



"Lighting the Path"

Launch Your Business. Accelerate Your Business.

Becoming a New Influencer

Social media persists as one of the most talked about phenomena in business stories. However, getting a good handle on what to do with the influential blogosphere can be challenging and time-consuming, but you CAN do it. In this and the next several issues of "Lighting the Path," my readers will quickly gain greater insight on how to master this wonderfully accessible and affordable platform for shaping your business' future. Social media is a highly influential platform that consists of social networks, blogs, user boards and Usenet.

We'll cover social networks in this issue and other media in future issues. New social networks arrive each day on the Internet, such as these that are published in the May 2009 *Entrepreneur* magazine: asmallworld.net, decayenne.com and professionalblackbook.com, all new places to meet other entrepreneurs and business leaders.

However, none seems as ubiquitous as [LinkedIn](http://www.linkedin.com) at the moment. I was at a reunion event for my alma mater, Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, and as we reconnected and traded business cards, most everyone asked, "Are you on LinkedIn?" If you're not on LinkedIn and you own a business, you should be. I recently found a terrific blog on how to maximize your time on LinkedIn at <http://www.linkedintomarketing.com/blog/> by Nathan Kievman of Co-Founder of Woovertise, Inc., a new social media marketing start-up company. LinkedIn offers a tremendous way to drive traffic to your website because of its ability to boost your ranking on search engine pages. It's also a phenomenal tool for positioning yourself as an expert and for generating joint ventures and strategic alliances.

I recommend subscribing to Kievman's blog for tidbits on what to do with LinkedIn and, in particular, view his "Power User Strategies Video" free webinar posted on April 11, 2009. In it, he reports the following stats on the who is on LinkedIn:

Average Age: 41	Average Household Income: \$109,703
Male: 64%	Household Income \$100k+ 53.5%
Own Smartphone/PDA: 34%	College Grad/Post Grad: 80.1%
EVP/SVP/VP: 6.5%	Business Decision Maker: 49%

In our next issue of "Lighting the Path," we'll cover more about how to feel more confident in using social networks to boost your business, whether you are in a business to business or business to consumer marketplace, and help you understand the power of this powerful marketing and business development tool.



Denise Stillman
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Business owners need advisors who will help them visualize their future from a different perspective, then help take them there.

[Clear Directions, LLC](http://www.cleardirections.com), positively transforms business owners' revenues through smart, strategic marketing and profit planning, as well as accountable business coaching.

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What Makes You Different?

As my daughter enters her pre-teen years, she nears the era of conformism, which is in direct opposition to what I teach my clients. Strategic planning is as much about what you will do as what you won't do, and it's all about what makes you stand out from the crowd. I'm frequently asked, why should I bother with a strategic plan? To that I usually respond, "What makes your business different?" Many will launch into their 30-second elevator pitch, which is usually quite good.

However, many business owners struggle to consider how they will be unique, interesting and relevant for today and in the future. Knowing your value proposition is crucial. During a strategic planning engagement, we work to identify – with blinding clarity – your business' value proposition, which is how you are uniquely positioned to offer a compelling product or service that people are willing to buy. Without a strong value proposition, your business is destined for mediocrity at best, failure at worst. Whereas entrepreneurs launching a new enterprise must create a business plan as a blueprint for their business, existing enterprises at least two years old, should create a strategic plan that guides them for anywhere from 18 months to three years.

[Contact us](#) for a 30-minute consultation about how a strategic plan may help guide and protect your business.

Going Green ... Virtually

From organic eating to organic search engine optimization, the organic movement is here to stay – even in recessionary times. You may know that supporting organic farming through the purchase and consumption of organic foods helps provide a safer, more healthy environment by not polluting our groundwater, rivers, lakes, and oceans with pesticides and chemical fertilizers; reducing soil erosion; increasing the diversity of wildlife on and near farms; and providing safer working conditions for farm laborers (no exposure to pesticides).

Did you know that supporting another new movement – this one in small business – can help the environment, too? It's called the virtual assistant. With a virtual assistant, you hire an independent entrepreneur who provides administrative, creative and/or technical services. He or she utilizes advanced technological modes of communication and data delivery to assist you in your area of expertise from his/her own office on a contractual basis. Since your virtual assistant does not commute to a "brick and mortar" office, there are no gas emissions associated with this position. In addition, proofing of nearly all work is done via e-mail, so you save the use of paper, further preserving the environment.

If you'd like to learn more about the benefits of a virtual assistant, please feel free to contact Amy Sanders of [Virtual Admin Concepts](#) at 815.216.6408 or amysanders@virtualadminconcepts.com. I personally have worked with Amy for several months now and have found her to be professional and extremely helpful.



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