

Mark Amtower, consultant, Amtower Off-Center host

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

Welcome to It's All Journalism. My name is Michael O'Connell. Today I'm here with Mark Amtower. He does the radio show [Amtower Off Center](#) here at [Federal News Radio](#) in Washington, D.C. Mark's a marketing guy, right?

Mark Amtower, consultant, Amtower Off-Center host

I am a marketing guy.

Michael O'Connell

And how long have you been in marketing?

Mark Amtower

Started my company in 1985, advising companies on all aspects of marketing to the government.

Michael O'Connell

And the reason I asked you in here and I'd actually mentioned this on an earlier podcast when we were talking about LinkedIn, is that you and I were going to have a conversation about how to use LinkedIn. At work, they want me to learn as much as I can about LinkedIn and see how we can sort of integrate it in the way that we promote our stories, get sources, just generally get our content out there on a different social media platform. And LinkedIn is a different social media type of platform. How did you come to LinkedIn?

Mark Amtower

I was invited early on. I'm one of the first quarter-million members of LinkedIn. So I've been on since February of '04, about eight months after it actually launched. I joined LinkedIn the week after Facebook launched at Harvard. That's how long I've been there. I was invited by a couple of people in the government market and I knew these guys were not time wasters. I didn't get active until '07, though. I had to read a couple of books on how social media was really changing the learning and marketing landscape, PR landscape as well. I decided to study it and I focused exclusively on LinkedIn at that point because it is all business. Business professionals join it, business professionals from around the world. We're now at 210 million members. But the cool thing is not the number of members. It's the number of groups there. There's about 1.7 million groups on LinkedIn. These are self identified communities of people who share various interests.

Michael O'Connell

Right.

Mark Amtower

Any IT topic you can imagine is covered there. There's probably over at least a thousands groups that deal with various aspects of the government. So legislative groups, lobbying groups, but a lot of groups that are in my sweat spot, which is government contracting.

Michael O'Connell

Right. And that's kind of where you have been concentrating on things and wielded what you've learned to some degree of success. So, what do you think LinkedIn does well from a marketing standpoint?

Mark Amtower

From a marketing standpoint, it does something that I call connecting dots in the dark. You know there are certain types of people in certain companies. You don't know who they are. But, through LinkedIn, you can look up the company, and, if the company has a profile, it will tell you how many employees of the company are there, whether they're first, second or other degree to you. If they're first or second, you can peruse them. The first degree connections, obviously, you know or you kind of know. The second degrees, there's usually a lot more of those, but you're able to look at them. So, you can find the kinds of people that you want.

Michael O'Connell

Right.

Mark Amtower

And you can find the kinds of experts you need.

Michael O'Connell

And certainly from a journalist's standpoint, that's something that's very useful. If you know of a type of story that's going to — fire regulations, or something like that. You can search on a group for that. You could find somebody that has that expertise and you can go to them for a source.

Mark Amtower

Right.

Michael O'Connell

A couple of weeks ago, [LinkedIn for Journalists](#), which is one of these groups that LinkedIn has, specifically targeted for journalists, had a training session that people could call into and follow along on their desktop. And it was sort of a guide and a walk-through the basics of LinkedIn. I have kind of mixed feelings about the experience. It was mostly, I would say, just sort of a field trip through LinkedIn. This is how you set up a profile. This is where the groups are. This is what this is. There wasn't a lot of, to me, hands on, this is how you use it. But I think for anybody who wants to get an understanding fresh coming to it, I think it's a good first step. Make sure you fill out your pro-

file. Make sure you know how to make connections. Make sure you know how to find people on there through their specialities and things like that. From that level, I think it's a really good starting point. Do you have any thoughts about how people who want to get into it should start?

Mark Amtower

Yeah. Have a goal. Understand what your strategy is before you come in, because that's going to impact how you build your profile, how you make connections and the groups that you select. So, you have to have an end point when you're starting this thing. Just be clear about what you want to do and then build your profile accordingly.

For reporters, if you really want to leverage LinkedIn, your profile has to be pretty informationally robust about who you are, what you've done, where you've been. And when you reach out to people, they'll understand the value you could bring to them by talking to them. Now, as a reporter, oftentimes, especially with a larger companies, you have to deal with the flacks. The PR people and the —

Michael O'Connell

Yeah, the PIOs.

Mark Amtower

Communications, whatever they want to call themselves. In the government market, you have to do the same thing. So, there's communications officers. If you want to talk to a senior fed, you've got to jump through the same kind of hoops — often more — to do that. You can find those people on LinkedIn. They're pretty obvious.

Michael O'Connell

Right. And what's nice is, as I mentioned before, finding people who have specialities, like you said, you'd have to go through a lot of the same hoops that you normally would do if you're dealing with a company or a government agency, where you've got to go through the front door and you've got to follow the procedure and talk to the right people. But sometimes, you need an expert, a source, on something specialized, and this is a way to get your entree there.

And another thing I'd like to expand on which I thought was an excellent point that you made is that LinkedIn is a very good platform for getting information about you out there. I think a lot of people, I know, one of my first exposures to it was in thinking about looking for another job. So, you put your resume up. You put your experience up. And then you try to look for opportunities in some of the groups and sort of link up with people who are in the same career field, career path, who can maybe open those avenues and everything.

But once you go beyond that and you think about what you're going to put in your profile, you want to present yourself as somebody who's reputable.

Mark Amtower

Right.

Michael O'Connell

The great thing about social media, and I think people who have done Facebook and, I think to a degree to Twitter, is that the more that you put out there about yourself, the more trusted you can become or you are perceived to be.

Mark Amtower

Right. And if you're, from my perspective, I have a [blog](#). I do [Twitter](#). I write a lot of articles for various media. I like to share information, but I can't just share my own information. When I find things that are germane to a specific communities, I share those. And I try to keep the ratio at somewhere around 3-to-4-to-1. Three other people's articles to one of mine.

Michael O'Connell

And that's stuff that shows up, I forget what they call it, the news stream or whatever it's called on there.

Mark Amtower

I post them in groups, but what it does is not simply raise my visibility, but if the articles are truly germane to the group, it raises my credibility. The same thing for journalists. If you're an unemployed journalist and looking for a job and you have a blog, post news very germane to specific groups and then include your blog posts among that. And you're raising your visibility to other media people as a result. So, if there's an opening there, the likelihood is that they already know who you are.

Michael O'Connell

Oh no. You've definitely have to get your voice out there and I've sort of have taken advantage of that in the six or seven months that I've been concentrating on LinkedIn as a way to promote the podcast. As we put up new episodes, is promoting it in certain groups that are journalism themed or find the audience of the people who would be interested in it and put it in there. And I've been able to get comments and feedback on that and people share it, as they would on Facebook or something. But then, also, you can connect with them and it sort of branches out. We're sort of in a luxury in that we're actually covering media, so being in that space sort of helps us with the content that we're doing.

Now, what about promoting other people and connections? Let's talk about connections first. Do you make a lot of new connections? How do you do that?

Mark Amtower

I have over 5,000 connections on LinkedIn. But, it's part of my strategy to be among the most visible people in government contracting and among the most connected. So

when people want to reach out to someone else, oftentimes they'll do it through me. So I'll see company A connecting with company X. That feeds me information that, you know, this person may be looking for a job, but there may be teaming/partnering going on here. The more I know about what's going on in the market the better.

Michael O'Connell

Right, right. Do people contact you when they get on LinkedIn or do you see things on LinkedIn that then becomes content for you in some other way? That you contact someone and say, "Hey, I want to interview you for the radio show or —"

Mark Amtower

I monitor the discussion. I'm in the max number of groups you're allowed, which is 50. And 48 of those are related to some aspect of the government market. I've got a couple that are closer to where I live. So, monitoring the discussion definitely gives me not only topics that are trending, but gives me, like media — technically, I'm not media. I do a once a week radio show. I'm not a pro. But it allows me to identify the experts and I've met some extraordinarily bright people through LinkedIn. Just top of the line folks, you know, specialists in business development, capture management, other marketing people, some great sales people and some really, really good business owners, people who get leveraging the social networking platform to build their business.

Michael O'Connell

Let's talk about promoting content. One of the reasons that you and I are talking is at my job, they want me to learn a bit more about LinkedIn so that we can promote more of our content out there. Since we last spoke, I built a company page. I started posting articles in there. What's the best way to sort of get, if I've got a news outlet or something and I want to make sure I get our content and some of our reporters and staff and people on LinkedIn, put them visible there, what's the best way to do that?

Mark Amtower

The best way to do that is probably through the groups, but as one person, you're going to be limited the number of groups that you can join. So it's got to be staff-wide. Some of the other producers have to join, so Tom and Emily's [Tom Temin and Emily Kopp, of [The Federal Drive](#) on Federal News Radio] producer should be there. Francis' [Francis Rose, host of [In Depth](#) on Federal News Radio] producer should be there. If Jason [Jason Miller, executive editor, Federal News Radio] has a producer, that kind of thing. So you can broaden your footprint groupwise, but you know, take Jason's show, [Ask the CIO](#). I will cut and paste the link, occasionally, when I find something germane, because I actually listen to Federal News Radio when I'm driving, and I always learn something, which is cool. But when I learn something and I want to share something, I post it in various, specific groups. I write for [Washington Technology](#). They used to have the top stories of the week thing on the side of the page. Whenever I would post my articles in WashTech, two days later I would always be in the top two. So, I would be driving traffic.

It's hard to over emphasize the value of the groups, because, again, these are targeted communities. It could be hundreds of people. It could be tens of thousands of people. But they'll all get that email once a day, "These are the new discussions in the group. These are the most popular discussions."

So, as a traffic driver, finding the right groups for the right information is incredible. And in their last quarterly Wall Street briefing, whatever they call those things, Jeff Weiner, the current CEO of LinkedIn, said that their next big push is going to be how to share more content for the platform. So I'm kind of anxious to see what they're doing. I know part of it's going to be advertising, but part of it has to be making those groups more robust and be able to target the information feed that you get when you go on your LinkedIn homepage.

Michael O'Connell

We had a podcast when we first talked about LinkedIn, a few weeks back, when we were talking to [Jason Huffman](#) of Food Chemical News. And he was the one who actually first encouraged me to start posting in LinkedIn groups. And one of the things he would do, if they had a particular story that was a little, not necessarily their mainstream story, but could possibly have a slightly wider appeal, he would go around and look for a group. I think the example he gave was about school lunches and he looked for like a principals' group or something like that. He got people to click on it and read the story. Thinking about how you can make yourself more aware and finding audience and everything.

Another thing that I know that you've been sort of pushing for us is getting that button on our website, getting that button on our stories.

Mark Amtower

A share button for LinkedIn, yeah.

Michael O'Connell

Why should we be doing that?

Mark Amtower

Because it makes it much easier for people when they find information to just have that synapse click and say, "Oh, they have a LinkedIn button. I can post it to a couple of those groups that I like." So when you click on the LinkedIn button you have three options. It'll post to your profile. You can send it to individuals that you're connected to or you can post it to groups. If you click on the groups button and just type in an "A" where it said "Start typing groups," all of the groups that you belong to that start with "A" pop up. You can post a story or a link into up to 50 groups at a time. It may not be germane to all the groups that you belong to and you may not belong to 50. But, if it's germane to five groups, it takes you about 60 seconds to post it to those groups. And this does two things, it shares the information and it raises the visibility of the person that posts that link.

Michael O'Connell

I think anybody who is familiar with posting to Facebook and Twitter and certainly, if they go to websites, they'll see these buttons in there. We talk a lot about LinkedIn for Federal News Radio because there are a lot of people from the federal government, a lot of people in our audience, federal managers, who are on LinkedIn and think of LinkedIn as "This is my business space. This is where I want to concentrate these issues." And they'll keep Facebook and Twitter for other things. So, having that button there, like having that button for Facebook and Twitter, which we already have on our website, it's just another platform for people to share on.

Mark Amtower

The other thing that could be important, rather than simply post a link to the story, you have the ability to put in your own headline. And you can comment on it, so you can share why you think this story is important. You don't have to write much. A sentence or two is fine.

Michael O'Connell

And it's fairly similar to Facebook in that respect. But again, we're talking about a different style of platform where it's more business oriented, marketing oriented.

Mark Amtower

From my perspective, it's the coolest marketing platform I've ever seen and I've been doing this for a long time.

Michael O'Connell

Yeah, but you're doing it from a marketing angle. Is there anything else about LinkedIn that you think is really important to kind of get that out there?

Mark Amtower

Reporters need to know who the thought leaders are for each niche, subject matter experts, and those are two different things. Subject matter expert may know more about it, but from my perspective, a thought leader is somebody who's out there sharing more. There may be people a little deeper on a subject but they're not willing to share as much or they're just restricted in the ability to share.

Michael O'Connell

Right.

Mark Amtower

But, as reporters, you need to know who these people are and your ability to reach out, to connect to them is much easier on a platform like LinkedIn, as long as you don't send that crappy form letter. You know, "I want you in my network on LinkedIn."

Michael O'Connell

Right. And that's an interesting thing. How do you personalize something like that?

Mark Amtower

When I'm reaching out to anyone on LinkedIn, most likely we already share connections, cause I'm reaching out to somebody in the government market. So I'll say, "We share X number of connections to government markets and maybe two or three groups. I'm interested in having someone from your agency or your company as part of my network."

Michael O'Connell

And again, that was one of the things in the LinkedIn for Journalists discussion that they did bring up that I thought was actually pretty cool. It's like, put some personalization into what you're doing.

Mark Amtower

Yes.

Michael O'Connell

Don't just make it an automatic ticket. You may have a "form" on your desktop that you copy and you sort of build off of, but make sure you personalize it.

Mark Amtower

You brought up earlier, when you're looking for a job, it's a great place to post your resume. I don't think people should post resumes here. What you want to do is tell your story and your story begins above the fold here on LinkedIn. As soon as that first screenshot happens, there has to be something that compels people to read further down. It's just like like news, OK. You've got to have a good headshot. You have to have a name, just a name, and use the headline space. Tell people not where you work but what you do, what you're interested in.

Michael O'Connell

Right.

Mark Amtower

So, it compels them to look a little bit. "Reporter at B.gov." Whoopie. What do you cover at B.Gov? What do you cover at Federal News Radio?

Michael O'Connell

What do you find interesting there?

Mark Amtower

Exactly. And it implies who you're looking for.

Michael O'Connell

Right. And actually, now I remember the point I was going to bring up. The other thing that was in LinkedIn for Journalists that I thought was really valuable was the encouraging of sort of due diligence, that you put in some time, you spend some time on LinkedIn and use it. You said, "Go into it with a strategy." Well, you know, if you want to sort of build up the people that you're connected with, maybe every day you go in, look at the stories that people have posted, you post a new story of your own, then you like a bunch of other stories. And if some of those stories that you like, you may comment on are people that you're not connected to but are in your group, you connect with them.

Mark Amtower

Now you're on their radar.

Michael O'Connell

Right, right. You're sort of building those connections and sort of building off shared interests. Just putting the effort in and not just doing it willy nilly but actually thinking, "Well look, I'm going to use this tool to sort of spread my profile out here in this realm and to do that, I'm going to need to look seriously at each little aspect." Maybe spend 10 or 15 minutes each day reading stuff, reposting. And the other thing they talked about was endorsing people. If you've made connections with people, I know that a lot of the connections I've got right now are journalists, you know, endorse them. "Do you know this person is a good editor or photographer or whatever?" You can endorse them with that. It helps them out. It helps to sort of foster that connection.

Mark Amtower

The endorsement thing is a two-edged sword. People can endorse you for anything. They have to be your first-degree connection, so I always go in and I carefully select the areas that I accept endorsements in. So, I've been recommended or endorsed for over 50 different things. There's only 12 things that show up on my profile and that's it.

Michael O'Connell

Right. And what ends up happening is that you allow people to define who you are.

Mark Amtower

Exactly.

Michael O'Connell

So you still want to keep control of that.

Mark Amtower

Journalism would be a biggie for you and if people are endorsing you for playing left field, who cares?

Michael O'Connell

Unless I'm looking for a job in Major League Baseball.

Mark Amtower

Well, there you go.

Michael O'Connell

Well, this is really kind of fascinating. I think we're going to wrap it up here. But thanks for coming in here Mark.

Mark Amtower

Sure.

Michael O'Connell

I found this really interesting and entertaining.

Mark Amtower

My pleasure.