

How to Build a Professional Student LinkedIn Profile

Think of your LinkedIn profile as an interactive business card. It's a summary of your professional experience, interests, and capabilities that is designed to attract the attention of important people who are searching for you online — recruiters, networking contacts, and grad school admissions officers. A strong profile is a key differentiator in the job market. So let's get started...

1. Craft an informative profile headline

Your profile headline gives people a short, memorable way to understand who you are in a professional context. Think of the headline as the slogan for your professional brand, such as "Student, National University" or "Recent honors grad seeking marketing position." Check out the profiles of students and recent alums you admire for ideas and inspiration.

2. Display an appropriate photo

Remember that LinkedIn is not Facebook or MySpace. If you choose to post a photograph — and we recommend that you do — select a professional, high-quality headshot of you alone. Party photos, cartoon avatars, and cute pics of your puppy don't fit in the professional environment of LinkedIn.

3. Show off your education

Be sure to include information about all institutions you've attended. Include your major and minor if you have one, as well as highlights of your activities. It's also appropriate to include study abroad programs and summer institutes. Don't be shy — your LinkedIn profile is an appropriate place to show off your strong GPA and any honors or awards you've won.

4. Develop a professional summary statement

Your summary statement should resemble the first few paragraphs of your best-written cover letter — concise and confident about your goals and qualifications. Remember to include relevant internships, volunteer work, and extra curriculars. Present your summary statement in short blocks of text for easy reading. Bullet points are great, too.

5. Fill your "Specialties" section with keywords

"Specialties" is the place to include key words and phrases that a recruiter or hiring manager might type into a search engine to find a person like you. The best place to find relevant keywords is in the job listings that appeal to you and the LinkedIn profiles of people who currently hold the kinds of positions you want.

6. Update your status weekly

A great way to stay on other people's radar screens and enhance your professional image is to update your status at least once a week. Tell people about events you're attending, major projects you've completed, professional books you're reading, or any other news that you would tell someone at a networking reception or on a quick catch-up phone call.

7. Show your connectedness with LinkedIn Group badges

Joining Groups and displaying the group badges on your profile are the perfect ways to fill out the professionalism of your profile and show your desire to connect to people with whom you have something in common. Most students start by joining their university's LinkedIn group as well as the larger industry groups related to the career they want to pursue.

8. Collect diverse recommendations

Nothing builds credibility like third-party endorsements. The most impressive LinkedIn profiles have at least one recommendation associated with each position a person has held. Think about soliciting recommendations from professors, internship coordinators and colleagues, employers, and professional mentors.

9. Claim your unique LinkedIn URL

To increase the professional results that appear when people type your name into a search engine, set your LinkedIn profile to "public" and claim a unique URL for your profile (for example: www.linkedin.com/in/yourname). This also makes it easier to include your LinkedIn URL in your email signature, which is a great way to demonstrate your professionalism.

10. Share your work

A final way to enhance your LinkedIn profile is to add examples of your writing, design work, or other accomplishments by displaying URLs or adding LinkedIn Applications. By including URLs, you can direct people to your website, blog, or Twitter feed. Through Applications, you can share a PowerPoint or store a downloadable version of your resume.
