

# Networking effectively: *Essential* for being successful in business

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## Abstract

One of the keys to being successful in business is the ability to network effectively. Making efficient use of the interactive communication tools available to you today, such as business networking websites like LinkedIn, Plaxo, and Xing and microblogging platforms like Twitter®, not only increases your chances of winning new clients and business but also helps in retaining them. This article describes the steps to efficiently win and retain clients and how to use business and social networking platforms to increase your chances of success.

**Keywords:** Business, Social networking, LinkedIn, Twitter®, Communication

The age-old adage 'it's who you know and not necessarily what you know' is very true in business. But getting to know the 'who', particularly when you're trying to operate internationally, can be tricky, especially in this day and age where sending emails is not always enough.

## Market yourself to develop business

Gaining contacts and future business associates is one of the most important practices in any business. Having a product or service to sell with no buyers is destined to end badly! Many people underestimate the power of sales. Coming from a sales background, I believe it is key to sell yourself and services (or product) properly. Simply being an exceptional writer is not enough. Sitting in your office, you can't just expect to receive work because you have X years of experience in the industry and have a website. You need to market yourself appropriately and make the buyer want to buy your services in the near future.

## Your role as a businessperson

If you are seeking new clients, remember that you are not only a writer but also a businessperson, which requires a change in philosophy and modus

operandi. Yes, you're a great writer, have X years of experience and have written an array of documents in a dozen medical fields, but can you bring the business in to showcase your talents? Are you winning business the right way? More importantly, are you retaining your business? Even if you work for a company, you need to make new contacts to ensure a steady flow of work.

This is where business relationships become paramount. Without any sort of relationship in life, be it with family, friends, colleagues, or even your personal trainer at your gym, your situation won't work nor will it evolve. You must build relationships and gain trust through exceptional work, but you also must remember to add the human element too. Business is business, but people buy people.

## Building relationships with business network websites

We are in an age where modern technology has transformed our way of life and business, simplifying and speeding up almost everything. Building relationships has also been made easier; are you on Facebook® with your family and friends? Do you stay up to date with loved ones over social media, seldom sending emails? Well, this approach also applies to business life, if you use it wisely.

The biggest business networking website is LinkedIn ([www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com); Figure 1). Others such as Xing ([www.xing.com](http://www.xing.com); Figure 2) and Plaxo ([www.plaxo.com](http://www.plaxo.com)) also have a following in Germany and America, respectively, but LinkedIn is number one. Almost everyone in business is on it, and if they're not, then it would be a very good idea if they were because, increasingly, employers and business partners want to see a professional online presence. Your online persona and CV play a big part in modern business, especially in medical writing, where your profile, when completed, serves as a showcase of your experience and achievements.

The screenshot shows a LinkedIn profile for Bilal Bham. The header includes the LinkedIn logo, account type (Basic), and user name (Bilal Bham). The navigation bar shows 'Home', 'Contacts', 'Groups', 'Jobs', 'Inbox', 'Companies', 'News', and 'More'. A search bar is present with 'People' and 'Advanced' options. Below the navigation bar, there is a banner for an auction: 'Auction -- Lab Equipment - Over 500 lots. Bidding underway, now. Click here to view available items. From: BioSurplus, Inc'. The main profile section includes a profile picture, name 'Bilal Bham', title 'Owner and Medical Writer and Editor at Scripsi Scriptum Limited', and location 'Preston, United Kingdom | Pharmaceuticals'. A status update reads: 'Bilal Bham I am actively searching for new projects to take on :)'. The 'Current' section lists 'Owner and Medical Writer and Editor at Scripsi Scriptum Limited'. The 'Past' section lists 'Medical Editor at Renovo Limited', 'Medical Writer at Sanofi-Aventis Deutschland GmbH', and 'Associate Medical Writer at Accovion GmbH'. The 'Education' section lists 'The University of Manchester' and 'Preston College'. The 'Recommendations' section shows '1 recommendation'. The 'Connections' section shows '500+ connections'. The 'Websites' section shows 'Company Website'. The 'Twitter' section shows 'ScripsiScriptum'. The 'Public Profile' section shows 'http://uk.linkedin.com/in/bilalbham'. Below the profile section, there is a 'Summary' section with 'Professional Experience' and 'Goals'. The 'Professional Experience' section lists 'Medical and scientific writing, editing, proofreading and QC on CSRs, IBs, manuscripts, abstracts, posters, power point presentations, formulary packs, review articles and editorials.' The 'Goals' section is empty. To the right of the profile, there are several widgets: 'Share profile', 'View profile', 'Ask for recommendations', 'Create your profile in another language', '90% profile completeness', 'Complete your profile quickly', 'Import your résumé to build a complete profile in minutes.', 'Profile Completion Tips (Why do this?)', 'Ask for another recommendation (+5%)', 'Ads by LinkedIn Members', 'Tumor Studies Software', 'Automate your lab today for \$99 per month per user. We host, no worries.', 'Learn More >', 'Digital Marketing eBook', 'Read how medical & healthcare firms are using digital to reach customers', 'Learn More >', and 'Who's Viewed Your Profile?', '8 Your profile has been viewed by 8 people in the past 3 days.', '10 You have shown up in search results 10 times in the past 3 days.'

LinkedIn has helped me to win a lot of business and keep in touch with all my clients and many other professionals and friends

Figure 1: My LinkedIn profile page.

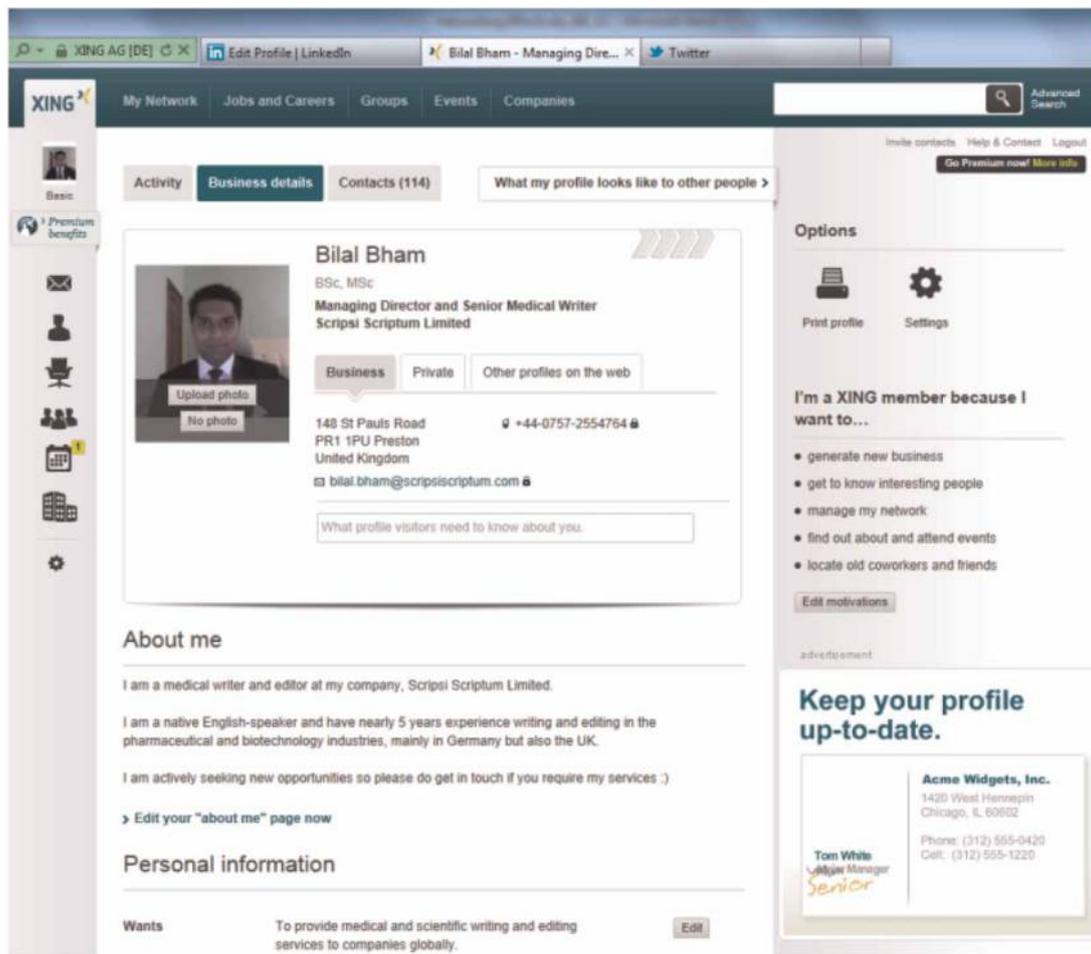
## LinkedIn and Xing – What are they?

LinkedIn is a business networking platform, like a Facebook® for professionals, which allows you to connect with people in the professional world. You can either be invited to it or go to the website yourself and create a profile. There are different levels of membership, ranging from the relatively limited but free standard membership to different levels of premium membership, which requires a paid subscription but opens up many features like sending messages to people who aren't connected to you and seeing more details in their profiles. The more people you are connected to and the more groups you subscribe to, the more people will be available to see what you have to offer. Xing is similar to

LinkedIn, in that you can be invited or join up yourself, and premium membership makes available a range of features unavailable under basic membership such as writing to people you aren't connected to.

## How to make a new business contact

Blindly phoning companies, so-called 'cold-calling', is only productive to a certain degree – you usually end up being given the generic info@ email address. Therefore, you need to have a focus; simply asking for a 'medical writing manager', for example, won't help and you are unlikely to get any further than the gatekeeper. Having an objective in mind and not losing focus is very important – be single



Xing has allowed me to retain contact with my German colleagues and friends

Figure 2: My Xing profile page.

mindful when doing business development. Use the following approach to make a new business contact: research, identify, call, present, connect and retain.

#### *Research*

Do some background research on a company that could be a potential client. You might decide that certain pharma or biotech companies, CROs, or medical communications companies look interesting because they have had a good measure of recent success with drug trials or acquiring new business. Frequently visiting pharma news websites such as [www.worldpharmanews.com](http://www.worldpharmanews.com) and other similar websites will help give you an insight into the industry and will allow you to act upon breaking news so that you can be more focused in chasing potential business leads.

#### *Identify*

Use LinkedIn, for example, to search for individuals relevant to your field working within that company.

Typically, these are regulatory affairs managers, publications managers, medical writing managers and, if need be, the boss of the company.

#### *Call*

This is where your writing abilities take the back seat and your abilities as a business person, in this case your sales skills, take precedence. Phone the company and ask to speak to the person in question directly. You may encounter someone blocking your progression to the person you want to contact – a so-called ‘gatekeeper’ – but this is where your personality and presence of mind and a bit of guile, kick in.

#### *Present*

Once through to the decision-maker, show your personality and present yourself in the way you see fit. What works for one person won't necessarily work for another, but the one piece of pertinent advice I can offer is to keep your

conversation short and succinct. Insist on sending over a summary of your experience and a copy of your CV for their records.

### Connect

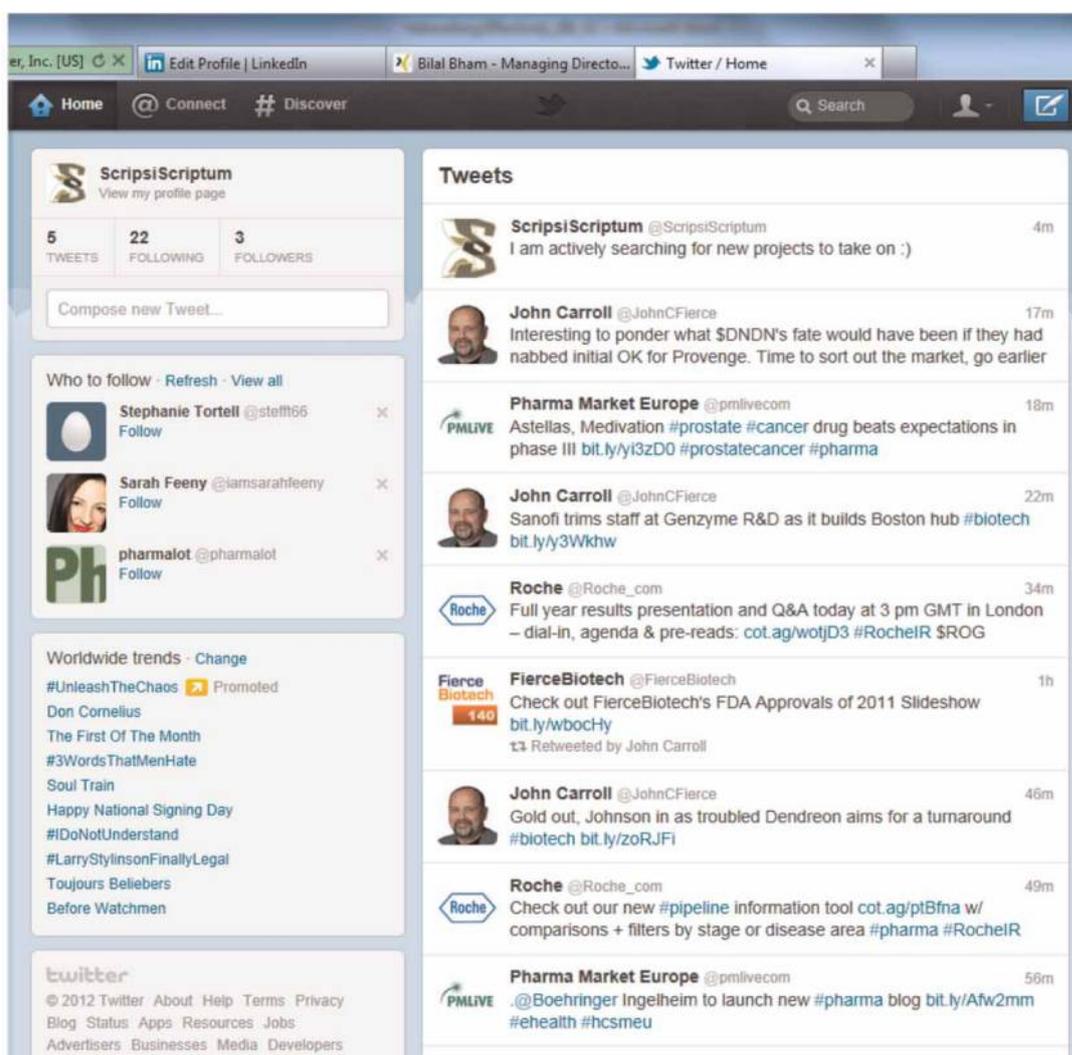
Insist on trying to connect with the person you have spoken to over LinkedIn and/or Xing so that they have access to your profile page at the click of mouse.

### Retain

After connecting, try staying in contact without becoming overbearing, perhaps sending updates on your experience or any changes, or even simple courtesy messages so that you keep their attention and they don't forget who you are!

## Tapping into social media

Keeping the attention of clients and potential clients via platforms such as Twitter® (www.twitter.com; Figure 3, Figure 4 and Box 1) in addition to LinkedIn is also rewarding. Twitter® is a free and non-profit social networking and microblogging platform where people can send out short messages via status updates, so-called 'Tweets'. You can 'follow' or be 'followed' by people on Twitter®, whoever they are, meaning that you can view their Tweets on your profile and vice versa. You can also view Tweets from people you are not following and vice versa. It works purely because of the users, who may be ordinary individuals like you and me, famous people, companies, or institutions and so forth who will send out Tweets about what they are doing, what is coming up or any breaking news or gossip, which then spreads through reblogging.



Twitter has given me the opportunity to follow and be followed by professionals in the pharmaceutical industry via microblogging

Figure 3: My Twitter® profile page.

How to create a Twitter account

Figure 4: Joining Twitter®.

**Box 1: Twitter®: the basics**

Website: [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)

Profile: microblogging social networking platform limited to 140 characters per status update, i.e. 'Tweet'

Accessibility: quick, simple, and easy to set up an account

How to create an account:

Creating a Twitter® account is the simplest account you will ever create! (Figure 4)

Go to [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com), fill in your name, your email address and think of a password, then click on sign-up, which will allow you to create a username, and voila, you are finished! It really is that easy and the rest of your profile is simple to complete because the registration process is quick and takes you through it, it is very user-friendly!

For further information: <https://support.twitter.com/>

Some basics: The @ and # symbols:

The # symbol, called a hashtag, is used to mark keywords or topics in a Tweet and is used as a way to categorize messages.

An @reply is any update posted by clicking the 'Reply' button on another Tweet.

Connectivity: You can 'follow' or be 'followed' by people on Twitter®, whoever they are, meaning that you can view their Tweets on your profile and vice versa. You can also view Tweets from people you are not following and vice versa.

Mobility:

Using Twitter® via your smartphone is also very easy. To use it via your smartphone, either visit the website or even better, download the free app, put in your details and away you go!

Twitter® is very simple. Unlike Facebook®, where you have many fields to complete on your profile and have an unlimited number of characters for your status updates, Twitter® is the converse. The amount of information you can put in your profile is limited – tweets are restricted to 140 characters. Sending out informative or often simple tweets to your followers (who may be your clients) keeps you

alive in their minds, meaning that they're less likely to forget you. Being connected over Twitter® is also increasingly seen as the new way of forming and developing business relationships as well as spreading breaking news. One of the most convenient features of LinkedIn and Twitter® is that they can be linked, so that updating your status on one of the platforms will automatically do the same on the other.

## **Don't forget to live in the 'real world' – face-to-face networking still works!**

Remember that you don't simply want to become a voice over the phone or a still photo online. Networking events, conferences, congresses and so forth are equally vitally important. For example, I connected with someone over LinkedIn, but they never replied to any of my follow-up emails; however, upon meeting them in person, I swiftly got a reply with a view to potential future business. So, attend events, and never leave your business cards at home! Again, ask to connect with them over LinkedIn. It is them you want the business from and to connect with, so you must be proactive in your efforts to connect with them. Don't simply expect them to connect with you – they're likely to be busier than you are and you won't be the only person who will have given them your business

card. Stand out in some way and try to leave an impression!

## **Summary**

Networking effectively for the benefit of your business is important in today's highly competitive business world. Building and maintaining long-term relationships are key to successful and mutually beneficial business relationships. Current business and social networking platforms such as LinkedIn, Xing, Plaxo, and Twitter<sup>®</sup> have simplified interactivity by tapping into our innate needs to communicate. Communicating face-to-face and via the telephone will never be replaced, nor should they be, but taking full advantage of the interactive business and social networking tools available is an intelligent investment of time and effort that will help make your business development a bit easier and more efficient.

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## **Author information**

**Bilal Bham** has a BSc honours degree in Genetics from the University of Manchester, which included an industrial placement year at European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) and the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO) in Heidelberg, Germany. He also completed an MSc in Immunology and Immunogenetics at the same university.