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Social media guidelines: Who and what is worth your time

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With all of the social media networks out there now it's difficult to keep up, never mind knowing what to do once you've created your profile. I'm asked all the time for advice on which networks should be kept private and which should be used for business networking. For the start of 2013, let's go back to the basics.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is one of my favorite networks and was created in 2003 as a business networking site. The social media tool has now grown to a membership base of over 200 million users. Feel free to connect to people in both your business and personal world. You never know what commonalities you may have with a personal contact. Spend your time networking with business contacts though, not personal. With LinkedIn, I wouldn't advise you to connect with every person that sends you a message, be selective. Remember - your entire LinkedIn network can see who you are connected to so you wouldn't want to connect with someone with poor rapport or someone you barely know. If people want to connect because you share a common group, do some digging, read their profile and then make a decision.

Twitter

Twitter is best known for being a fabulous search tool. Many people have even made Twitter their go-to news source as Twitter always answers the question, "what's happening right now?" For example, the other day there were helicopters flying over my house and police cars flying through the streets of Somerville. I simply jumped on Twitter and searched the hashtag for my town, "#Somerville" and used keywords like helicopter and police. I immediately found 10 tweets from around my neighborhood reporting on what was happening including photos and videos. Twitter is also great because you aren't getting the story skewed by the media, you're getting the news from citizens viewing it first-hand. While searching hashtags, keywords and names, you'll surely start to build your ideal online community from the 500 million+ active users. Use this social site for personal and business TO SEARCH but if you want to connect with people on both a personal and a professional level I would suggest two Twitter accounts. If you want a very personal account, be sure to mark your account as private in settings so people can't find you. Remember, people make connections based on their social graph, which is essentially the summary you write to describe yourself in your profile.

Facebook

With over 1 billion active users since its launch date of 2004, Facebook takes the crown as being the largest social networking service. Facebook originated as a college networking site and has now expanded to allowing businesses to have pages. In general, most people use it as a personal

networking site, but slowly people are adopting the idea of connecting to businesses. They connect either because they have a passion for the company culture and the product, because they want to learn about events or just want the discounts associated with liking the page. Facebook really isn't the place to build your business networking contact database though - stick to LinkedIn.

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