

How I Used LinkedIn to Get a 41% Response Rate & 6 New Clients

By Kelly Parkinson

<http://copylicious.com/2008/03/how-i-used-linkedin-to-get-a-41-response-rate-6-new-clients/>

When I started my copywriting business, I didn't want to make cold calls. The point of becoming a writer and working from home was to completely eliminate all human contact. But seriously, no one likes making cold calls. And direct mail, with its 2% response rate, seems like a waste of money—and paper. Not the best approach if you specialize in clean tech and sustainability.

One day I was clicking around LinkedIn's website and read that *InMails* (their proprietary emails) were 10 times more effective than cold calls. It seemed too good to be true, but for \$50 a month and a guaranteed response, with the ability to cancel anytime, I was willing to give it a try.

Turns out, *InMails* actually work. Over 6 months, I sent 32 *InMails*, heard positive responses back from 13 of those people, and got 6 new clients from LinkedIn. In this post, I'll spill the beans on why LinkedIn is so effective, and you'll get a step-by-step process for pitching prospects using LinkedIn *InMails*. You don't need to limit yourself to introductions—something a lot of people get tripped up on. You can simply contact prospects directly.

Here's why I believe sending *InMails* is so effective:

1. Anyone who works for a company is swamped with emails at work. But she isn't swamped with personal emails. And that's the email address I see most people use. Why? Because a job is temporary, but LinkedIn and the contacts you make there last forever. You want your LinkedIn stuff to follow you from place to place—it's about you, not about your company.

Also, many LinkedIn users are always looking for their next opportunity—and don't want that opportunity to come through on their work email servers. So, you're standing out in two important ways: You're standing out because you're in their personal email inboxes, and you're standing out because receiving an *InMail* is still somewhat novel. They're curious how it works. Curiosity works in our favor.

2. *InMail* protects the recipient's email address. The recipient can read the email and respond—"yes, interested," or "no, not interested"—without ever revealing her email address. This makes people feel safe and comfortable, which makes them more likely to engage with you.

3. As a social networking community, LinkedIn isn't quite as buttoned down as other forms of communication. You can send a quick note with a call to action, without getting into the entire sales pitch. It's a good way to let prospects self-qualify. They can easily check you out—profile, recommendations, contacts, website—before agreeing to move forward. It gives them control—a very good thing.

4. It's very unlikely your prospect is getting bombarded with LinkedIn mails from spammers and others trying to "sell" her something. For \$50 a month, you only get to send out 10 *InMails*. You get those *InMails* credited back to your account if the person doesn't reply—but it's not enough to make it worth a professional salesperson's time.

As a solo consultant, you don't need to send out more than 10 *InMails* a month, because you can only handle so many new clients. You're not selling stuff—you're developing a relationship. I got a 41% positive response rate—which is better than any other form of marketing I know. It could be the industry or the timing, but whatever it was, I'm positive no other tool could have brought these kinds of results. I don't know what results you'll get—but whatever they are, they'll be better than cold calling or direct mail.

Here's my step-by-step process for pitching prospects on LinkedIn:

Step 1: Identify your target market. The key is to be able to say you specialize in their area, that you know their industry; to sound like you're one of a kind.

Example: Vice President of Marketing of a Growing Clean Tech Company

Step 2: Search for various combinations of keywords around the person you're trying to reach and the industry she's in.

Step 3: Sort the results by "in your network" and "outside your network." Contact the "in your network" people first, and copy and paste the URLs into a doc so you don't have to keep searching to rediscover them. You can only contact 10 people at a time, but if you come back the next month, you'll have those URLs ready.

Step 4: Click on their profiles and check their company website to verify they're the right kind of client for you.

Step 5: Check their contact preferences. If "consulting offers," "new ventures," "job inquiries," or "business deals" are listed, it's okay to proceed. If not, do not send an *InMail*, no matter how badly you want to. For one, it's bad karma. And for another, they could lower your *InMail* rating—a 5-star rating displayed to everyone you contact. If you want to get in touch with this person, you'll need to either be introduced, make a cold call, or send a personalized letter in the mail.

Step 6: All systems go. Send *InMail*. Here's the one I used, with minor tweaks depending on the individual:

Hi Alan,

I'm Kelly Parkinson, my company is Copylicious, and we specialize in working with green tech companies to capture their prospects' attention. My knack is translating fancy concepts into clear, accessible stories. I've written for [company], [company], [company]. I know how tough it can be to find a copywriter who 'gets' the green tech industry. I'm that girl!

I'd very much like to speak with you about your marketing ROI. I only need about 10 minutes or so. Could you let me know when might be a good time to speak?

Look forward to hearing from you!

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But you don't want to use my exact *InMail*. So, let's deconstruct it into a template:

Dear [Name],

I'm [your name], my company is [your company], and we specialize in [helping (x) struggling with a problem; or accomplish a result]. [A sentence on how you help them do this.] [A sentence on who your clients are—ideally, these clients should be in their industry.] [Why you're the right person to help them.]

[Call to action: what would you like to do, what will the topic be, when would you like to them to do this. Ask them an open-ended question.]

[Sign off]

[your name]

[LinkedIn lists your contact information automatically, so you don't need to put it here.]

Good luck!

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