



TECHNOLOGY

This Foolish Mistake Wrecks People's LinkedIn Profiles (and Reputations)

Spamming people with invitation requests is nothing next to this bad behavior.

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BY BILL MURPHY JR. - 13 SEP 2017

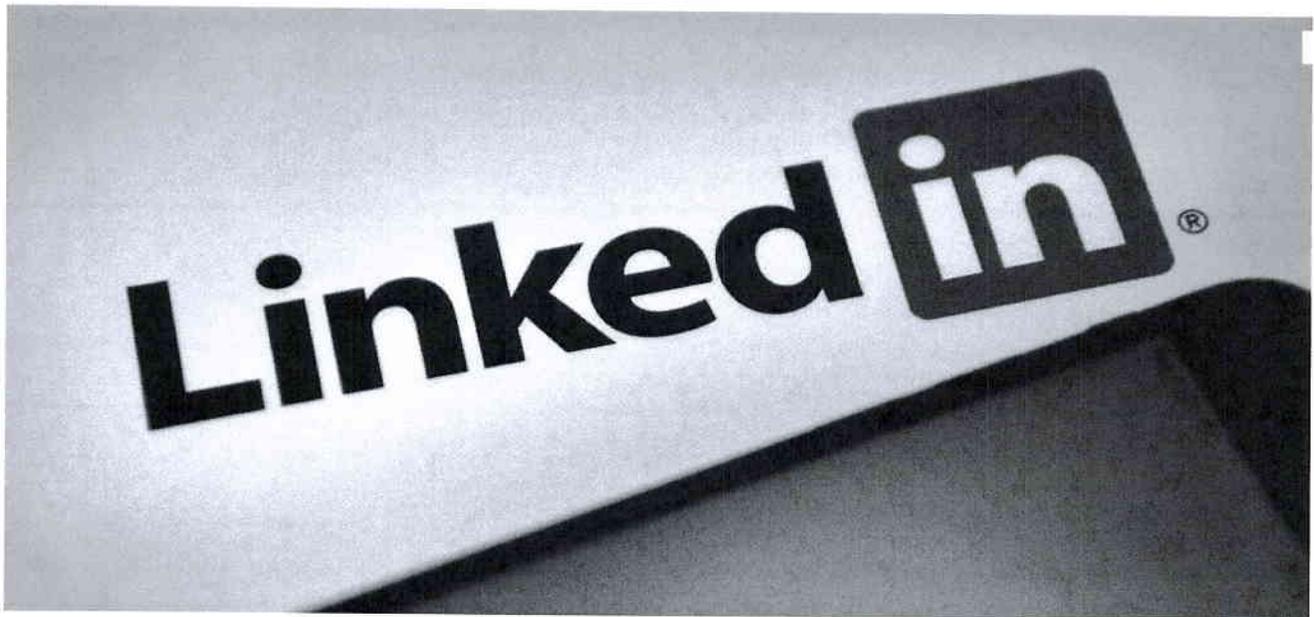


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LinkedIn is an incredibly useful social network, but it can also be a breeding ground for bad behavior. You know some of it--spammy networkers and over-sharers for example--but also full-fledged plagiarism and copying. Yet, these kinds of practices destroy people's reputations and even lead to them losing their LinkedIn accounts.

We'll show you below what to do if someone rips off content you've created--whether we're talking about someone parroting your profile, or simply cutting-and-pasting an entire article you've written. But first, when I asked a LinkedIn spokesperson for comment, she pointed me to the site's terms of service, which emphasize that members agree not to "copy or distribute ... the posts or other content of others without their permission..."

And, she also pointed to the potential penalty: "LinkedIn will disable accounts found using infringing content."

A common problem

When I asked LinkedIn members if ripped-off content is truly a widespread problem, I heard story after story:

An employer "stole my identity on LinkedIn to get a freelance job and submitted the work I posted as her own," said Karen S. Dennis, of KSD Public & Media Relations.

"A former client ... literally copied content directly from my LinkedIn profile and website to her profile and website when she started her own consulting business," reported Keri Bonfili, who runs a boutique PR agency.

"A subscriber to my list [told] me that someone was taking content," Andrew Warner of Content Ranked, reported, "and using it as articles on LinkedIn as their own. The sad thing is that this person was copying six marketers in total (including myself)."

The reasons why content-copying seems to be on the rise are clear. First, when people see someone else getting sales leads and recruiting calls as a result of their LinkedIn profiles, it's tempting--if woefully dishonest--simply to copy the the profiles to try to get that kind of attention, too.

More broadly, we're living and working in a professional world now in which almost every professional needs to produce original content in order to stand out from the crowd. Yet, writing good articles and creating other things to share is hard work.

(Heck writing this article took me several hours.) And so people look for shortcuts.

"I think a number of plagiarizers don't realize what they are doing is wrong," said Maureen Fitzgerald, a Wisconsin blogger who says she's had articles and photos lifted from her blog and social media feeds.

Some people claim they copy out of admiration, agreed author Dianna Booher, who said she's had people steal her content many times. "Others steal, but think they will never be caught. Others are simply ignorant of the law."

The official process

LinkedIn's process for reporting this kind of content theft is a bit involved. Step one is to fill out the LinkedIn copyright infringement form, under penalty of perjury. The company would clearly prefer you "first attempt to resolve these issues amicably by contacting the alleged infringer directly to discuss a resolution," according to its instructions.

As I mentioned, I came to this topic after I got a notification that a popular Facebook page had shared a link to one of my articles--only to realize that the link actually went to LinkedIn, where somebody had copied and pasted my article into his feed.

He got hundreds of reactions and comments, too. (Here's the real article, in case you're interested.)

What most people do

Fortunately, a sternly worded email to the the person who'd copied my post was all it took to get him to take it down. However, I started searching for the text of some of my most popular Inc.com articles on the site, and found many other members who'd done the same thing. I contacted a few--but eventually gave up.

Of course, I had some additional recourse, in that I could write this article.

Unfortunately, however, other LinkedIn members told me they figured fighting would be futile after their content was copied, and that their answer was simply to take down or rewrite their original versions--including sales materials and even entire profiles--out of fear that they'd be suspected of having copied the plagiarists.

Have you had a similar experience with people stealing your content and posting it on LinkedIn or elsewhere? Let us know in the comments below.

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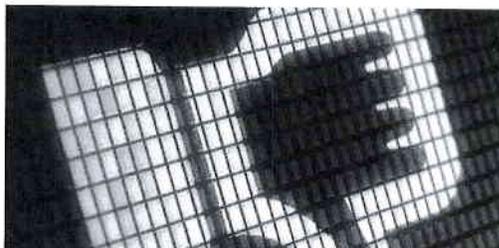
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