

LinkedIn links up with panel of 'influencers' (Update)

October 2 2012, by Michael Liedtke

(AP)—LinkedIn is adding more expert advice to its website and making it easier for its users to find their pearls of wisdom.

The online professional networking service hopes the proffered tips and advice will help it extend its clout beyond the help-wanted market.

The new feature added Tuesday will encourage LinkedIn's more than 175 million members to sign up to follow the musings of "influencers"—a 150-person panel that includes President Barack Obama, business moguls, Internet bloggers, self-help gurus and entrepreneurs.

LinkedIn Corp. plans to anoint other people as influencers, but only after screening candidates in order to ensure they are qualified to dispense helpful advice.

Besides Obama, LinkedIn recruited his Republican Party challenger, Mitt Romney, to be among its initial group of influencers. Virgin Group Richard Branson also has agreed to share his thoughts, along with oil mogul T. Boone Pickens, actor James Caan and Craig Newmark, the founder of online classified service Craigslist.

Other LinkedIn influencers, such as chef Marcus Samuelsson and Cleveland Clinic CEO Delos Cosgrove, are expected to cater to people interested in specific fields. Some also got on the list because they are members of LinkedIn's news staff.

LinkedIn, which is based in Mountain View, California, is counting on its influencers to share their tips in short essays, video and photos. It's similar to the sharing that occurs billions of times per day on Twitter and Facebook, where users see information posted from other accounts that they have chosen to follow.

The concept represents something different for LinkedIn, whose system requires users to send requests to establish a connection. The tie-in doesn't occur until both people agree to it.

LinkedIn members will just have to click on a "follow" button to track what any of the influencers are sharing. The feature is part of LinkedIn Today, a daily news section unveiled last year as part of the company's attempt to build its website into something more than a digital rolodex that unites people looking for a better job with talent-hungry employers.

If the news section and the addition of the influencers pans out the way LinkedIn envisions, people will have more reasons to check into the website more frequently and perhaps stick around longer. That, in turn, would help LinkedIn sell more advertising.

One of Facebook's biggest advantages in the Internet market is the habit-forming nature of its website, where its users post photos, status updates and links to other interesting stories on the Internet. More than half of Facebook's 955 million users visit the website at least once a day.

Although LinkedIn is smaller and less addictive than Facebook, it has fared better on Wall Street. LinkedIn's stock has more than doubled from its May 2011 IPO price of \$45 while Facebook's stock has dropped by more than 40 percent from its initial public offering price of \$38 in May of this year.

LinkedIn shares closed Monday at \$117.94 while Facebook's stock

finished the session at \$21.99.

Investors have become enamored with LinkedIn because the company appears to be well-positioned for years of steady growth as it changes the way employers find new workers. LinkedIn generates two-thirds of its revenue from fees that it charges companies, recruiting services and other people to gain additional access to the website's members.

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