

BY **KERRY FREEK**, EDITOR, WRITER, AUTHOR; EDITOR-AT-LARGE, WATER CANADA

CULTIVATING A COMMUNITY ON LINKEDIN FOR YOUR BUSINESS PUBLICATION

AS A POWERFUL NETWORKING PLATFORM for professionals, LinkedIn is a haven for business content. Trade titles have the potential to thrive here. Professional associations and conferences offer your readers a chance to connect with their peers, and LinkedIn is an extension of that mentality. While it doesn't take the place of face-to-face interaction, it's a channel for them to get the dirt on industry issues, gather leads, and, in some cases, conduct business.

Used to its full advantage, a LinkedIn group can be a great marketing tool for both your B2B publication and your readers. Here are a few tips and tricks for stirring up conversation, growing your audience, and raising your magazine's profile.

WHY LINKEDIN WORKS FOR B2B

A good business publication doesn't just know its target audience—its editors, publisher, and writers eat, sleep, and breathe the industry. They know which topics and issues will excite their readers and provoke response. If you're managing a LinkedIn group, you can use your niche to your advantage. The platform gives those readers an option to publish their opinions and join discussions with their peers.

It's not a new formula. For years, online forums have allowed this back-and-forth to take place. You may find, however, that your audience doesn't comment much on articles hosted on your website—after all, comments voice personal opinions, and, in a professional environment, that comes with a certain amount of risk.

But your readers might be more inclined to comment on a LinkedIn group post, or simply share the link with their social media followers. Passing along an article or blog post from an authoritative source (your publication) can be a subtle statement that doesn't threaten job security or professional reputation.

PICK SOME CHAMPIONS

So—you've got a group, but you're the top (and only) contributor. Are members sitting on their hands rather than publishing comments or clicking the "like" button? Recruit your columnists and bloggers! Insider knowledge from recognized industry leaders (or pot-stirrers) with their own networks and followings can offer readers a special sense of exclusivity. Think about adding a

clause in their contracts that requires some activity in the group. Or, more simply, if their column is getting a lot of traction, notify them and ask if they'd like to respond to comments. Editorial staff and publishers are welcome to participate, too—the more people engaging with your group, the better.

BEING A GOOD GROUP MANAGER

Managing a group isn't simply about posting links to articles and blogs. To make truly effective use of LinkedIn, publications must engage their followers.

BE INTERACTIVE. Start or end your posts with a call to action. Ask provocative questions that encourage responses and stay active in the conversation.

BE FREQUENT. Industry magazines strive to be leading sources of information. If your publication's group has long stretches of inactivity, it loses credibility and dynamism and can reflect poorly on your magazine's reputation.

BE STRATEGIC. There's a difference between being frequent and being annoying. Rapid-fire posts can overwhelm readers. For the best results, create a social media strategy that includes regular updates, timing, and rules for monitoring and moderating the discussion. Tweak as needed.

SPREAD THE WORD - ATTRACT MORE FOLLOWERS

It goes without saying that your website should include links to your social media channels. If your publication is available in print, advertise those channels. Reference the group—at the conclusion of an article, tell readers the conversation continues online and encourage them to join the debate.

How else can people learn about your LinkedIn group? Does your e-mail signature include a link? What about your business card? Have you introduced special offers or contests exclusive to members?

Above all else, remember that business and niche publications thrive on creating a sense of community and shared interests. If you cultivate those values, provide solid content, and encourage interactivity, your publication—and its social media channels—will flourish.

 **DOWNLOAD MORE HOTSHEETS AT** magazinescanada.ca/cultural/hotsheets