

**B**y now, you've probably heard you should be on LinkedIn. Whether you're a new college graduate or a veteran registered dietitian nutritionist, your LinkedIn profile has the power to fast-track your career. Used to its full potential, it can attract employers, generate new clients, enhance your credibility, establish you as a thought leader and increase your industry knowledge.

Underutilized, however, it could result in missed opportunities. If you've taken the first step toward creating a profile, you may be wondering, "Now what?" To make sure LinkedIn is helping and not hurting your career, follow these best practices for optimizing your profile, your network and your presence.

#### Paint a Picture

Your LinkedIn profile is one of your best opportunities for introducing yourself to the professional community and is often the first impression you'll leave on a potential client or employer. It's up to you to make sure you're portrayed in a professional light, from the photo you select down to the experience and skills you include.

Start with a photo you're proud of. While a corporate headshot isn't required, photos should be more professional than personal. Avoid photos that include pets, goofy expressions, inappropriate clothing or loud backgrounds. By default, your most recent job title is your LinkedIn headline. Consider changing it into a personal branding statement that reflects who you are and what you have to offer. A good profile also has a compelling summary statement — a brief cover letter, of sorts — describing who you are and what you have to offer.

Think of it as the LinkedIn equivalent of an elevator pitch.

It's important your profile reads like a resume, not a memoir. Just like a good resume, your work experience is best presented in bulleted form so recruiters, prospects and other contacts can quickly search, scan and scroll their way through it. The LinkedIn feature "endorsements" allows your connections to endorse you for the skills you've listed in your profile. Therefore, be sure to include a comprehensive list of skills for which you want to be known. The more complete your profile, the better.

#### Get Noticed

Equally important as having a complete profile is making it easily available to those who want to view it. With that in mind, you should increase your profile's visibility by making it public, which maximizes your exposure by allowing it to appear in search engine results. You also can make

your LinkedIn profile easier to find and share by claiming your vanity URL. For the best results, choose your name (or a variation of it) as a stronger alternative to the web address LinkedIn automatically assigns for your page.

Utilizing keywords is another way to make sure your profile gets in front of the eyes you want to see it. Pepper your summary and job descriptions with keywords you want to be associated with. If you specialize in celiac disease, for instance, make sure your profile includes terms like "wheat," "gluten-free" and "food allergies" so your profile will show up when people search LinkedIn for those terms.

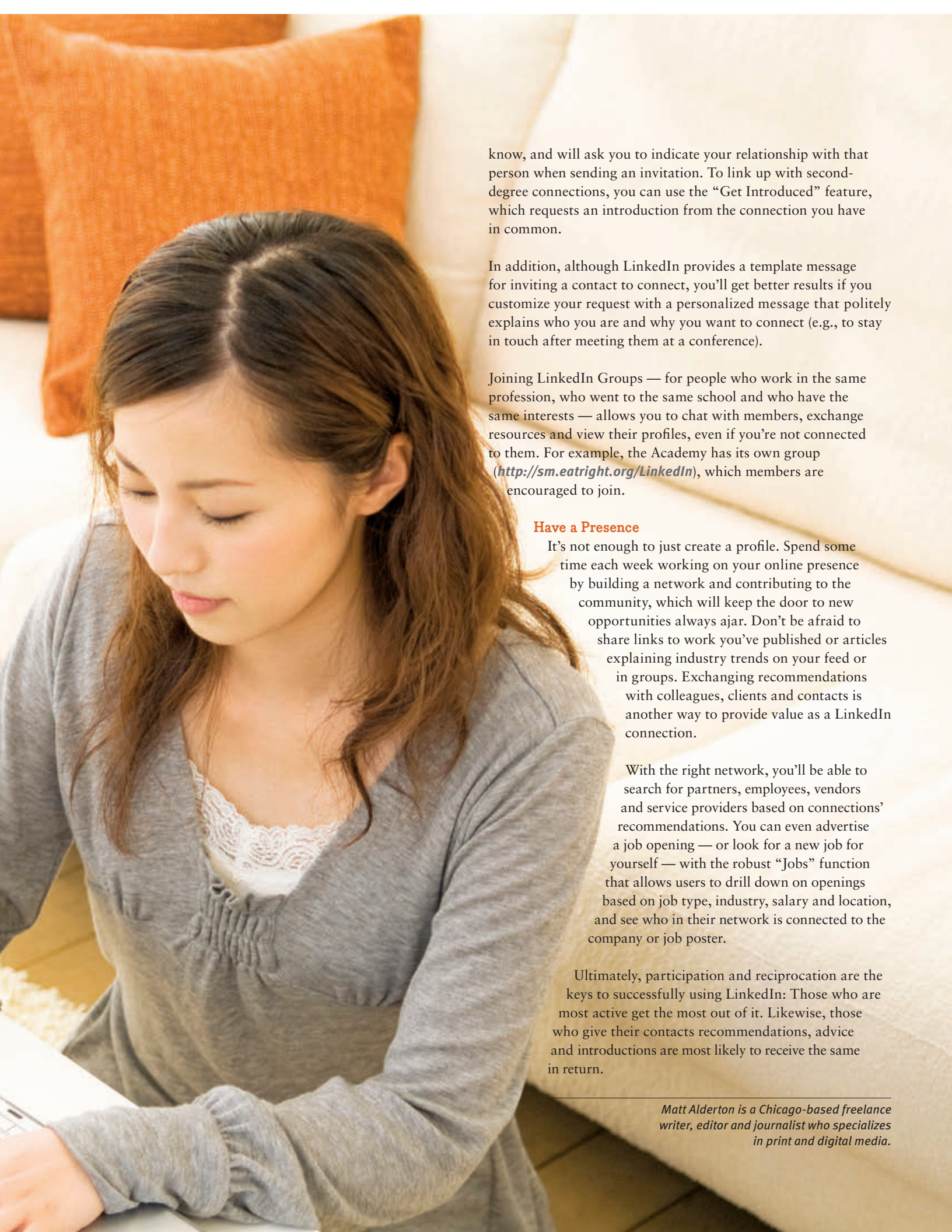
#### Connect with Purpose

LinkedIn is all about networking, but you shouldn't invite just anyone to connect. While you may be able to get away with tastefully adding people you'd like to network with online, LinkedIn recommends only adding people you actually

## #SOCIALPRO:

# Mastering the Art of LinkedIn *Networking*

YOU'VE ALREADY CREATED YOUR LINKEDIN PROFILE. HERE ARE TIPS FOR MAXIMIZING ITS POTENTIAL. By Matt Alderton



know, and will ask you to indicate your relationship with that person when sending an invitation. To link up with second-degree connections, you can use the “Get Introduced” feature, which requests an introduction from the connection you have in common.

In addition, although LinkedIn provides a template message for inviting a contact to connect, you’ll get better results if you customize your request with a personalized message that politely explains who you are and why you want to connect (e.g., to stay in touch after meeting them at a conference).

Joining LinkedIn Groups — for people who work in the same profession, who went to the same school and who have the same interests — allows you to chat with members, exchange resources and view their profiles, even if you’re not connected to them. For example, the Academy has its own group (<http://sm.eatright.org/LinkedIn>), which members are encouraged to join.

#### **Have a Presence**

It’s not enough to just create a profile. Spend some time each week working on your online presence by building a network and contributing to the community, which will keep the door to new opportunities always ajar. Don’t be afraid to share links to work you’ve published or articles explaining industry trends on your feed or in groups. Exchanging recommendations with colleagues, clients and contacts is another way to provide value as a LinkedIn connection.

With the right network, you’ll be able to search for partners, employees, vendors and service providers based on connections’ recommendations. You can even advertise a job opening — or look for a new job for yourself — with the robust “Jobs” function that allows users to drill down on openings based on job type, industry, salary and location, and see who in their network is connected to the company or job poster.

Ultimately, participation and reciprocation are the keys to successfully using LinkedIn: Those who are most active get the most out of it. Likewise, those who give their contacts recommendations, advice and introductions are most likely to receive the same in return.

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*Matt Alderton is a Chicago-based freelance writer, editor and journalist who specializes in print and digital media.*