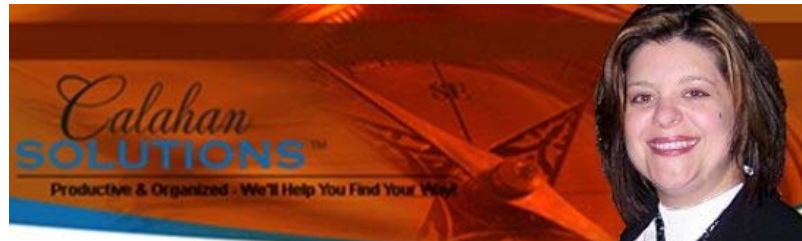


[Stephanie LH Calahan](#) '95 (BIS/HR) is a dynamic entrepreneur, nationally known speaker, media personality, author, publisher; and productivity / organization specialist. [She and her consultants](#) focus on helping you make the most of your time, space, information and ideas. Her clients have included fortune 500 companies, startups, nonprofits, universities and numerous individuals across the country. Rolodex, Stacks & Stacks, and the Neat Company are a few of the international companies that have sought her expertise. We recently sat down with Stephanie to talk about social networking and how she uses tools to build and maintain vital business relationships.

If you've been wondering how you can get full value from participation in our COBAN group on LinkedIn, read on. Stephanie shares exactly what you need to know, understand and do.



Q: When did you start using online social networking as a tool to grow your business?

Stephanie: I have been using various forms of social networking since I started my business back in 2002. A lot has changed since then—tools have come and gone. One thing remains consistent; however, people are more comfortable making purchases from those they know, like and trust. My business is in a high-touch industry. We work with people on areas of their business and life that are often private. One way for my prospective clients to get to know Calahan Solutions, Inc. and me is through connections on social networking sites.

Q: Why did you start actively using social networking as a way to build your business?

Stephanie: Traditional face-to-face networking is effective, but limited in location. Since we provide services globally, we wanted to find a way to connect with people on a global scale. Of course, we have web sites, an email newsletter and other marketing collateral, but that only lends to one-way conversation. Online social networking allows for a full conversation and participation when the prospect is ready. I have found that some people that link/friend/follow me start up conversations right away, while others wait a while. We're ok with that because every day is new exposure.

In addition, since most social networking sites have better search engine stats than my own site, it is a good way for me to get massive exposure for my business and do it all for free. Check out <http://www.alexacom/topsites> and you will see that the top 100 sites across the entire internet include many social networking sites.

Q: OK. Let's focus in on LinkedIn. Do you only use these tools to prospect for new clients?

Stephanie: No. I actively work on the various sites and meet new people every day. I have built some fabulous international relationships just by actively participating in LinkedIn and those relationships have turned into projects and client work.

Q: Tell us about how our readers should “work” on LinkedIn.

Stephanie: Here are six essential steps to complete:

1 - Make sure you have a solid profile page.

Alexa ranks [LinkedIn at 72](#). It is likely that a prospect will find your LinkedIn profile on a Google search before they would find your web site.

2 - Get your company listed too.

Go to the [Company Add page](#) and click the add button. Fill in the fields and save.

3 - Understand that there are different types of users on LinkedIn.

Some users are open to connecting with people that they do not personally know and others are not open to it at all. Use caution when making a connection request and be familiar with [LinkedIn's user policy](#). A good rule to follow is if you would not do or say something at a face-to-face networking event, don't do it online either.

*****LinkedIn has a "5 strikes and you are out" policy.** If, over the course of your membership, you have 5 people press the IDK "I don't know" button on your request, your account will get locked up. It is a good idea to ask their permission for a link prior to sending a link request.

4 - Use your home page.

It is the heart-beat of your connections. You can see what people are focused on and offer assistance or encouragement easily. You can also find new people to connect with. Remember, it is about the relationships, so building the connections you already have is a great first step.

5 - Understand how to leverage the Answers section.

The answers section of the site is a very powerful tool. You can build your network, do market research, find answers to commonly asked questions, position yourself as an expert, find experts and much more. If you have knowledge in a particular area, you can search for that topic and reply. It is a great way to build credibility.

6 - Join and participate in groups like [Illinois State University College of Business Alumni Network \(COBAN\)](#).

Join groups with a specific reason in mind. When you have focus in your networking you will be much more productive. At first, less is more. Join no more than one group a week and actively begin participating. It is through participation that you build relationships. Each group has its own set of rules, so check them out and participate accordingly.

***Tomorrow look for Part Two of our interview with Stephanie Calahan with specifics on how to more effectively use the COBAN group.**