



Your Profile Is a Search Result. Rank For It.

The 20-minute playbook to LinkedIn's 2026 algorithm, a profile that ranks, and the honest 0→10K roadmap — before you post another thing.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Everything that matters, in pointers

This mini gives you the honest map of LinkedIn growth in 20 minutes: why the platform still has free reach, how the 2026 algorithm decides what travels, how to build a profile that ranks, and the staged path to 10K. Read it once and you'll out-plan most "gurus."

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THE ONE IDEA TO HOLD THE WHOLE WAY

LinkedIn moved from a network graph to an interest graph — a genuinely useful post can travel far past your follower count. But the algorithm still wants real substance, held attention and real conversation. There is no hack around being useful.

Why LinkedIn now

- **The scale:** 1.3B members, but only ~310M monthly active — the ones who show up are in a professional, buying/hiring mindset.
- **India's position:** the #2 market by users behind only the US — over 130 million and growing, a story a LinkedIn exec called one of the platform's most energising.
- **The reach gap:** LinkedIn organic reach runs 5–10% per post vs Instagram's 3–6% and Facebook's 1–3%. It's the last major platform with free reach.
- **The catch — it's personal, not pages:** company-page reach fell an estimated 60% from 2024–2026. The algorithm favours real names and faces over logos.
- **The hiring case:** 89% of recruiters use LinkedIn for talent acquisition, and 70% of the workforce is "passive talent" found, not applying.

1.3B

Total members globally

~310M

Monthly active users

#2

India's rank by users

CHAPTER 01 · CONTINUED

The reach gap, platform by platform

PLATFORM	TYPICAL ORGANIC REACH	AVG ENGAGEMENT 2026
LinkedIn	5–10%	~3.9–5.2%
Instagram feed	3–6%	~1.6%
Facebook (organic)	1–3%	~0.15%

On Facebook, a typical unpromoted post reaches around 15 out of every 10,000 followers. Organic Facebook is, for practical purposes, dead. LinkedIn engagement rose ~8% year-over-year while Instagram's fell ~26%.

Who fits: consultants, freelancers, founders, career-switchers and job seekers. If someone would pay for your judgment or hire your skills, you belong here.

PRO INSIGHT

LinkedIn is the last major platform where a small account with zero ad budget can still reach thousands of the right people organically — an arbitrage this book is built to help you capture before it closes.

The algorithm decoded

- **The core shift:** from a network graph (reach capped by your connections) to an interest graph — LinkedIn now matches posts to people who care about the topic, whether they follow you or not.
- **Three-stage evaluation:** 1) a quality classifier filters spam in the first minutes · 2) the "golden hour" (~60–90 min) sets the first distribution wave · 3) a 2026 Depth Score keeps re-judging your post for 24–48 hours.
- **Dwell time beats likes:** the algorithm rewards how long people stop and read, not just a reflexive tap — why carousels and long-form text out-reach quick hits.
- **Comments outweigh likes:** every source agrees on direction; the exact multiplier (2x–15x) is disputed and unsourced. Anchor on the behaviour, not the number.

FAKE-STAT WARNING

"61+ seconds of dwell = 15.6% engagement vs 1.2%" is a widely copied number with no primary source. Dwell time is real and important — those exact decimals are not.

Two signals worth knowing

- **Reply early:** top-1% creators reply ~255% more than average (~134 vs ~38/week), with a modest positive link ($r \approx 0.41$) between commenting activity and follower growth.
- **Creator Mode is gone:** removed in March 2024. Featured section, Follow button and analytics are now on by default for everyone — any guide telling you to "turn it on" is stale.
- **The links debate:** SEO blogs claim in-body links cut reach 40–60%. LinkedIn's own product leadership publicly debunked this in 2025: no intentional penalty, as long as the post delivers value on its own.
- **The reconciliation:** lead with standalone value; if you link, consider the first comment. A post whose only job is to bounce people off-platform still tends to underperform.

FRESHNESS CHECK

Use this as a filter for any LinkedIn advice you read: Creator Mode gone (2024), engagement pods actively targeted (2026), company-page reach down ~60%. Miss these and the source is probably stale.

The profile that ranks

- **The headline is your highest-leverage field:** it appears in every search result, comment and connection request. Formula: role + who you help + outcome/specialisation + proof or keyword.
- **The About section builds your "Topic DNA":** front-load keywords, write 500+ of your 2,600 characters, weave in 7–15 keywords naturally — LinkedIn search is semantic now, not just keyword-matching.
- **Banner & Featured:** the two highest-visibility spaces most people leave on default. State who you help, a proof point, and a next step.
- **Skills:** a skill endorsed ~50 times is far more discoverable than one endorsed twice — concentrate endorsements on a few, and claim your custom URL (linkedin.com/in/yourname).
- **Open-to-work — an honest trade-off:** the public green banner maximises recruiter visibility but signals active searching; recruiter-only avoids the stigma while still surfacing you in searches.

THE FORMULA TO TEACH YOURSELF

[Role] + [who you help] + [outcome/specialisation] + [proof or keyword]. "Data Analyst · I help SaaS teams turn messy data into decisions · SQL & Python · ex-Fortune 500." Never settle for just a job title.

Content that travels

Not all formats are treated equally — some stack signals (swipes, saves, dwell) the feed loves.

FORMAT	REACH RANK
Document / carousel	Highest
Native video	High
Text-only	Solid backbone
Polls	Near-dead
Articles / newsletters	Bypasses feed

 **Hook-first writing:** only ~140 characters show before "...see more." Write the opener as its own deliberate sentence — a specific number, a contrarian take, a mid-story moment.

Pillars, cadence & the small-account lever

- **Pick 3–4 content pillars:** expertise/how-to, industry opinion, personal story, light promotion — aim for roughly 80% educate/entertain to 20% promote.
- **Cadence:** 3–5 posts a week is the sweet spot. Tue–Thu is the durable best window; Wednesday ~4pm is often the single strongest slot in 2026 data.
- **The #1 lever for small accounts:** if you're under ~1–2K followers, thoughtful daily comments on bigger, relevant creators usually out-perform posting more — it borrows their audience.

WATCH OUT

Polls were downgraded as engagement bait — treat them as effectively retired. If you want opinions, ask a real question in a normal post and reply to every answer.

The 0→10K roadmap

- **The honest timeline:** ~8–12 months of consistent, strategic posting, with "normal" monthly growth around 2–5% of your current base. 10K is a direction, not a deadline.
- **Stage 1, 0→500 — Foundation:** finish the profile fully, connect toward the 500+ badge (~28% acceptance is normal), start daily strategic commenting, warm up with 2–3 posts a week.
- **Stage 2, 500→2,500 — Consistency:** lock a 3–5×/week cadence, settle your pillars, test every format, and reply to every comment fast — most people quit here because results feel flat.

8–12

Months of consistent posting
to reach 10K

2–5%

"Normal" monthly growth rate

3

Stages, each with a different
job

Stage 3 — and the honest warning

- **Stage 3, 2,500→10K — Authority:** double down on your 1–2 best-performing pillars and formats, launch a newsletter (your owned, algorithm-proof audience), and repurpose winners across formats.
- **The unglamorous pattern:** an analysis of 1,500 accounts that scaled from under 5K to 50K+ found the same recipe every time — 3–4 posts/week + strategic commenting + an authentic voice. Nothing exotic.
- **Skip engagement pods:** they were a real shortcut for years; in 2026 LinkedIn actively targets them (Forbes, March 2026: "LinkedIn Just Killed Engagement Pods"). Shadowban recovery reportedly runs 60–90 days.

BUILD GENUINE ENGAGEMENT INSTEAD

A relevant, warmed network from Stage 1 · daily real comments on bigger creators · posting when your audience is actually online. There's no safe shortcut here.

Comments & conversion

- **Inbound beats cold, by a lot:** inbound leads convert at ~14.6% vs ~1.7% for cold outreach — roughly an 8.6× gap (single vendor survey, but the direction is echoed everywhere).
- **The lead-magnet mechanic:** build one genuinely useful free resource, post it with "comment [word] and I'll DM you the [resource]" — it grows the post and your pipeline at once.
- **DMs that don't feel salesy:** give before you ask, never pitch in message one. Open with real context, deliver the resource with no strings, ask a genuine question.
- **The newsletter converts because it reaches:** ~30–50% open rate (push + email combined) vs ~20–25% for standard email — it bypasses the feed algorithm entirely.
- **For job seekers:** recruiters search by keywords and profile fit, not follower count — a 300-follower profile with a sharp headline can out-surface a 10,000-follower profile that's keyword-thin.

Turning followers into income

- **Followers don't pay, offers do:** you don't need 10K followers — a few hundred of the right people plus one clear offer beats a year famous and broke.
- **Ghostwriting — the best-sourced play:** per-post \$300–\$1,000; retainers run \$1.5K–\$15K/month. Corroborated across multiple independent pricing guides — the most reliable rate data in this niche.
- **Other paths, rated honestly:** 1:1 coaching \$200–\$1,000/session · group cohorts \$500–\$2,000/seat · digital courses ~\$150 · sponsored posts \$1,500–\$3,000 (single-source, least reliable).
- **The Justin Welsh benchmark:** grew ~2K→750K+ followers with zero ad spend, monetized largely via a ~\$150 course. Self-reported and unaudited — an aspirational anchor, not a promise.

THE PATTERN TO NOTICE

The reliable money is in selling a service (ghostwriting, coaching, consulting) — not in being paid for your audience (sponsorships). Sell what you do, not who's watching.

CHAPTER 08

Your 90-day plan

- **Days 1–30 — Foundation:** rebuild the profile, send 10–15 personalized connection requests a day toward 500+, comment daily on bigger creators, post 2–3×/week to warm up.
- **Days 31–60 — Cadence:** lock 3–5 posts/week, settle your pillars, test every format, reply to every comment within the first hour.
- **Days 61–90 — Authority:** double down on your best pillars and formats, launch a newsletter, and introduce the one offer from Chapter 7.
- **The time budget:** the whole system fits under an hour a day — 15–20 min/day commenting, 60–90 min/week batch-writing, a 20-minute weekly review.

THE WEEKLY REVIEW RITUAL

Same day, same 20 minutes, every week: which post got the most meaningful engagement and why · which pillar or format underperformed · did the comment streak hold · what's next week's single focus.

YOU'VE GOT THE MAP. NOW GET THE TERRAIN.

This was the 20-minute version. The full guide is the whole system.

You now know more than most people chasing LinkedIn growth hacks. The complete **LinkedIn Personal Branding** guide takes every chapter above and gives you the full diagrams, tables and day-by-day execution plan.

- **The full 8 chapters** — every concept above, illustrated and expanded, plus the FAQ & glossary appendix.
- **The complete algorithm breakdown** with the three-stage evaluation diagram and every source flagged honestly.
- **The full profile-optimisation checklist** — headline, About, banner, Featured, skills, all worked examples.
- **Every content template & posting calendar** for the 0→10K roadmap, stage by stage.
- **The complete monetization rate tables** — all seven income paths with 2026 rates and confidence levels.

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