How to Master B2B Lead Generation With LinkedIn Groups

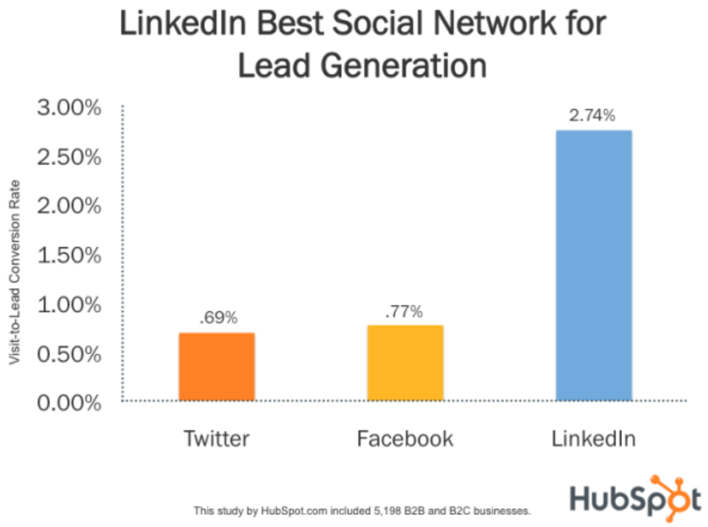
Your step-by-step, actionable guide

for sales and marketing professionals

to grow your following of potential customers on LinkedIn.

First things first: LinkedIn, especially if you are marketing and selling a B2B solution, is by far the most effective source of leads than other social media networks. Don't just take my word for it, here are the numbers:

LinkedIn generated the highest visitor-to-lead conversion rate at 2.74%, almost 3 times higher (277%) than both Twitter (.69%) and Facebook (.77%).



Now let me ask you a question:

How many customers, business opportunities, sales leads did you get from LinkedIn last year?

If you didn't get any or only a few, don't worry – it doesn't happen by itself however there is a deliberate pathway, that I will show you in a minute, that you can follow to make LinkedIn a MAJOR source of sales opportunities for you.

If you are like most other people and like me at some point in the past, you probably joined Linkedin some 3-5 years ago… uploaded your photo, filled out basic profile information and invited your friends and colleagues to join. You may have joined a few relevant groups and tried to reach out directly to potential clients, with little or no success.

And yet, if you are reading this report, then chances are you certainly wondered why some organization are literally "killing it" on LinkedIn, driving massive amounts of targeted, high-converting traffic from LinkedIn that they turn into paying customers down the line. And you are left wondering if your investment of time and effort in LinkedIn is nothing but a waste of time.

The difference is that they know and follow a distinct, simple, yet non-obvious set of rules and tactics that I will share with you in a minute.

If you follow them, LinkedIn in general, and LinkedIn Groups in particular, can become your most vital source for highly focused and engaged sales leads.

However, most LinkedIn members approach groups the wrong way:

- They join only a handful of groups
- They try to post promotional material in groups and get little or no traction; or, worse, get banned from the group
- They give up

I will show you exactly the easy steps you can follow to turn things around so that you see get the most ROI on investment of your time and efforts into LinkedIn Platform.

First, let's briefly go over basics:

1. LinkedIn Groups are NOT for selling your products or services. Let me repeat:

   "LinkedIn Groups are not for selling."

   Any attempt to pitch LinkedIn group members to buy your solution will quickly get you in trouble with group members, group administrators and/or Linkedin itself.

2. The main objective of your actions on LinkedIn is to:

   a. Identify and join target-rich groups on LinkedIn.

   b. Establish a relationship with relevant group members and group administrators by positioning yourself as a thought leader and a "trusted advisor".

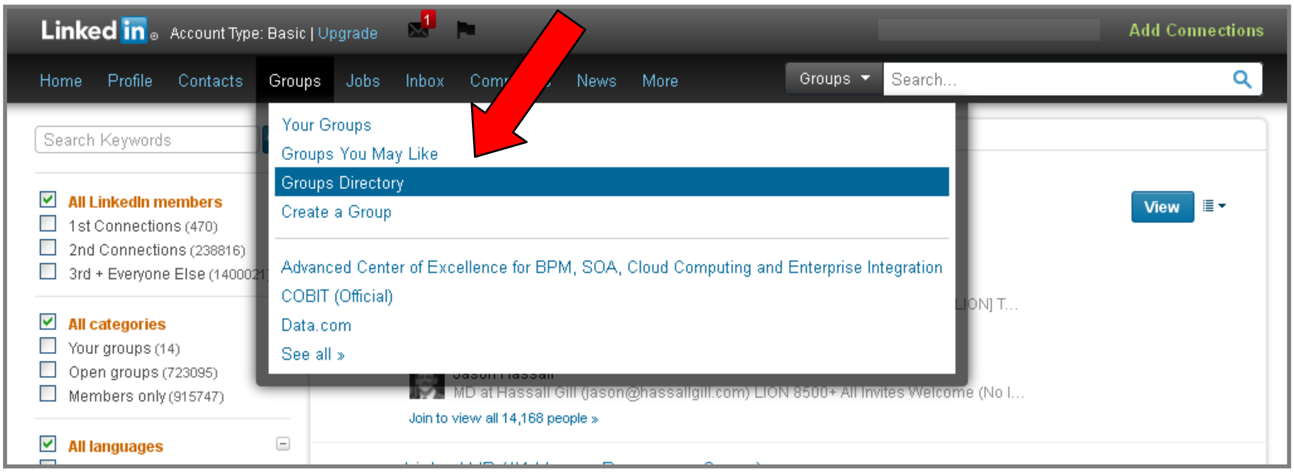
   c. Provide value to group members for FREE and eventually drive them to relevant landing pages **outside of Linkedin** where you can capture their email address to continue nurturing and selling outside of LinkedIn via email.

3. You can accomplish this objective by creating and/or curating unique, relevant and valuable content for members of LinkedIn groups.

I will show you exactly how you can do each of these steps in a minute.

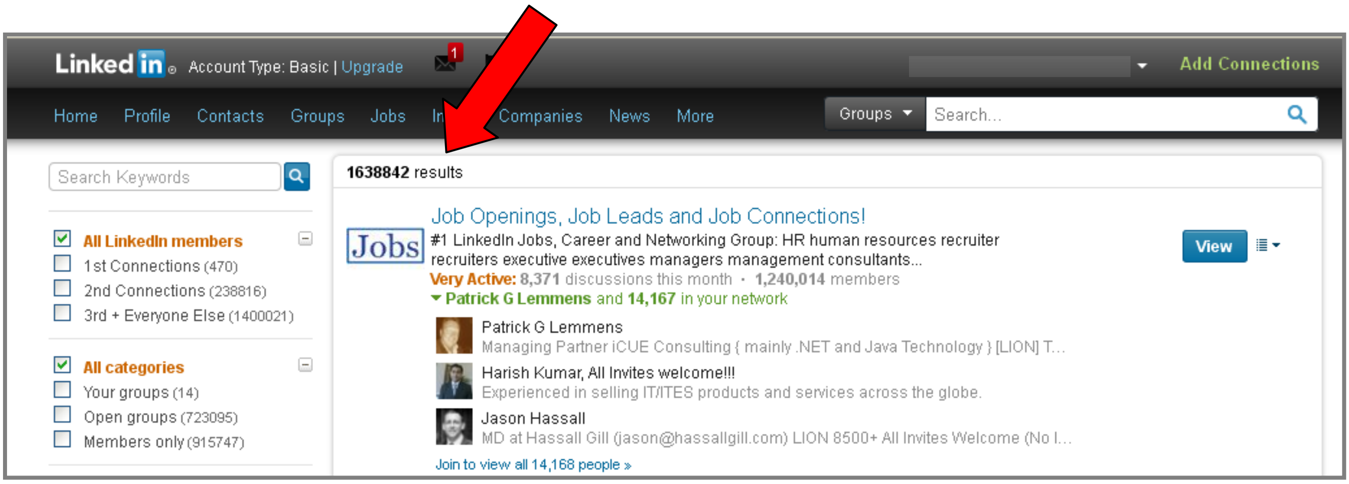
Identify and Join Target-Rich Groups on LinkedIn

First, once you login to your LinkedIn profile, go to Groups > Groups Directory



As you see, you can chose from 1,638,842 groups!

As you probably know, LinkedIn only allows you to join 50. Not to worry, we will sort through which groups you should join in no time.



Now, there are several ways you can go about choosing which groups to join:

1. Keyword Search

First option that you can use is a keyword search.

Now, let’s say, you sell ERP systems to Chief Information Officers at hospitals. You can start by searching groups with keywords:

- “Healthcare IT”
- “Chief Information Officer”
- “Hospitals IT”

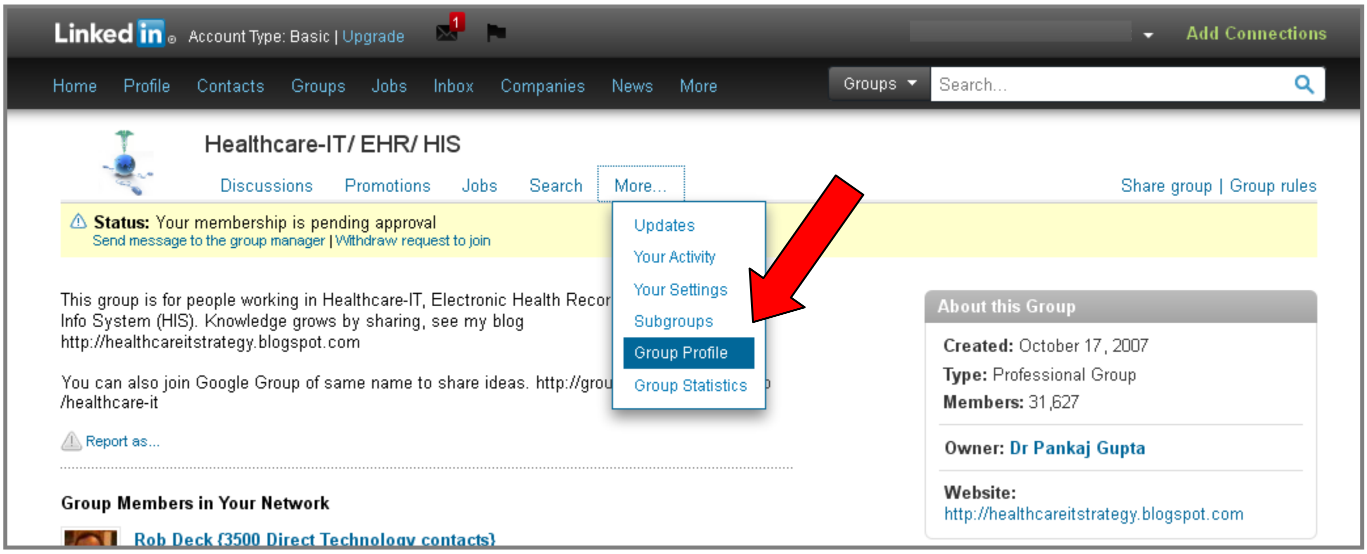
- “Healthcare ERP”

You get the idea. See how many groups come up and if the group look relevant, save in an excel file – I will explain in a second how you will use this data to rank group that you’d need to join.

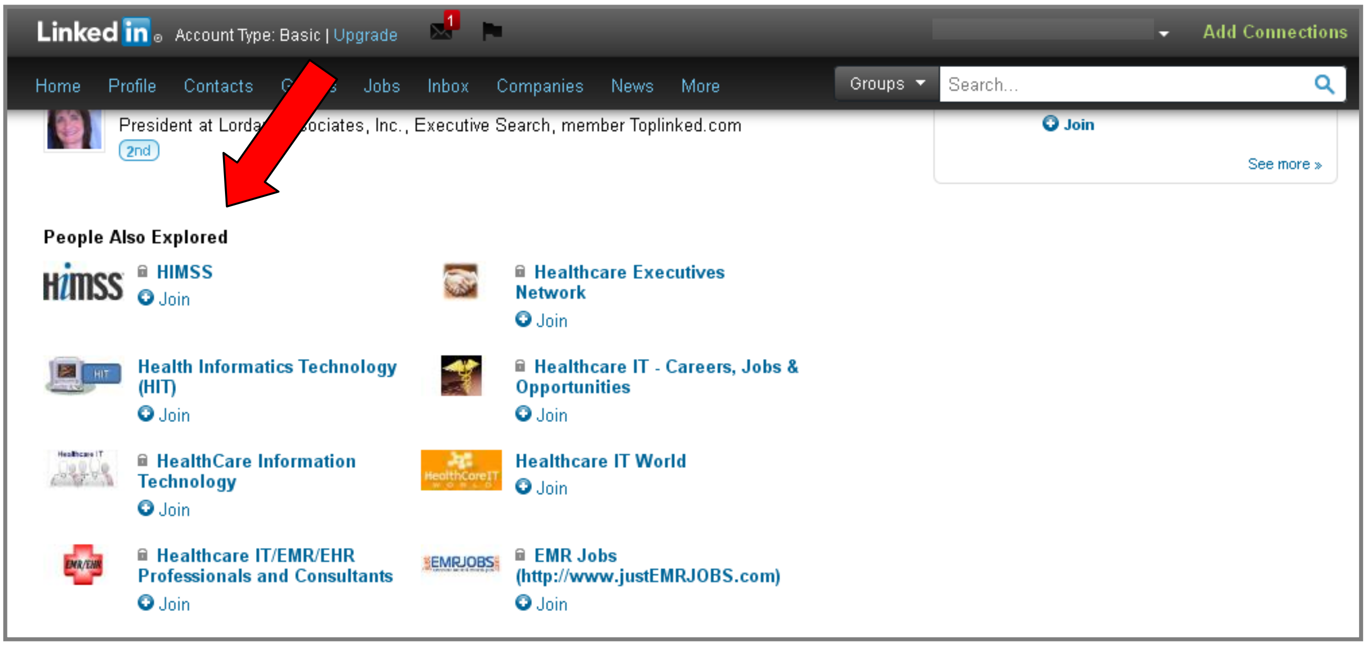
2. “You May Also Like”

Let’s say, you’ve found a “Healthcare IT” group. Now, LinkedIn has a suggestion tool that puts similar groups together.

Go to the Group Page > More > Group Profile



Then scroll down and you will get to the “People Also Explored” section that lists similar groups. These are your prime targets:



3. Client Profiling

Go ahead and make a list of your current clients, best prospects and leads and then find them on LinkedIn. I am not asking you to invite them to connect though.

Even though you are probably connected to a good number of them anyway.

Once you get some 50 people on your list, rank them in terms of how representative they are of your “ideal client” – in terms of title, size of the organization, geographic location, and industry.

Once you ranked them, pick top 20 people on your list and locate their LinkedIn profiles. When you get to a profile, scroll all the way down and you will see the list of groups this person belongs to. Make a list of these groups.

Get this information for each of the 20 people on your list. Then, from this list of groups find 50 groups that appear most often. These 50 groups are in essence, what I’d call, “target-rich” for you.

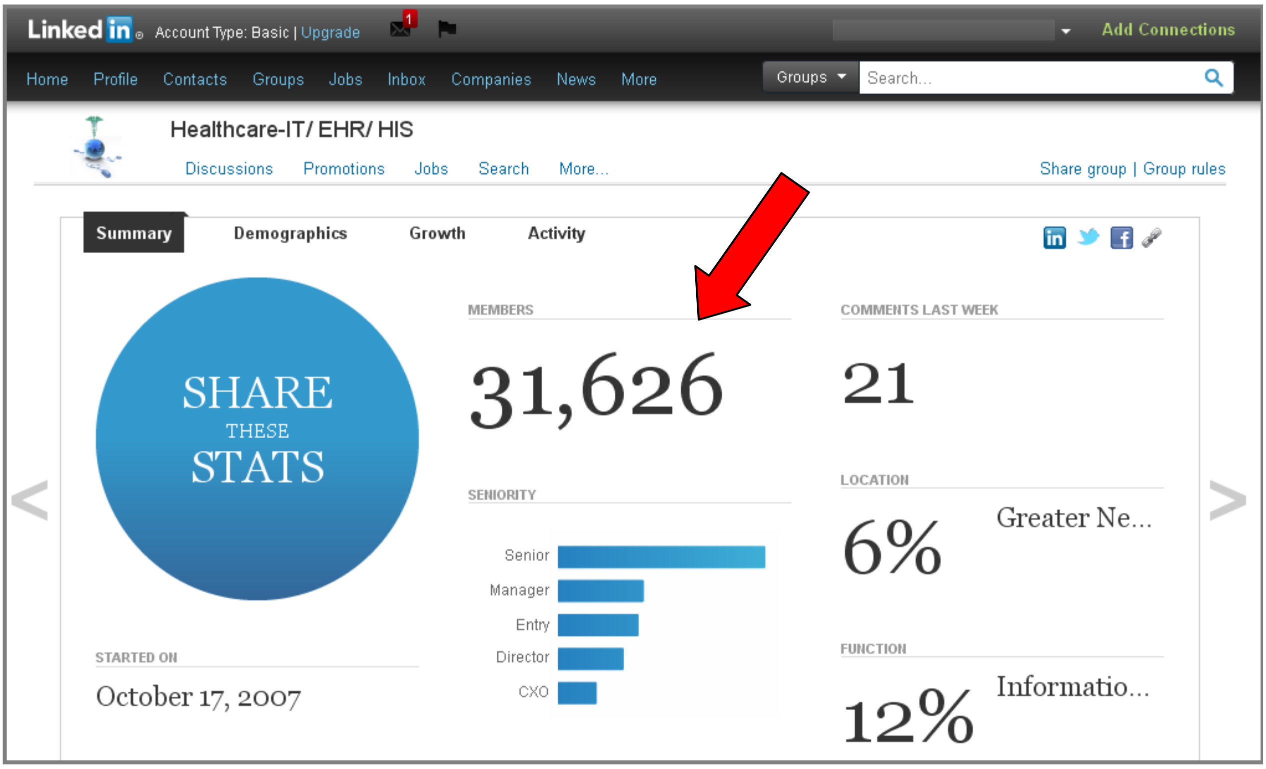
Now, should you go join them? Not yet. First, let’s find out which one make the most sense for you.

Yes, now is the time to rank them:

Let’s say from these three steps you got 200+ groups that look relevant and target-rich. Now, how do you rank them to make sure that you use your allocation of 50 groups wisely?

The three parameters you look at are:

1. Group Size – usually, the bigger the group, the better.

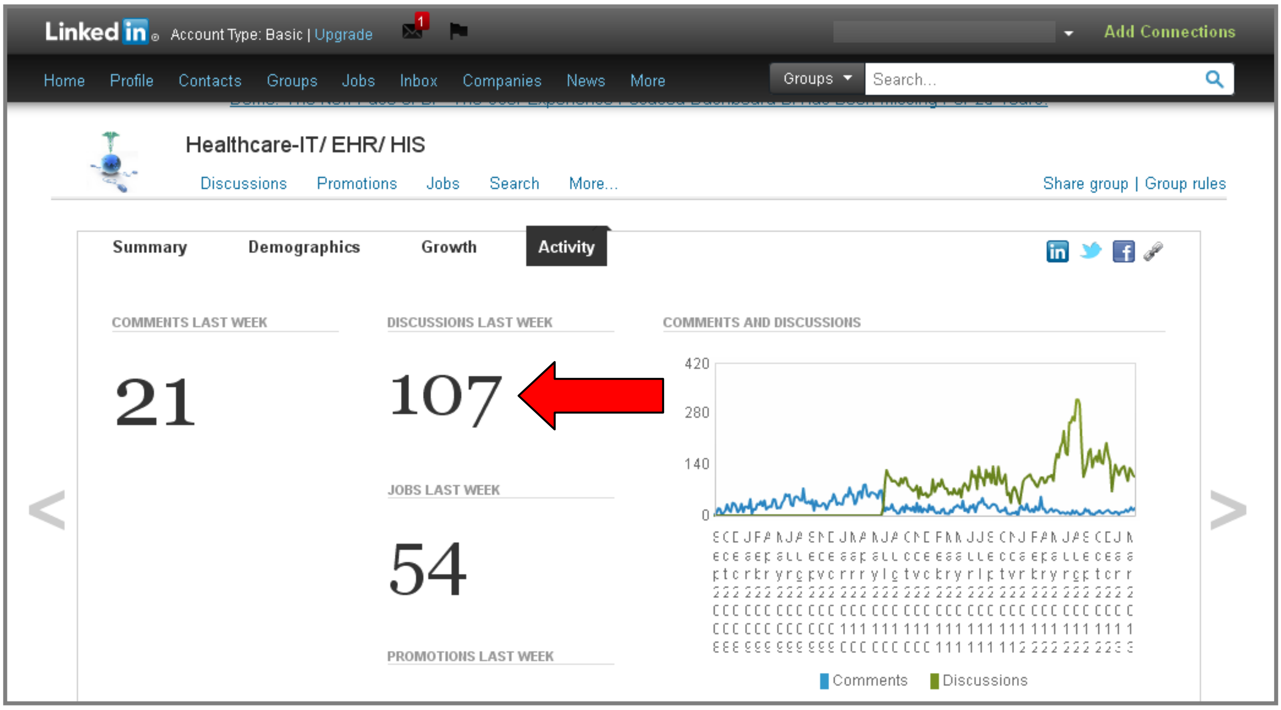


2. Activity

Groups do go stale. Their administrators get lazy or move on to other projects, they get over-run by spammers, etc.

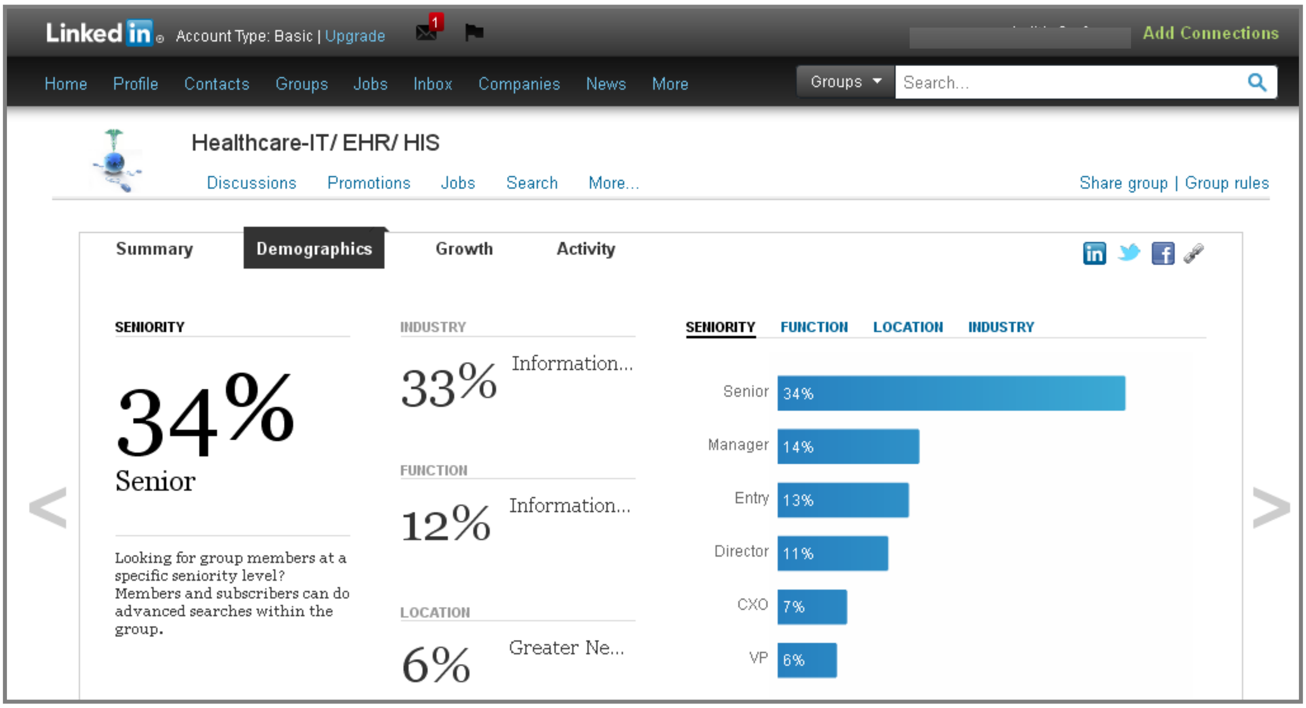
So, before you decide on which group to join, check how many discussions get started every week.

Again, the more the better.

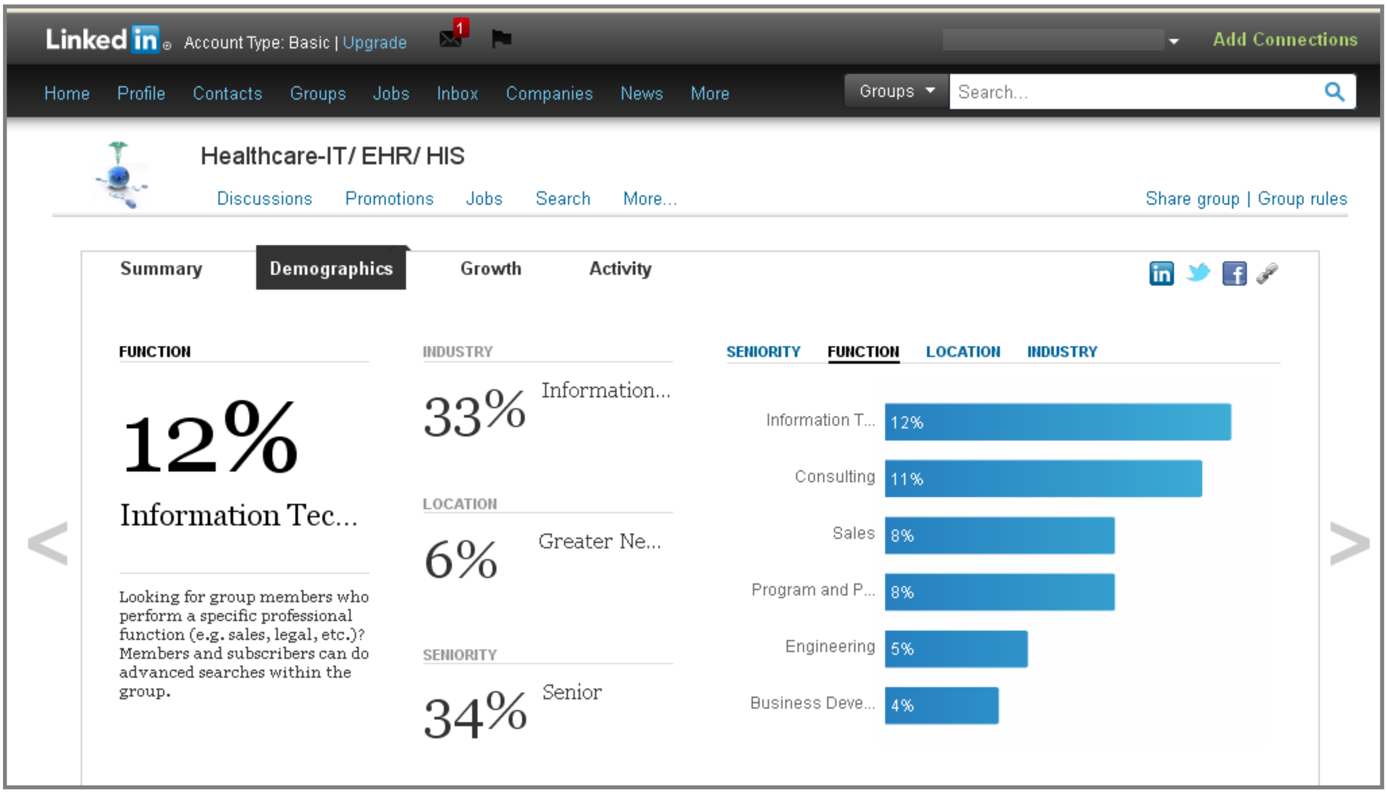


3. Demographics

How close do group demographic match with your ideal target market? You can research the group before joining. Specifically, you can find out how senior the group members are:



...what function they represent:



Where they are located in the world, what industry they are coming from and more.

Once you've researched and ranked all your groups, pick the top 75. I know that you have an allocation of only 50 groups that you can join, and this is a hard limit imposed by LinkedIn.

However, let's face it – not every group is going to accept you as a member. So let's build in some cushion to fall back on to.

Now simply go to each group's profile and click "Join".

Some groups will accept your application right away and you will get a notification to that effect. For other groups, you'd have to be approved and you will get a message saying "Your request is received".

Then the owner or the administrator of the group will review your application and you will get accepted, rejected or, in some cases, ignored.

In case your group application is still in "Pending" status after 2 weeks, you can either contact the group owner with a "Hey, I applied and haven't heard back, please accept my application." Or you can withdraw your application and go to another group.

Once You Get Accepted

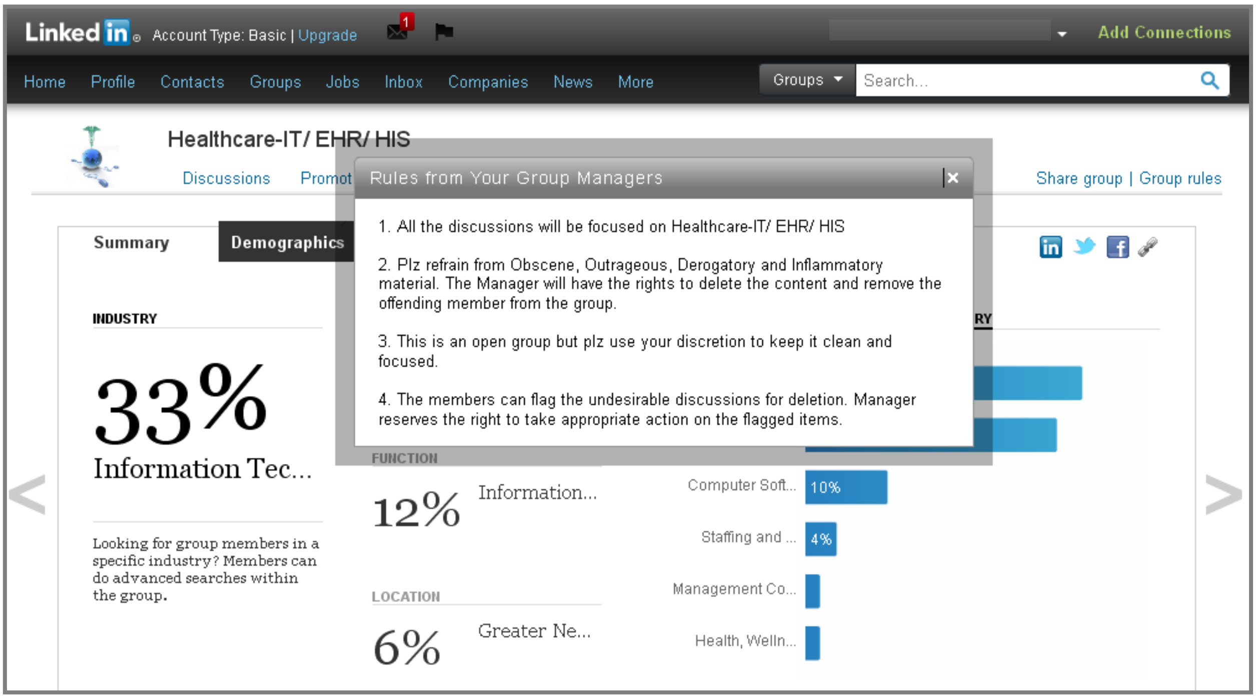
LinkedIn

Before we go into content strategy on LinkedIn, let me just say this:

The key to success with LinkedIn Groups is to learn and play by the rules of the sandbox, follow the leaders and “give, give, give, give, give, give … before you ask”.

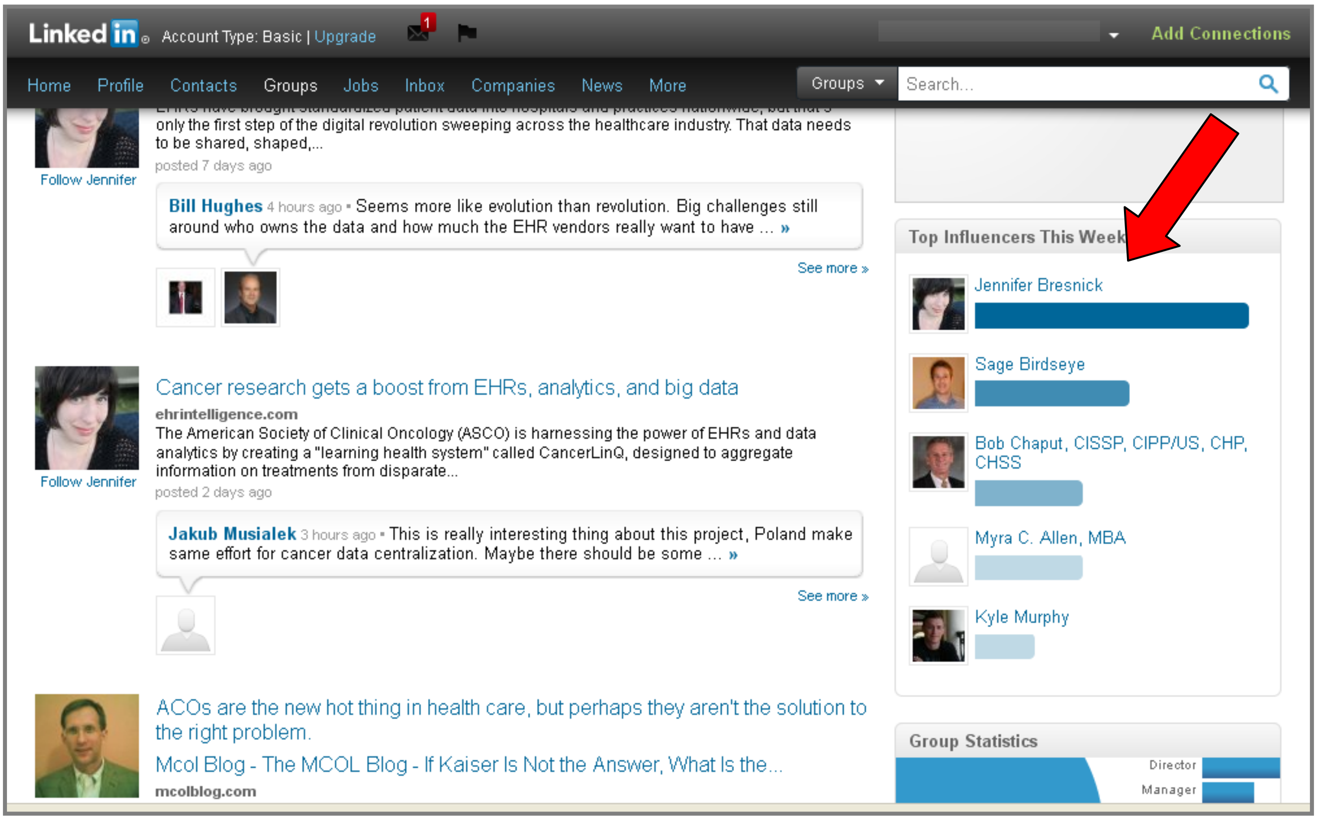
Now, let’s review the most vital elements of your LinkedIn strategy:

1. Review Group Rules



2. Follow the leader(s)

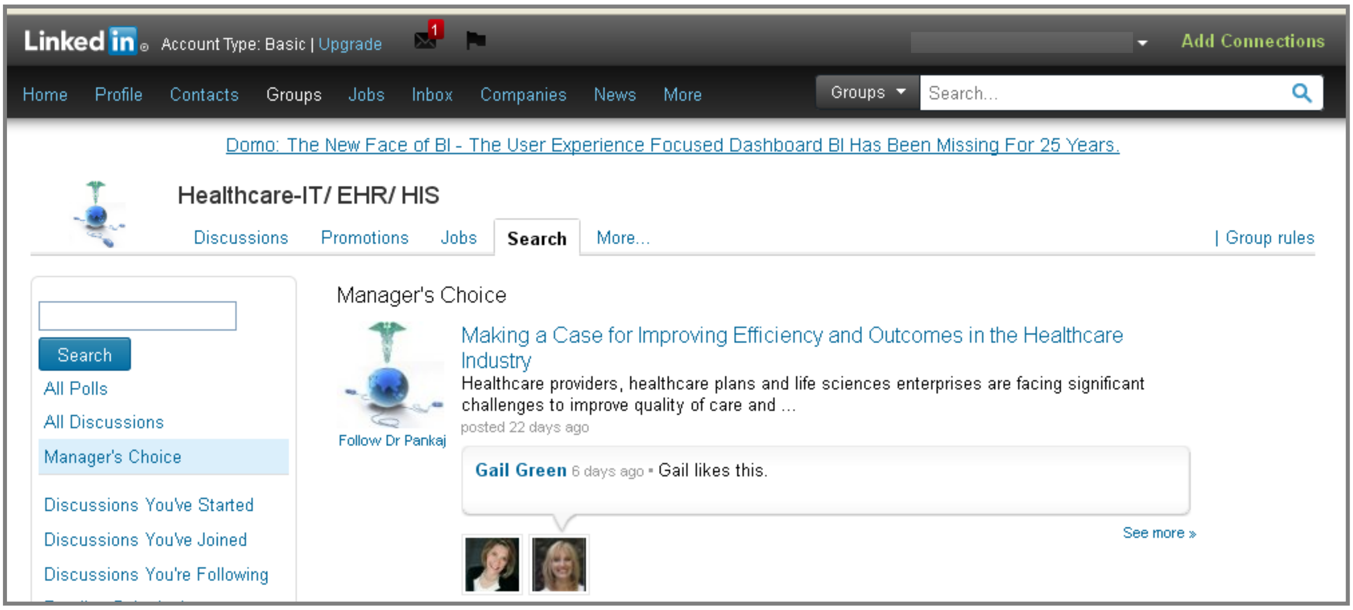
As you see, Jennifer Bresnick and Sage Birdseye are the top influencers of the week. This is to say they've started the most discussions, received most "like" and comments.



So, go check their posts for the last couple weeks. Get a sense of what they are posting.

What topics do they cover? What type of content they are sharing: blog posts, articles, videos, white papers? Is it their own content? How promotional is it?

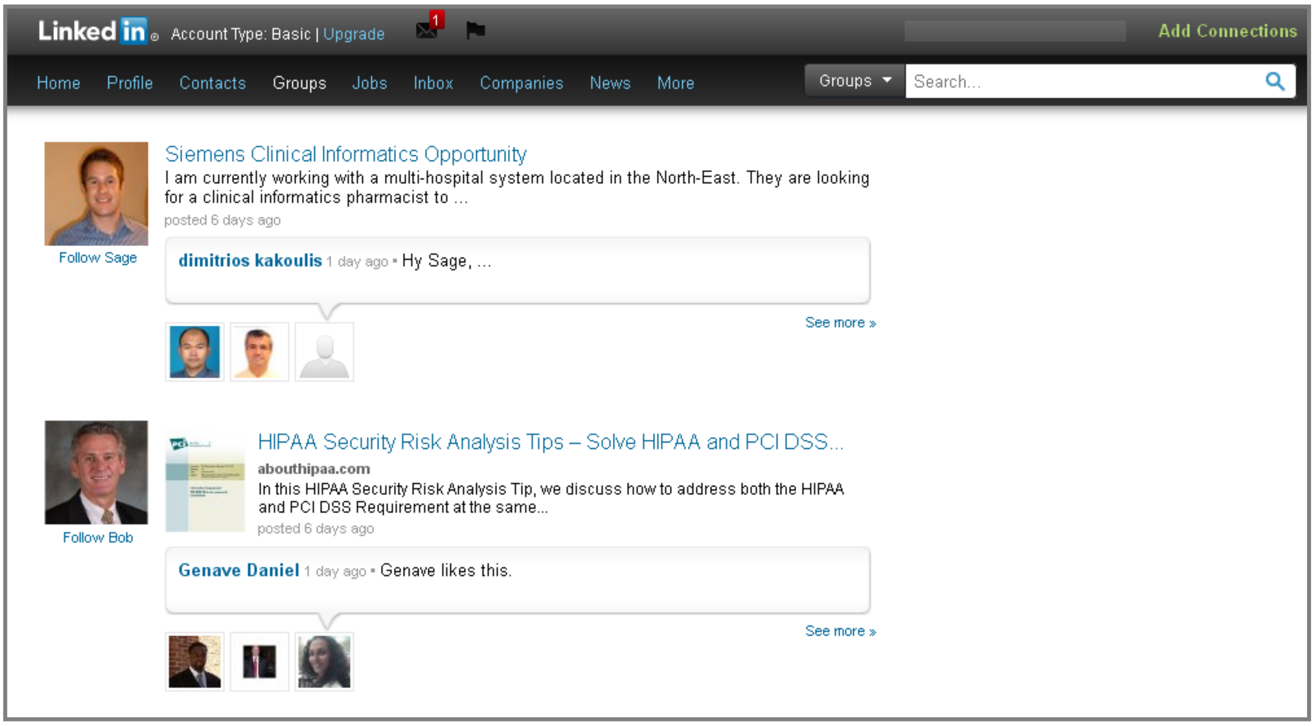
This step will help you calibrate your own voice and message.



See what type of content the manager of the group likes. This will serve as an excellent guideline to make sure that your own content gets accepted and promoted.

4. Most “Likes” and Comments

See what discussions received the most likes and, more importantly, the most meaningful comments.



Again, this will help you calibrate your own messaging and provide you with ideas of what topics, formats and styles resonate with the group.

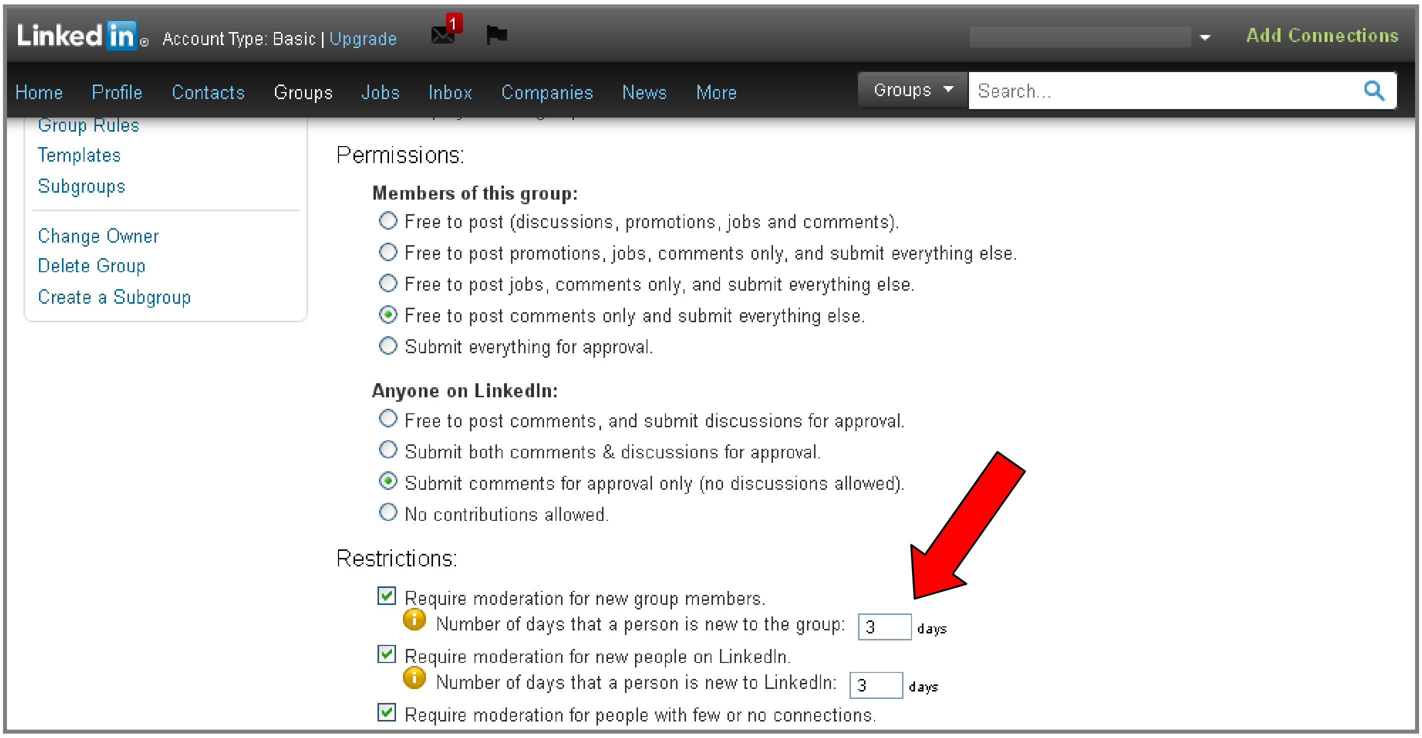
5. Quarantine Rules

Just so you know, the fact that you got accepted into a group does not mean that you can go ahead and start posting, promoting and getting your message across.

As any communication tool, LinkedIn can and is used by overzealous sales people in ways that resembles spam.

For this reason, LinkedIn has built-in tools for group owners and administrators to deal with that and you should be aware of them.

These are default group setting (which, I imagine, most group owners leave intact):



As you see, as a new member only your comments can go through right away.

Your posts would need to be approved by the group administrator or moderator.

Also important, try to wait for at least 3 days before becoming active in the group as your comments will certainly be moderated.

Finally, I assume you are NOT new to LinkedIn and already have at least several dozen connections. If you are an absolute newbie, as your first step, try to get at least 10 connections before joining any groups.

6. Sequence

Sequencing is essentially about being deliberate and precise not only in terms of what you do in LinkedIn groups, but also in what order. Think “learn to walk before running”, or, more suitable for a sales and marketing environment: “try to go on a first date before trying to propose”.

So here’s your sequence:

a. “Likes” – this action does not require moderation and only serves as a quick vote. Check some of the discussions started in the last couple weeks and “like” the ones that seem relevant/interesting.

b. “Comment” – make a comment on a discussion that someone else has started. Try to be helpful and provide valuable insights. Add to the conversation. *NOTE: absolutely no promotions are acceptable! For example, you can’t say: “this is an excellent solution, however here is one that’s better > link< … and link to your solution. This is will not sit well with the author of the discussion and the owner of the group and will likely get you blocked.

c. Question – questions are excellent for posting into a discussion are of a group for several reasons.

   i. A question usually does not lead users away from LinkedIn. It keeps them on the page. Which makes LinkedIn happy because they can serve more ads and it makes the group owner happy because he/she sees participation from the group audience.

   ii. A question compels users to respond, especially if they know the answer. This is just one powerful neuro-linguistic pattern that's hard-wired and most people can't resist. If someone stops you on the street and says: "Excuse me. Can you tell me where the nearest subway station is?" – I bet, you'd drop everything you were doing and start responding to the question.

   iii. A question can give you excellent insights into your target market, your competitors. This could be your most impactful market research and the best part – it is FREE.

Some of the questions you can ask:

"I am new here. Can you guys tell me the best way to ______."

"I am considering A and B as our solution for ______. Which one would you recommend?"

"In your view, what's the difference between A and B solutions for ____?"

IMPORTANT: Engage with responders, "like" their comments, and answer their questions. Otherwise your question may seem as a cheap trick by the community because you don't show that you care about the answer.

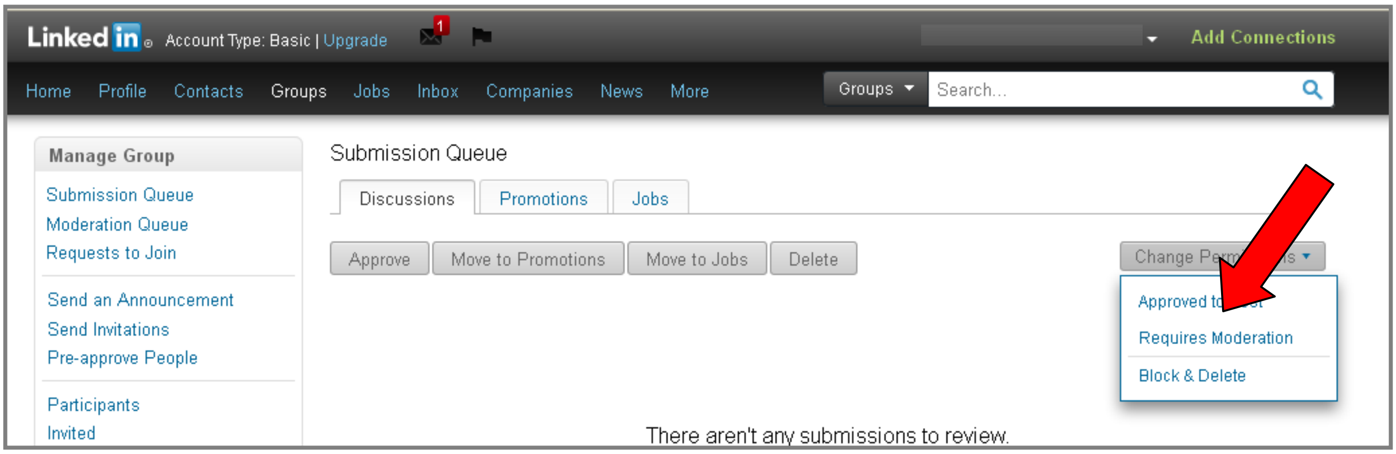
d. Neutral post – breaking news, mainstream media

Search in Google for your keyword for the group in the news section. See what comes up. Share relevant and insightful articles from an authoritative source – Forbes, Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Harvard Business Review.

At this stage, you are not a marketer. You are a curator of relevant, insightful and helpful information for your target audience.

e. Valuable resource with a lead capture mechanism

After you established yourself as a trusted expert, a provider of valuable content, a curator of relevant news and updates, you can post … no, not a blatant promotion… but a link to your own blog post that has an email capture mechanism.



The key here is to remember two buttons that are within instant reach of every group owner:

“Requires Moderation” and the dreaded “Block and Delete” :

Before you post your promotional content, remember those two buttons. When in doubt, post helpful content instead.

7. Ratio

As I mentioned previously, try to maintain the ration of 7:1 where 7 is valuable, FREE, non-promotional content, most of which is not even yours.

Be helpful, provide value and resources, FREE.

Then 1 in this ratio is, again, a piece of valuable content, but with a lead capture mechanism.

Content Strategy for LinkedIn Groups

1. Blogs

Created an interesting blog post, an infographic, or a resource? Share with the relevant group.

When you are starting a discussion in a group, try avoid “I”, “my”, “me”. If you post: “Here is the new blog post I just finished, come check it out” then the only hits and comments you are going to get would be from your mother.

Because no one else cares.

Instead, remember that an impactful discussion on LinkedIn groups satisfies two objectives:

a. It has qualities of a good headline: it promises value, shows a clear path to a benefit, entertains, captivates. Even though this is outside of scope for this report, I’d recommend ProBlogger and Copyblogger on insights for writing powerful headlines.

b. It engages. The best way to engage is to ask a question (“I found this shocking. What is your reaction?”). Or provide a call to action (“Tell me in comments so of the ways you dealt with a similar situation”).

2. Landing Pages

Landing pages are essentially, mini-websites with almost no navigation that provide an image (a cover of the ebook), a brief description, often in the form of bullet points, a form (e.g. Name, Email) and a call to action (e.g. "Download Now!").

3. Video

You can also link to a video on your website, or a 3rd party aggregation service like YouTube, Vimeo, Veoh and others.

Posting video can become an impactful tactic for you because a) video is perceived as high-value content, b) watching a video is passive (i.e. easy) form of content consumption which explains some of its popularity and c) the thumbnail image of your video will be included in your discussion – if it is informative and/or engaging, people will click on it.

Advanced Tactic: Group Member Outreach

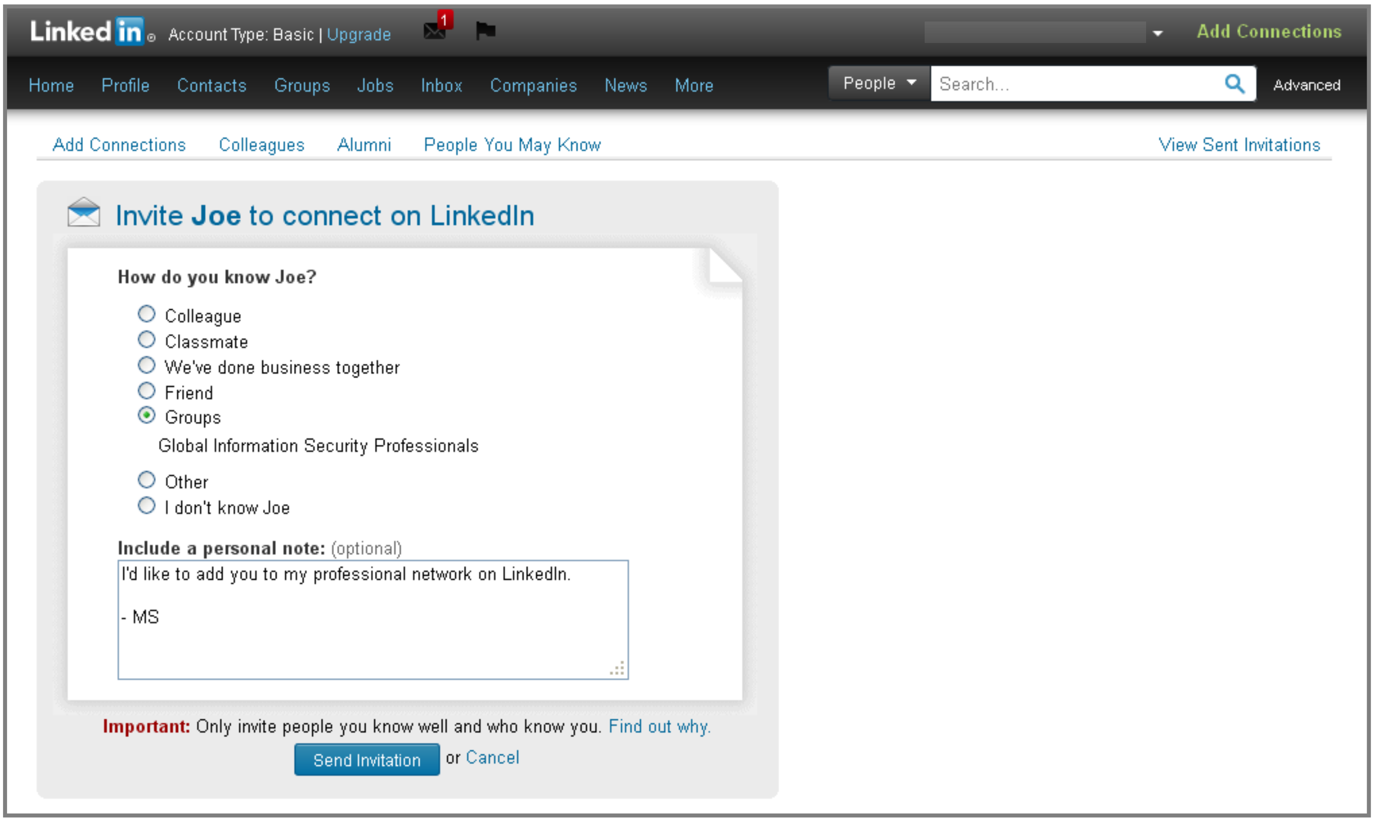
One advanced tactic you may want to consider is reaching out to group members directly. If done sparingly and tactfully, this could become an indispensable way for you connect with potential clients.

WARNING: If done recklessly, this tactic may get you blocked by the group and in trouble with LinkedIn, so use appropriately.

From the main page of the group, go to "Members" section. You will see the list of members that you can also search.

Next to each member you will see a link "Invite to connect":

When you find someone who could become your lead, prospect and potential client, click on “Invite to connect” and you will get to this screen:



Now, some members set their profiles in a way that accept invitations from groups, not all of them do that. But the ones that do, we can use.

Here is a tricky part:

If you keep that default invitation that simply says: “I’d like to add you to my professional network on LinkedIn” there is a good chance that none of your invitations will get accepted.

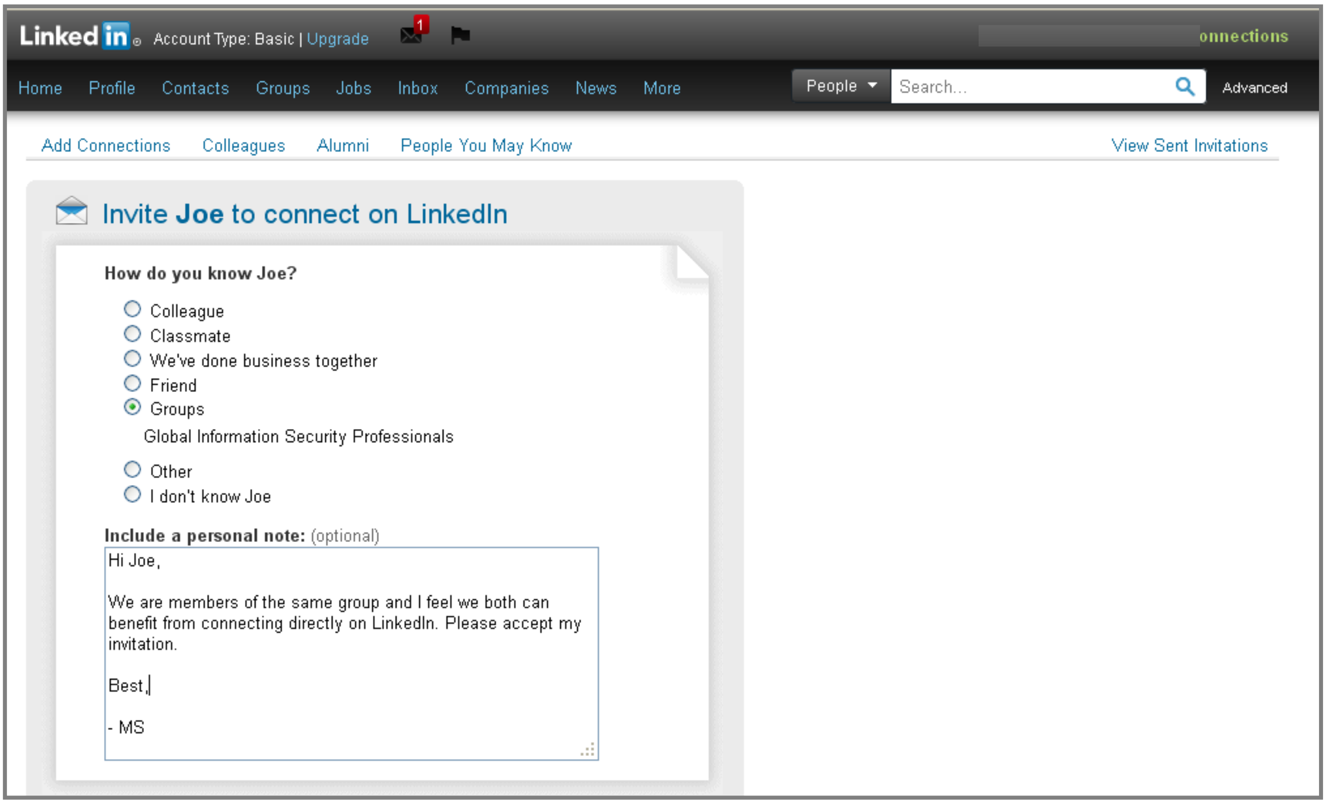
Because this invitation is dry and boiler plate.

Because this invitation does not show the benefit the recipient is going to get from connecting

Because it does not empower the recipient (“I want to add you” = “I want to do something to you”)

Because it does not show the common ground between you and the recipient.

Now, let's try this instead:



"We are members of the same group" – show common ground

"We can both benefit from connecting" – mention benefit

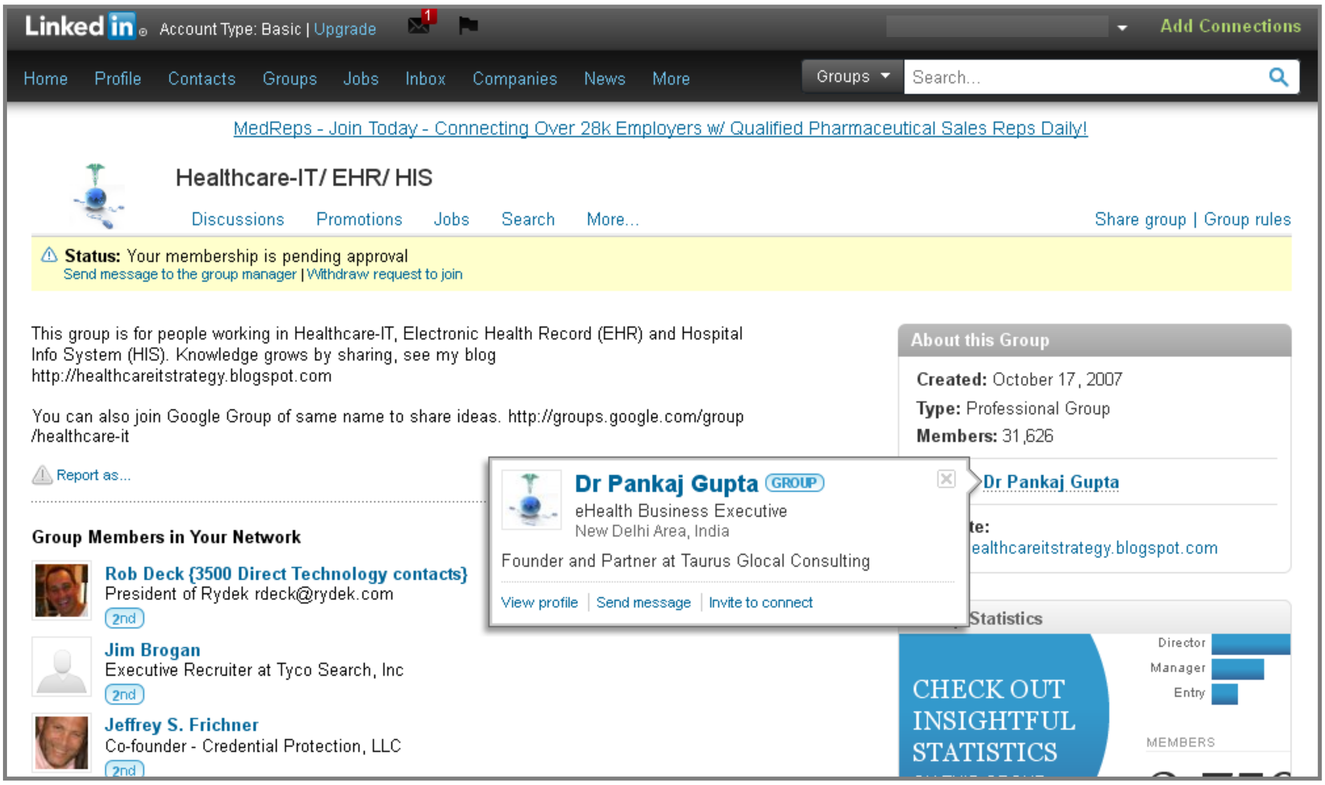
"Please accept my invitation" – you are in charge and can chose to accept my invitation

I guarantee you that if you send your invitations following these steps they WILL GET ACCEPTED. Because I tried it a 1,000 times and it works.

Advanced Tactic: Group Owner Outreach

Group owners have a lot of power. They can ignore your application to join. They can approve or delete your discussion. They can ban youf from the group.

They also can promote your content by making it "Manager's choice". They also have the power to message directly every member of the group. This makes this person very powerful and you can find a way to leverage that.



Here is how you can do that.

Go to the main page of the group and then to Group Profile. You will see the profile of the group owner. Click “Send message”.

Now what you say is very important. Ideally you want to:

a. Stroke the ego – congrats on managing such an awesome group, it’s been truly a powerful resource for me and my team
b. Find out what they do – are they a vendor, a consultant to the group members, are they using the group for lead generation? Do they represent an industry association? An executive conference? – knowing who they are will give you cues to their frame of mind and their ultimate interest. So that you can craft your message to speak to that.
c. Give – most group owners want to grow their group.

So here’s how your message to the group owner may look like:

“Dear Dr. Pankaj Gupta

First of all, congratulations on running the Healthcare IT group. My colleague turned me on to it and it’s been one of the most effective on line resources for me since.

I’ve noticed in your group profile that the group has roughly doubled in size in the last 6 months, I imagine due to your hard work, no doubt.

I also realized that you recently published a book on Healthcare IT and this is why I am writing to you.

You see, I am a member of "ERP for Healthcare" group and I'd love to share a chapter from your book with them. I feel this will position you as an expert in the field and attract additional members to your "Healthcare IT" group.

If you could share your knowledge and send me a pdf or a link I could post, I'd greatly appreciate.

Regards,

-MS"

I bet $10 that Dr. Pankaj will drop everything and respond in under 3 minutes to a message like that.

What can be your next steps?

As I mentioned previously: give, give, give… without asking anything in return. Once you have enough credits in your "trust account", you can ask for return favors. More on that in my upcoming book "How LinkedIn Became Your Best Sales and Marketing Tool".