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The instinct to be distinct

LEADERS ON LINKEDIN

THE CATALYST
FOR DRIVING
BUSINESS GROWTH





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PREFACE



In today's digital age, personal branding on LinkedIn has emerged as a powerful tool for business growth. Leaders who embrace LinkedIn can significantly impact key business metrics and create meaningful connections with their audience.

In this report, we explore the strategies, challenges, and success stories of leaders who have harnessed the power of LinkedIn to drive business growth.

Our own LinkedIn story began in 2018 when EC-PR was almost broke.

We had a very short client list, and our largest client had just restructured its PR in-house.

Having considered LinkedIn marketing for a while, it seemed like the ideal opportunity as our choices were becoming limited. We conducted a four-month initiative, mainly outbound, which resulted in us contracting over £100k fee income, paying for the work 18 times over.

At this point, we thought: "Oh, we need to take this platform seriously". Not just as a business, but as leaders, developing and working our distinct personal brands, to keep opportunities warm and nurture relationships.

Over the intervening years, we have built a vibrant, successful B2B PR business with our LinkedIn network at the heart of our marketing and prospecting.

We have defined and refined our approach and been taught by the best LinkedIn trainer in the world – Lea Turner – who contributed valuable insight to this report.

Over time, we started to capture our best practices into a repeatable methodology to help our clients develop their distinct voices on LinkedIn, complementing and maximising the earned media activity (press coverage) we deliver. This report serves to share knowledge and expertise to help you elevate your brand by harnessing the power of your Leaders on LinkedIn.

Enjoy!

Lorraine Emmett

Lorraine Emmett

Managing Director,
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INTRODUCTION: PEOPLE BUY FROM PEOPLE



The phrase “people buy from people” cannot be underestimated. It’s a golden rule emphasising the power of personal relationships, trust, and credibility within the B2B space.

With over 930 million members, LinkedIn has become the world’s largest professional networking platform – a far cry from its roots of being somewhere you go if you’re looking for a job. It’s now a community that, when harnessed correctly, can be your secret weapon for business growth, creating commercial opportunities, and elevating your company’s reputation.

Having active Leaders on LinkedIn is one of the most underused but most cost-effective ways to increase customers and open doors for mid-sized technology businesses. Edelman revealed that a whopping 82% of people are more likely to trust a company when their senior executives are active on social media. And LinkedIn state that leads developed through employee social marketing convert more frequently than others and socially engaged companies are 57% more likely to see increased sales leads.

But it’s no stroll in the savannah – there are challenges for those who have yet to find the winning formula. So, how do you make your socials soar?

To develop this report, we brought together leading marketing professionals, c-suite execs and business founders to discuss the benefits of active Leaders on LinkedIn and answer three critical questions:

1. How can personal branding for c-suite leaders improve key business metrics from reputation to commercial opportunities?
2. How can marketing leaders build a business case for leaders to be more active on LinkedIn?
3. What are the common pitfalls to avoid, and how do you overcome objections from your leadership team?

Their insights and experiences are enlightening.

Liz Churchman



THEME 1: **PERSONAL BRANDING AS A DRIVER FOR BUSINESS GROWTH**

In its simplest form, personal branding is centred around crafting and promoting a distinct identity that sets leaders apart, emphasising their unique value and expertise in their field. It's about consciously shaping perceptions to showcase your authenticity and strengths. Kicking off this discussion and reinforcing this rationale is CEO of Concirrus, **Andy Yeoman** who offered insights into the significance of personal branding for him and its influence on his business.



The power of personal branding: A CEO's journey

Challenge:

His journey started without any background in the marine or insurance market, despite this being the core market for his insurtech business. "The pivotal advice I received was to view the industry not merely as an entity, but as a community to nurture and engage with."

Approach:

Andy unpacked the limitations of traditional advertising and underscores the importance of a PR and brand-led approach. He emphasised the need for, "having an opinion about the customer's market, beyond just their technology – it was about understanding how our technology could impact their business and then taking this well-informed opinion out to the insurance media, as well as sharing it on LinkedIn."

For Andy, LinkedIn became the catalyst for cultivating his unique opinion about the market and engaging the community in meaningful conversations. He stressed that, "LinkedIn provides the perfect platform not just for corporate promotion, but for individuals to express their perspectives and engage authentically."

Result:

By investing the time and effort to develop and nurture his own personal brand, not only did Andy achieve global recognition as the second most influential person in the marine insurance space, but the organisation's client roster increased tenfold in two years. Reflecting on his greatest surprise from his LinkedIn activity, Andy said: "The greatest surprise is how many people actually read my posts and mention these to me when we meet."

<https://loydslist.com/LL1130061/Top-10-in-marine-insurance-2019>





Lea Turner, Director of Lea Does LinkedIn, only started her LinkedIn journey in 2019 but now boasts a following of over 160,000 on the platform. For Lea, LinkedIn has allowed her to help so many people, both through her training business and through her support as an ambassador for Hope4 (www.hope4.org.uk) – the charity she works alongside. “The reach and influence I’ve built on LinkedIn has helped raise huge sums of money, which in turn has helped thousands of lives in the poorest parts of Europe.”

Echoing Andy’s earlier point, she believes that building a community is the key factor. “LinkedIn isn’t just about logging into the platform, shouting your opinion to everybody and then leaving. It’s got to be about starting conversations and building relationships with people – that’s where the true value of LinkedIn is.”



Johnny Halife, Partner at SOUTHWORKS, also echoed this sentiment, highlighting an intriguing shift in networking. “While people may know about a company, they will turn to individuals LinkedIn profiles first when seeking connections or answers. This emphasises the critical role of personal branding for effective networking.”



THEME 2: CREATING THE BUSINESS CASE FOR LEADERS ON LINKEDIN

Effective LinkedIn leadership: strategies and outcomes

Leading a busy marketing department of a deep tech company, **Ciara Barron**, Director of Marketing at Blu Wireless, is all too familiar with some of these pitfalls and she has invested vast amounts of time ensuring business leaders avoid them.



According to **Ciara**, “Strong LinkedIn leadership entails focusing on individuals with rich backgrounds and compelling stories to tell. At Blu Wireless, we prioritise our efforts in understanding the viewpoints and backgrounds of our C-Suite as this becomes the driving force behind our content strategy that we hope will ignite meaningful conversations.

“Authenticity is the cornerstone of our content strategy. By aligning content creation with genuine perspectives and experiences from our leadership team, we feel confident that the content is resonating with our target audience. This is evident through the increase in likes, comments, and direct messages, as well as inbound leads.”

Patience remains a key factor, as Ciara noted that LinkedIn growth isn’t instantaneous, and the number of followers isn’t likely to skyrocket immediately. Leaders need to be in it for the long term. Ciara believes the business is now reaping the rewards. “We started from a place of being relatively unknown in one of our hard-to-reach sectors and a belief internally that LinkedIn was not the place to reach our audience but now we are being approached by one of the top tier industry publications for thought leadership content, as well as becoming a platform for new leads. This was the result of authentic thought leadership and a consistent voice.”





Measuring success



When asked how leaders should measure success on LinkedIn, what's realistic and meaningful, **Lea** commented that checking analytics including post impressions is useful. "Take a closer look at who is seeing your posts, what industries are they working in, where are they located and what's their job titles. Then ask yourself: is that who you want to be speaking to? A general rule of 'good' post reach impressions is 5-10% of your follower count. Likes, comments, reposts all help boost content further (comments and reposts have more impact). It's also important to factor in how many conversations you're starting, in your comments and DMs, and also in the real world. If leads aren't the goal, focus on the impact what you're saying is having."



Director of Market Engagement at Ascensos, **William Carson** adds: "The hard metrics around post impressions etc are simple to monitor and report on but we shouldn't forget the softer metrics. Are you receiving more meaningful and relevant inbox messages, do people such as partners, colleagues, clients, prospects mention your post content when you're in 1-2-1 or group situations, are you being approached to attend or contribute to specific industry events, are you finding dialogue with prospects easier. Where you are using a team to support you, you will want to measure your ROI against all of this, but of course, you need to ensure this isn't in isolation from the broader business objective for your brand/company – be that growth through supporting your strategic targets programme, or indeed simply helping your lead generation activities."



Igniting conversations on LinkedIn: crafting engaging content



Drawing on the topic of the content strategy, **Cheri Burns**, a former journalist and now Global PR Strategist and Leader at Encompass Corporation, provided some invaluable insights into the touchpoints that will spark conversations and fuel engagement within this digital sphere.

“The crux of igniting conversation on LinkedIn lies in understanding the audience’s expectations. It’s about striking that chord that resonates uniquely, deviating from the norm, and showcasing content that stands out in multifaceted ways. Contrary to passive consumption, the goal is to incite dialogue, to provoke thoughts, and to elicit responses.” Cheri believes that there are three fundamental touchpoints:

1. Provocative yet relatable content

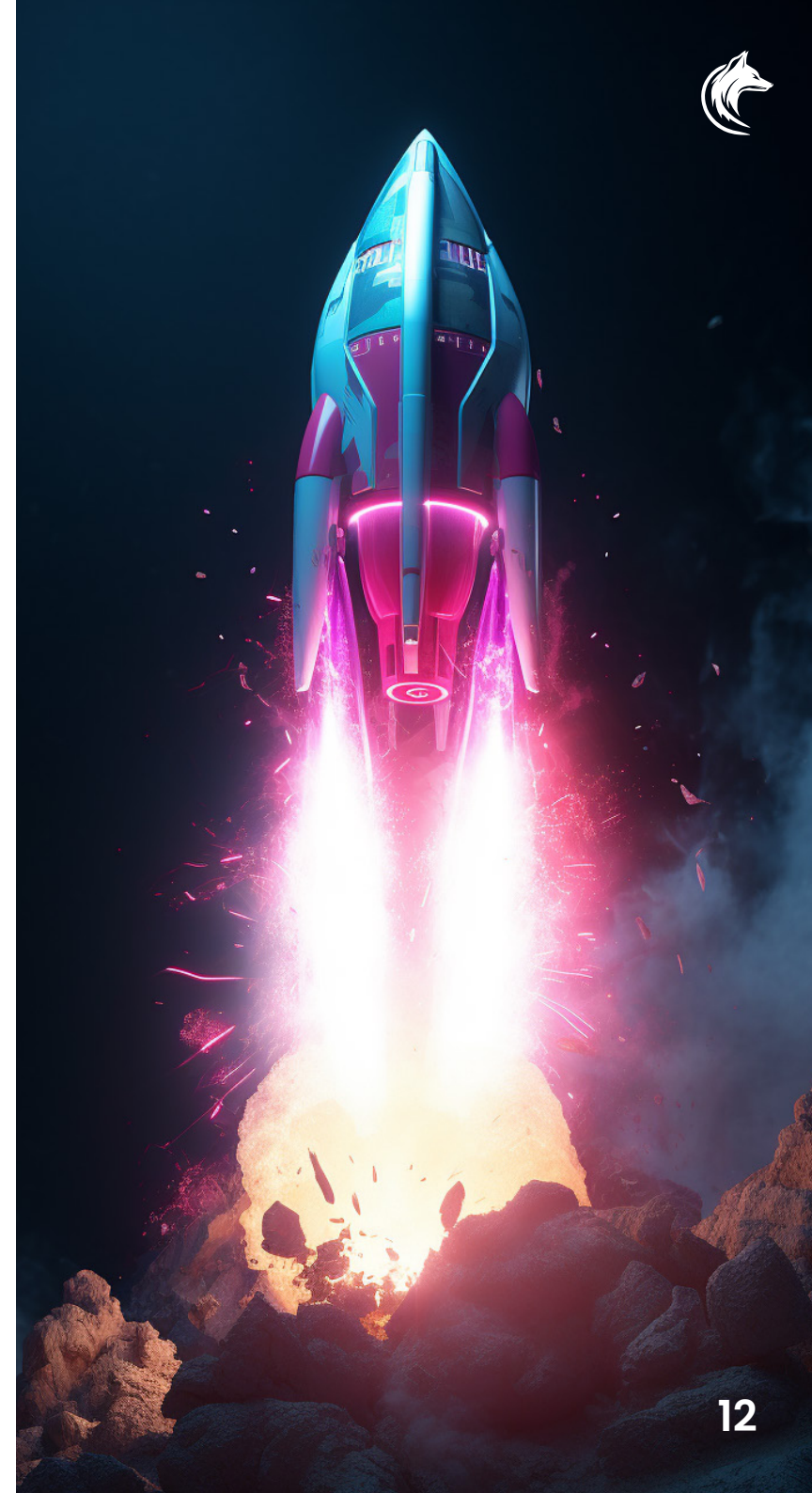
Content that stimulates debate, evokes emotions, and prompts individuals to contribute their viewpoints. However, Cheri underscores the necessity of relatability. “It’s not solely about being provocative; rather, it’s about studying emotions and crafting content that resonates deeply, compelling others to engage in a conversation.”

2. Encouraging two-way conversations

LinkedIn is a platform for a two-way dialogue. Cheri stressed the significance of crafting content that invites responses and prompts individuals to not merely consume but actively participate. The aim should be to create an environment conducive to discussion, where differing perspectives find a space for expression.

3. Standing out and inviting engagement

The essence of the content is not to be contentious for the sake of it. It’s about being distinct, embracing uniqueness, and inviting engagement. Cheri prompts contemplation on whether to be perceived as ‘spiky’ and highlights the importance of emotions, steering clear of mere provocation.





Ensuring authenticity: the role of senior leaders

So, you've agreed on the content, but how involved do leaders need to be in the creation and delivery of content? Is this something leaders can simply pass to their Marketing team to 'do it for them'?



For our very own Deputy Managing Director, **Liz Churchman** and **Johnny**, the short answer was no. Active involvement of leaders in managing their personal brand is crucial. Liz explained: "Leaders must lead. This isn't something that can be done to them – there has to be a level of collaboration in identifying content themes, key messages and tone of voice to ensure their authenticity, passion and personality shines through."



Liz highlighted that audiences quickly discern inauthenticity, which in turn erodes trust so it's vital that leaders can express their own passions and learnings genuinely.



Liz also advised against forcefully fitting corporate messages into personal branding narratives. Instead, she advocated giving leaders the freedom to interpret messages, offering a more personal touch that aligns with their audiences' expectations. **Billy Burnet** at XTM International furthered the point, highlighting the need to strike a balance between authenticity and alignment with business values. "Leaders should infuse their personal style into business values, creating a cohesive blend that resonates with their audience."



Presenting the business case

Pitching the business case for senior leaders to be on LinkedIn continues to be a challenging conversation for many CMOs but for **William**, it's simple. "If you're not present, you're not relevant."



Andy echoed the simplicity of this message by stating, "It's 2023. We face a choice – we either take charge of crafting our distinct voice on LinkedIn or be judged by our silence. We can choose to participate or not, we can choose to like this or not, but we cannot choose whether we or our brands are judged. For me, this is not optional. We must decide to own our profile, embrace it, and run with it. Much like a mobile data plan – what's the business case for that?"

The simple truth for Andy is that you are either connected or disconnected and in today's environment, the price of being 'connected' might not be cheap but the cost of being disconnected is unthinkable.



Johnny recommends people should think of LinkedIn as a goldmine for brand awareness. "When our top leaders share insights and stories there, it's like putting a spotlight on our company. It's not just about posting content; it's about showing we're leaders in our field. Plus, it's an awesome networking tool – think of the partnerships and talent we could attract. And let's not forget our team; seeing their leaders out there on LinkedIn, publicly praising, and recognising the work of the staff is a big morale boost and a magnet for top talent. It's a win-win all around."



THEME 3: NAVIGATING THE PITFALLS AND OBJECTIONS

Navigating the pitfalls: strategies for effective personal branding



Of course, there are challenges and pitfalls that **Lea** is more than familiar with.

“One of the things I often see from senior leaders is that their profiles are all about them. We need to remember that our audience is more interested in the insights and value we have to offer than a recital of our personal achievements.”



Lea challenged the outdated approach of viewing LinkedIn as a digital CV by stressing the importance of showcasing achievements that benefit others. She advocates for a profile that speaks to how one's accomplishments have positively impacted others, emphasising the inherent self-interest in why people choose to follow and engage. "They want to know how following you will benefit them personally."

Another essential pitfall to avoid, according to Lea, is maintaining an entirely business-centric profile. She draws a parallel to real-life networking events, where relationships rarely blossom solely from just business talk. "We all find things that we have in common with people we meet and that's where relationships start. It very rarely becomes a valuable relationship if we only ever cover the business side of things. I'm not suggesting you need to share every detail of your personality or your personal life but humanise your profile and showcase some of your personal interests as this will lay the foundation for more genuine interactions."



Johnny stressed the importance of presenting a multifaceted personality and not just a professional façade. "Sharing personal passions or hobbies humanises leaders, fostering relatability and trust among their audience. The recognition and connections I've made with industry leaders has been surprising and unexpected. Initially, I thought it would be nearly impossible to engage in meaningful conversations with such prominent figures and yet, to my astonishment, I found myself not only discussing but also showcasing our work to them."

For Johnny, this networking community has opened doors he never thought possible, allowing him to share insights and ideas with some of the top minds in his field. "It's been an incredibly rewarding and eye-opening experience."





Moving on to the subject of how often a leader should post, frequency emerged as a key theme, with recommendations to post content at least twice a week, while Lea Turner is an advocate of five times a week being the ideal for maximum impact. The emphasis lies not just on frequency but also on the value and genuine enjoyment while engaging on LinkedIn. The enjoyment factor contributes significantly to sustained engagement.

Don't make the mistakes we made!



Given the extensive experience amongst our contributors, we were keen to know what they would do differently if they could start their LinkedIn journey again. **Johnny** highlighted the amount of time he wasted considering and questioning whether he should or shouldn't post, interact, and even use emojis. Now, he would get on with the process of networking, creating content and sharing more of who he is, his values, what he stands for, and how it relates to the company he's building. He would also interact a lot more.



For **Cheri** it was all about authenticity. "I started using LinkedIn purely professionally. I thought you had to always be in the corporate voice and mind. As we've all discussed today, you need to show some of your authentic self - you need to let people in a bit for them to relate to you."



Finally, **Lea** shared that she would get over herself and do more videos. "Videos fill me with dread - I don't like it all, but it has made a huge difference in terms of building trust, familiarity with people and skyrocketing my brand. So, I would just get over myself sooner, stop standing in my own way and start creating short, engaging videos."



CONCLUSION

The weight of evidence shows that LinkedIn has grown from lion cub to a mighty beast and, for those who know how to tame its raw power and unleash its potential, has become an impressive tool for business growth.

Our network of senior leaders has relayed how they have used LinkedIn to secure influence and credibility, develop a distinctive voice in competitive markets, generate income, and support charitable work. Not one mentioned using the platform to change their job or having regrets about the time and effort invested!

They have used it to save businesses, launch businesses, build and grow businesses and universally, this has been achieved via their personal profile, not their company page. They speak as one regarding the importance of being authentic, consistent and supportive – giving as much as they receive in terms of both their content AND their comments.



Leaders on LinkedIn share insight and offer learnings from throughout their careers and personal lives so that others can learn from them and not make the same mistakes. This vulnerability makes them accessible and credible, and by sharing bite-sized personal stories, they reveal their passions and interests, attracting like-minded individuals. This combination is powerful, enabling human connections to build into robust relationships rooted in shared interests both in and out of the 'office'.

The delicate balance between professionalism and personality underscores the need to share personal aspects or hobbies to forge human connections. Engaging beyond the world of work fosters relatability and trust, expanding connections beyond professional facades. Leaders' active involvement in managing their personal brand is crucial, guiding and identifying themes and messaging that resonate authentically.

A strategic approach to personal branding for senior leaders involves understanding the target audience's content format preferences and where they seek information and insight and ensuring the leader is present in those channels, speaking consistently and purposefully.

Measuring success through metrics like reach, impressions, and engagement reflects the impact of authentic engagement. Balancing personal and professional content on LinkedIn and consistent posting reinforces the blend of professional expertise with personal narratives.





For one MD
in just six months,
**we increased
their network
(followers)
by 141%.**

**“While I have never
approached LinkedIn
as some kind of ‘sales
lead tap’ recent
analysis shows that
no less than 25% of my
business leads this
year have come from
my LinkedIn activity.”**

**The reach
(impressions) of their
LinkedIn profile
went up by 690%**

(from 15,768 over the previous
six months to 124,529).

And their network became more
engaged with their posts –
**we saw a 659% increase
in Likes, Comments, and
Shares** (from 269 to 2,043).

Maintaining authenticity and infusing personality, even in AI-driven content, remains paramount in content creation. Embracing video content allows leaders to shine authentically, fostering higher engagement. Ultimately, this comprehensive approach emphasises authenticity, blending personal and professional elements, and amplifies the effectiveness of personal branding efforts on LinkedIn.

If you're hooked and want to get your Leaders on LinkedIn, we've created a white glove service called Catalyst – download your copy of the **Catalyst Executive Profiling guide** [here](#), you'll discover, more practical tips and tricks for LinkedIn success and pitfalls to avoid on your journey. Catalyst is a structured, practical approach to activating your C-suite execs on LinkedIn.



ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM OUR EXPERT CONTRIBUTORS

While the report delves into various crucial aspects of Leaders on LinkedIn, our experts shared extra insights regarding AI, connection volumes, and the strategic necessity of personal branding. We are excited to share this bonus content with you and hope it helps to shape your own journey!



1. Everyone seems to be dabbling in it, so how do you see AI-generated content affecting authenticity for novices?

AI-generated content on platforms like LinkedIn has sparked a debate about its impact on authenticity, especially for novices looking to establish their personal brand. Let's hear from our contributors, **Billy Burnet**, **Lea Turner**, and **William Carson**, as they share their insights on this matter.



Billy Burnet: "In cases where leaders are struggling to get started with their personal branding journey on LinkedIn or find themselves lacking inspiration on certain days, using AI-generated content can be the spark that's needed. However, I would always recommend post-editing the content to make it your own."

Billy highlights that AI-generated content can serve as a valuable starting point, especially for those who may be new to personal branding or LinkedIn. It can provide a foundation upon which novices can build their own unique voice and perspective.



Lea Turner: "I think AI can be extremely helpful to novices, offering a springboard in terms of ideas and outlines for their content. However, more guidance needs to be provided. AI content shouldn't be the 'end product' of LinkedIn content; instead, it should be a guide or a first draft before you add your own stamp on it. I'm very much against using AI for comments and strongly advocate against this practice! New users often think AI will be a great shortcut to creating loads of content, but they quickly learn that it gets little to no traction and does nothing positive for their brands."



Lea underscores the importance of not relying solely on AI-generated content as a final product. While it can provide structure and ideas, she emphasises the need for novices to infuse their own personality, experiences, and insights into the content. Additionally, Lea cautions against using AI for comments, highlighting the potential pitfalls of inauthentic engagement.



William Carson: “Having used GenAI to create content, it’s clear that the ‘authenticity’ element is diluted, and the more of it you use, the less authentic the tone of voice becomes. This is similar to the ghost-writer content of several years ago that was once the norm for C-suite leaders who wanted to have a presence on LinkedIn but didn’t get too involved in content creation. Over time, it gets easy to spot.”

William’s perspective provides valuable insight into the potential downsides of relying too heavily on AI-generated content. He suggests that an overreliance on AI can lead to a loss of authenticity over time, a sentiment shared by many in the industry.

“All that said, where GenAI can be useful is in triggering creativity. ChatGPT won’t particularly reflect your industry but can identify the common hallmarks of good content that attracts attention, specific to LinkedIn, and will therefore help with the form, shape, and emphasis that your content needs. An area that some appear to be using AI for on LinkedIn is in the comments section. In these cases, the AI simply does a mash-up of the actual post content and feeds it back as some form of a response – but this is to be avoided. For me, this evaporates trust.”





2. Do you feel the number of connections within a targeted account, say Ikea is something people should be aiming for.



Lea Turner: “If this is for a company page, then you should always be using your 250-company page invites per month and tagging the company in employee posts to push more eyes over to the company page, but when it comes to making sales, or building influence, that more often comes from the PERSONAL rather than the company pages.”



Liz Churchman: “Success on LinkedIn should not simply be measured by the number of connections. It’s quality over quantity every time. You want the right people – not just anyone. Also, bear in mind the unengaged can turn out to be the most surprisingly profitable opportunities. Just because someone doesn’t comment or react, doesn’t mean that they’re not listening and learning.”



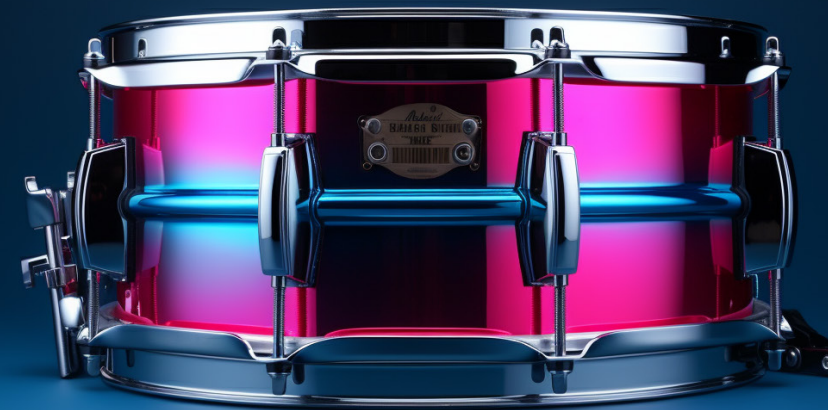
3. Do you think personal branding for leaders requires a strategic approach and what channels should marketers prioritise? Is it just about LinkedIn?



Liz Churchman: “Unquestionably, yes it does require a strategic approach. For two reasons. Firstly, you don’t want to waste the leaders time – everything that you do with the leadership team needs to be efficient and purposeful.

Secondly, your audience consumes information through various media channels. Leaders need to be available and accessible through the most important ones. This underscores the importance of understanding the target audience, emphasising the need to ask pertinent questions: Where is the audience? What content engages them? Where do they seek information? Recognising LinkedIn as one platform in your armoury and the most important one over which you have complete control, a strategic approach is therefore essential.

Furthermore, combining thought leadership and personal branding for Leaders reinforces the strategic approach. The synergy between these elements allows for a comprehensive influence strategy that addresses industry-specific needs while establishing a Leader’s identity within that context.”





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At EC-PR, we are passionate about B2B communication and pursuing our instinct to make tech brands distinct. We believe your work is amazing and we want to help you tell the world how extraordinary it is.



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