



# Direct messaging

## Building strong relationships

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**COMMUNICATION** is fundamental to humans. We need it to foster cooperation, to get things done, and in business, to persuade others to buy. It's crucially important and regularly misused. Communication is also fundamental on LinkedIn where all activity centres around it.

LinkedIn allows members to communicate with each other via direct messaging and anyone can freely message their 1st-degree connections. This is yet another reason why it is useful to have a strong network on the platform – personal access to more people.

Direct messages are excellent for bypassing gatekeepers and reaching your intended recipient. It does, however, require recipients to monitor their messages but with the importance of LinkedIn now widely understood, it is increasingly rare for messages to go unseen.

While email is enjoying a resurgence, I believe that direct messaging via LinkedIn is a better option. Most people manage their own LinkedIn account and receive message notifications, and messages don't get dumped into junk or spam folders as often happens with emails. It also resolves the issue of people using Reply All with emails, or messages going to unintended recipients.

A further reason to consider using LinkedIn direct messages is the variety of ways it can be used. Options include text, voice and video. The message function also includes locations and calendars, plus the ability to include files of many kinds. Most of us use only a fraction of these features.

A LinkedIn direct message is still sufficiently unusual, so stands out. Permission to send is unnecessary and opening it won't install malware on the recipient's computer – all great reasons to use LinkedIn messaging.

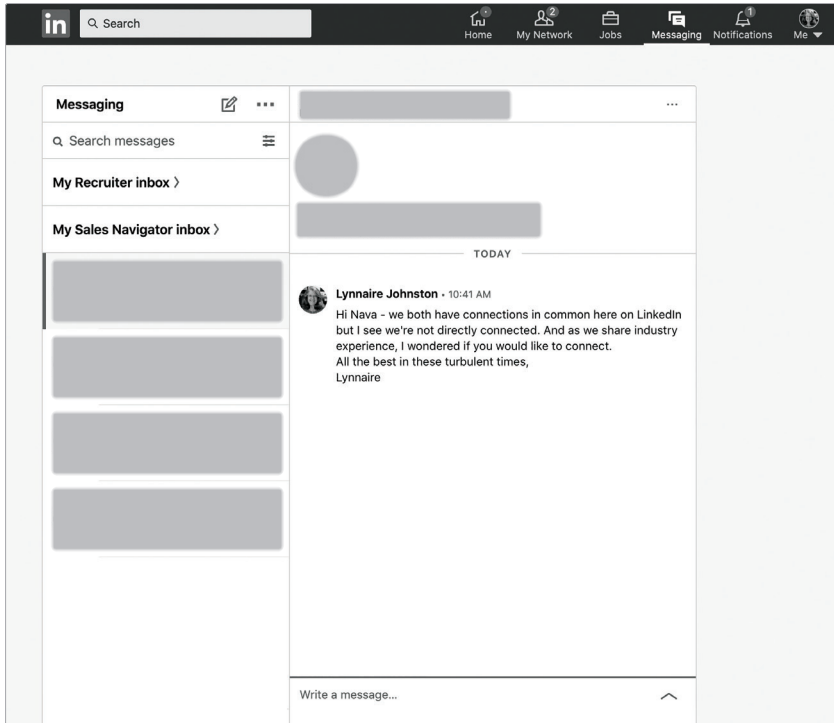
I strongly believe in the power of direct messaging and use it constantly in my own and my clients' LinkedIn marketing. Not only is it useful for transactional messages ('let's organise a time to chat'), but also for sending someone a question ('I'm stuck on xxx, please can you help me resolve this?') or building a relationship by asking them to explain a bit about what they do or an aspect of their profile you want clarification on.

Direct messaging can also be used to:

- Thank a new connection for having accepted your invitation. (This is especially effective when you send a voice or video message. See chapter 1.)
- Invite a connection to an event or meeting.
- Request participation in a survey.
- Ask for help with a project you're working on.
- Share information you think would be useful.
- Persuade a connection to visit your website or landing page.

## Direct messaging nuts and bolts

On **desktop**, the messaging function can be found under Messaging on the main menu at the top of the screen or by clicking on the black Messaging box at the bottom right of the screen. On **mobile** the speech bubble icon indicating messages is at the top right of the LinkedIn app Home page where a number inside a red circle indicates unread messages.



*The messaging section can be found under the Messaging tab in the top menu.*

At the time of writing, only 1st-degree connections can be messaged from a free account. However, paid accounts such as Sales Navigator make it much easier. Sales Navigator has its own messaging system, InMail, which has the added benefit of allowing those who are not 1st-degree connections to message each other.

Should you want to send a message to a certain group or subset of connections, you will need to conduct a search so you know who to send to. Searches are possible on both free and paid LinkedIn accounts and filters are used to help find those who most closely fit the parameters you want.

These filters include:

- 1st- or 2nd-degree connections
- Location
- Current company
- Past companies
- Industries
- Profile language
- Schools
- Services
- Name

Sales Navigator offers more filters and the ability for searches to be saved.

Depending on the purpose of your message and the number of recipients, a solution is to create a group message. This is similar to a group email message, where all participants receive the same message with one push of the send button.

## Creating direct messages

LinkedIn provides three methods by which we can send messages – voice, video and text. And messaging couldn't be simpler.

- On **desktop**, go to Messaging in the main menu.
- Click the blue editing pen and type in the name or names of your recipients.
- Write a message. You can add files, gifs, photos and emojis.
- Click the blue Send button to send your message.

On **mobile** it is just as simple but with more options although these are semi-hidden behind the + key to the left of the Write a message box.

- The messaging tab on mobile is on the top of your screen to the right of the search box on the Home page.
- To send a message, click on the blue editing pen circle at the top of the screen, and type in the name of your recipient/s.
- On the left of the Write a message box is the + key. Tap this to bring up a menu containing Attachment, Photos, Camera, Video, GIF, Location, Availability and Mention. This last feature allows you to add another recipient to your message.

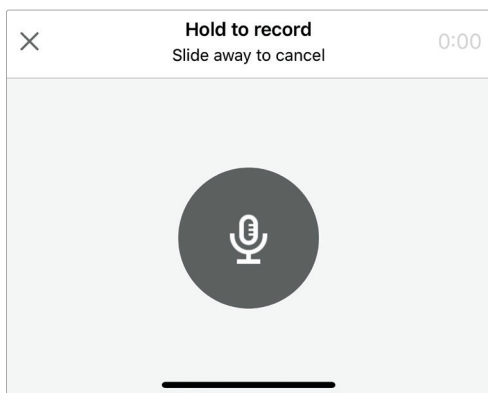
Most of these options will be self-explanatory but the more unusual ones offer functions you might not have thought of using:

- GIF – LinkedIn offers quite a selection of different GIFs but I would advise caution as this isn't Facebook. None of the offerings are potentially offensive but they aren't business oriented so it would pay to know your recipient. LinkedIn is primarily about business relationships, after all.
- Location – this sends a location and potentially your current one without seeming to check that you want to send it. Caution advised.
- Availability – takes you to your calendar from which you can choose a day/time, telling your recipient, 'These are the times that work for me'. This isn't sent automatically.
- Mention – brings up the @ allowing you to add another recipient to the message. Why you wouldn't include the person at the message invite stage, I'm not sure but it does provide another option.

- Video and Camera – these take you direct to those functions on your phone or tablet which you can then add to your message before sending. (More on video messaging shortly.)

## Voice messages

Of these features, the one I use most often is voice message. This shows up as a microphone icon to the right of the Write a message box when you've chosen your recipient. Tap the icon and a big blue microphone appears on the screen. Hold this down and record your message. When you've finished, lift your finger and either send the message or delete it. At any point in the process you can swipe right to delete it and start again.



*The microphone icon from where you can send voice messages to connections. This is available only on the app.*

The voice message feature allows you to record one message at a time. There are apps available that allow bulk batching of messages but I highly recommend staying well away from them. LinkedIn is diligent in fighting external automation platforms which seek to



destroy the relationship-building aspect of the platform and in its Terms and Conditions explicitly prohibits them.

Voice messages can be up to a minute long so there's no time to waffle. Prepare what to say before starting to record to avoid mistakes because – and this seems a shame – it's not possible to listen to the message before sending. My advice: if you're not sure you're happy with it, don't send it. Re-record it. But the contrary view here is that it should sound natural. You don't want to appear rehearsed. After all, one of the reasons for sending a voice message is to build or cement a personal relationship with your connection.

Since voice messaging became available in 2018, I've been using it regularly to nurture relationships with new connections. Any time someone new connects, I send them a voice message. In only one case has anyone been negative about this. An Auckland strategist whose profile says she is passionate about leadership but who in her communication to me said she found 'messages like this' inappropriate. It was unclear whether she disliked the content of the message (which thanked her for connecting) or the idea of the voice message itself. Her response read:

*'These messages i [sic] do find inappropriate and respond to simple requests to link [sic] only.'*

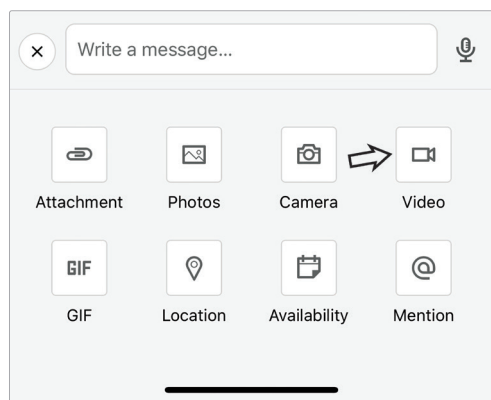
People often don't know voice messaging is available and ask how it's done, so they can try it for themselves. However, voice messages can only be sent to 1st-degree connections.

## **Video and video messaging**

It is also possible to send video messages through the mobile app. Like voice messages, each one is unique to the recipient. Bulk recording and sending is not an option.

Video, however, can be used to record a single message off the LinkedIn platform which can be sent to many. Of course, that precludes any personalisation, reducing the effectiveness of your efforts.

I like recording messages using someone's name, so the recipient knows it was just for them. There seems something karmic about it that prompts a positive response. But it may be that the uniqueness of a video message outweighs the personalisation of a voice message. The only way to be sure is to try it. And that, like many things on LinkedIn, is a very good thing to do.

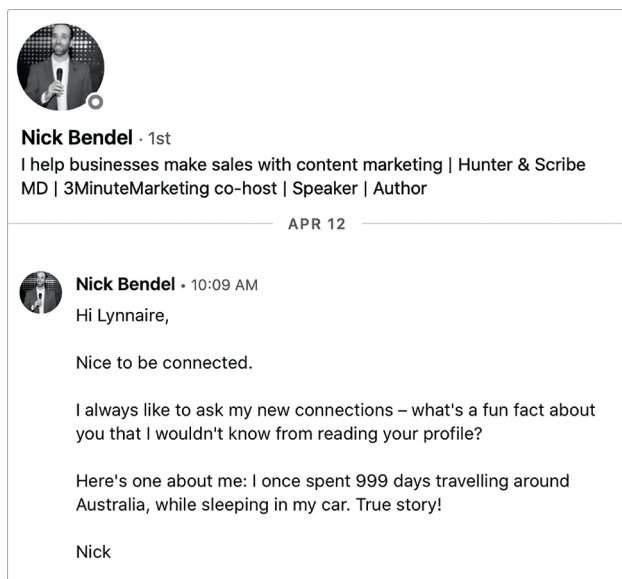


*Video messaging and other options can be found under messaging on the app.*

## Ways to use direct messages

The options for using the direct message function are as varied as the people using them. For me, a voice message is a great way to say 'thank you for connecting' when someone has accepted my connection invite or asked me to connect. It works remarkably well; recipients respond positively and more consistently than they do to a simple written message. It seems somehow to resonate, to make an

impact. (I explain this in greater detail in Chapter 1.) This screenshot below is an example of a great follow-up message.



*Example of a great connection message.*

I also send direct messages to my connections each month with value-added material that helps them with their LinkedIn marketing. But equally, I could send info about my other area of expertise, copywriting. The key words here are 'value-added'. Sending spam messages is inappropriate if you are coming from a sharing and giving angle on LinkedIn.

In the course of research for this book, I canvassed colleagues on how they use direct messaging in their LinkedIn marketing. Here are some of their methods:

- Sending a survey that acts as lead generation tool.

- Asking a question aimed at determining if a new connection might be interested in the products and services being offered.
- Asking a question that begins building a relationship or is related to the person's line of work.
- Commenting on a common situation and asking, genuinely, how they are doing (as in during the coronavirus pandemic).
- Introducing connections to each other to facilitate networking.

Before the coronavirus pandemic it was common for people to request in-person meetings with those they had 'met' only online. Direct messages suggesting a coffee were an effective way to achieve that. In light of the virus, how we meet has changed and we now get together using Zoom or Skype. Again, direct messages are an ideal way to move the relationship forward.

But these uses of this endlessly adaptable feature are just a few examples of what's possible. Start thinking about how it could help your business or career and you'll be surprised at the ideas that spring to mind.

## **Direct messaging results**

Whether your direct messaging efforts are a success will depend on the quality of your communications. Here are some of the types of responses you might receive:

- An acknowledgement of your message through a comment or an emoji.
- An enquiry about your product or service.
- A personalised message.
- One of the prompted messages.

- A voice message.
- A video message.

However, inevitably not everyone you message will respond. In fact, it would have to be a very attractive offer indeed or a very small recipient sample to achieve a 100% success rate. Still, response rates are much higher in my experience than conventional emails. Although I concede there is room for both and I will often move a message thread to email if it looks to be ongoing, simply so I can better track the messages.

At the early stage of the conversation with someone you have only recently met on LinkedIn, trust levels are low, and one party may be keener on the interaction than the other. The aim is to develop the relationship in a way that isn't threatening and that adds value for both parties. For instance, asking what the person you're messaging does is a waste of an opportunity. If you're communicating with them, you should already know this and a bit about them, who they've worked for and where they're located.

Don't, however, make the mistake of thinking that no reply means the recipient has either not received the message or has ignored it. The message may simply have slipped down their feed (like emails do in your inbox) and been overlooked. I've been surprised how often a conversation that seemed to stop dead in its tracks gets picked back up again weeks or even months later. Then it's a scramble to look up the original thread and get back up to speed on the person.

If you are having multiple conversations simultaneously on LinkedIn, it can be difficult to keep track. Sometimes messages get lost in the messaging app simply through sheer volume.

To a LinkedIn giver who wants to communicate, but not at a level considered spam, direct messaging is a godsend. It is a low-key way

to reach exactly the right person. Do it right and the relationships will come. Also keep in mind that the more you develop these relationships, the more people will be keen to interact with you in other ways. For instance, they will engage with your posts, furthering your reach. Your name will be top of mind should they be asked if they know someone providing your product or service. They may be keen to give you a LinkedIn recommendation or endorsement. Or, they may recommend you for a podcast or other media opportunity. The possibilities are endless because you don't know what or who your connection knows and they might be able to provide the exact opportunities you're looking for.

## **Message frequency**

How often to send direct messages is a tricky question and the answer is 'it depends'.

When you are engaged in a conversation, respond within as reasonable a time as you can but don't expect the other person to be waiting on your every word.

When sending a campaign of some kind to selected connections, be judicious in your frequency. Once a month is probably sufficient but don't pack the message full of spammy, salesy material. Make it informational and value-added so it is consistent with your other activities such as personalised messaging and non-promotional posts. This may be perceived as peculiar by those who prefer a more sales-focused approach and who are not interested in building and nurturing a relationship. They want a far faster method of selling that bombards connections with offers, messages of dubious value and a hard sell. To my mind, that ruins relationships rather than nurtures them. And it's one reason why I always turn down connection invite messages from a particular industry aligned with my own

as I know the moment I accept, I'll be in for a barrage of unwanted messages.

My strategy instead is to be low key; sending often enough to remain on the radar but not so frequently that I am perceived as pestering them. If six months or so go by with no response from the person, I simply remove them from the list. I don't disconnect, just no longer message them. I don't do so within this time because it generally takes a number of touches for people to respond. And, if they decide they do need my service after I've stopped messaging them, I hope they will remember those messages AND my name.

And so, in answer to the question at the top of this section: how often should you direct message someone, the answer is most likely to be somewhere in the three to five-week range, depending on what you're sending and your objective.

### **LinkedIn in Action**

A Melbourne design company specialising in the community health field, wanted to develop closer bonds with other people and organisations in its niche. It decided to direct message all its LinkedIn connections based in the local area and see who was open to meeting for coffee.

While the percentage of acceptances wasn't high, those who agreed were fully engaged with the networking process. The business owner found herself with introductions to other businesses which in turn meant a larger network and more opportunities to talk about her work with others who might have need of her services. A bonus was a wider network she could call on when she needed professional services for her business.

• • •

A Sydney-based business publishing entrepreneur has built an entire business on LinkedIn. Using LinkedIn as her sole marketing avenue, she has grown her business from a standing start to over

six figures in under three years. Any business owner, consultant, director seeking to write, publish and market their book approaches her first. She has achieved this by a multi-pronged approach, one of which is to direct message new connections with a survey to find out if they are interested in her services. This is done very subtly and those who respond positively receive follow-up messages designed to take the conversation to the next level. This approach allows her to weed out those who are uninterested in her service and instead concentrate on those who are.

## **What NOT to send in messages**

For many months, my regular message to connections was accompanied by a PDF. However, I failed to take into account that many people look at their messages on smaller screens than desktops, making a PDF too small to read. When a colleague kindly pointed this out, I immediately ceased sending PDFs. Now, I create a web page for the information and add the link to my message instead of attaching a PDF. It has the advantage of being more visually attractive because it shows a preview of the web page. It also provides reassurance that the site you're sending people to is legitimate and, if you are sending these in bulk, they are often quicker to send.

I am most grateful to my connection for pointing this out. But it serves as yet another example of how important it is to have good relationships with other professionals who have your back. And, of course, to be there for them should an occasion arise. And if it doesn't, pay it forward. As the great Seth Godin says:

*'I'm not teaching people selfish secrets, I'm teaching them generous principles and if they can pay them forward, I don't want any credit. I just want to see things get better.'*



As mentioned in the previous section, direct messages that could be considered spam are best avoided. Make them useful and add value by sharing information the receiver may not know. This has the added bonus of making you appear knowledgeable and of being someone who is willing to give without expectation of reward.

### **Getting it done!**

Direct messaging a large group of connections takes time (i.e. money) so it's worth doing well and the best way to achieve that is to plan. I'm not talking about long-winded, multi-page plans that take forever to put together and then sit in a bottom drawer. I'm talking about a clear and organised strategy that consistently moves you toward your goals. In my case, for instance, I want to be seen as a LinkedIn expert, the person to go to when LinkedIn work needs to be done. This means I need to share useful information with my connections, where possible taking them with me on my LinkedIn journey so they learn, too. To do this, I need to prove my value and there's no better way than helping them to achieve their own goals on the platform.

I favour the type of planning that can be easily changed should something else come along (as happened in early 2020 when Covid-19 overturned all our lives) but at the very least a 12-month or 10–15 message sequence should be worked out. This planning will mean that the messages are more likely to be sent because they can be added to the organisation's content marketing plan.

Being ad hoc with direct messaging isn't as effective as being consistent. Consistency results in recipients getting to know you and welcoming your messages because they have value.

## Responding to direct messages

I've talked quite a bit about sending direct messages, and a discussion about receiving them is also useful starting with etiquette. This dictates that when replying to a direct message you should always be polite, even if you are not interested in the person or their product or service.

Take this message I received in response to sending free, and I'd like to think useful, information to a connection:

*just stop*

*you ain't making me money ~ pass me a good lead or bounce*

Now, the lack of punctuation notwithstanding, that is wrong on so many levels. First, there was no attempt to be polite. No 'please don't send me messages like this'. It is unusual for people to respond in this way because most are exceedingly polite even when they're not interested. But every now and again someone like this young man – who is in car sales – decides there is no mileage in being polite. And the relationship breaks down.

His attitude is a mistake because with an online profile, there is no off duty. You are always representing the company you work for, which means that offensive comments like this young man's also reflect poorly on his employer. He also seemed to forget or be unaware that LinkedIn is about building relationships and I rather suspect that, if asked, he would complain that LinkedIn doesn't work for him.

But most people are not so rude and ask politely not to receive messages anymore. This should always be respected and responded to in the same vein.

The other aspect of receiving messages that is important is a timely reply when a response is appropriate or expected. When a connection

messages you, they expect you to respond in the same timeframe as they would an email. Delays can look impolite. But here's the rub. If you are sending and receiving multiple messages, they may get lost in the message feed (I know mine do so I have someone help keep me on the straight and narrow). The solution to this is to check your unread messages on a regular basis so you don't miss them.

If you receive multiple messages that require the same or a standard answer, have these written and saved where you can easily get at them. Sticky Notes on Windows and Stickies on Mac are both helpful for this or use Trello boards – whatever productivity app you use daily.

## **Top direct messaging tips**

### **1. Use the direct message option to reach out.**

While direct messages on LinkedIn are increasing in popularity and use, they have still not reached critical mass. If you want to personally reach out to a connection but don't have their personal email address, send them a DM instead.

### **2. Don't use direct messages to spam connections.**

This is considered very poor form. Just because you don't legally need their permission to contact them for marketing purposes (like you do with emails), doesn't mean you should abuse the privilege.

### **3. Use the forwarding function to message the same attachment to multiple people.**

The LinkedIn messaging feature is very basic and annoying to use because messages get lost in the stream. But if you are sending the same document to many people it's easy to forward it instead of having to attach it to each message.

#### **4. Instead of sending a document, send a link.**

Documents don't display well on small devices so offer an alternative to your PDF – a link. Still send the PDF if you wish, but you may find the link is more regularly opened than the attachment.

##### **LinkedIn by the numbers**

- LinkedIn generates three times more visitor-to-lead conversions than Twitter and Facebook. Not only do more potential leads land on your website through LinkedIn, they're also more qualified and willing to buy.
- 79% of B2B marketers see LinkedIn as a good source for generating leads.
- 46% of social traffic to corporate websites comes from LinkedIn.
- LinkedIn is the top place to find quality content according to 91% of marketing executives. Other social media platforms were down in the 20s.

Sources: LinkedIn, foundationinc.co

## Summary

Direct messaging via LinkedIn is a relatively new form of marketing to potential clients which offers the advantage of being different. Using this technique well demonstrates you are committed to communicating and sharing material of value, without expectation of reward. In this chapter I have covered who to direct message, the different methods of direct messaging available, ways to use direct messages and the results you can expect. I have also looked at message frequency, what not to send in messages, responding to direct messaging and, finally, planning and implementing your messaging campaigns. If you have mastered these basics you are now ready to begin pulling together the different LinkedIn activities in a cohesive strategy that will get you the results you want. And that is what Chapter 5 covers.

## Checklist

### Direct messaging plan template

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Target market					
Topic					
Start send date					
Material source					
Other marketing to consider					
Images/videos required – source, delivery date					