

# Help!

## I Have Social Media Rejection Syndrome!

How some LinkedIn members are using  
this social media channel

Elaine Fogel  
SOLUTIONS Marketing & Consulting LLC  
[www.solutionsmc.net](http://www.solutionsmc.net)

©2009 All rights reserved.



## Introduction

On August 25, 2009, I created [a blog post](#) on [Marketing Profs Daily Fix](#) entitled, “Help! I Have Social Media Rejection Syndrome!” I had intended this tongue-in-cheek piece to stimulate discussion on an experience I had when one of my [LinkedIn](#) invitees clicked, “I don’t know this person,” ultimately rejecting my invitation and essentially putting me on notice with the LinkedIn program – i.e. requiring me to enter someone’s e-mail address during the invitation process.

Below is the information that LinkedIn provides about using its system. I admit that I hadn’t read this policy until this experience with rejection.

### Invitations & Connecting

#### Connecting to someone on LinkedIn implies that you know them well:

- They’ll have access to people you know
- Others may ask you about them and vice versa
- You’ll get updates on their activity

LinkedIn lets you invite colleagues, classmates, friends and business partners without entering their email addresses.

**However**, recipients can indicate that they don’t know you. If they do, you’ll be asked to enter an email address with each future invitation.

Over the course of the next few days, there was a flurry of comments on the blog and in subsequent LinkedIn discussion groups to which I belong. It appears that the topic sparked many people to share their personal experiences with LinkedIn – both positive and negative. What I discovered was an interesting dichotomy between those who are using LinkedIn to connect to people they already know, and those who see it as an online “networking” tool to expand their business horizons.

I started out with my own bias - distinguishing LinkedIn as a social networking forum to fulfill several objectives:

- ▶ To connect to others with whom I have much in common - people in marketing, the nonprofit sector, communications, and, to a lesser degree, those who live in my former place of residence.
- ▶ To stay in touch with those people I have met in person or who are “Cyberspace” friends and colleagues.
- ▶ To build my brand and stay top-of-mind with my business prospects, as I share my expertise and engage in conversations.
- ▶ To open the door to new suppliers and professionals.
- ▶ To learn and grow from other professionals.

I did this by inviting people in my discussion groups to “link in” or by asking for introductions from colleagues. I admit that, on occasion, when LinkedIn posted, “People you may know,” I was proactive and asked to connect to several, even if we had never actually met or worked together. As a result, I have many newfound business contacts.

I am happy to introduce people to each other, even though I cannot always vouch for their work habits or character. To me, it’s the same as someone asking me for a referral to an accountant or a hairdresser. I can offer names of people I have heard of, or whom friends have used, without actually having used their services. It’s up to the people requesting this information to do their due diligence.

For me, LinkedIn is a channel to unlimited opportunities. Unlike Twitter, which some perceive as a numbers game – to see how many followers they can acquire – I regard LinkedIn as a network of quality business connections.

So, coming from my personal paradigm on LinkedIn as a social networking channel, it came as a surprise to hear from so many people who will only link to people they already know. My first reaction was that it defeats the purpose of networking. If I attend a business networking event in my city, I often walk up to people, offer my handshake and introduce myself before engaging in conversation. I couldn’t see the difference in the LinkedIn space. Until my blog post...

I am including here, many of the comments I received in all discussion forums. I have taken snippets of longer comments, did some minor editing for typos and spelling, and removed any references to those who authored these remarks.

What I hope it will expose, in an anecdotal way, is the motivation and philosophies behind some members' LinkedIn use. These results could merit further research; however, it does give us a glimpse into the behaviors and mindsets of those who are currently participating in this social media channel.

## Blog and Discussion Group Comments

“Someone I had met several times, and who is in the same women’s group as I, sent me a response to my LI invitation with ‘How do I know you?’ I replied and still, no acceptance several days later. I’ll join you in therapy Elaine!”

.....

“Social networking is just like any other networking - you need to get to know the person. You can't just send invites and expect everyone to say, ‘Yes.’ ... People want to know whom they’re dealing with - it could have an impact on their professional reputation down the line... I pretty much connect along the same lines, and then ask existing contacts if they could introduce me to someone in their connection list, if I feel there's a synergy. I've found it much more effective than just reaching out to someone I've never met, spoke with, or connected with.”

.....

“Elaine, it does not make any sense. As one who leads networking workshops, the idea that one only networks with those they know is ludicrous. The idea behind networking is to build relations - make old ones stronger and new ones strong. Suggesting that we invite only those we know defeats the purpose of networking.”

.....

“There are a lot of quirky people on LinkedIn. I think a lot of them know that they should be on there for professional reasons, but they aren't really comfortable with the concept of social media. Like the people who connect with you, but won't share their connections. What's up with that? It's like they're afraid you're going to hit up everyone on their list for a job. Maybe there are people who do abuse their LinkedIn connections, but I haven't experienced that personally.”

.....

“I, too, ask for introductions, and those who are conservative in their networking efforts have every right to decline an invitation. That doesn't mean others don't have a right to invite them to connect.”

“Elaine, I admit I have clicked the LinkedIn "I don't know this person" more than a handful of times. I have also sent notes to people like the one you have received... but, I suggest that if they *really* want to get to know me, they chat with me on Twitter, Facebook, or any other social network first (Most don't -- telling, isn't it?).”

.....

“If I don't know you, how can I refer you? I would hate to be asked for a recommendation or referral for someone I don't know...then I have to admit that I am networked with someone I don't actually know. Embarrassing! ... Remember, by networking via LinkedIn we are giving people potential access to our network that might include long-standing relationships. I don't want to damage those by letting someone in who doesn't understand proper social media/networking protocol.”

.....

“I'm more than willing to connect with people via LinkedIn that I've never met in person, but ONLY if they have connected with me several times before hand (via Twitter, commenting on my blog, etc.) I get too many requests from people saying, 'Hey, I read and like your blog, let's connect.' But I have never heard of the person before - they've never sent me a message on Twitter, commented on a post, sent me an e-mail, etc.

I want to make sure that people I'm connected to on LinkedIn are actually professional acquaintances that I would feel comfortable connecting to others in my network or possibly even recommending.”

.....

“I tend to treat each social network a bit differently, depending on my comfort level and how I use the network. ... [In] LinkedIn - I connect with people I know personally (when it makes sense) and professionally, or people who, above and beyond my Facebook requirement, I'm happy to share my professional network with (on top of being comfortable enough with them to share a bit about my life). To me, it comes down to comfort level. I put my real personality out there for people to see, and I owe it to myself to connect with people in a way that makes me comfortable.”

“Elaine, it may seem rude, but LinkedIn wasn't originally intended to work like Twitter, where you could just add folks that you don't know. I tend not to add folks I don't know unless I've conversed with them first. I guess I get skeptical about what folks' intentions are. There are folks who just add people so they can solicit business, spam you, etc.”

.....

Elaine, ...I usually don't go so far as to mark a LinkedIn invitation with the 'I Don't Know' button, simply because I've heard about them having a detrimental impact if anyone gets too many of them - and I don't want to negatively impact anyone. I usually just archive them. ...When it comes to LinkedIn - a site where I often receive referral requests, I am very careful about whom I connect with. My reputation is only as good as my network, and if I can't vouch for someone, I don't connect with [them].”

.....

“Based on the type of information that is available on LinkedIn, I can see why people are selective about which requests they accept. I think of LinkedIn as my professional network; the place where I can go and get concrete data on a person's work history, contact info, recommendations, etc. The power of LinkedIn is in that relevant network that you build, not in how many 'friends' you can collect.”

.....

“LinkedIn is predicated on a referral strategy -- how can anyone authentically offer referrals of people they don't really know? And how much value is there when someone who doesn't know me 'refers' me to someone she doesn't know? How is that social?”

.....

“I actually think it is a great limit that LinkedIn has put into place and I reject invitations many times from different people. The point of any network, online or off, is that you choose what you want to get out of it in the end. Some people may accept any invitation because they figure 'the more the merrier,' but others want to have a more limited scope. “

"I'm a LinkedIn rejecter, too. If I don't know you well enough to help you get a job (or ask you to help me), then I don't know you well enough for LinkedIn. I use LinkedIn as a dynamic way to keep up my connections after I've moved on from a job or contract."

.....

"I've never had an invitation declined yet. Have to say I'm very selective as to [whom] I contact... I've developed some thickish skin so it doesn't bother me a lot. Rejection never feels good, but if you never ask, then you never get a 'yes' from someone."

.....

"Seems we all have very different perspectives of what LinkedIn should be. But isn't that the beauty of social networks, Elaine? We use them in the way that suits [our needs and us]. Otherwise where's the benefit?"

.....

"Elaine, in my own perspective, I think there are just people who have a different idea of what social media is. Maybe the person you gave an invitation to had a 'different' brand of social media. Or perhaps I am missing out on things: is there a new trend out there called 'anti-social media?'"

.....

"Elaine, I think there are people who have different perspective regarding 'what social networking is' so don't feel rejected."

.....

"Each [channel] has an audience and a use. I've occasionally received LinkedIn requests from people I don't know, but either recognize from Twitter... or a LinkedIn group I belong to. And I have a small number of connections on Facebook that are strictly professional which I manage via the groups and privacy settings. Once you've decided how you want to use these channels, I actually think it's a good idea to let other users know why and how you connect on them, rather than leave them wondering why their invitation wasn't accepted."

“It all comes down to individual comfort level.”

.....

“As a marketing professional, you should know that trying to add someone to your list of connections without at least introducing yourself first is a no-no. Most social network users are way too aware of spammers, scammers, and climbers to accept every request that comes their way. Your rejecter had the courtesy to explain her reasons; I probably would not have bothered.”

.....

“I’m with you Elaine in believing that a networking site should enable you to network. Not only do I think LinkedIn should NOT be punishing us for reaching out beyond the circle of contacts we know, it should be actively providing tools to help broker those valuable new relationships...Think about it: LinkedIn has 45 million members and many of those are buying things every week. Just as many are selling things. It amuses me greatly that LinkedIn calls itself a business networking site and yet does NOTHING to help engage those buyers and sellers with each other. It’s not helping business get done, nor networking!”

.....

“...I actually got that ‘you’ve invited too many people you don’t know’ slap a few weeks back. I was pretty amazed as I do invite a few people I don’t know, but I always explain my connection... I then explain why I would be interested in connecting, i.e. how I think we could benefit. I’ve never received a ‘don’t know you’ response, just no response, but for 500 invites, I have less than 10 of these - lots of people I do know, never respond.”

.....

“Elaine, I have been rejected as well by people that I have met a few times. I just forget about it and move on. On the other side, I have tried cutting back on my acceptance of invites that are the standard invite from total strangers. If a person doesn’t even add a personal note on the invite, I wonder why we should connect. I never click ‘I don’t know.’ I just archive it.”

"I think [people] need to set their own policies based on their comfort level and goals. That said, one can miss out on opportunities by being too restrictive. I've become more selective on all networks, but LinkedIn is where I'm most restrictive. I will accept requests from people I've never met, but only after we've made some sort of connection... Overall I think we just each come up with the rules that will suit us best."

.....

"... The whole purpose of LinkedIn goes unserved if we can't connect with people we haven't met and probably never will. I am a bit shy of asking people to connect and am quiet nervous when I hit the 'Send' button to invite someone. I am worried about being perceived the wrong way."

.....

"Elaine, I am afraid I have rejected some requests when I don't recognize them and they haven't been introduced by a trusted source. I am not a believer in 'more is better.' I prefer to know all of my connections...and also to have some known reason for the connection, rather than just volume. The premise is relationships are more valuable than a large number of contacts."

.....

"I just never take it personally unless I know the person really well. Everyone has different motivations and reasons for using social nets, so if they don't want to connect with me, I move on. If it is someone I really want/need to link to, I'll try to get a hold of them in another way (email, FB, phone, in person, etc.)... I think proper etiquette is to include a brief note to a person you invite to LinkedIn, explaining why you want to connect... To me that is building a qualified network. But if you just send me a blind invite and I don't know you (or haven't talked to you in more than 20 years... my memory is only so good) you will most likely get rejected by me without a note or reason."

“My connections are all people I know, albeit not necessarily well. I don't think I've ever had a request from someone I don't know. I would never send anyone a rejection letter. LinkedIn is for professional use, and in my opinion, the more people you know the better. I usually accept all requests, as long as they seem credible. I know the people that I'm connected with, but always like meeting new people.”

.....

“To a large extent, I only use LinkedIn to maintain connections with people I know in real professional life. There are more than enough of these people to keep me busy! If I'm making a connection with someone I don't know, there's usually a very specific action item or reason behind it which I communicate to that person. Adding people solely for the sake of adding them has no value, and arguably negative value. I try to have a greater value per connection if at all possible.”

.....

“I think it's better to just ignore the request to link and pretend you never saw it. No need to slam the person who dared to reach out to you because they thought you might be interesting to know... I did have to reject a colleague recently who repeatedly asked me to write him a reference. I barely knew the guy. We had spoken maybe 3 or 4 times and we didn't even reside in the same country, let alone work from the same office. I finally told him I just didn't know him well enough. It didn't make me feel good nor do I imagine it did much for his ego.”

.....

“I tend to lean more towards Elaine's way of thinking on this. The whole idea, of networking is to form authentic relationships. As such, I give people the benefit of the doubt upfront. The relationship has to start somewhere. Just by joining someone's network, or friending them, or following them doesn't imply a full-fledged endorsement of their character or professional ability. If someone asks for a recommendation or reference or introduction, I can assess the degree to which I will accommodate this by how well I know the person and can always add that disclaimer in the recommendation.”

“My take on LinkedIn: A real connection has been made in the real world, and LinkedIn is where we can keep in touch.”

.....

“My female friends seem to be more cautious than I am in accepting people into my contact list on LinkedIn. I probably ought to be more cautious. I do keep my contact list hidden, however, out of respect for them. Of course, I'm always disappointed when my contacts block theirs.”

.....

“I understand the caution, especially among the women, but I think much of it is from the old world where you physically had to meet [people] to actually say you ‘know’ them. No one wants to be stalked, but it's very easy to stop it on LI. So what if you connect with someone you don't know? If [she/he] turns out to be a jerk, or worse, you can simply cut off the connection. I've cut off a few after they turned out to be spammers or (apparent) crazies.”

.....

“As a connector, you're simply trying to help people with their problems, which means putting together people who need employees and potential hires. Putting them together does not constitute an endorsement. As for hiding your connections, I think caution is overstated here and that's bad personal marketing. Don't forget LI is basically about B2B marketing, and in B2B, you're judged very much by who you know, or who you hang out with.”

.....

“... I do look for new contacts through groups. I don't think ‘we're in a group together’ is one of the options on how to connect, but maybe it should be - then the person can check your posts, comments, etc. and see if [she/he] is willing to make a new connection. But, [they] shouldn't be penalized if they don't want to and shouldn't have to use the ‘I Don't Know’ option because you do have a common connection through the group.”

“... Well, I use it to reconnect with people I know and to connect with new people I don't know... Using it to make people aware of what I do and how I can help is an objective. I'm trying to network to grow my business... You [need] to do some research on the potential network connection to make sure there is some common link before just popping out an invite. After that, if they think you're worthy, you have to follow up and nurture the new relationship connection to achieve your objectives no matter what they might be.”

.....

“I had to laugh at your post too. I was guilty of saying no to a couple of invitations because the inviter did not include a personal note telling me how [she/he] knew me or why [she/he] wanted to connect. At the time - I did not know that LinkedIn then blocked your ability to connect after 5 of these... So now I archive if I don't want to respond.”

.....

“... To help make a ‘connection’ work, I find that if I include some common threads or interests in my invitation I have better luck getting my invite accepted. It seems like we all dread the possibility of being ‘cut off’ due to the 5 ‘I don't know this person’ rule. Linking is an interesting and fun way to build a professional network.”

.....

“... When it happened to me, I was rejected by someone I know who only wanted to use LinkedIn to connect with people in the same field of work. And since that was not my field, [he] rejected me.”

.....

“My tip is that when connecting with strangers, tell them why you want to connect with them, who you are and why you should connect, or what will happen next.”

“I am very picky [about] who I let in into my circle. I have rejected a lot of people actually. The last thing I want is some jokers trying to contact my contacts and bothering my coworkers, friends etc. for their own means. I have even rejected friends and family who are not in my field, sorry this is not Facebook!”

.....

“I get a lot of requests from members, which I welcome. However, I do check their postings and in other groups to see if they are serial posters and/or spammers. LinkedIn is for professional connections, as has been pointed out... I don't mind someone not accepting my invitation to link. What I hate, though, is when someone responds ‘Don't know this person’ without taking any time to look at the invitation.”

.....

“I am a longtime user of social media on a personal level, and I'd advise you not to take rejections personally. Usually when I reject or ‘un-friend’ a person, it has to do with an attempt to keep business and personal contacts separate or cut down on an unwieldy amount of reading. I have actually taken someone off a list because [she/he] made too many interesting/distracting entries per day!”

.....

“I have received a variety of requests to provide recommendations on LinkedIn. In several cases, I've not met the individuals or worked with them directly. I had to decline their requests... And, I must say, that content was difficult to create. How can one be generous to the community while also setting boundaries? That is a tough one these days.”

## Summary

The majority of comments seem to indicate that these LinkedIn members are discriminating, restrictive, and/or cautious in their use of this social media channel. Many deem it to be wholly different from their use of other social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace. It will be interesting to see how LinkedIn evolves as a professional networking site, and how its members benefit from it over time.

## About Elaine Fogel

Elaine Fogel is president and CMO of SOLUTIONS Marketing & Consulting, a boutique marketing and communications agency located in Scottsdale, Arizona. During her career, Elaine has worked for, and with, many businesses and organizations on marketing strategy and communications tactics.



From her earlier agency career assignments in Canada copywriting Procter & Gamble, Nestlé Carnation, and Kraft materials, Elaine's passion for marketing has evolved to helping clients reach new heights through strategic brand-building, integrated marketing communications, and exceptional customer service.

Elaine is a senior contributor to MarketingProfs.com – a weekly publication distributed to over 320,000 marketing professionals worldwide, and a writer for its Daily Fix blog – a Top 25 Marketing Blog. She has been a contributing writer for *The Business Journal* and her articles have appeared in many publications, including the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, *Marketing News*, and *Advancing Philanthropy*, in addition to reprints in association newsletters.

Elaine is active internationally in the American Marketing Association and the Association of Fundraising Professionals. She is also a professional member of the National Speakers Association and does keynotes and presentations on marketing, branding, and customer service at conferences and meetings. [www.elainefogel.com](http://www.elainefogel.com)

Elaine's career has included stints as a cookbook author, teacher, singer and television show host.



- ▶ Strategic Marketing & Consulting
- ▶ Creative Services
- ▶ Communications and PR
- ▶ Project and Print Management
- ▶ Workshops & Presentations
- ▶ Promotional Products