



# SHOULD YOU ACCEPT ALL YOUR LINKEDIN INVITATIONS?

WE TACKLE THE QUALITY V QUANTITY DEBATE.

Here's a question, and it's not a trick one: What do you and Barbie have in common? Nothing, you say? Apart from a love of caravan trips and evening wear. Well, if you're even mildly ambitious, like Entrepreneur Barbie, you'll both have an impressive LinkedIn profile. And Barbie's is so good, salary comparison site PayScale had a story on three things we can learn from it.

Since its 2003 launch, LinkedIn Corporation has grown to more than 300 million users worldwide, and has the online professional networking market cornered. But, with the need for a LinkedIn profile now established (beyond a doubt), there's still the issue of what it's actually for and how we should best use it. For example, what if someone wants to 'connect' with you and you have no idea who they are? Should you accept? Is LinkedIn a numbers game? Is it a case of the more connections you have, the more impressive you seem to potential employers and the more opportunities will cross your path?

Yes, says Dan Schawbel, founder of Millennial Branding, a Gen-Y research and management consulting firm, and author of *The New York Times* bestseller *Promote Yourself: The New Rules For Career Success*.

"Accept everyone," says Schawbel, with a caveat to reject obvious spam. "I did and I have 10,000 connections. It's important because if you don't have a large LinkedIn database then you don't get to see many profiles. If you don't get to see many profiles, you can't connect with more people, and you can't pitch them or apply for jobs. You're basically cut off from the world."

But is there any point having connections with people you'll probably have no further contact with? "It's not like they'll all do you favours, but a percentage will and that's what you need to get to the next level in your career," says Schawbel. "It's a numbers game. Everything is a numbers game. The more people who connect with you, the more followers you have. There are so many circumstances [where a job

opportunity comes from someone you don't know] in an interconnected world. To cut yourself off is foolish."

But before you get too click happy on the 'accept' button, let's hear from career expert and author Nicole Williams, who takes the opposite view. She believes it pays to be much more discerning when deciding who to accept on LinkedIn. "Our basic line is: if you don't know or trust this individual, you shouldn't accept the connection request," says Williams. "It's all about quality. This should be someone who you can help in their career, and who's able to help in yours. It should be a reciprocal relationship."

Williams, who has about 500 connections, says she often rejects requests. No photo on your profile will result in an immediate refusal, and she also rejects people who don't include a message reminding her how she knows them, and preferably outlining how they can help each other professionally.

"It's a professional platform, so you have to be more cautious than you would on social networking sites because this isn't your friend database," she says. "This is representative of your professional relationships, it represents your professional brand, so you need to be particular about who you allow to be a part of your network."

Treating it as a numbers game is "undermining the efficacy of the site", which fulfills a vastly different role from other social networking sites, continues Williams. "Twitter's a broadcast medium so numbers are important. Facebook: those are your friends. But this is a different beast. The usefulness is attached to building relationships and connections that actually matter and that are meaningful and can lead to the enhancement of your career, so if [the connection] is just a name in a database it doesn't look good. Employers aren't thinking, 'Oh, he has 5000 connections, that's of value.' They're looking more specifically: 'Do we have a connection in common? Is this connection in common someone I could ask for a reference?'"

Putting the quality v quantity debate to one side, Williams and Schawbel agree on one thing: as a professional networking platform, LinkedIn has no real competition. "No other site out there allows professionals to connect, to learn and to enhance their existing career," says Williams.

Adds Schawbel: "There's an opportunity cost not being on that platform." ■

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