

Social Media for Framers

By Barbara Markoff

Social networking sites can help you expand and manage your list of contacts, providing a cost-effective way to market your business

In today's age of immediate information technology, picture framers having a presence on LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, or other social networking sites are one step ahead of their competition. Each social media service offers different advantages. By joining one or more of these social networking sites framers can have a free online presence, communicate with their contacts regularly, find new sources, promote their businesses, and post recommendations. The use of social networking sites by business owners is huge and growing every day. The beauty of this type of networking is that it is always evolving. Though the use of social networking sites may be more beneficial for art and framing companies geared toward going after commercial business, all picture framers can use social networking to gain new business.


LinkedIn

I first joined LinkedIn around 18 months ago when an administrator from one of my large projects sent me an invitation. I had no experience with LinkedIn, but I joined and received several invitations to connect with other business friends. Upon reviewing their profiles on LinkedIn, I realized it had merit




Making connections via social websites can lead to face-to-face meetings with potential clients, which can help develop new business with local retailers and designers.

People



Natalya Murphy 

Business Owner, Professional Framer, B2B Matchmaker

Greater Omaha Area · Design



Natalya Murphy is looking for examples of outstanding customer service. 2 months ago

Current	• Owner at Creekside Framing & Gallery
Past	• Lead Software Development Engineer at Qwest Communications  • System Engineer at Electronic Data Systems 
Education	• The Landmark Forum • Lawrence Technological University • University of San Francisco
Recommendations	7 people have recommended Natalya
Connections	106 connections
Websites	• Creekside Framing and Gallery
Public Profile	http://www.linkedin.com/in/natalyamurphy

Summary

Small business owner focused on fostering growth in our local community and enriching the lives of my clients and fellow businesspeople.

I first ventured into independent business with custom framing. I still love the framing business but I quickly realized that my greater passion was helping fellow businesspeople succeed and thrive in their own professional lives. I have moved from a hands-on role in Creekside Framing & Gallery to more of a marketing and oversight position. I now focus my energy not only on marketing my own businesses but also on helping other businesses thrive and grow.

I am a firm believer in giving back to others, so I volunteer my time to various civic and church organizations.

Specialties

custom framing, preservation framing, military shadowboxes, laser engraving, custom photo gifts, framing of magazine/newspaper articles, award plaques, corporate gifts, small business marketing

The first part of a LinkedIn profile, such as this one of Natalya Murphy's, provides an overview of who you are and what you do. The business orientation of this site makes it well suited to developing new client contacts.

and deserved a full investigation on my part. I uploaded a photograph, filled in details about my education and experience, and summarized exactly what my business offered. I proceeded to invite my business contacts to be connected to me. Slowly I built up a network of more than 200 business contacts that I communicate with regularly. Instead of hunting for e-mails of clients and business contacts, some of which have impossible e-mails to remember, I have LinkedIn e-mails of my important business contacts.

Sending e-mails to contacts through LinkedIn is fast, simple, and efficient. Healthcare artist Henry Domke, for example, has more than 1,000 connections on LinkedIn. He says, "LinkedIn has helped me keep track of clients as they move. This is a significant problem. Perhaps 20 percent of my clients move each year. Following them is not easy, but LinkedIn gives me a way to reach them even if they are in new cities."

LinkedIn is set up to organize contacts and promote yourself and/or your business. In my case I promote both myself as a corporate art consultant and my business, Arrageous!, as an art and framing company. In addition I promote myself as an educator at PFM

Seminars on the subjects of networking and art consultation. My contacts include artists, interior designers, corporate executives, clients, architects, project managers, and general business contacts. LinkedIn connects business people and is a forum for communication and information.

The best part is that it is free and user friendly. Domke says he regularly uses LinkedIn to learn about new and existing clients. He explains that, "By reading the profiles of contacts I have learned things about them I would have not known otherwise. That helps me to better understand them and to better serve them."

Business owners on LinkedIn find themselves adding connections regularly and updating their profiles to include new material. Each profile can list job experience, education, recommendations, interests, websites, and what your business is all about. Your profile has a specific section at the top on what you are currently doing. I change this message quite often, mentioning projects or products I want my contacts to know about. When this message is changed, LinkedIn automatically sends the information to all my contacts.

LinkedIn serves as a site for professionals to develop an extensive network of contacts, referred to as connections, which are added by mutual consent. Users of LinkedIn cannot only view their own connections, but they can also view the connections of their connections. This puts them in touch with another layer of potential high-level people to interact with. It also opens the opportunity to explore new contacts and expose your professional information. Upon request, a user can ask for a mutual contact for an introduction, easing the barrier to communication. Whether you are looking for new leads or sources LinkedIn offers an endless number of contacts worldwide. LinkedIn has more than 30 million users, and almost every Fortune 500 company is represented.

Tracy Morse, owner of a Fast Frames business in Phoenix, says, "I use LinkedIn to promote my picture framing business. By completing my profile in its entirety, it allows those who are connected to the professionals that are 'linked' to me to preview my business and the recommendations that have been written about me. Since I can see all

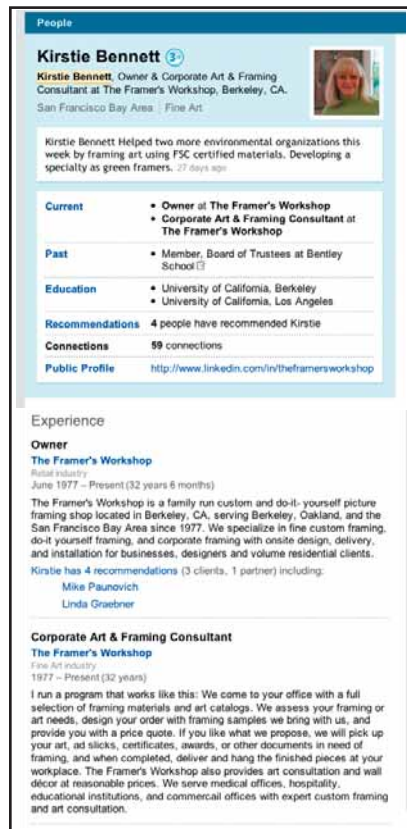
of the connections of each of my contacts, it allows me to ask for an introduction when there is someone in particular that I'd like to know better. Having a personal recommendation from one of my business contacts is invaluable. I also know how important it is to reward others who you value and enjoy doing business with through a recommendation."

Another feature of LinkedIn is the ability to join groups and post questions with likeminded individuals. Anyone can start a group or join an existing one. On LinkedIn you will find a group of picture framers called LIFE (Local Independent Framing Experts), whose members exchange information about new products like eco-friendly framing materials or post questions to help solve framing situations.

LIFE member Carla Bates, CPF, owner of The Frame Shop of Conshohocken in Philadelphia, understands that social networking is an excellent way to market her company at no cost other than her own commitment of time. Bates says, "I am a member of LIFE and have registered my business on LinkedIn, Merchant Circle, City Search, and a number of other websites along this line. I display as much information on these sites as I can free of charge. I have created coupons on a few of these

sites and have had a good response. Typically the coupons are brought in by people outside of the store's immediate area. These sales are also by people that are not in our data bank; therefore, they are new customers. I have received a few reviews on these sites. Having these listings, reviews, coupons, and store information posted on these sites has helped the website get higher rankings on major search engines. I would say that all this combined has helped increase business that we would have otherwise not received."

Tim O'Neill, CPF, who owns Reed Arts in Columbus, OH, is also a member of LIFE. He has been able to target customers outside of his geographic area by using social media sites. O'Neill says, "MySpace hits seem to be mostly artists. They find us, ask to be our friends, and then ask about either framing quotes for their art or to be represented in our gallery. The Facebook responses seem to be more



Another part of a LinkedIn profile is an area for listing your credentials, such as Kirstie Bennett's. Potential clients can see at a glance your ability to provide framing services.

of an immediate response to something we've posted about an artist we're featuring. People interested in the art that they see contact us about availability. I've sold a few pieces framed this way. They're not beating down the doors, but I've sold products to people outside of my geographic area this way."

While reaching customers outside of your own geographic area may be difficult with ordinary marketing programs, it is much easier by using social networking sites. Surprisingly, new customers nationwide may respond to your marketing efforts on social networking sites. Stephanie Weber, president and cofounder of Artful Decor in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, is an art consultant who specializes in residential and commercial art and custom framing. She says, "We have used LinkedIn groups to find new business across the country and to find business partners. From starting a group discussion on artwork for corporate space, a client contacted us who needed artwork for a facility across the country who we would never have met otherwise. We just closed a substantial sale with that client and were able to do all the design work remotely. We also found a designer in the area through LinkedIn People Search to install the artwork for us." The key is to actively post discussions and respond to posts by other professionals in the art and framing industry.

Local LinkedIn groups also provide a good opportunity for meeting business professionals in your own community. Unlike traditional networking groups, local LinkedIn groups have no membership fees and the members have professional backgrounds, such as writers, scientists, corporate executives, and professors. Framers should investigate local groups and attend gatherings to network effectively. One advantage of attending local LinkedIn networking business groups is that you can come as often as you like and learn about where money is being spent in your community. By joining local LinkedIn groups you can also connect with influential members of the design community who may need art and framing services. Recently I was

John Barlowe (3)
 Founder at LIFE / Local Independent Framing Expert
 Toledo, Ohio Area · Retail

Current

- Founder at LIFE / Local Independent Framing Expert
- Owner at Frame Shop Art Gallery & Gifts

Past

- President/Owner at Triangle Kitchen Centers Inc.

Education

- University of Toledo

Recommendations 11 people have recommended John

Connections 106 connections

Websites

- My Company
- My Website

Public Profile <http://www.linkedin.com/in/johnbarlowe>

Recommendations For John

Founder
 LIFE / Local Independent Framing Expert

"John deserves the highest praise for his perseverance to raise awareness about local independent framers. His selfless dedication to this cause and his management of the L.I.F.E. Group (Local Independent Framing Experts) have been exceptional and very professional." July 28, 2009

Paul Nahas, Owner & Designer, Frame & Art Gallery II
 worked with John at LIFE / Local Independent Framing Expert

"John has been an inspiration to many Framers, including me, and is always there to assist when he can. His knowledge in the field has helped me out in many different ways. I am proud to be a member of LIFE and honored to have been accepted into this organization." July 23, 2009

Carla Bates, CPF, Certified Picture Framer, The Frame Shop of Conshohocken
 was with another company when working with John at LIFE / Local Independent Framing Expert

"John, as the founder and creator of LIFE / Local Independent Framing Expert, is a champion of the picture framing industry and believes in working together to achieve a common goal. His excellent work speaks for itself, and on a personal note, he is a very kind and thoughtful person." April 10, 2009

Maureen Innocenzi, Owner, Innovate Frame & Design
 was with another company when working with John at LIFE / Local Independent Framing Expert

"John has worked hard to set up LIFE / Local Independent Picture Framers. This alliance of professional framers is a great way forward for framers in many countries to establish themselves under an easily identifiable body - allowing the public to identify qualified and professionally competent establishments. John has driven this project from conception to a rapidly expanding group." April 9, 2009

Mark Wallington, Owner, Eight Bells Gallery
 was with another company when working with John at LIFE / Local Independent Framing Expert

"I highly recommend John. He is a master at Picture Framing, Graphic Design and Marketing. On top of all John's talents, you just couldn't find a nicer person to work with on any project." April 9, 2009

Jerry Ervin, Owner, Cedarwood Gallery
 was with another company when working with John at LIFE / Local Independent Framing Expert

LinkedIn also has an area for posting recommendations, such as these on John Barlowe's site, that attest to your professional skills and character.

able to schedule a lunch meeting with a principal of a major interior design firm in San Diego who I met through a local group in LinkedIn. Since I had been trying to pitch my art and framing services to this firm for four years, I was very pleased to finally have a one-on-one meeting with my new contact. I credit LinkedIn with helping me make this contact. While I have not closed a sale yet, I am very optimistic that I will be able to form a new business relationship with this particular firm. This company did not have any current projects but expressed an interest in using my company for future projects.

Other Sites

Facebook is less businesslike than LinkedIn but is still worth researching, especially when trying to connect with younger clients. A business owner can have his or her own Fan Page, connecting with clients who become "fans." Products can be featured and pictures posted. Ads can be purchased on Facebook and linked to websites to attract new clients. It is important to understand that the use of Facebook by the younger generation is a way of life. Facebook and LinkedIn are often used together to capture new customers. Kirstie Bennett, owner of The

Framer's Workshop in Berkeley, CA, uses several social networking sites helping her bring in new clients.

Understanding that both exposure on Facebook and LinkedIn may generate interest to her business website and in turn lead to increased sales, Kirstie updates both of these social networking sites regularly.

Framers who use social networking help position themselves in Google and Yahoo searches. Another popular site is Twitter, which allows the user to send a short message of 140 characters to a group of approved followers. Again, this is an excellent way to disseminate information about what is new and exciting at your business. On Twitter you identify yourself by setting up a personal user name and then using that name you send out a "Tweet," which is a short message. You can follow others on Twitter, keeping an ongoing dialogue with people in as many areas

of interest you like. YouTube has tremendous potential as well for exposure. Is a bit trickier to master than LinkedIn, Twitter, or Facebook.

On Twitter, I usually send a message weekly about tips for running a successful art and framing business. It's another way to be in front of an audience without paying for print ads and getting a rotating message out to that specific audience. The power of Twitter can be documented with the recent popularity contest between Ashton Kutcher and Larry King, racing to be the first to achieve a record-setting 1 million followers. Ashton Kutcher won and now has more than 2 million followers on Twitter.

The ability to reach framers or any specific audience worldwide with your own specific message was beyond comprehension when most framers started their businesses. Why not take part in the technology to reach out and communicate with others especially when it is easy and free?

Not only can social networking sites help broaden one's client base, but framers can also reconnect with existing clients who may need to be reminded of their services. Getting in front of existing clients could be costly if you are relying on direct mail or print ads in local publications. John Barlowe, owner of Frame Shop Art Gallery & Gifts in Toledo, OH, (and member of LIFE) says, "We are kind of new to social networking. While I haven't been able to count on any new customers, we have reconnected with several existing customers. They had been meaning to bring in some items for framing, but seeing my name was the incentive they needed to come in."

Clearly, the younger generation buys through websites and communicates through social networking sites. As the youth of today enters the workforce, their buying patterns and communication will transition into using social media sites to gather information that will influence what they purchase. O'Neil of Reed Arts recognizes the importance

BENEFITS OF SOCIAL NETWORKING FOR FRAMERS

1. Increase your visibility and let people know who you are and what you do.
2. Promote your framing products at no cost other than your time.
3. Broaden your client base and business network.
4. Improve your company in Google and Yahoo searches.
5. Learn from experts and exchange information.
6. Join local business networking groups with no membership fees.
7. Connect with younger clients who use social networking every day.
8. Connect and do business with clients outside your geographic area.
9. Reconnect with existing clients to remind them of your services.
10. Organize your connections and cross-market to your customers through multiple sites.
11. Keep track of customers who move.

of connecting with today's youth. He says, "We've been participating in Internet social networking for a couple of years now. I have a Reed Arts page on MySpace, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Merchant Circle. I recently started tweeting on Twitter. We have had response on MySpace and Facebook. I think it's still kind of a new thing for our main demographic, but I also believe if we're going to train a new generation about the art of custom framing, we have to stay on top of web interaction. It's where they all hang out."

Social networking is an excellent way for picture framers to instantly reach their audiences and broaden their business networks. By connecting

with others on social media sites you are increasing your visibility and branding your company. The time is now to begin. Unlike the cost of maintaining and upgrading a business website, social networking will help you grow your business at no cost other than your own time. Social networking is a phenomenon on the rise as a way of marketing and interacting with business professionals. It is no longer just for the generation of the texting and instant messaging youth. It has grown into an essential component for all types of businesses and should be explored as another tool to raise visibility. In today's economic climate every strategy helps, and the importance of social networking should not be underrated or overlooked. Though it is difficult to measure the results of social networking, picture framers, gallery owners, and others involved in art-related businesses should strongly consider using one or more sites in an effort to increase their business. ■



Barbara Markoff is co-owner of Artrageous!, an art and framing retailer in San Diego, and has been an art consultant for 25 years. Her firm specializes in art selection, framing, and installation for the corporate environment. She has a BFA in ceramics and an MA in art therapy. Her new book, *Becoming a Corporate Art Consultant—The Handbook for Corporate Art Consultation*, will be published this year.