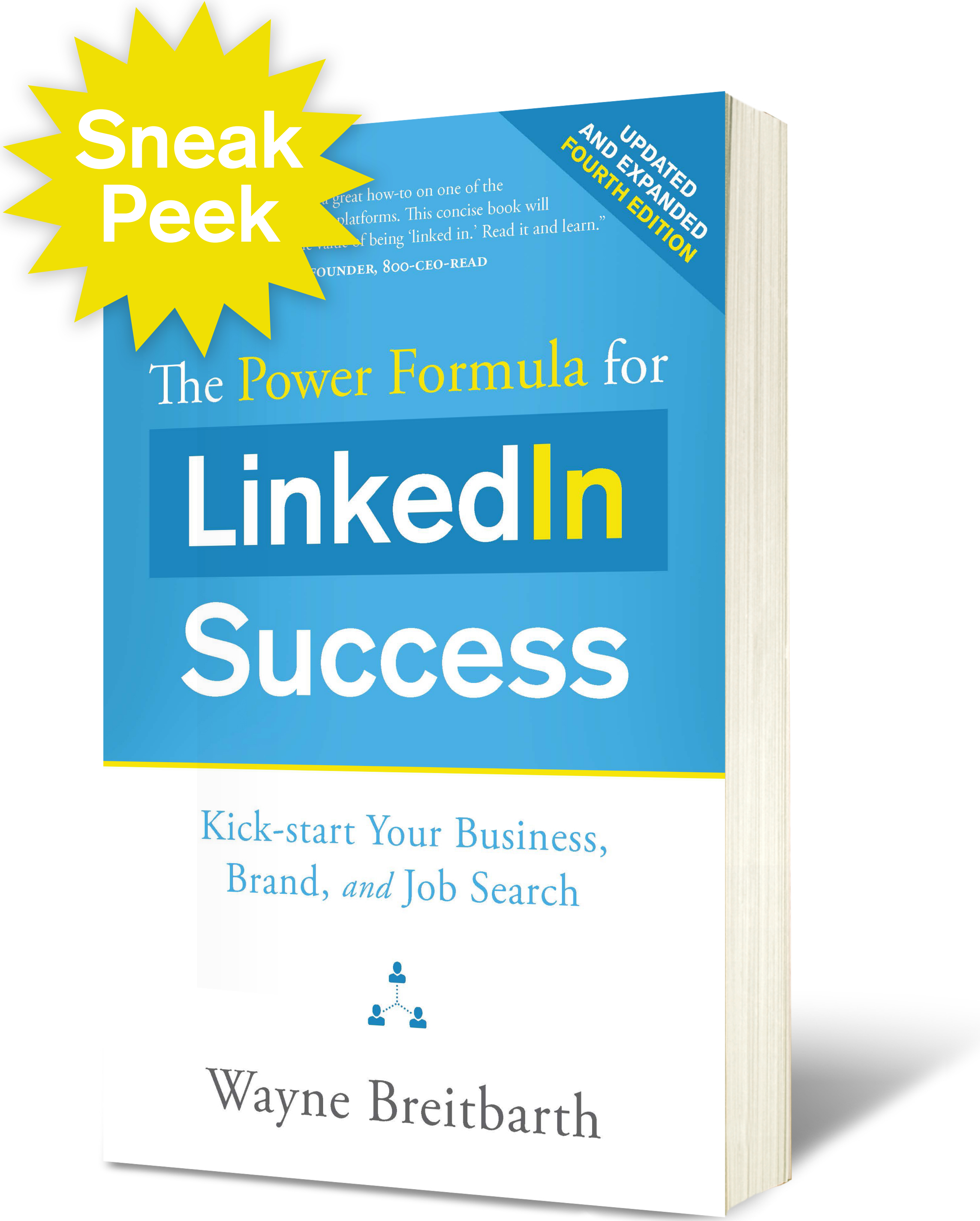
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The Power Formula for LinkedIn Success

Kick-start Your Business, Brand, *and* Job Search

Wayne Breitbarth

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Fourth Edition

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CHAPTER 12

There's Gold in Them Thar Hills

Expanding Your Network

As you can tell from previous chapters, the winner of the searching aspect of the LinkedIn game is generally the person who has a lot of connections. However, please continue to keep in mind that when you first start using LinkedIn, I recommend you only add to your network people whom you know and trust, because when you add a new contact, you put your extremely valuable network in his or her hands. Remember, it is **your** network. It is a possession you have worked your entire career to build, and when you add a connection on LinkedIn, it is like handing your Outlook database to that individual and trusting him to treat it as professionally as you would treat his.

Once you start getting more comfortable with the way LinkedIn works, I typically recommend that you start selectively adding people you may not know but would like to get to know. Everyone's situation is unique, but here are some general suggestions that will help you understand what types of people you may want to connect with to strengthen your network and help you enhance your brand, find a job, assist your favorite nonprofit, or grow your business.

Who can help you enhance your personal brand?

- People who have had similar career paths to yours
- Leaders in your industry associations
- Individuals who have large networks (LinkedIn or otherwise) concentrated in your region or industry
- People who work for some of the well-respected companies in your region and industry

Who can help you find a new job or advance your career?

- People who work in your industry and region
- People who work for companies you are interested in
- Recruiters who specialize in your industry
- Consultants and experts in your industry
- Human resources professionals who work at your target companies

Who can help your favorite nonprofit thrive?

- People who volunteer for or sit on boards of similar nonprofits
- Individuals who work at large corporations, foundations, etc., and tend to support nonprofits like yours
- People who are involved in groups that have large volunteer pools (e.g., religious organizations, schools, clubs)
- People who work for media outlets

Who can help you generate sales leads, market your company's products and services, and grow your business?

- Individuals who are the direct decision-makers for the purchase of your products and services
- People who are indirectly involved in the decision to purchase your products and services (strategic influencers or people from the company who weigh in on the decision)
- High-ranking officers at the companies that purchase your products and services, even if they are not the direct decision-makers
- Individuals who hang around with the people listed in the first two bullets (and probably deliver similar services to the same purchasers)
- People who are recognized industry experts
- Leaders of your industry associations and/or people who manage industry events
- Individuals who are well-networked in your region or industry
- Experts who provide educational content for the industry

I recommend you have an ultimate goal of acquiring at least 200 to 250 connections (muskie size), as opposed to the 50 to 100 connections (minnow size) that many LinkedIn users acquire. If you want your searches to be useful, you really want to consistently add connections. This chapter will show you how to find new people to add, accept or decline the requests you'll get, and gather interesting information about your expanding base of contacts. Once you've built your muskie-size net, when you go fishing you'll be sure to come up with lots of potentially valuable connections.

The most common and preferable way to add a person to your network is to search for her by name and then go to her profile. If she is a second-degree connection, click the big blue Connect button. If she is a third-degree connection, click the three dots just below her profile photo and select *Connect*. In either case, you should add a note, rather than simply sending LinkedIn's basic message. Explain in your short personal note why it would be beneficial for the person to allow you to be part of her network. In my opinion, it is very lame if you don't customize your invitation. Remember, you are adding this person to your group of trusted professionals. Therefore, you should add a personal touch to your invitation, and customizing the connection request will get you a much higher response rate.

Here are seven simple suggestions for creating what I like to refer to as a five-star connection request. There is a 300-character limit for your personal message, but that should be more than enough to get your relationship started on the right foot.

1. Use the person's name in your greeting.
2. Mention where you met him/her (in person, on the phone, online) and/or who you have in common.
3. Suggest a face-to-face or phone meeting if you want to develop a deeper relationship with the person.
4. Offer something of value based on your review of the person's profile or your personal knowledge of the individual.
5. Explain how you can help the person or how he/she could help you.
6. Help the person feel good about the connection. I usually say, "I would be honored to have you join my LinkedIn network."
7. Include a friendly closing statement. "Sincerely" is a little bit stiff in most circumstances. For instance, I might say "Go Pack Go" to a fellow Wisconsinite.

Of course, you won't be able to include all seven suggestions in every invitation, but choose the most relevant ones in each situation. If you follow these simple suggestions, more people will accept your invitations, and your new relationships will be off to a strong start.

Finding valuable people whom you can invite to join your network can be challenging, but LinkedIn has some great features to help you quickly grow your network. Not only is it easy to find former classmates and coworkers, but LinkedIn also shows you who has taken a look at your profile and thus might be interested in joining your network or doing business with you.

Connecting with Classmates

You will quickly realize that you have access to a truly amazing database of fellow alumni, and connecting with your former classmates will be fun and, hopefully, profitable, too. To access the Alumni feature, start typing the name of your school in the search box on the top toolbar, and choose the correct entry when it appears in the drop-down list. This will take you to your school's University page. Click the Alumni tab to view a list of all the LinkedIn members who have said they attended this school. You can filter the list by where they live, where they work, what they do, what they studied, what skills they possess, and how you're connected to them. By clicking any of the composite results (city, company name, skill, etc.), you will narrow the search, and you'll then see the people who meet your search criteria. You can narrow your search even further with the "Search alumni by title, keyword or company" box or by using the *Start year* and *End year* filters, where you can enter whichever years you're interested in.

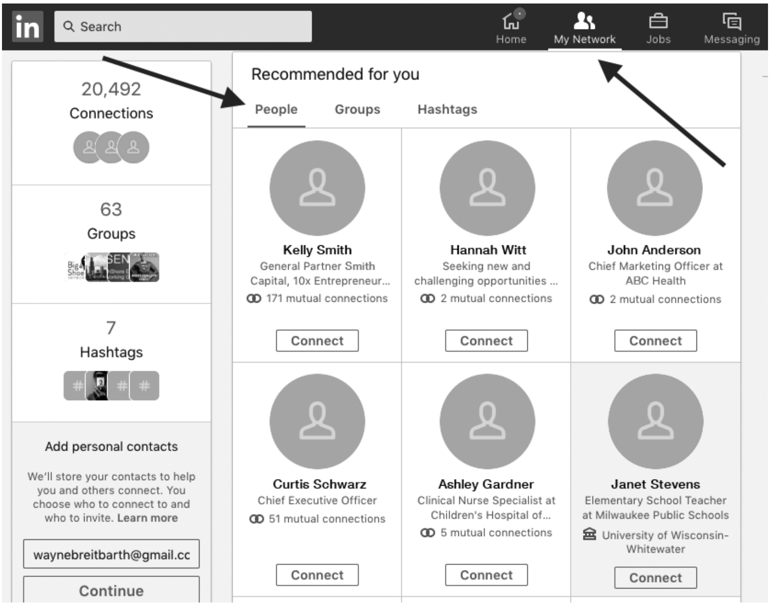
The exercise above will undoubtedly result in quite a large number of potential connections, but if you say to yourself, *Well, that's too many*; *that's going to take me too long to review*, then I guess you don't really understand why you are even on LinkedIn. Rather than viewing this process as a hassle, treat your search for valuable connections as if you were hunting treasure—tell yourself, *There's gold in them thar hills*. Your classmates present a tremendous opportunity to make some important connections. These are people who will remember you from your college days, and you will now be able to tell them what you are up to today. Reconnecting with old friends is fun, but it can also be very productive; some of your old drinking buddies may now be presidents of the companies with which you are trying to do business. Many others will likely have nice databases of first-level connections, which could lead to great connections at the second or third level for you. You just never know.

"Recommended for you—People"

If you click *My Network* on the top toolbar and scroll down a bit, you will see the "Recommended for you—People" section (see Figure 12.1). LinkedIn has a special formula for putting people in this section, and although they have not revealed how it works, you will be amazed at the names you find here. From my observation, these people typically fall into one or more of the following categories:

- They are connected to someone in your network.
- They attended a school that you also attended.
- They are a member of a group to which you belong.
- They either work with you currently or have worked with you in the past.
- They have selected the same location that you have selected on your profile.

Figure 12.1: LinkedIn helps you find new connections.

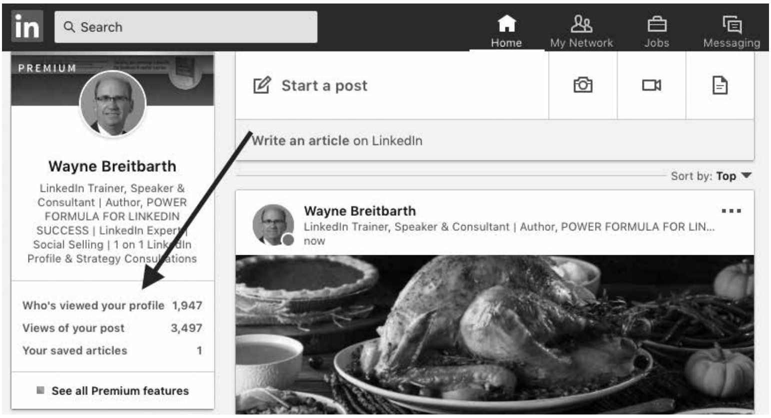


You will find these suggestions not only useful but also somewhat entertaining. LinkedIn has helped me find a number of guys I used to drink dime taps (10¢ beers) with during my college days! Do not overlook the usefulness of this feature in finding new connections.

"Who's Viewed Your Profile?"

LinkedIn also allows users to see how many people are looking at their profile with the "Who's Viewed Your Profile?" feature, which you'll find in the left-hand column of your LinkedIn home page (see Figure 12.2). This is an interesting box to click on from time to time, but don't expect to always see the name of the person who looked at your profile. You may instead see any

Figure 12.2: More views of your profile should create more business opportunities.



of the following information about the person: job title, type of company or industry, company name, location, or simply "LinkedIn Member." From this information, you can sometimes guess who viewed your profile and perhaps may be interested in meeting you. The person who is "checking you out" chooses whether you will be able to see his/her name or not. In Chapter 18, I will discuss this and other settings that are available for each individual LinkedIn user.

The "Who's Viewed Your Profile?" section can also help you identify whether you are increasing your activity and presence on LinkedIn. It will display information like "Your profile has been viewed by 122 people in the last 90 days." As with all networking, increasing your activity has the potential to increase relationships, which may lead to increased business.

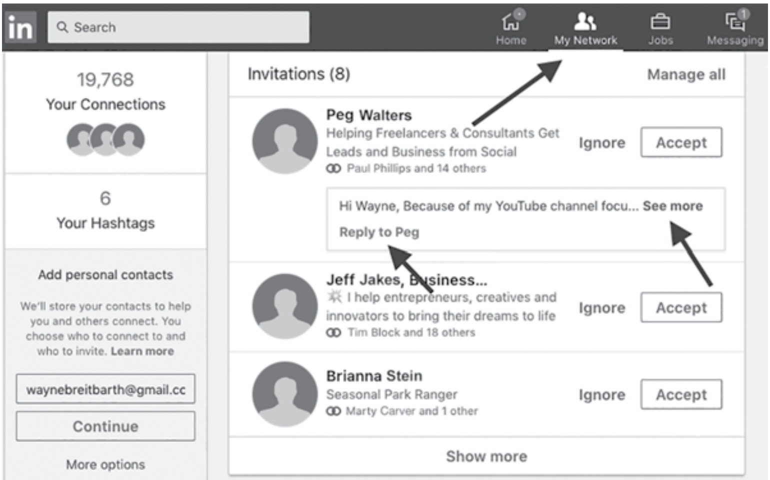
Accepting or Declining Connection Requests

People frequently ask me what they should do when somebody they don't know invites them to connect on LinkedIn. This will begin to happen with greater frequency as you become more active on LinkedIn. Whether you accept or decline will be based on your overall LinkedIn strategy. For example, if you're a sales professional, you should consider connecting with people who work or have worked at your target companies and people who know current or past employees. This is an excellent strategy for job seekers as well.

To review your open invitations, click *My Network* on your top toolbar. You will see the screen in Figure 12.3. Here are the three ways you can respond to an invitation:

1. **Accept.** The person will immediately become a first-degree connection when you click the Accept button.
2. **Reply to [*name*].** People often overlook the option of using the Reply feature because it is not one of the obvious choices. If you click *See more*, you can review the message from the person who has invited you into her network. You can reply without accepting the invitation by clicking *Reply to* [name]. If I have had an interesting meeting with a person and we belong to the same group or club, I can send a message saying something like, "At the next meeting, let's make sure we connect and get to know each other better so we can join each other's LinkedIn network."
3. **Ignore**. If you click *Ignore*, the invitation will be deleted. Before deciding to ignore an invitation, I suggest you check out the person's profile to determine whether there might be a reason to meet him or her.

Figure 12.3: Consider all of your options when responding to an invitation.



After choosing *Ignore*, you can select *I don't know this person*. Then the person will not be allowed to send you any more invitations.

Connecting with Competitors

I am frequently asked, "Should I connect on LinkedIn with competitors?" My quick answer is, "Are you nuts? Why would you want to hand over your database of prospects and customers to a competitor?" However, because not all relationships are simple and one-dimensional (competitor or not a competitor), here are some factors to consider when deciding whether to connect with a "competitor."

- **Are the identities of your customers already public knowledge?** If they are public knowledge, then connecting with competitors is not as big of a deal.

- **Do you hide your list of connections from your network?** If you do, then they cannot see to whom you are connected anyway, so there is less risk.
- **Do you think you are better at LinkedIn than your competitors?** If so, then maybe you are going to gain more from looking through their connections than they will gain from looking at your connections.
- **Are you connected to only people you trust, or is your network more open?** If you choose to connect with people who are not your trusted friends, those people could potentially allow your competitor to come over to their office and scroll through your list of connections. This is certainly unlikely, but it is possible.

Also, keep in mind that relationships change over time. If a trusted coworker who is in your network goes to work for a competitor and becomes your number one nemesis, then you may want to consider disconnecting from that person.

As you can see, there is no simple answer to the question of whether you should connect with competitors. However, after you consider the points mentioned above, you can make the decision with your eyes wide open.

Taking advantage of the features explained in this chapter will enable you to quickly add a large number of connections. You'll be on your way to building that big muskie net, so that when you search for new contacts, you will have plenty of people to choose from.

APPLYING THE POWER FORMULA

- Making connections using the steps outlined in this chapter may seem a bit time-consuming, but it's well worth the effort. Every one of your **unique relationships** gives you lots of second- and third-degree connections, and any of them could be the person you want to meet.
- These steps work more effectively when you have thoroughly outlined your **unique experience** in the Experience and Education sections. If you fail to list a job or an educational experience, you will miss out on potential credibility as well as the opportunity to make valuable connections with people you met while gaining that **unique experience**.

Identify the connection strategy that will help you grow your business and brand by downloading "The LinkedIn Connection Conundrum: Who Should Be in Your Network?" available at **www.powerformula.net/connections**.

Acknowledgments

What a wild ride it has been—writing a social media book at age fifty-three, watching it become the number-one-selling LinkedIn book on Amazon.com, and now publishing a fourth edition. I couldn't have done it without the help of the following people:

Brenda (my wife, best friend, grammar czar)—You have been the inspiration for the book in so many ways—from your beginning declaration, "We should write a book," to your many, many hours of typing, proofing, editing, convincing, and, most importantly, persevering. You're great!

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Wayne and Marge Breitbarth (my parents)—Even though you will never be on LinkedIn and perhaps never read more than this page of my book, your living examples of what it means to be a friend, business owner, and parent have had an immeasurable influence on the experiences and perspectives that I share throughout the book. I love you!

Tim Rudd (my good friend and former partner)—Thanks for being the most understanding partner a guy could have during my exploration of LinkedIn.

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Joe Guidi (Mini Me)—Your youthful insights about how younger business professionals think and act have helped me every step of the way. You are wise beyond your years (and an awesome son-in-law, too).

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Jason Alba—Your book *I'm on LinkedIn—Now What???* started me down this path. I don't know whether to curse you or hug you, so I will stick with the latter. Thanks for being a pioneer.

Jan Vermeiren—Your book *How to REALLY Use LinkedIn* helped me get to the aha moment of realizing you'd better have a strategy on all this social media stuff or not waste your time.

Gary Vaynerchuk—As I am writing this with my "Crush It" wristband on, I am thankful for the inspiration your book and videos have given me to do just that—crush it.

Erik Qualman—Your book *Socialnomics* was the first book I read that connected the dots for me on how social media works from a 35,000-foot view.

David Meerman Scott—Had I not devoured *The New Rules of Marketing and PR*, I would not have come to the realization that we are all thought leaders at something, and the Internet is our way to be able to create a "worldwide rave."

My Early Audiences (my guinea pigs)—I can't believe you had any interest in listening to a CPA/office furniture guy talk to you about something you wanted nothing to do with and then told your friends to do the same. I couldn't have and wouldn't have wanted to do this without your encouragement.

Pepsi Max (my caffeine elixir)—I don't know that I could have gotten through all the writing and editing without the extra caffeine and ginseng with which you are so lovingly loaded.

Jesus (my Lord and Savior)—Your example of how to connect with people is the standard for which we should all strive.

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About the Author

Wayne Breitbarth, one of the world's foremost LinkedIn experts, is an industry leader in LinkedIn training and marketing. The first edition of his book *The Power Formula for LinkedIn Success* was the bestselling LinkedIn book on Amazon for more than a year and a half. Wayne has helped more than 100,000 people access the full power of LinkedIn for their companies and careers. He has inspired audiences around the globe, at conventions, industry association events, and corporate training sessions. Wayne's diverse business experience, pragmatic teaching style, and infectious sense of humor have earned him the praise of the press and the distinction of being referred to as the "LinkedIn Guru."

When he began using LinkedIn in 2008, he was an owner and president of M&M Office Interiors in Pewaukee, Wisconsin. He currently devotes himself full time to helping companies develop a comprehensive strategy for using LinkedIn to increase sales, raise brand awareness, recruit employees and reduce recruiting fees, and discover new markets for products/services. In addition, he helps individuals maximize their use of LinkedIn to meet and exceed their professional goals and advance their careers.

Prior to his involvement in the office furniture business, he spent nearly twenty years in the automotive industry. He received his BBA from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and his MBA from Marquette University. Wayne is also a Certified Public Accountant and spent the early years of his career as an auditor and small business consultant with Arthur Andersen & Co.

Throughout his career, Wayne has been involved with a number of philanthropic organizations. His financial background has enabled him to assist SecureFutures (formerly Make A Difference-Wisconsin) in its mission to enrich the community by empowering high school students to make sound financial decisions. His work with this organization includes serving on its board of directors as well as teaching financial literacy classes to students in Milwaukee Public Schools. He is also the founder of Urban Promise, an urban youth mentoring program that brings together business professionals and high school students in Milwaukee Public Schools. Wayne has also served on the board of directors of the Community Warehouse, a nonprofit organization that serves the Milwaukee community by providing affordable home-improvement materials, and Milwaukee Working, a nonprofit in the Central City that creates jobs for men and women who are either underemployed, never employed, or background challenged. He has also served as a youth leader and teacher at Eastbrook Church in Milwaukee.

Wayne's work with urban youth has been applauded by the Wisconsin Institute of Certified Public Accountants, and he is a past recipient of the WICPA Public Service Award.

Wayne resides in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, with his wife of 38 years. They have three daughters and two granddaughters.