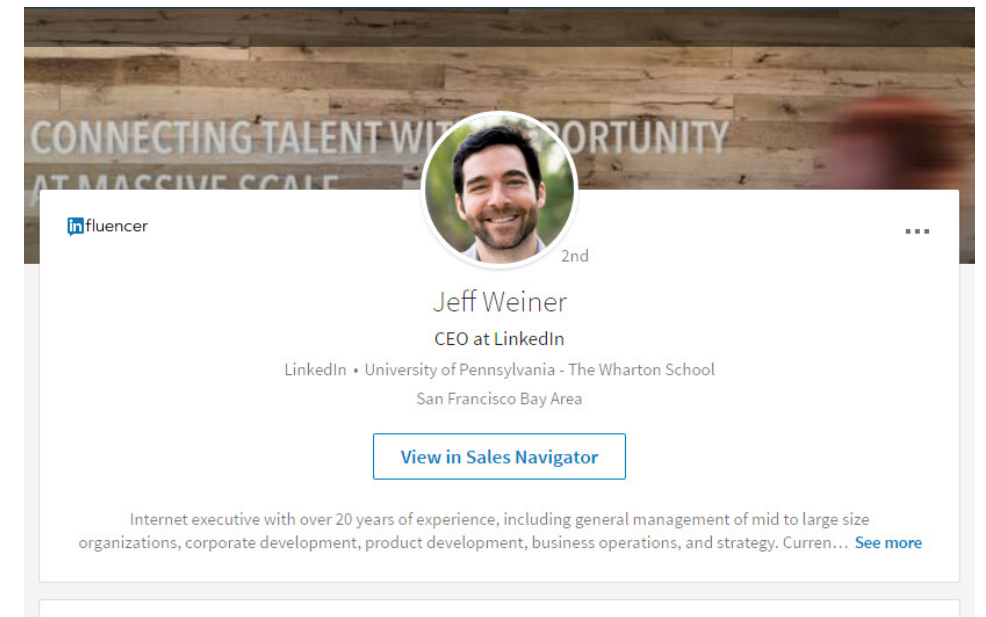
Your LinkedIn profile is an important business tool, so it's worth taking some time to make it stand out from the rest. Here are our top five tips:

Photo

First impressions matter – so make sure your profile gives visitors the right idea about who you are and what you do. Dress professionally and look friendly. This is one time when it can really pay to use a professional photographer – it'll be money well spent.

Background

Your profile's background photo is prime visual real estate, so make sure the image is working for you. Show yourself at work (e.g. meeting clients or speaking at a conference), include logos or contact information, and avoid using a generic stock photo at all costs.



Headline

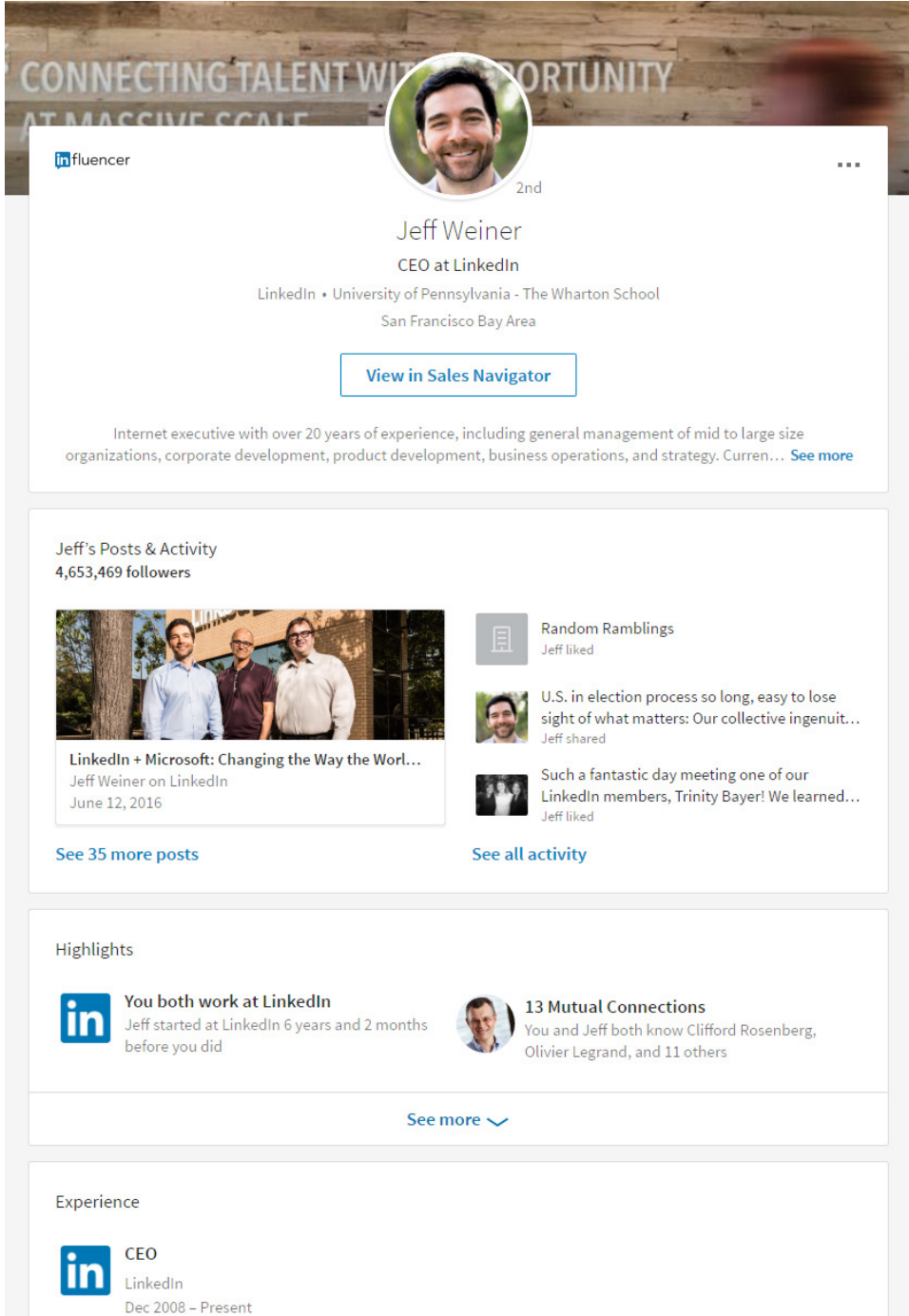
You can do much more with your headline than just list your job title. Think of it as an opportunity to tell visitors something important about yourself, like your personal motto or mission statement (so long as it's professionally relevant).

Summary

After seeing your photo, background and headline, visitors' eyes will most likely fall on your summary. You can write this in the first person ("I am ...") or the third person ("Kim is ..."), but it should express your personality, focus on how you can help the reader, include extra contact information (like Twitter, email or phone details) and finish with a call to action.

Rich media

Don't limit yourself! Add links to PDFs, SlideShares, videos and other audio/visual assets. It's a great way to engage readers and make your profile more memorable.



The image is a screenshot of a LinkedIn profile for Jeff Weiner. At the top, there's a banner image with the text "CONNECTING TALENT WITH OPPORTUNITY AT MASSIVE SCALE". Below the banner is a circular profile picture of Jeff Weiner, a man with dark hair and a beard, smiling. To the right of the picture is a small "2nd" icon. Below the picture, his name "Jeff Weiner" is displayed, followed by "CEO at LinkedIn". Underneath that, it says "LinkedIn • University of Pennsylvania - The Wharton School" and "San Francisco Bay Area". There is a button that says "View in Sales Navigator". Below this, a short bio reads: "Internet executive with over 20 years of experience, including general management of mid to large size organizations, corporate development, product development, business operations, and strategy. Curren... See more".

The next section is "Jeff's Posts & Activity" with "4,653,469 followers". It shows a post from "LinkedIn + Microsoft: Changing the Way the Worl..." dated "June 12, 2016" by "Jeff Weiner on LinkedIn". To the right of this post are three smaller activity items: "Random Ramblings" (Jeff liked), "U.S. in election process so long, easy to lose sight of what matters: Our collective ingenuit..." (Jeff shared), and "Such a fantastic day meeting one of our LinkedIn members, Trinity Bayer! We learned..." (Jeff liked). There are links for "See 35 more posts" and "See all activity".

The "Highlights" section shows two items: "You both work at LinkedIn" (Jeff started at LinkedIn 6 years and 2 months before you did) and "13 Mutual Connections" (You and Jeff both know Clifford Rosenberg, Olivier Legrand, and 11 others). A "See more" link with a downward arrow is at the bottom of this section.

The "Experience" section shows a single entry for "CEO" at "LinkedIn" from "Dec 2008 - Present".

But note, not all customer information has equal value.

To create actionable insights, you need relevant and targeted information from reputable sources.

To uncover this customer intelligence, research industry trends and identify hot button topics. Start sharing relevant articles, with some insightful annotations, via social media. As you go about this research, identify influencers and potential prospects and follow them on social media. Your mutual LinkedIn connections could be valuable here.

It doesn't take long to get started in social selling. In fact, B2B salespeople only need to invest up to 10% of their time to be successful on social media.⁶

Your customers want social selling

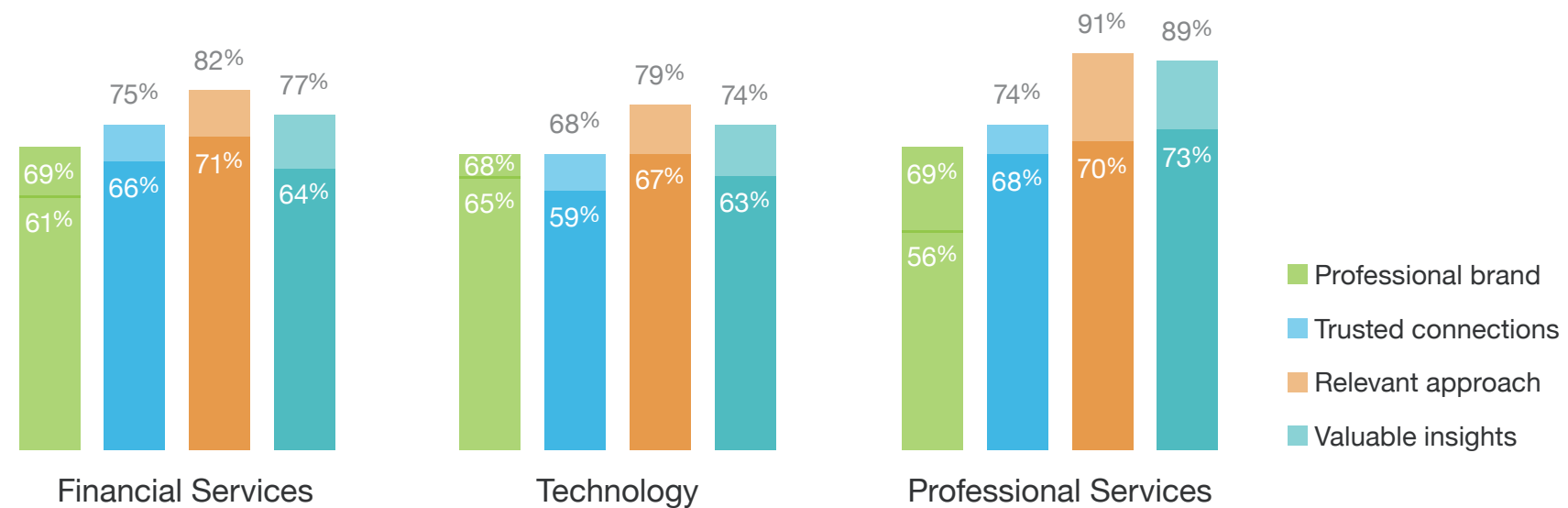
LinkedIn research shows that customers want social selling. They want trusted connections and valuable insights that go well beyond the general.

Buyers from the Asia-Pacific region generally want more trusted connections and valuable insights from their sales reps than they're currently getting (Figure 1). In the technology sector, buyers rate the current performance of sales reps on delivering trusted connections at 59% – but the importance of this factor is 68%. In addition, while the importance of valuable insights in professional services is 89%, the current performance of sales reps is only rated at 73%.⁷

7. LinkedIn, B2B Research Drivers, H1 2016, Slide 11.

Figure 1: Buyers report gaps from their sales reps on social selling pillars

% stated importance (light) vs performance (dark) on each pillar.



Clearly, there is room for improvement. Now we'll examine the three key things that social sellers must understand about their customers to better meet the needs of buyers and boost sales: the customer themselves, their business and their industry as a whole.

Social selling tips:

- Research shows a positive relationship between social media 'prowess' and exceeding sales quotas.
- Base your social selling material on high-quality, targeted and reputable material.
- Effective social selling only takes minutes out of your busy day.

Who is your
customer?



To succeed in sales, you need to establish a personal connection with the buyer.

In the age of social media, this task is easier than ever. Social media networks offer a rich source of information to underpin a tailored approach to sales prospects.

What does your customer do?

You know the customer's role, or at least how they describe it, but what do they actually do?

This is a crucial piece of information for determining an effective social selling approach. It could be a waste of time discussing high-level strategy and change management to a junior employee (despite what their job title suggests).

Try to assess what their day-to-day work involves and adjust your approach accordingly. If you work primarily with professionals in one industry, it could be worth sitting down to interview one or two contacts about their roles. Get to know what their day, week and year look like so you can better understand their problems.

Where does your customer fit in their organisation?

Are they a cog or a decision-maker?
Have they plateaued or are they quickly rising through the ranks?

Which key stakeholders could be involved with the potential prospect and decision-making more generally? These stakeholders should be identifiable from a prospect's professional networks and recent media releases and articles.

What are the pain points for your customer?

Make authentic contact with your prospect. One way to do this is to step away from the 'sales-y' tack and discuss their needs and challenges. This sits at the heart of social selling.

LinkedIn's Head of Global Content Marketing, Alex Hisaka, asks us to "Re-imagine the way all revenue-generating professionals work – where we're engaging with prospects to understand their buying intent signals and address their actual pain points."⁸

As part of this process of getting to know your customer, you develop a sense of community and prove to them you understand their concerns – and turn interactions into relationships that can convert into sales.

What business is your customer in?

To effectively engage in social selling, you need a deep understanding of the business your customer or prospect is in. LinkedIn research on Asia-Pacific buyers found that the top two factors in separating an excellent sales rep from a poor one were knowledge and understanding of the customer's business (see Figure 2).⁹

8. LinkedIn Sales Solutions, Creating a Customer Centric Salesforce

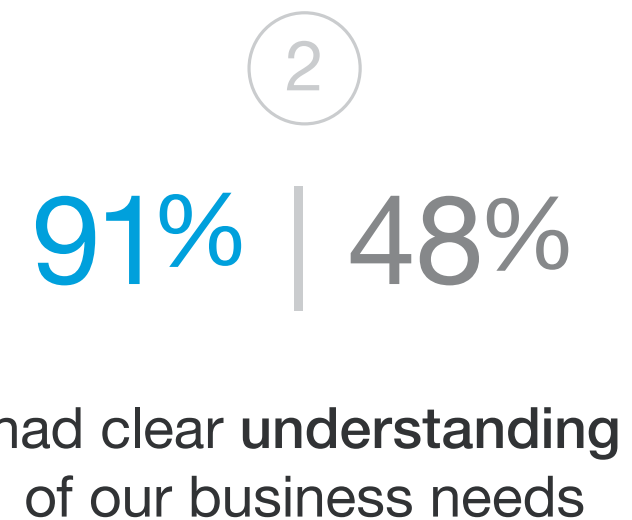
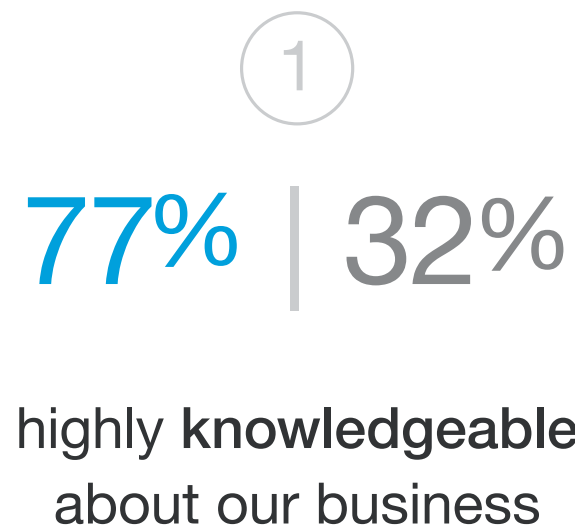
9. LinkedIn, *Influencing B2B Buyers*

Social selling tips:

- Move away from just selling a product.
- Move towards selling a solution that displays an in-depth knowledge of your customer and their pain points.

Figure 2: Social selling actions set sales reps apart*

*The number in blue represents promoters of sales reps' performance; the number in grey represents detractors.



This LinkedIn research also found that deep business knowledge is a driver of a sales professional's Net Promoter Score (NPS). For example, in professional services, having a knowledge of the business was the second most important factor affecting ratings of a sales rep's performance.¹⁰

By understanding your prospect's business, it is much easier to put together a personalised, insightful and ultimately successful sales pitch.

10. LinkedIn, *Influencing B2B Buyers*

Getting familiar with the business

It can be very difficult to get across an entire business. Instead, focus on three key elements to underpin your social selling approach.

Products, services and business profile.

- How does the business make its money?
- Does it offer a range of products or services or is it a niche operation?
- How would you explain the business in simple terms to someone who doesn't know the industry?

Organisation-specific business challenges.

- What are the unique challenges facing this business?
- Is it a takeover target, dealing with a merger or wrestling with the entry of new competitors?
- Are there succession issues or difficulties in attracting key staff?

Broader strategic direction and leadership goals.

- Where is this business heading?
- How well are the business leaders steering the company and in which direction?
- Is the business offering likely to change in the next few years?

Social selling tips:

- Don't try to develop an encyclopaedic knowledge about your prospect's business.
- Focus on what the business sells, its unique challenges and leadership's strategic goals.



What is the nature
of the industry?

As part of their social selling efforts, sales professionals should learn about their customers' industries. Here are the most valuable elements to focus on:

- How competitive is the industry? Is it concentrated with a few large players or highly fragmented with many participants? Does the business compete on price, customer experience or product differentiation?
- Is it easy for new businesses to enter the industry? Here you're assessing the barriers to entry and whether existing businesses have an entrenched competitive advantage.
- How do the businesses interact with their suppliers? Industries with many suppliers are quite different to those where just a few control most of the value in the supply chain.
- What macroeconomic forces are affecting the industry? What is the relationship between the economic cycle and the industry's performance? This element calls for a big-picture view of the industry and its place in the economy.

Once you've assessed these factors, what solutions are businesses putting in place to address these challenges and achieve success? This analysis should encompass the strategic initiatives used by leadership teams and any digital disruptions likely to affect the space.

Social selling tips:

- Knowing about your prospect's business is good; understanding their industry as well is better.
- Have a clear sense of the competitive make-up of the industry, including barriers to entry and macroeconomic forces.
- Research the strategic initiatives and solutions being put in place to address industry challenges.

Turning your social efforts into sales

Armed with this information, you can implement an authentic social selling approach. This can turn an unwelcome cold call into a 'warm call', that is, a relevant and welcomed approach that can turn prospects into sales.

A perfect channel to develop your warm call is through LinkedIn's Sales Navigator. According to LinkedIn research, 70% of buyers want their sales reps to use LinkedIn for social selling activities.¹¹

With more than 450 million members and two new members every second, LinkedIn is the ultimate resource for all customer-facing professionals. LinkedIn Sales Navigator is designed around the needs of sales professionals.

If your role is to acquire new customers or retain existing ones, LinkedIn Sales Navigator can simplify your life. Request a demo today to see how we're changing sales for the better.

Visit us today at business.linkedin.com/sales-solutions.

11. LinkedIn, B2B Research Drivers

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