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Ignoring LinkedIn Is Hurting Your Career

With its refreshed app and some tricks, it's time to make the uncoolest professional network part of your social-media routine



By **JOANNA STERN**

April 12, 2016 1:41 p.m. ET

At Social Media High, Facebook is the all-star quarterback, Twitter is the school paper's editor in chief and Snapchat is the mysterious, Harley-riding transfer student. That makes LinkedIn the nerd who skips prom for the mathlympics.

Yet, like in every great John Hughes movie, the underdog actually belongs in the in-crowd.

Admit it. Your most frequent interaction with the world's uncoolest network is deleting those "Join my network" emails. You're not alone: 61% of LinkedIn users visit the site no more than every few weeks, according to Pew Research Center.

I was the same, avoiding LinkedIn's baffling design and incessant nagging. But a few weeks ago, when I decided to give it a real varsity tryout, I realized LinkedIn deserves a place on my phone's home screen. I now check it a couple of times a week to find out what's happening in my industry. Use it right and you'll get ideas on how to improve your business, find new leads—and maybe land a job you didn't even know you wanted.

 IT'S WHO YOU KNOW

Check out Joanna Stern's other guides to social media:

- How to Start Liking Facebook Again (<http://www.wsj.com/articles/how-to-start-liking-facebook-again-fixes-for-the-biggest-complaints-1436897830>)
- How to Make Twitter Useful (<http://www.wsj.com/articles/how-to-make-twitter-actually-useful-1458065159>)
- How to Use Snapchat (<http://www.wsj.com/articles/snapchat-101-learn-to-love-the-worlds-most-confusing-social-network-1452628322>)

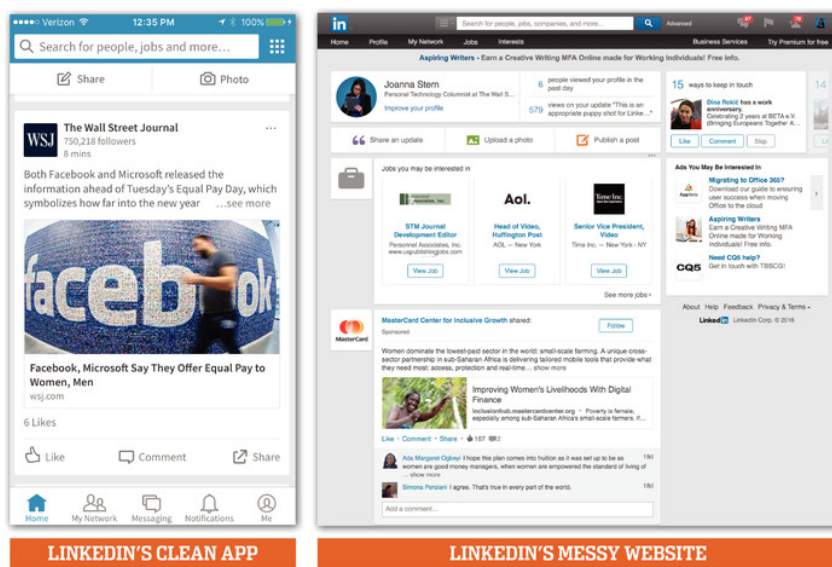
What's changed? LinkedIn has drastically improved its iOS and Android apps over the past few months, with even more iPhone app changes arriving just this week. With some tricks and assistance from LinkedIn pros, I've been able to zero in on the most important features within the overwhelming service. Don't get me wrong: Parts of it are still inexcusably terrible. But what other social network allows you to connect with people in a professional way?

Get Better at Your Current Job

Regardless of how you plan to use LinkedIn, I have one piece of unvarying advice: Avoid the cluttered website. The design is so unintuitive, I'm convinced doctors will discover it's the cause of a new distraction disorder—or high blood pressure. I've mistakenly sent invites to people when I had thought I was accepting theirs. I've spent hours trying to figure out why it says I have 97 new messages when I clearly don't.

The company is aware of these issues and is hard at work on improvements, says Julie Inouye, LinkedIn's senior director of member marketing and communications.

If the website is an overflowing attic, the iOS or Android apps are what remain after a good spring cleaning.



LinkedIn's mobile app is much easier to navigate than its website. *LINKEDIN (2)*

Sure, you'll find more advanced features on the Web, but the app has what you need

most, including profile editing, messaging and contact management.

Using the app's personalized feed of job advice and industry news is a must. Like the best trade publication ever, it gives readers a steady flow of deep insights. Knowing that I'm a tech writer who's connected to many people in the media industry, LinkedIn placed a story on Apple's News efforts at the top of my feed the other morning. Facebook wouldn't do that.

The suggestions have been better since I customized my feed. To do that, tap the three dots in the top right corner of a post, select Improve Your Experience, then pick the topics that interest you most. You'll begin to see more topical trending news articles—some from online outlets and others written specifically for LinkedIn.

Get a Stronger Network

For a decade, I've been using LinkedIn wrong. I always thought the best way to get rid of the little red pending invites was to accept all. That's actually the worst thing you can do when trying to build your network of business contacts.

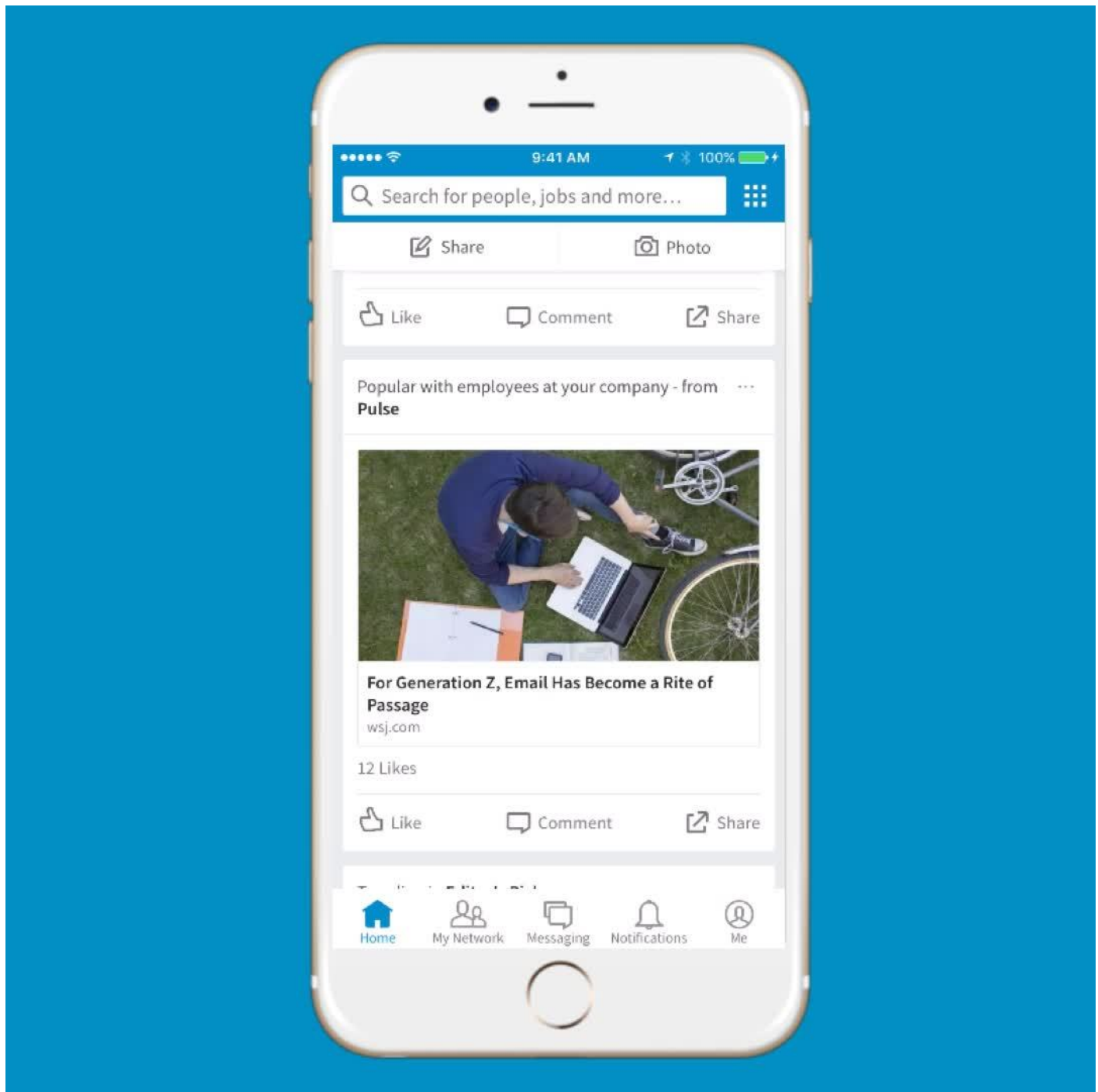
Since everyone I accepted could message me, my inbox was full of junk. No, attorney in Indonesia, I don't need representation. Another major reason to be wary? Some of the invites could be from scammers or phishers, aiming to leverage your information.

So I spent an hour culling my contacts by clicking on LinkedIn's hidden Remove Connection button. (You can find it in the app by going to the contact's page and selecting the three dots in the upper right corner.) You shouldn't be afraid to do the same. It's just business—and they won't be notified.

If you want them to remain as connections, you can alternatively opt to remove updates from them in your feed by unfollowing them. If you want to maintain a LinkedIn Rolodex of thousands, one seasoned user suggested tagging contacts with keywords. Unfortunately, this feature is only available on the website.

So how do you know whom to accept? Consider each invitation and focus on people who are of real value to you.

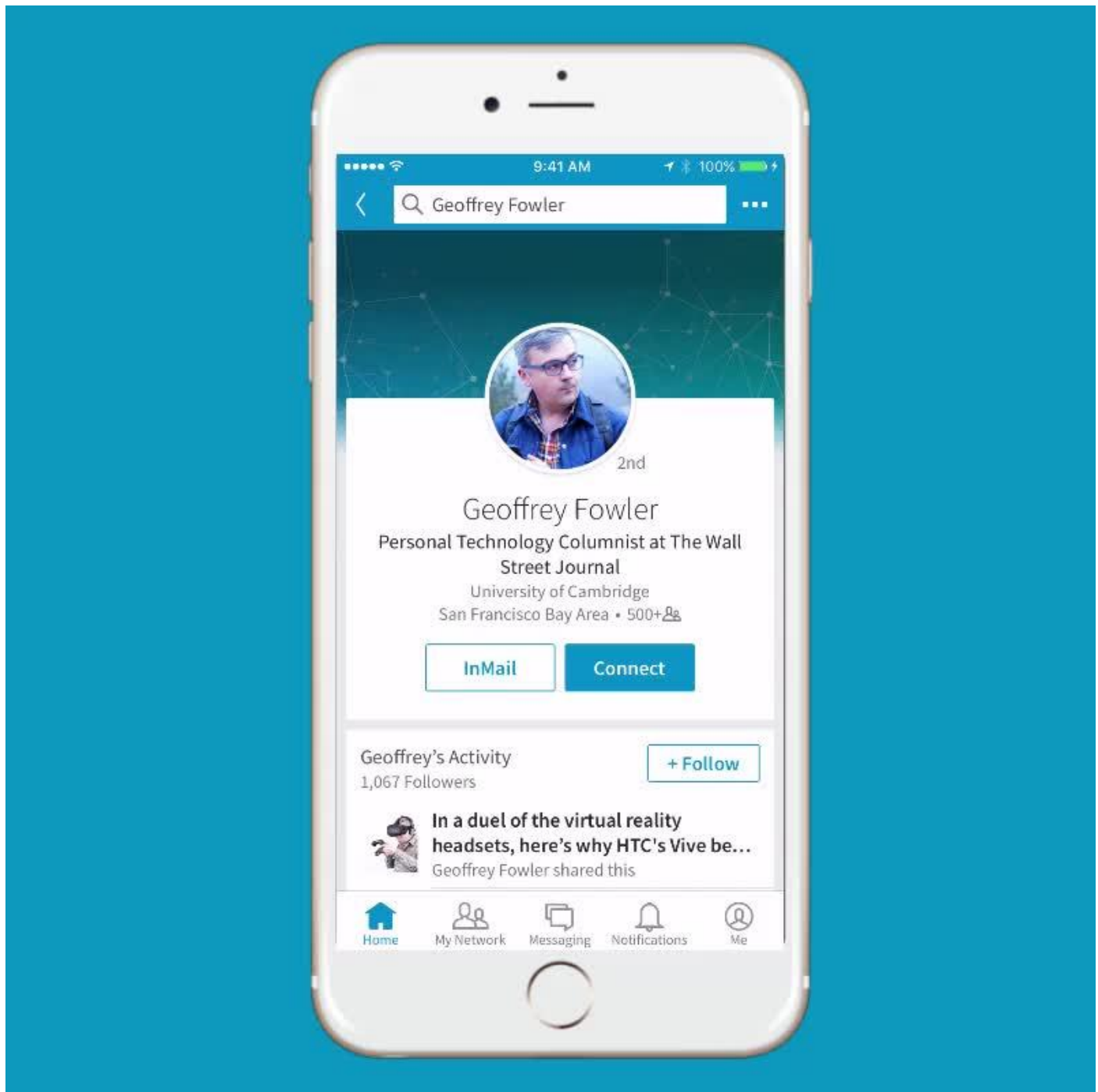
“You should keep it to people in your industry who you think could be of assistance, and to people you know and have done work with before,” says Victoria Ipri, an independent LinkedIn consultant, who teaches private classes and webinars on how to use the social network.



Follow these steps to personalize your LinkedIn feed.

When you're reaching out to someone, explain your intentions. Your best move is to swap the generic "Please join my network" email for a note saying why you'd like to connect. Two wrinkles: You have to do a new one for every person, and in the app you have to go to your potential contact's profile page to find it. (Tap the three dots and select Personalize Invite.) At the time of publishing this article, the personalized invites sent from the mobile app weren't appearing to recipients. LinkedIn says the bug will be fixed this week.

So then what? What do you do with these contacts?



It is best to send new contacts personalized invitations.

LinkedIn provides reminders to reach out to contacts when they've landed a new job or are celebrating a job anniversary. That can border on spammy. Instead, I've started interacting with my network the way I would on Facebook, posting status updates and links to articles. The thoughtful LinkedIn comments are a refreshing change from what I get on the snarkier avenues of the Internet.

You may end up reaching out to people about business leads or job opportunities. But even just being present on the network, lumped in among the right people, could advance your career.

Get a New Job

One of the most important things you can do on the Internet is create a strong LinkedIn profile. Update yours now. Don't worry, I'll wait.

It doesn't matter whether you are actively searching for the job of a lifetime or you plan to stay at your current one until you retire. Your LinkedIn profile is often one of the first things to pop up in Google search results. Eighty-seven percent of recruiters use the service, according to the 2015 Recruiter Nation Survey.

Ms. Ipri, my LinkedIn coach, says to think of your profile as less of a résumé and more of a cover letter. The most important part is the summary field. "This needs to describe you to everyone, including the people who would be hiring," she says. Say what you do in a creative and smart manner. Profiles with a summary receive seven times the views that ones without it get, according to LinkedIn. Update your pic, too: Profiles with photos performed 14 times better, LinkedIn says.

Those pesky little endorsements can be useful, too. LinkedIn looks at who endorses you and then uses those connections to help others find you. The endorsement tool is in need of a lot of work, but if you figure out how to use it, endorse a colleague. Scratch their back, maybe they'll scratch yours.

After a few years of letting my profile rot, I took the above steps and added some extras, including an honors and awards field. According to a widget on the website, my profile is "All-Star" strength—possibly my greatest accomplishment since graduating college.

To level up even more, you could pay \$30 a month for LinkedIn's Premium service for job seekers. It lets you see who's looking at your profile (unless the viewer has turned on Private Mode), or how you rank among peers. Just be warned: There's no way to try it without forking over your credit-card number.

For most, I suggest simply making LinkedIn a staple of your social-media routine. Use it correctly and you'll find it more rewarding than scrolling through all the puppies, babies and vacations on Facebook. Remember, it's always that uncool high schooler who goes on to greatness.

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PHOTO: DREW EVANS/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

THE ART OF THE PROFILE

Victoria Ipri works with clients to make their LinkedIn profiles shine. Here are her top tips:

- **1) A strong headline:** Don't be afraid to use all 120 characters to polish your LinkedIn profile headline. Go beyond your job title and company name, to add your core skills and describe your profession.
- **2) A well-written summary:** In first person, write two to three paragraphs about your career passions, special qualifications and achievements you're proud of.
- **3) Use keywords:** Browse job descriptions similar to your desired position and pick out keywords to sprinkle throughout the summary and headline so recruiters can find you.

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