

# 6 Ways to Use LinkedIn to Boost Fundraising



Imagine 118 million Americans sharing details of their professional lives and interests, titles and education, and board service and volunteer experience — directly to your donor database.

That's how some fundraisers view the social network LinkedIn: a giant storehouse of accurate, up-to-date information ready for their use.

"I find these tools extremely valuable," says Joop Rubens, senior director of development for the library at the University of California at Santa Cruz. "I could hardly do my job without LinkedIn."

While the network may not be used widely for direct appeals as other sites are, the information it contains can aid so many of the traditional tasks of fundraising: finding new connections, learning about prospective donors, and building relationships.

We spoke to a number of fundraisers about how they use the network. What follows is their advice, much of which you can use immediately with a free account on the site.

**Fill in the blanks in donor data.** The more you know about a donor, the better. And when a donor provides the information, it's likely to be correct.

A prospective donor's LinkedIn profile "is going to be fairly accurate and up-to-date," says Qaya Thompson, a development researcher at Yale-New Haven Hospital. She looks at the profiles of prospects to add to and confirm information in her organization's database. That includes job titles, schools they attended, boards they sit on, groups they belong to on LinkedIn, personal and professional interests, and even their headshots.

That information can help a fundraiser find a connection or piece together information that isn't available elsewhere. For example, Ms. Thompson says, graduation dates and a professional history can help her determine a donor's age.

Similarly, Mr. Rubens says he looks at the employment history of prospective donors who live in Silicon Valley to see if they worked at a technology startup in its early days, when employees are often given stock as compensation. If the company has since gone public, he can better gauge a person's ability to give.

**Look for reasons to reach out.** Kate Parker, associate director of development at the University of New Hampshire's Peter T. Paul College of Business and Economics, says she uses LinkedIn at least 10 hours a week, mostly to build relationships with her donors.

She looks for changes in location or job, promotions, and other profile updates, any of which can be a nice "touchpoint," she says, offering a reason to reach out to a donor, congratulate him or her, or see how the person is doing.

**Connect to your board members' networks.** If you've ever asked a board member to make introductions to colleagues and contacts who could become donors or supporters, you may have been met with silence.

"When you say, 'Hey, board member, who do you know?' you get blank stares," says Nathan Hand, director of advancement at the Oaks Academy, an Indianapolis private school that serves mostly low-income children.

So Mr. Hand started connecting with his board on LinkedIn and scouting their networks. Before a recent meeting with a board member who had agreed to make introductions, he put together a list of seven promising names from the board member's LinkedIn connections.

Mr. Hand says they spent their time together talking about ways to make introductions — not brainstorming a list of contacts.

He also asks all of his board members to list their board service high in their profile, possibly even in their professional headline, to stress the importance of their role with the organization and to build awareness and credibility for the school.

**Identify prospects to meet in person.** When Ms. Parker plans a trip to meet with prospective donors, she schedules two or three "anchor visits" and fills in around those appointments, usually with people she finds through LinkedIn.

When she travels to New York, for example, she will often board the train in Boston, do a search on LinkedIn for alumni in specific career fields, and reach out to potential donors through the network to let them know she would like to meet.

On a recent trip, she says, she left the station in Massachusetts with four visits scheduled, and had arranged seven more by the end of her train ride.

Even when a prospect she is visiting suggests another potential supporter to meet, she usually makes her introduction through the social network instead of over the phone or through email.

“It’s a much more comfortable first place for a donor to start talking about your institution than a cold call,” Ms. Parker says.

**□ Find board members and volunteers with the right skills.** As founding director of Uhambo USA, a group that supports the work of a South African disability organization of the same name, Lucinda Kerschensteiner relies on LinkedIn to help find board members and volunteers across America.

At least five of her organization’s board members were recruited through the social network, along with four volunteer “advisers” who contribute their professional skills to the organization for free.

She says she uses LinkedIn like a headhunter, searching for the skills she needs, looking for signs that a person is willing to serve on a board, and checking past experience — especially any work done in Africa.

She then sends a message through the site to introduce her organization to the candidate and ask if he or she would like to help.

That’s how she recruited Mr. Rubens, the fundraiser at University of California at Santa Cruz, to serve on her board: She was looking for fundraising help from people who had experience working with Africa-focused nonprofits.

“That clearly wouldn’t have happened if it wasn’t for LinkedIn,” Mr. Rubens says. “I’ve now given [money] to the organization.”

**□ Import data in bulk.** The most advanced nonprofit efforts are those that use LinkedIn to collect thousands of records to find potential supporters flying under the radar.

That’s what Concordia University, in Montreal, did this spring. The university hired a data firm to search LinkedIn for people with connections to the campus. The search returned about 20,000 records after eliminating people who went to another Concordia University or had duplicate profiles. The service cost about 10 cents for each record.

Paloma Gonzalez, manager of prospect development for advancement and alumni relations at Concordia, says her department then ran in-house models on the profile information, whittling the list down to about 1,500 to 2,000 people most likely to have strong ties to the

university. That list was further rated and vetted by three student employees.

“What it would have taken for us to do it manually ... you would have had to hire a team of researchers,” Ms. Gonzalez says.

The results will be handed over to the university’s fundraisers and alumni affairs staff soon, says Gilbert Tordjman, executive director of advancement services at Concordia. Staff might then identify alumni networks in unexpected places, better mobilize young donors with big social-media presences to promote the institution, or make better, more targeted appeals.

“It’s about finding them the right place within Concordia,” Mr. Tordjman says.