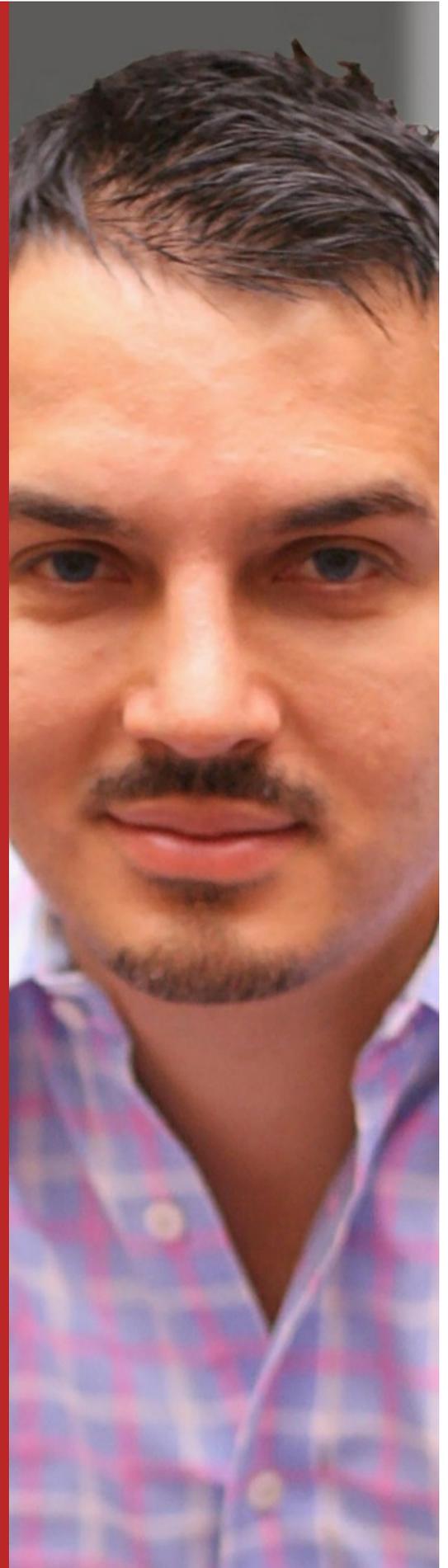




SuperFastBusiness Presents

How To Leverage LinkedIn For Increased Reputation And B2B Sales With Alex Pirouz

How to leverage the power of LinkedIn for increasing reputation, accessing key decision makers and making sales to small and medium enterprises.



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by SuperFastBusiness



Alex Pirouz

James: James Schramko here, welcome back to SuperFastBusiness.com. In our interview series, I like to go out and find experts in different areas of the market, sometimes in even my own area of specialty, so that we can bring in some new knowledge.

Today, we're going to be covering a social media platform, which is the popular business-centric platform of LinkedIn. And I'll confess upfront, it's one that I have very little active knowledge in. I don't really use LinkedIn, I haven't spent the time to understand it. So I've brought in a special guest, Alex Pirouz. Welcome.

Alex: Thanks James, thanks for having me.

James: Now you run a training on LinkedIn. Your site's called Linkfluencer.com, and you approached me with some interesting information about LinkedIn and how some of your success stories have been using it in a nice, organic way. And by that I mean we're not going to be talking about the advertising platform on LinkedIn. We're going to be talking about how to maximise LinkedIn using the more organic features that it has. Because it appears that a lot of people don't really know how to use it.

Alex: Yeah, that's true. We actually did a survey, probably two years ago now, where we reached out to over 1,200 business owners and we realized through that survey that actually more than 85% of them are on LinkedIn but have no clue how to use it. And when I say use it, I'm not talking about features and benefits. More in terms of how to drive business and essentially generate leads.

Why LinkedIn?

James: Well let's just start off by first talking about why should we even consider LinkedIn.

Alex: Good question. So I guess the reason why we, in my opinion the number one reason we all go out there and market our business is to get our message in front of key decision-makers. What a lot of businesses are doing is they're using the traditional forms of advertising and marketing, which I personally think is a little bit outdated. Now when you look at LinkedIn, they've now reached over 300 million people, and 49% of those 300 million users are actually key decision-makers. And there's a lot of buzz around data at the moment and being able to use data to then market to your target market.

Well, LinkedIn actually allows you to look at your target market's profile and then be able to formulate a message that's relevant to what they're currently working on and obviously solve some of those challenges. So that in itself is, I

think, very, very exciting, and there's so many different ways you could use LinkedIn, like getting in front of key decision-makers, building joint venture partnerships and also getting a lot of free press coverage because 94% of journalists are actually on LinkedIn and it's their preferred network.

James: OK, so we really should clarify here. Who are we talking about here as a perfect user of what we're going to be talking about today? You will mention words like SME, which stands for small to medium enterprise, is that right?

Alex: Correct.

James: Now what if we're not an SME but we sell to an SME?

Alex: Yeah, what I've found is the big difference between LinkedIn and Facebook... I think Facebook's more B-to-C...

James: Yup. You mean business to consumer.

Alex: Correct. And then LinkedIn is more business to business, so B-to-B.

James: So if you're a digital marketing agency, if you're a marketing provider, if you are some kind of consultant, coach, expert, and you have business customers, then this is a good platform for you.

Alex: 100%.

The three-step system

James: I know there's some members of my [SuperFastBusiness membership](#) who are doing very well with LinkedIn, and they're doing something to do with groups or associations. But what I'm really interested in finding out from you is how we do this. And I know you've got a three-step system. I'd love you to take us through those steps.

Alex: Yeah, sure. So the three-step system is called "Plan, Connect, Profit." So the first step being Plan, I think a lot of business are on there and they don't actually know why they're on LinkedIn. They might have been told by an associate or might have read an article and then slapped up a profile.

The first couple of steps you need to take in the Plan stage is coming up with your marketing objectives, and then once you're clear on those, then you need to know exactly who you need to connect with to achieve those

objectives. And then once you're clear in terms of your client profile, it's a matter of creating a LinkedIn profile based on the outside-inside approach, you're looking at the top three objections and challenges your clients face and then building a profile around that. And that really is Step 1.

And Step 2, which I call Connect, is all about building your funnel. And the first thing you need to do is segment your contacts, and James, as you know, that's extremely important when you're building a list.

And then once you've segmented your contacts and put them into various folders, because LinkedIn's got a very powerful CRM system, you can then go out and start using the advanced search filter on LinkedIn to be able to find your target market and then once you find them, you start connecting with them and building your sales funnel and we tell all of our clients, make sure that you have at least 400 targeted contacts before you move to step 3, because you just can't test and measure with a hundred.

And then Step 3, now that you've got a funnel of 400, let's say, to use an example it might be lawyers that we're targeting, so Step 3 is the Profit stage, and the first thing you need to do in the Profit stage is come up with a call to action. So once we've built a good relationship with these 400 lawyers, what is our call to action? Is it a seminar, is it a face-to-face meeting, phone meeting, etc.?

And then there's a four-step relationship-building system I created which is called the "rapport bank." So over a series of four different emails, you would provide them rich content that's relevant, and what you're essentially doing is you're just building value and trust. And then at the end of that process you promote your call to action and finally you look at the results that have come through and look at what you can do to improve and systematize the process. So it's all streamlined.

James: Nice. Well, thanks for sharing the three-step system with us, Alex. Now let's put this in practical terms. I want you to tell me about a success story. Tell me how this translates in the real world. What's happened to someone who you've become aware of, what did they do, what sort of results did they get? Step us through that, perhaps.

A LinkedIn case study

Alex: Yeah, sure. So I've worked with a serial entrepreneur by the name of

Creel Price. He exited his last business quite successfully and he wanted to license his business methodology called “Decisionship” out to coaches. And so when we met together he basically said to me that we’re looking to license this to 20 coaches. Using the three-step system that I just mentioned, we went out there and within about 90 days we connected with 3,000 coaches worldwide.

And again what we did was we segmented his contacts, we built his profile, we came up with his marketing objectives, and then that 3,000 we then put them through that four-step process which I mentioned earlier, and literally within probably five months, we generated close to a \$160,000. And not only that, we also as a result of that we set up a trip to go to South Africa because we work closely with the Richard Branson Centre. So all that came about just using the three-step system and we ended up getting 17 coaches on board. We fell three short but that’s one case study out of working with a high net worth entrepreneur.

James: Yeah. Well I imagine if you had a really good business model with 3,000 prospects, if he was running it through something like direct coaching or whatever I’m sure that would have turned into millions of dollars. Hopefully the licensing wasn’t onerous on him.

Alex: Yeah. We were fortunate because we built the right coaching structure around it, and I think we could have, like you said, we could have definitely monetized it a little bit more, but having been in the industry we probably didn’t maximise it as much, but I guess it’s not a bad result considering we didn’t spend a cent on marketing.

The story behind Alex’s media success

James: Right. Well it’s just the time, I suppose. There’s a cost to time. Now give me another example, perhaps in your own case. I think you did something pretty clever with regard to media appearances. I notice on your site there’s lots of media banners, you’ve got the usual Featured in, although Yahoo! I wouldn’t say is a huge claim to fame to be featured on. But you have got other things. You’ve got the The Age, Sky News and Entrepreneur and Inc. and Forbes, how did you generate that publicity for yourself?

Alex: Yeah, so I might actually take Yahoo! down after this phone call, so... (Laughs) I never thought of it.

James: In our industry, in the Internet marketing space, we see people featured in Google and stuff, and it's a bit of a stretch. I think sometimes that can take away. But the more reputable publications, I was really interested in the stat that you had before about how many journalists are on LinkedIn, and how you can use it for media.

And I think that whether you're selling to small to medium businesses as a freelancer or an expert or whether you are a small to medium business, sometimes it's nice to get articles written up or to have a feature, to be in some of these media outlets. It can give you a lot of exposure, but also can credentialize you if that's important to your customers from a trust factor.

Alex: Oh, definitely. So the story behind I guess my success in media was more, when I first started my advisory firm I moved back to Sydney from Wollongong and I really wanted to create some sort of point of difference, because I'd failed in a few businesses but also exited two of them and I thought that was a great differentiator but you've probably seen this yourself, James, there seems to be a coach on every street corner in Australia.

So I went to a couple of media agencies and after the third one I just said, I'm going to do it myself. Stumbled across LinkedIn, at the time I had 50 connections, and I read a report by Artike Media Group which said 94.2% of journalists are actually on LinkedIn. That got me excited, and started connecting with one or two journalists, and literally within three months I had a network of 250 contacts and built a meaningful relationship with a lot of those contacts over the next three months, and I managed to get featured in over 50 publications.

And the powerful thing about that is not just getting media exposure but being able to obviously funnel them into generating new clients and building a database. And just recently, when I launched my current business, because I had already built that network of journalists, I went back to them and literally within three weeks I got featured in 20 publications. So it is something that you can, once you got those relationships, it's not just for your current business but it's for any business moving forward.

James: Right, and I think it's fair to say that as a business owner, you're fairly proactive with getting yourself exposure. I think from memory you contacted me about having a discussion. So you've actually been proactive in seeking message boards for your message to get out, right?

Alex: Yes, exactly.

Some big surprises

James: And what would you say the biggest lesson you learned was when you were doing this publication rampage? What were some of the surprises?

Alex: Well, I think the biggest surprise was the fact that a lot of the journalists I spoke to, and I didn't even think of this, but they're just sick and tired of getting press releases that are not targeted based on what they're currently working on. Essentially what they do every day is they sit down, they go through hundreds of press releases to come up with three or four good story lines, and then they struggle for time and getting in front of experts that they can rely on to comment on their specific articles.

So that's the top two, I guess the two things I learned was that obviously, pressed for time, they don't have access to experts and also they're sick and tired of seeing press releases in their email. So what I did was rather than doing what everyone else was doing, I would connect and build a relationship before I even talk about who I am and whether my story would be a good angle for their publication.

And that worked a treat. And yeah, I've managed to build an emotional relationship rather than a business relationship, and that, I think, has been the difference on why I've succeeded rather than failed.

James: Right, so you've done a two-step process.

Alex: Yeah. Because a lot of small business owners, they connect, and then literally, within the next week, they're hitting up journalists and editors on their story. And as you know, you've got no relationship with that person for them to feature you. So it just doesn't make sense.

James: Yeah, I often get emailed and LinkedIn was just a straight up cold hit. I don't even log into LinkedIn. I don't think I've logged in for months. I couldn't care less about it up until now because I have, well certainly in the services space I've taken very much a wholesale position. I have resellers dealing with the end users but I've wanted to do this discussion for them. I think they should be using LinkedIn significantly.

Another mistake people make

James: And you mentioned one of the big mistakes was having no plan. Tell me another mistake that people make.

Alex: I think segmenting your contacts. So, like I mentioned in the three-step system, LinkedIn's got a very powerful CRM system that allows you to segment your contacts based on various qualities, so for instance when we worked with Creel we segmented the coaches that were coming in based on where they were located. So Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, America etc., So the number 1 key to LinkedIn success in my opinion is making sure that every single communication you have with your contacts, whether it's an invitation to request, or sending them an email, it has to be personalised, and it has to be targeted.

And those two things you can't do if you've got a list of let's say, a thousand, two thousand contacts. And you can't personalize your message because you don't know where all of them are situated and what industry they're in. When I first started, I burnt a lot of contacts. At the time I had 1,500 people in my network and I just wanted to reach a hundred of the contacts that I had in the media. And I had to go through the 1,500 to be able to personalize my message, so it took a long time.

But I also sent the wrong message to people and it just wasn't relevant. So that's I guess another big mistake that people make. I guess most people don't know how to segment their database.

Setting up your profile

James: Right. And tell me, just from a basic perspective, let's say we've got a LinkedIn account because at some point we thought it was a good idea to register, and we're listening to this interview, and we think, "OK, I'd better go and check my LinkedIn and see what's happening." Can you give me some tips in terms of when you first log in, I imagine we should even be paying attention to our own profile, for example. What are the immediate things that we should pay attention to?

Alex: Yeah. Before even segmenting your contacts, I would definitely be looking at your profile. And the interesting thing is because LinkedIn has become such a big network, when people Google your name, most often your website won't even be the first thing people look at. It will be your LinkedIn

profile. And if they look at your profile and it's not, it doesn't resonate with them, show them how you can potentially solve their challenge, that's where you're going to lose a lot of people. So I would definitely be working on your profile and there's a ton of things you could do to it, and I'm happy to go through a couple if you think that would be of value.

James: Well, I think we should, yeah, alright, let's talk about that.

Alex: Awesome. So, yeah, the first thing is coming up with a compelling headline. So putting "Director at XYZ Company" is just not going to fit because that's not what people are searching for on LinkedIn. And there's actually over a billion searches per day on LinkedIn for names and companies. So you have to kind of think from an SEO standpoint. So if you come from that mindset you got to think, "What would my target market normally be putting into Google to search for my service?" And then once you have five or six of those keywords, you would then put that into your headline. And try not to make it sound too sales-ey.

I've seen like essays on headlines where they'd say, I help people create millions of dollars over three years, whatever that might be, but just try not to make it too sales-ey. Obviously, a great professional photo helps. So the first three areas people look at is your photo, your headline, and then your summary. Now your summary, in my opinion, needs to be in story format written in third person, and it really needs to convey a few things. So the story line needs to be past, present and future.

So how did you start in business, how have you transitioned to where you are, and that's where you put in your key achievements, failures, any publications you've been featured in, etc., and then you finish off by essentially writing what you're currently working on. And that's like the three most important parts that I would work on to begin with. And then there's also this skills and endorsements section and if you go to most people's profile, they'll have 30 to 40 different endorsements which they've accepted over time.

And the problem with that is you get seen as a generalist rather than a specialist. So I always recommend having only three to five endorsements from a person or branding perspective, and those have to again be relevant to your target market and the challenges and objections that they have. I could literally go on for another 20 minutes, but they're like the top four or five things I would do.

Getting recommendations

James: If you did go for another 20 minutes, what would the main things you would have talked about been?

Alex: Recommendations. So I think what most people do, they just go out there and ask for recommendations, but my recommendation would be to go out there and again ask for recommendations based on those top three challenges or objections. And be very clear. So when you're asking for a recommendation, this is very powerful, it's actually three times more powerful. Having your LinkedIn recommendation is three times more powerful than the one on your website, because most people don't believe what you put on your website as much as something they see on a social network.

So, very, very powerful to have a list of recommendations on your profile that resonate to your target market. And again what I have done is I've researched. When I first started building my recommendations I looked at the top 50 business advisors on LinkedIn, and then I looked at the number of recommendations they had each, and through that I got an average, and my aim was to then double that average, so that way when someone comes to my profile I already stand out from the pack and I've managed to work that to 110 recommendations so far.

James: Wow. That's pretty effective.

Alex: Yeah. So what else can we talk about? Experiences. So if you have experiences that you've written – I should say work experience, if you've got work experience that you've written and it's not aligned to what you're currently working on, so if you worked on this 20 years ago and it's not relevant, I'd personally take it out and only have work experiences that are relative to what you're currently providing.

James: So we're talking about the difference between a CV and a compelling sales dossier.

Alex: Exactly. Yeah.

James: So do you think some people are just using LinkedIn like a resume, hoping to get headhunted or something? There's a lot of employers on there, right?

Alex: Yeah, exactly.

James: So I guess some of those employers would be key decision-makers that we want to access for whatever reason.

Alex: Yes.

James: Especially journalists. But maybe purchasing officers or technology and marketing chiefs who would be decision makers on solutions we could sell.

Alex: Exactly. Yeah.

James: So how do we get in touch with those people and have them wanting what we have?

Alex: Yeah, so, I touched on this briefly. It's called the advance search filter. So at the top of your LinkedIn profile there's a link. For you to use this feature you probably need to upgrade to the premium package. I'm currently paying, I think it's \$29.99 per month, and what that does is it allows you to search a lot deeper in terms of targeting the key individuals you want to connect with.

Once you click on that advanced search filter, it will bring up, I think it's a section where you basically put in keywords, you put in the title of the person you're looking for, you can also search by Sydney, Melbourne, Las Vegas, whatever that might be, and so many other factors like do you want it searched 2nd or 3rd degree connections, what's their seniority level, how big, which the company size of the person you're looking for.

I will say to our members that you should always look at and play around with the advanced search criteria to come up with the one that's going to drive them the most amount of possible connections within that search. So your first search, you might bring up 50 to 100 lawyers in Sydney as an example but by the time you go through your 10th search, you might find that you played around with the keywords or the location or the company size, and then now you've got access to 5,000 or 2,000 contacts. Yeah, that's what I would do.

James: Great! All right. What question should I be asking you that I don't know to ask because I'm not a LinkedIn user?

What questions should you be asking?

Alex: Yeah. Interesting question, I've never actually been asked that.

James: I hope I'm not asking the same dribble that everyone has asked. I want to thrill and delight our audience with this rollercoaster of unusual questioning.

Alex: Sure. So what questions should you be asking? I guess the first thing is, the first question we get, we ask a lot of our members is, "What are your marketing objectives over the next 6 to 12 months?"

So that's like, before you do anything, and I would dare to say, before you kind of login and design your profile, really sit down and figure out specifically what are you looking to achieve over the next 6 to 12 months, and then based on that, everything else will become a lot more clearer.

So that's the first question I would ask myself, "What am I looking to achieve in the next 6 to 12 months?" I should also mention that will make sure that your purpose and your objectives on spending time on LinkedIn will be a lot more clearer.

James: Yes. I think starting with the end in mind is always a good idea. OK, so to bring things to a close, what is our action steps list for someone listening to this interview? They've got or are going to get a LinkedIn account, they sell or are a small to medium enterprise, they get it.

They're like "Alex, yes. I love it, I want to connect, I want to profit, I want to meet journalists who can put me in huge publications, I want to get access to key decision-makers, I want to sell like crazy to the right audience for my stuff, I'm going to make my profile super compelling and I promise to segment my customer list." So what does it look like if we were like step 1, step 2.

Action steps

Alex: Sure. So step 1 again, sit down, and I'm assuming mostly your community would already have a pretty good understanding of the marketing objectives; so once that's clear, get an understanding of three things. If you know your marketing objectives, then you've got to look and think OK, as an example, I'm a business adviser and my target market are lawyers, I would think in three different ways.

So one, “How can I start connecting with lawyers and building that funnel 101?” Two, “Where are my lawyers going before, during, and after my own service and how can I build JV partners with those companies?” And then three, “Which publications are lawyers reading and connecting with journalists and editors within those publications and building those relationships?”

So once you’re clear on that, it becomes so much easier. From there, you build your LinkedIn profile, make sure that’s compelling based on what we’ve talked about, segment your contacts, start connecting with that called target market and email market to them.

James: Beautiful. Well thank you so much for spending the time talking about this platform. It’s part of a series that I do. I’ve spoken to experts on Pinterest, I’ve spoken to experts on Facebook, I’ve spoken to experts on Instagram, and now we’ve covered LinkedIn, which is great, because we’re just accessing different marketing channels, which will serve some of our audience wonderfully.

So thank you so much Alex for popping by. That’s Alex Pirouz from linkfluencer.com. I’ve really enjoyed finding out about LinkedIn.

Alex: Thank you for having me.



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