Grow Your Sales with LinkedIn






Session 3 Guide

LONESTAR
SALES PERFORMANCE

Contents

Prospecting & Selling Using LinkedIn

Savvy business people are increasingly using LinkedIn as a primary source of new leads and tangible revenue. In fact, for business-to-business, LinkedIn is a critical tool that can make your prospecting faster, smoother, and ultimately more profitable.

In fact, in our opinion LinkedIn is one of the best tools you can have for business development, and it provides some huge advantages you should be aware of:

Know Who Your Network Knows

Your 1st Level contacts open up a path to a wide range of 2nd and 3rd Level connections. This is how you scale your network. Strike while the iron is hot – whenever you meet anyone (online or off), always follow up quickly with a connection request while you are still fresh in their mind.

Identify the Decision Maker

It is important to understand how any organization makes decisions.

When you connect with a prospect, see who else in the company connects to him or her. Read our section on researching a profile before a meeting, to build up knowledge about potential prospects. You'd be surprised how much information people put in their profiles – which team they're on, which office they work out of, what projects they're focusing on. With a little detective work, you can quickly build up a picture of who you should be talking to, what they're like (check out their recommendations), and what they've done before.

You can also build up a map of who reports to whom, gaining a clearer picture of the people you'll need to influence to make the sale. (For starters, look at the "Viewers of this profile also viewed..." box on their profile.)

Never Make a Completely Cold Call Again

I know hardly anyone who likes making cold calls. More often than not, cold calls can feel like they are a waste of time and you're banging your head against a brick wall. These days there is little or no excuse for going into any call totally cold.

With LinkedIn, you can learn enough about someone to make your call more relevant and useful to them. I pay particular attention to changes in profile, status updates, connections we have in common, and anything they've posted to a group (which can be reason enough to call them in the first place).

You should be working on making prospects at the 1st or 2nd Level. If they are a 2nd Level connection – contact your mutual connection and ask him the following:

- How well does he know the person you are trying to connect with?
- What inside information about the prospect can they provide you?
- If they know the prospect well, would they consider making an introduction?

No Gatekeeper

Getting to the right person is often no easy task. Ask anyone in sales and they'll tell you, senior decision makers are a tough group to get through to. It's not surprising when you think of it: they are besieged with calls and emails every single day. To protect their time, they screen their calls, ignore most of their mail, and have gatekeepers to prevent unwanted intrusions into their business world. It used to be that you had to get past or through ... the gatekeeper.

While I'll try everything I can think of to get through to senior execs using traditional channels, sometimes they are simply too well-guarded. That's where LinkedIn groups come in. If I belong to the same LinkedIn group as the prospect, my chances of connecting with them go up dramatically.

If we aren't in the same group, I could always invest in getting a paid LinkedIn account and use LinkedIn's InMail Service to contact them. InMail is LinkedIn's internal email system, which enables you to send an email to any LinkedIn user without requiring an introduction. Basically, it ensures your email gets through to the prospect's inbox. LinkedIn claims that an InMail message is 30 times more likely to get a response than a cold call (which, if anything, sounds conservative from my experience).

InMails are only available on paid accounts. The higher the level of your account, the more InMails you're allowed. On the entry-level business account, you're allowed three InMails each month. This means you'll want to reserve using them until all else fails. But the good news is that if you do not get a response to an InMail within seven days, your credits are refunded.

How do you intend to use these LinkedIn functionalities? What message will you communicate as you use them?

See Who Looked at Your Profile

It always amazes me how few people know that you can see who's looked at your profile. Unless visitors have set their profiles to anonymous, you can click on the "Who's viewed your profile?" link and see a list of them. The free account limits how many you can see, while paid accounts give you the whole list. Of course, once you know this, it can become quite a compulsive activity – er, should I say, addiction.

This capability helps you in two ways:

1. The fact that someone looked at your profile is a good excuse to reach out with a connection request.
2. If you look at other people's profiles, a certain proportion will always look back (see 1 above).

Even when you get visitors described as "Sales Director from the Pharmaceutical Industry," you can still click on them. LinkedIn will then give you a list that will include the actual visitor. It then takes just minutes to quickly visit each profile to show you've looked back. It is also a great way to find other prospects.

Connect with Your Customer

I want you to start off by connecting with your existing customers. It just makes sense to first connect with all your customers that have a profile on LinkedIn. By connecting with them, it will help you later with some of the other things you will need to do. These connections are going to be a great source of information, and your biggest resource for finding similar prospects.

Take a few minutes now to make sure you look for, and connect with, all your clients.

Start With a Plan

We want to develop a plan for our prospecting on LinkedIn, so we can focus on what we are trying to accomplish. It is easy to get sidetracked when using social media tools like LinkedIn. You log in with a purpose, and then 45 minutes later you find you're wondering what you'd initially logged in to do. So we are going to design our personal LinkedIn Prospecting Plan.

Your LinkedIn Prospecting Plan

Earlier in the course, we talked about knowing specifically who our target audience is and what problems we solve for them, so we could incorporate this into our personal profile in a conversational-style aimed directly at those prospects. Next we want to establish a connection with the prospects that fit our target audience definition. I have attached a LinkedIn Prospecting Planner and an Ideal 200 Prospect worksheet for you to download and use.

Step 1: Make a List of Prospects

I want you to create an initial list of the "Ideal 200" companies you would like to work with. Beside each company name, list the key people you would need to connect with to do business with that company. Don't worry if you don't have all 200 company names, or you are not sure who you should be connecting with at those companies. We will use LinkedIn to help us fill in the gaps we have.

When this has been completed, I typically see a list of 200 companies and just over 300 contacts (just over 1.5 contacts per company). The number of contacts will vary slightly, depending on the size of the target company – larger companies will potentially yield more contacts than smaller companies.

Don't move to step two until you have completed your list. (If you are struggling to come up with companies or contacts, don't worry. We will deal with that in the next step. Just do the best you can.)

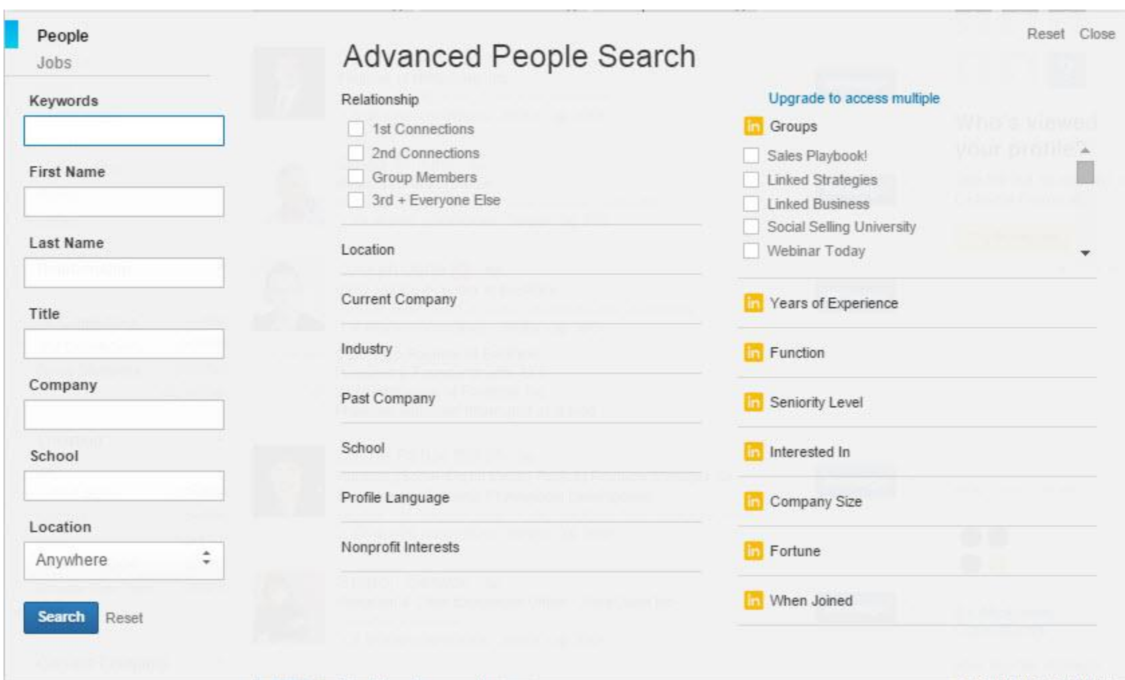
Step 2: Fill In the Gaps

At this point, you will likely have fewer than 200 company names, as well as a lot of blank spaces in the contact area. This is the point at which we are going to fill in the gaps, by using the following LinkedIn tools to help us:

Search for Prospects

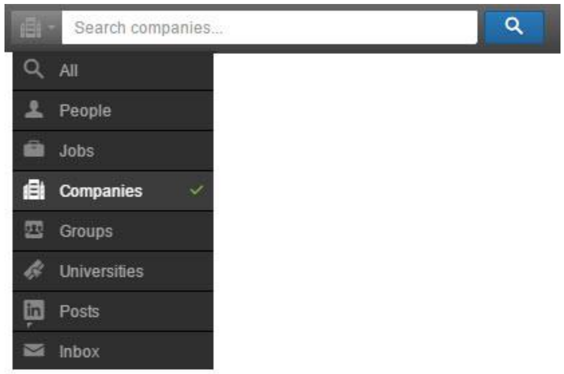
LinkedIn has a fabulous search facility. With their advanced search, you can find people by title, company, location, or keyword. Upgrade to a paid account and you can add company size and seniority level, too. By intelligently mixing the different filters, you can dig really deep and identify key individuals quickly and easily.

You can also save your search filters and get a weekly report listing potential new customers that match your criteria. For example, I could save a search for Accountants within 25 km of the hotel where I am holding a training class. Then each week, I would get an email with any new listings of Accountants who match my search (and who deserve a closer look). I can't overstate what a powerful feature this is. I use it all the time.



Company Search

Use the Company Search feature to look up all the companies you are targeting. Then use the "How You're Connected" widget to show you who at that company has a LinkedIn profile, and whether you are connected in some way.



Add the names of your ideal prospects; then check out their profiles to see what LinkedIn groups they belong to. Mark any that are 2nd Level connections, and mark who your joint connection is. We will use this later, when we are looking for ways to connect with your target prospect.

Work your way through the list to create your Ideal 200 prospects. Once that is completed, we can start to work on connecting with as many as possible.

Creating this list will help keep you on track with prospects you should be connecting with. Your Ideal 200 is a living document that you should be updating on a frequent basis.

Once you have connected, you can take them off that list and move them into your Prospect Check, in rotation.

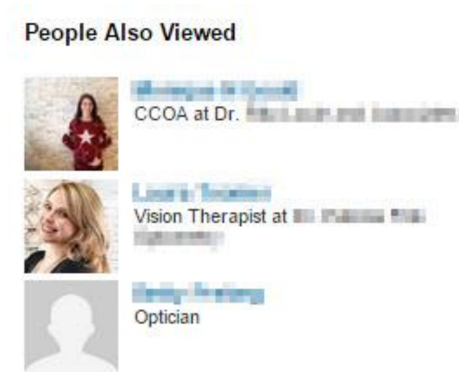
Do You Need More Prospects?

When you are filling in the Ideal 200 Prospecting Worksheet, are you struggling to come up with 200 companies or target connections? LinkedIn really does a great job of helping you find prospects with such similarities as job titles, companies and location.

Check out the following three sections, to find more prospects:

1. People Also Viewed
2. People Similar to {Person You Are Viewing}
3. Others With a Similar Position at {Company Name of the Person You Are Viewing}

People Also Viewed



Look at the profiles of your current customers. On the right sidebar, you will find the People Also Viewed widget. This widget will show you a list of the profiles the LinkedIn users visited before and after visiting your profile. This usually results in finding a few people that you don't yet have on your prospecting list. Click on their profiles and see if they are potential customers for your business.

People Similar to…

The "People Similar to" widget generates profiles similar to the one you are currently viewing. This will pull profiles showing similar job titles, industries and groups, and will be a great source for you to find more prospects similar to your best customers. Clicking on these profiles will take you to their pages, so you can determine whether any are a likely prospect for your business.

Others with a Similar Position at….

This widget helps you dig deeper into that same company by showing you individuals with a similar position. For example, if you are looking for a Personal Injury Lawyer at a firm, this widget will also show you other Personal Injury Lawyers there. It is important to have multiple connections and different points of entry into any company you are targeting. Connections change and people move on, so if that happens, you'll want to make sure you can continue working with their former company, as well as potentially gaining access to their new company.

So, clicking on this widget will show you the profile of similar prospects, to see who else you should be trying to connect with.

Step 3: Join Groups

In the LinkedIn Prospecting Plan, we ask you to record the LinkedIn groups that your existing best customers and your target audience belong to. This is an important step, and I don't want you to skip it. There are a number of reasons you want to join the groups your target audience belongs to. For example, member discussions are great for telling you about frustrations and unmet needs. They can also give you the perfect reason for making contact with a prospect.

But groups are incredibly useful in three other ways:

1. They allow you to see more of an individual prospect's details – in particular, their full name. This is usually restricted to 1st Level contacts (which reinforces the importance of tip 1).
2. Group membership gives you both the reason and capability to make more connections (it's one of the criteria you can select when you send a connection request).
3. They allow you to follow your prospects that are in the same groups as you. Yes, LinkedIn allows users to follow up to 5,000 prospects (people). Following is not as good as connecting, but it can aid you in making a connection.

LinkedIn allows you to join up to 50 groups. Don't waste even one. Make sure you find as many as possible of the groups your target market is enrolled in.

To what groups do you currently belong?

To what groups should you belong?

Have you researched what groups you could join that might benefit you and your business?

Step 4: Follow

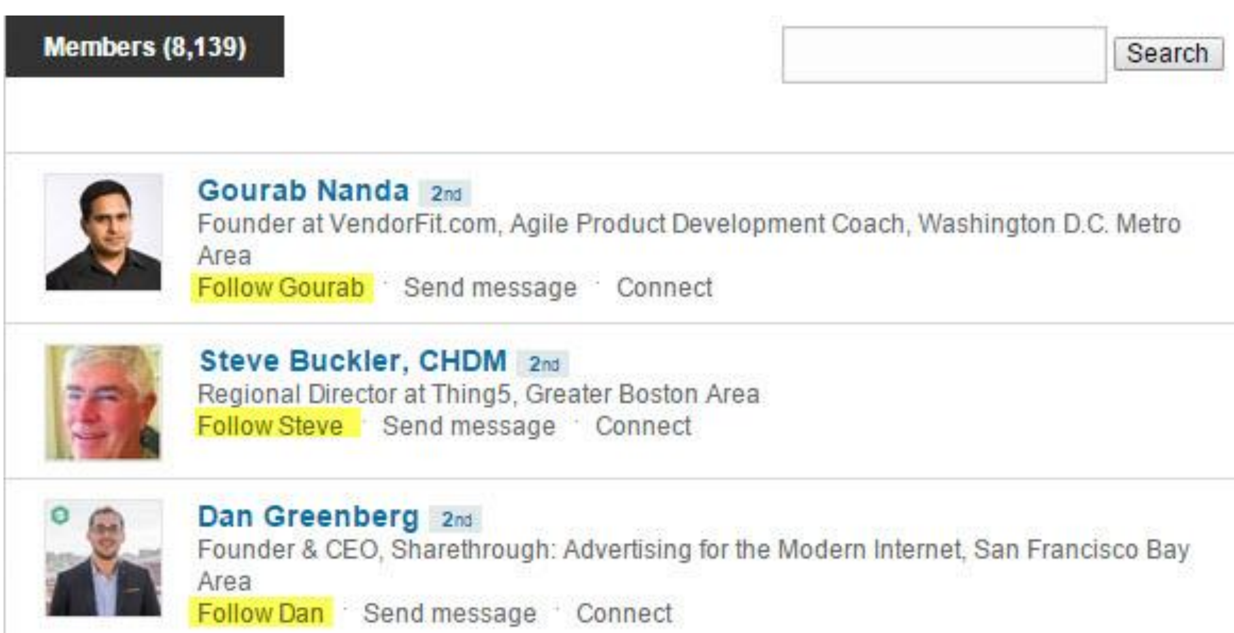
Following allows you to keep track of your prospects and their companies. By following them, you will be able to keep track of what is going on with them and their company.

Follow Your Ideal 200 Prospects

Go to the LinkedIn groups that you joined in Step 3, and now start to follow the prospects you ultimately want to connect with. Most LinkedIn users never realize they can follow other users in their same group.

LinkedIn likes to build community, and having members be active in groups keeps them on the site longer and coming back more often. So LinkedIn gives group members more access to other members of their group, by allowing them to both send messages and follow. Sending messages is pretty straight forward, but following another group member is often not so obvious – so let me outline the process for you.

1. Go to Interests in the Main Menu bar -> Groups from the dropdown.
2. This will take you to a list of all your groups. Click on the group you want to access.
3. On the group’s home page, you will see the members tab. This will show you all the members in that group.
4. In that list of members you will see any first level connection who by nature of you connection you already follow. On any 2nd level connections you have the ability to click on the Follow <Contact’s First Name>.
5. Clicking on this will allow you to see that person’s activity (and profile), plus when they make updates, it will come across your feed like your 1st Level connections.



Follow Your Prospect's Company Page

Use the "Follow Company" feature to follow the prospect companies you have targeted. This ties you into news about them, and you can see what connections you already have within their employee base. Go to your prospect's Company Page and click on the yellow "Follow" button.

Step 5: Look for Opportunities to Connect

Once you are following as many of your prospects as possible, it is now time to look for opportunities to connect with as many of them as you can. In our section on "How to Connect" we gave you examples of wording you could use to invite prospects and others to connect with you. This is by no means the only way to do it. So let me show you the steps for making a Successful Connection on LinkedIn.

How to Make a Successful Initial Connection on LinkedIn

Learn About Them

Have you ever been in your office working away when the phone rings and on the other end is a sales person calling to try and sell you something? While I appreciate the guts it takes to telephone a prospect, I am always annoyed when it is obvious they know nothing about me or my business. In this age, there is no excuse for not doing some research before you pick up the phone. I am not talking about hours of research – I am talking about taking even 5 minutes to look over my website and scan my LinkedIn profile. In the same vein, there is no reason why you should be attempting to connect with anyone before you do some research on them.

By just looking at their profile, think of all the information I suddenly have available that will allow me to personalize my invitation to connect. Here is just a small segment of the information I can access:

1. Connections we have in common
2. Where they worked prior to their current job
3. Where they went to school
4. Any honours and awards they might have received
5. I can see what their recent activity has been on LinkedIn
6. I can see who they have recommended and who has given them recommendations

That is only the start of the information that is available. Later in this course, we will have a section on how to prepare for a sales meeting using LinkedIn to find opportunities for building rapport and connections.

Ask For an Introduction

If they are a 2nd Level connection, ask one of your mutual connections for an introduction. LinkedIn makes it easy for you to see how you are connected with the prospect. Go to the prospect's LinkedIn profile and in the right side bar you will find the How You're Connected. Click on the profile of your connection and see if they might be willing to make an introduction.

Although LinkedIn gives you electronic tools to facilitate an introduction, I recommend you don't use them. In fact, my recommendation is that you go old school and phone your mutual connection. Tell them you've noticed on LinkedIn that they are connected to someone you would like to meet. Tell them the name and ask how well they know the prospect. If they know them well, ask for a personal introduction. If they don't know them very well (and that is a good possibility), you are best to look at developing a different approach. If you can get a personal introduction, this is always the best approach because it gives you instant credibility.

Flattery

Yes flattery is a strategy. It is very effective to compliment the person you are trying to connect with. Take a look at a recent post they made in a group, or a blog post they recently posted, or perhaps a presentation they did at an industry trade show. Find something to compliment them on.

Like I mentioned in the "How to Connect" section, if that person has never heard of you, what's the incentive to press "accept?"

That's where the personalized note comes in. No matter how sure you are that the people you're hoping to connect with should remember you, write a brief message letting them know why you'd like to know them — and they'll be far more likely to accept.

Step 6: Connect & Classify Your Connections

Once you have invited them to connect and they have accepted (and why wouldn't they, if you created a great invitation?), you want to make sure you can identify the prospects in your network. You are going to use tags to connect and classify connections as part of your LinkedIn network. Why? If your LinkedIn connections are properly tagged and classified, it makes it much easier to have separate processes for connecting with a prospect and network connections. Tagging makes it easy to group your prospects to apply different treatments to them. Tags are found in the Contacts section of LinkedIn, and are absolutely invaluable for more advanced methods of using LinkedIn for prospecting.

Note: Once you follow a prospect, they should show up under your connections on LinkedIn. You can also tag them to keep your Ideal Clients easy to find amongst all your current connections.

How to Tag a Connection

1. Go to the Connections on the Main Menu and click on it.
2. Change the sort order to New.

3. When you move your mouse over their name, a new menu bar will appear. Click Tag.

4. You can now add any tag from your list, or to create a new one, scroll to the bottom and find the options to +Add New Tags or Manage Tags you already have. If you create a new tag, type in a name for it and click Save. To remove a tag, uncheck the box next to it.

Step 7: Schedule Follow Up

The last step is to schedule them for a follow up. Earlier in the course, I suggested that your prospects should be contacted at least 3 times a year (every 4 months), but actually 4 times a year (every 3 months) is preferable and seems to work best.

When new prospects have joined me on LinkedIn, I don't want to lose that early momentum, so early on I try to establish a little more interaction. This is what I typically do:

1. Thank them immediately for connecting. Now is your opportunity to ask them about ***their business.*** Notice I didn't say tell them about your business. You need to focus on them. They are more likely to engage if you are showing interest in them. Congratulations if you do this, because you have now just separated yourself from the majority of people on LinkedIn.
2. Depending on what they send back as a reply, you can continue the dialogue – but keep it focused on them. The **only time** you can talk about your business is if they specifically ask you about what you do.

3. Let them know you think it’s important to stay in touch with the great professionals you connect with, and ask if they mind you checking in a few times a year. This allows you to stay on top of what your network is doing, and makes it easier to send referrals to help them grow their business.

By keeping the focus on them and not trying to immediately sell something, you will start to build trust with this prospect. You will also build this prospect’s recognition of your name and, over time and with constant follow up, they will also start to learn more about what you do – not because you are going to email that information (unless they ask), but because they are going to become curious. They are going to go to your profile and look at it. They are going to start to see your other activity on LinkedIn through their news feed.

As they become aware of you, it’s likely that when you start to switch communication methods, they will be open to coming to an event you offer, or to talking on the phone or having a quick meeting when you are next in their area.

How to Turn Online Connections into Real-World Business Relationships

According to an Academia.edu study, there is a tremendous connection between your online and offline relationships. According to their findings, “The average North American has 634 ties in their overall network.”

If you are using social media to build your business, at some point you will have to transition into real-world relationships. There is no sense in having hundreds or even thousands of connections if you aren't able to turn them into paying customers – people with whom you actually engage in real life.

So how do you take your online connections offline? If you are ready to transition online connections into real-world business relationships, here is how to get started.

Moving these relationships means that you have to be strategic and intentional about how they progress. As your relationship progresses, so should your depth of knowledge. Your exchanges should become more granular in nature, and your goal is to move your online connections into more depth. This means that over time, your entire communication channels should be changing.

Move the Conversation to Email

Using LinkedIn works well for acquiring the connection, but often that’s where it ends. The problem is you don’t know this person well enough yet to engage with them in ways that will in the near term lead to doing business. So when you want to deepen a relationship that started on LinkedIn, send that person an email and ask more about their business or what they working on. What are they excited about? **What can you do that will help them succeed?**

Once you open that channel of communication, it’s forever open. And **email is a valuable channel**, because down the line, when you recognize a way to work with that person or find that you could use their advice, you can simply reply to the original email, and they’ll recognize you as a friend – or at least as someone with whom they have had prior contact.

Talk on the Phone

Yes, people actually still do that, once in a while. And it’s an especially good choice when you’ve connected online with someone who’s not all that comfortable with the online world. If you offer a phone conversation, **you’re giving them a way to chat with you while staying in their comfort zone**, which means they’ll probably be more open with you.

Of course, the phone isn’t for everyone; we’ve all had phone calls that have turned totally awkward. But if you’ve got a lot in common with a new online friend and plenty to discuss, take the time to dial their number. It can work in your favor – often in much better ways than you would have expected.

Create Opportunities to Connect Offline

You've probably heard the saying, "People want to do business with people they know, like and trust." But how will someone know if they like you, if they haven't yet met you?

As a business owner who is looking to market his or her company, you should be on the lookout for opportunities to get face time with movers and shakers in your network. Here are examples of how you can get started:

- Host a meet-up at a local restaurant, whenever you travel for business. You can easily do this using the advanced search tool on LinkedIn. You can put in the address of the hotel you are staying at and search for connections within a 25 km radius. This will give you a list of people in your network with whom you can connect.
- Attend events that feature people from your network as guest speakers. Let them know ahead of time that you'd like to meet up and introduce yourself.
- Set up one or two coffee meetings each week with new people in your network.