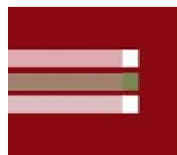


# AN EXAMPLE OF UK PUBLIC SECTOR BUSINESS NETWORKING

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## INTRODUCTION

This brief report describes the LinkedIn business networking web site. It sets it in the context of the wider set of web tools often referred to as Web 2.0. It gives examples of the profile of the UK public sector on LinkedIn. And it concludes with recommendations for public sector organisations.

## BACKGROUND

The term Web 2.0 has been in use since the mid-1990s. It is commonly associated with web applications that support interactive information sharing, user-centred design, and collaboration on the world wide web. Examples include:

- web-base communities of practice, exemplified by the local government Improvement and Development Agency networking web site Communities of Practice which currently hosts about 1,300 different communities
- blogging, or web logs (diaries) – as increasingly used by chief executives or on intranets and politicians publically, but available through free software and web-hosting such as WordPress to anyone
- sites that allow data to be downloaded, re-used and mashed up (combined by users with other information). Pre-eminent in the UK is the recently-launched [www.data.gov.uk](http://www.data.gov.uk) web site which already contains over 3,000 datasets
- image-sharing web sites like Flickr (photos) and YouTube (videos), already being used by some public sector organisations to communicate with a wider public
- the short-message service Twitter, again being used by many public organisations, in which short messages (140 characters or less) are used to communicate by text message or over the web with “followers”. England’s largest council Birmingham has over 1,300 followers on Twitter. Scotland’s largest council, Glasgow, has over 2,500 followers
- social networking sites like Facebook where people link online with friends. Organisations can also set up their own page on Facebook.

All these examples are distinguished from more traditional web sites where users are mainly limited to the passive viewing of information provided to them.

## A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF LINKEDIN

LinkedIn ([www.Linkedin.com](http://www.Linkedin.com)) has the characteristics of a social networking web site but with a specific business focus. It allows registered users to maintain a list of contact details of people (connections) they know and trust in business. They can invite anyone (whether a site user or not) to become a connection. This list of connections can then be used in a number of ways, for example:

- to build up a contact network of direct connections, the connections of each of their connections (second-degree connections) and also the connections of second-

degree connections (termed third-degree connections). This can be used to gain an introduction to someone the user wishes to know through a mutual, trusted contact

- to find jobs, people and business opportunities recommended by someone in the user's contact network
- to join groups of LinkedIn members who have special work interests and which in effect act as their own communities of practice within LinkedIn
- to research employers they may be interested in working for and seek employment through employers who list jobs and are searching for potential candidates
- to use various other online services from within the site, for example Twitter and WordPress.

Users can set options for the amount of information about themselves they will make available to other users. They can for example choose to keep their name private and describe themselves in generic terms such "Leader in government administration".

The site allows a user who is a current employee to set up a "company" page that provides information about the organisation concerned including – a descriptive overview, web site address, industry, specialties/company expertise, and number of employees. The site also generates percentage breakdowns on the company page of current employees who are site users – common job titles, universities attended, median age and gender.

LinkedIn says it has over 60 million users worldwide (February 2010).

## EXAMPLES OF THE PROFILE OF THE UK PUBLIC SECTOR ON LINKEDIN

A brief survey was carried out during May 2010 to establish:

1. for the largest councils in the UK (ranked by population) the number of people using LinkedIn who said they are current employees
2. whether there were any associated organisational ("company") profiles and
3. to seek examples of where organisational information could be improved.

The results of the survey come with one major qualification. They rely on the accuracy of information users submit to LinkedIn. For example, they may mis-state their current employer or not keep their profile up to date. Nevertheless, the results are a starting point for understanding the extent of use of LinkedIn and any impression it may give of the employers concerned.

A summary of the results is shown on the next page.

<u>Council</u>	<u>No. employees on LinkedIn</u>	<u>Profile?</u>	<u>Profile last edited by</u>
<u>England</u>			
Greater London	281	Yes	Researcher for a political group
Kent	500+	Yes	Internal communications officer
Essex	485	No	
Hampshire	500+	Yes	Web manager
Lancashire	331	No	
Surrey	500+	No	
Hertfordshire	343	Yes	Councillor
Birmingham	500+	Yes	Corporate director
Norfolk	375	No	
Staffordshire	246	No	
<u>Scotland</u>			
Glasgow	394	No	
Edinburgh	500+	Yes	IT project officer
Fife	351	No	
<u>Wales</u>			
Cardiff	209	No	
<u>Northern Ireland</u>			
Belfast	117	No	

*Notes: Councils are ranked by size of population served  
All nos. of employees are as stated by LinkedIn*

The number of users who said they were employees of the councils concerned ranged between 117 and 500+. There were organisational profiles of one sort or another for only 6 of the 15 councils represented. A range of users had updated the profiles that did exist including a councillor and a researcher for a political group.

In the time available it was not possible to replicate the survey for other parts of the UK public sector but a quick check confirmed that in Scotland, for example, there were LinkedIn users from – all 32 councils; all 14 territorial NHS health boards; 8 fire and rescue services; and 7 out of 8 police forces. There were LinkedIn profiles for only a very few of these organisations.

Where organisational profiles do exist they are contributed by users and therefore rely on their perception of their employer. Each organisation is allocated to a single “industry”. A council might expect to be categorised as “Government Administration” but the industry of some is defined as being in education management, public policy, government relations, real estate or even management consulting.

## CONCLUSIONS

LinkedIn is a well-established business networking web site used by millions of people world-wide.

As well as the characteristics described in this report LinkedIn has many other uses, for example, depending on the information they share, the ability to view the profile of any user which might include – their employment history, education, the nature of the business/employment opportunities they are interested in, any web site they own, contact details, birthday, even the books they are reading, and so on.

Whatever view employers might take of the desirability of this sort of business networking it is here to stay and should be viewed in a positive light. It is a source of information of various sorts and an opportunity to highlight the best of their organisation to the wider world. In fact it should be seen as part of their marketing mix.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

If they have not done so already, public sector organisations are recommended to do five things:

1. invite an appropriate member of staff who is already a user of LinkedIn or is willing to join to review the information about their organisation on the site in the light of the comments in this report
2. who is appropriate will depend on the way they do business but might best be one of their communications professionals, or perhaps an HR or IT colleague
3. decide how they wish their organisation to be presented on the site. If there is not an organisational profile set one up. If there is one edit it accordingly
4. any user of the site who says they are an employee can amend an organisation's details so they should ensure their nominated person regularly reviews and if necessary updates their profile
5. once they have got into this routine invite their nominee to advise on other potential uses of the site.