

Eight Reasons High School Students Should Be On LinkedIn (Forbes.com)



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Now that [LinkedIn](#) LNKD +0.08% is a decade old and has 225 million members, its fastest-growing demographic –30 million and counting—is students and those who are three years or less out of college. Though LinkedIn’s user agreement says that members agree they are at least 18 years old, I am going to make a recommendation and a prediction: High school students should start LinkedIn profiles now. I predict that LinkedIn will soon drop its age threshold or eliminate it altogether. Consider that [Facebook](#) FB -0.23%’s threshold is 13, and the site has hundreds of thousands, if not millions of kids under 13 using it every day. Unlike Facebook, LinkedIn has no place to enter a birth date.

Here’s an example of how teens can use it: Earlier this month, as she was applying for jobs, hoping to start after she graduates from high school on May 29, Genella Minot, a 17-year-old in Port Saint Lucie, Fla., realized that instead of sending a revised résumé for each new job, she could build a profile on LinkedIn and possibly submit that instead. She also hopes a potential employer will see her LinkedIn page and make a job offer. “I have all my information on there,” she says. “I’m hoping an employer comes across it.” Minot’s qualifications include CPR and first aid certifications and a 40-hour child care course given by the

Florida Department of Children and Families. She has also worked as a youth mentor and a volunteer at a regional health center. Her goal: a summer child care or health care job that she can turn into a part-time position when she starts at Indian River State College in the fall.

If I were Minot's career coach, I would give her some pointers on how she could strengthen her profile. Most important, she should be linking with adults, including teachers and supervisors at her volunteer jobs. At this point she has zero connections, which means she's forgoing one of LinkedIn's greatest strengths, the ability to branch out from your contacts to other people you don't know first-hand. Even if she were just to connect with relatives, she would put herself in a stronger position to do future networking. It's possible, for instance, that her aunt has a friend at the daycare center where she wants to work.

Here are eight reasons I think high school students should be on LinkedIn:

1. To get a customized LinkedIn URL. This will drive your LinkedIn page to the top of  searches on your name. The earlier you get this, the better. Here's how to do it: On your profile page next to the rectangular grey "Edit" button to the right of your name, click on the drop-down menu, and then click on "Manage public profile settings." Halfway down the page on the right side you'll see a grey bar that says "Your public profile URL." Underneath the bar, click on the blue phrase that says "Customize your public profile URL." Plug in your first and last name. If that's already taken, try your last name first, followed by your first name. If that's not available, try adding a middle initial or city abbreviation like NYC. Now that LinkedIn is so heavily used, this can be a challenge for those with common names. But SusanAdams75 is better than the random URL the site assigns you.
2. To make lasting connections. Maybe your sophomore English teacher loves you and before he became a teacher, he worked in publishing at

Simon & Schuster, where you want to intern. Or the director of the camp where you worked last summer has a close friend at New York Hospital, where you're trying to get a part-time research position. Networking contacts like these can be extremely valuable. Do connect with as many adults as possible who know you and your work. Peer connections are also important. Your friends and friends of friends may wind up working where you want to be.

3. To get recommendations and endorsements. If you do a volunteer internship at a bike shop, get your boss to write you a glowing recommendation that mentions specific things you did well, like handling customers and always arriving early and staying late. A student like Minot should list her specific skills from the long lists that LinkedIn offers, like Childcare, Child Development and Child Welfare. Adults she's worked with on her volunteer jobs will endorse her. Since endorsements accumulate over time, it's good to start early.
4. To highlight awards. If you're in a serious academic club like the debate team and you win awards, or your essay wins a nationwide writing competition, potential employers want to know. Create an Honors & Awards section on your profile and keep it up to date.
5. To show that you're serious. Most potential employers will put your name through a Google search. Having a LinkedIn profile tells a potential new boss that you are serious about building a career, rather than just socializing online. Maria Stein, Director of Career Services at [Northeastern University](#) in Boston, says for college students, a LinkedIn profile "shows

they're forward-thinking and that they know their skills are transferable.” If a high school student has a LinkedIn profile, it shows they are several steps ahead.

6. To boost your college application. I'm giving this advice with a caveat: I have heard anecdotally that admissions offices routinely Google college applicants and scrutinize Facebook pages. But I called seven admissions offices at random, including the [University of Chicago](#), Haverford and Babson, and none of them said they do this as part of their evaluation process. “We don't have the bandwidth,” says Babson's dean of admission, Grant Gosselin. Some schools like Bates have a strict policy of not searching students' social media accounts. But Haverford's admissions dean, Jess Lord, concedes that a LinkedIn profile is “very different” from a Facebook page. If a student points the admissions office to LinkedIn, Lord says his staff might take a look, knowing that it's geared toward networking and professional accomplishments, especially because Haverford cares about a student's work history.
7. To impress potential employers. If you're up for a summer job and your competition has only a résumé and no LinkedIn profile, a hiring manager will likely be impressed that you have had the foresight to establish a LinkedIn presence, especially if you have several strong recommendations, more than a few endorsements, a dozen connections and a work history that shows you've held down other jobs, even if they were volunteer positions.
8. To search for connections to the jobs you want. This is one of LinkedIn's great strengths: If you know what field or company you want to work in,

you can instantly search your connections for a link to a specific company, institution or field. It's likely a challenge for a high school student to come up with more than a dozen connections. But the beauty of LinkedIn is that you can keep building as you grow.

My colleague George Anders [wrote last week](#) about a new LinkedIn feature, called CheckIn, that makes it easy for people who attend job fairs to sign in with potential employers, linking potential hiring managers directly to applicants' LinkedIn profiles. I couldn't get any LinkedIn spokespeople to tell me what the site has cooking for younger job seekers but I have reason to believe there are plans in the works. Even if, like Genella Minot, you do no more than fill out a bare bones profile, you're putting yourself a step ahead of the millions of high school students who are looking for work now and will be competing with you in the future.