

## SOCIAL MEDIA

# As a Business Tool for Golf Instructors... Would You Endorse LinkedIn?

By David Gould, Staff Editor

Statistics tracking the success of LinkedIn since its debut in 2003 are stunningly impressive. Through its first decade of operation the website managed to acquire more than 260 million users in 200-plus countries. What is harder to prove is whether LinkedIn works well as a business-development tool for golf instructors and academies.

It's generally said that LinkedIn delivers more benefit for a business-to-business operation than to a company that sells to the consumer. If your golf clinics and schools target corporate groups, that makes LinkedIn a direct conduit. If, like most golf instructors, you market principally to consumers, you can still build your business with LinkedIn, because the business audience it attracts contains so many serious golfers.

It's obvious, but worth repeating, that the dollar cost of promoting yourself on LinkedIn is the same as on other social media sites—zero. Like any social media conduit, it takes effort and a bit of a self-promotion streak. It may also depend somewhat on the luck of who you connect with. Even people who are considered advanced users of LinkedIn would characterize it as a hit-and-miss, sometimes random pathway between business people. When in doubt, they spend their LinkedIn energy trying to connect with media people who are looking for subjects to write about, blog about or use in a broadcast.

Joshua Steimle, a contributor to *Forbes.com*, recently described his personal PR campaign using LinkedIn as quite successful. Within months of starting this effort he was mentioned in over 40 media outlets. Steimle strongly advises LinkedIn users to “tag” their connections with an industry name—otherwise the entire connection roster is one undifferentiated sea of people.

Among golf teachers, the experience of Proponent member Kenny Nairn is fairly typical—a good hire was made and a B2B issue of a non-recurring nature got handled through the selective magic of LinkedIn. “I was Endorsed by a client and one of that client’s customers suggested I review their tracking system for sales,” says Nairn, “I took the suggestion and ended up purchasing the system.” Along with his satisfactory experience sourcing a



business software tool, Kenny benefitted from what most people consider LinkedIn’s core benefit—locating qualified employees. “I sourced a very qualified sales associate that I ended up hiring,” Nairn reported, in a post on Proponent Group’s Facebook forum page.

Paul Kaster, who runs the instruction program at High Bridge Hills Golf Club in northern New Jersey, had a positive experience involving a student who came to him having first learned about Paul on LinkedIn. “She is a local business-

woman and resident of the town where our course is located,” recalls Kaster. “She came for lessons, then connected me to a sports psychologist who is quite good.” Asked to comment about the website’s proclivity to get members hitting the Endorse button for each other, Kaster takes a fairly positive view. “I think the endorsements have some value but only to other LinkedIn members who view your page,” he says. He adds that word of mouth recommendations still strongly outperform these button-clicks.

One Proponent Group member who speaks with a lot of enthusiasm about LinkedIn is Brett Packee, director of the Core Golf teaching program in Libertyville, Illinois. Not surprisingly, Packee begins his praise of LinkedIn by stating that “contacts and groups you follow can become a huge reference guide.” As with any online forum, blog or group interaction, you invest the time and brain activity not knowing if it will get you anywhere. Packee had very positive results from his interactions, as it turns out.

“LinkedIn is amazing,” he contends. “I arranged a business meeting with a CEO of a golf company that was set up through our LinkedIn connection. Plus, a golfer from Spain found me on the web, sent me a LinkedIn in request, we communicated, and he came to Chicago for three days of lessons.” Over the course of that visit, Brett’s Spanish student turned into a \$1,500 billing.

Greg Baresel, who teaches at Cantigny Golf Club outside Chicago, is another Proponent member who considers LinkedIn a “valuable tool.”

“To be able to connect with people I never thought possible has been a huge help for my business,” Greg says. “I see more results from LinkedIn than from any other social media site.”