

# LinkedIn Can Be Best for Brands, Provided You Understand What Brands Really Are

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When planning brand campaigns, LinkedIn is a little like the Ernie Hudson of social media, the fourth Ghostbuster people often overlook, in relation to higher-profile rivals like Facebook and Twitter.

But this is misguided, since it's clearly the platform that will generate the most ROI from a messaging perspective, particularly for business-to-business campaigns. As higher-profile platforms become more antisocial, amid Twitter's increasingly toxic discourse and the perfect-life fantasylands of Facebook and Instagram, LinkedIn stands out in the social media world for its decorum and the high level of its audience.

Still, marketers and PR professionals often insist that LinkedIn isn't a great place for brands. Brands have trouble establishing a voice or engaging directly with audiences in the way that they can on, say, Instagram or Twitter. What they really mean is that brands themselves have trouble presenting a manageable message. LinkedIn is, at its core, a site of *curricula vitae* and the thoughts around them, a collection of professional people who want to interact with other professionals in a way specifically designed to help their careers and businesses. Brands themselves are represented in a relatively flat way, positioned as well-manicured waypoints in a range of users' careers. So, marketers concerned primarily with brand promotion often ignore LinkedIn, taking the express

train to Facebook.

Yet, making LinkedIn an afterthought to most social campaigns misses the broader point about what brands are. Brands aren't a *what* but rather a *who*. LinkedIn is perfect for brands, provided you remember that brands are a compilation of the people who evangelize them, rather than a set of corporate ideas. After all, principles are hollow if no one lives up to them. Brands can actually make a stronger connection with audiences on LinkedIn because the site is designed for deep connection between individuals. When people connect, they have transparency into both their professional backgrounds and level of connection with others. You know your audience better, on a playing field where they're on their best professional behavior and, more importantly, ready to do business. This level of engagement is guaranteed to have better outcomes.

Of course, that also means that campaigns need to be way more sophisticated on LinkedIn than on other platforms. For one thing, the people on LinkedIn are better informed. In a business media environment riddled with startup-y hustleporn or leadership advice peddled by shut-ins who never even led a conga line, LinkedIn stands out in the quality of the information its users enjoy and demand. Sharing best practices and real-world experiences in real time far exceeds being told for the hundredth time that hustle beats talent. (Try asking your cardiac surgeon whether she lives by hustle or talent.) This level and tone of conversation is why users rarely have LinkedIn fatigue the way they do on Twitter and Facebook, at least nothing more than a good 18 holes could cure in an afternoon.

It's also why, as in all matters of effective messaging, authenticity is so important. Instead of campaigns based on brand messaging, effective use of LinkedIn needs to be built around the people in your organization. That means finding the right people to carry the message in an effective, authentic

way. You need to arm them with more than just compliance-approved thought leadership, instead incorporating these executives' actual thoughts and leadership into your campaigns. If you allow the people to shine, the brand halo will follow.

That might not be easy to do for a lot of corporate marketing folks, particularly those who have grown up on the flash-and-burn, influencer-sodden tripe that's common in most social media brand campaigns. But, particularly in the business-to-business space, LinkedIn should be the straw that stirs the drink of any campaign. Ignore it at your peril.



**About the Author:** An accomplished journalist and business leader, Ray oversees all of JConnelly's service teams, providing strategic guidance and support to the agency and its clients.

With more than 25 years of media, marketing and management experience, Ray has spent his career at the convergence of traditional and emerging communications channels. He most recently served as JConnelly's Chief Innovation Officer, developing technology and content platforms for a variety of clients. Before that, he served as Editorial Director for Entrepreneur, where he launched the Entrepreneur360 and Top Company Culture franchises, as well as the Entrepreneur Network video channel.

Previously, Ray helped launch the FOX Business Network, where he served as founding Business News Director. Earlier in his career, he was editor at SmartMoney.com and Dow Jones, a daily on-air contributor at CNBC and the IPO columnist at The Wall

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