

# LinkedIn to career success in business: Improving student employment outcomes in the digital era

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## **Strategic objectives addressed:**

This project focuses primarily on priority 5 (goal 2) of the RMIT University 2011-2015 Strategic plan which identifies the need to improve career outcomes through the incorporation of a “career development learning perspective in programs”.

The strategic focus of the University and therefore the College of Business for 2015 is in 3 areas; research, the student experience and employability. The proposed project will be directly related to employability but is likely to have a flow on effect of improving and enhancing the student experience for those students in Undergraduate (UG) business programs.

Towards the end of this project the RMIT 2020 strategic plan was launched; Ready for life and work. This project is strongly aligned to both the purpose and practice moving forward in College of Business programs in sync with the wider university philosophy.

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# 1 Executive summary

The changing world of education, employment and indeed of our students highlights the need to prepare our students and graduates for a very different employment future than previous generations.

Media often reports of the changing nature of recruitment and the mobility of a workforce which reported recently that millennials (18-35) change jobs on average every 3.4 years compared to baby boomers at 7.4 years (Kronos, 2016). This flexible and mobile workplace requires our students to develop ideas, network with a diverse group of professionals and to both build and seek out new opportunities. In doing so they will require the skills to brand and showcase their knowledge and abilities to a wide range of people through digital means; for most in Business careers, that will be LinkedIn.

This project highlights a number of key initiatives which have been implemented in the Business College to inspire and support students in both developing their own insights to their career and presenting their “brand” on LinkedIn.

The evaluation from these projects has shown an improvement in students’ understanding and use of LinkedIn and provided a solid foundation of knowledge and skills in both staff and students to continue to embed contemporary employability skills into curriculum as well as into extracurricular areas.

## 2 Outcomes

In the Bachelor of Business suite of programs the key focus for most students is their major sequence of study which in turn leads to their first area of employment. The nine different majors on offer are wide ranging across the business sector and therefore have very different outcomes and pathways to employment. Some are more self-generated (such as Entrepreneurship) whilst others such as Accountancy tend to have students follow a more focused accreditation-based pathway. However, what is common across all programs is that business students are beginning their career at a time when recruitment and job search practices are being revolutionised by new technologies and social media. A commissioned report by the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency in 2014 provides persuasive evidence that the job seekers market has moved primarily to a range of online resources with a key role being that of social media; including LinkedIn to reach and source potential future staff (Jepsen et al, 2014). In addition, for all of these students their first employment opportunity is key to their future success and the skills required to obtain their first position are both specific (discipline perspective) and yet generic (personal branding and profile) to the business domain.

To address the emerging challenges and opportunities facing our students as they seek to launch their business career in a digital era, three interrelated projects were designed, implemented and evaluated. Two of these projects were undertaken within the context of two majors; Marketing and Accounting, and one project was undertaken at the College level that was intended to engage the wider college and impact on programs across the nine majors. These projects all had a similar flavour in terms of preparing students for employment by building both their understanding and skills in developing and showcasing themselves (and their personal brand) through their digital presence as a means to enhance their employability outcomes.

For the purpose of this report, each project will be presented providing an overview of the project, its outcomes and impact and the evaluation that took place. A summary of the outcomes is then provided with a statement regarding the ongoing work to build and expand the work undertaken in these projects.

# Project 1 - Enhancing the Marketing Major for final year students: Launching your career

## Project overview and rationale

A two-stage careers event for final year Marketing students built on the success of an initiative piloted in 2013 (and continued in 2014), the MaCa (Marketing Careers) Event. This event was aimed at enhancing the second year student cohort experience as they transition from the first year common core business courses to the marketing major. One of the key messages communicated to Marketing students in their second year was the importance of 'marketing' and maintaining one's personal 'brand' in order to enhance their employability.

While the second year MaCa aimed to build awareness of the importance of career planning while at university, the new event for final year students provided the building blocks for the transition from university to their first full-time role in industry. This event focused on the importance of launching a career, engaging in ongoing professional development, building professional networks and curating a professional online presence using LinkedIn, as well as presenting case studies on graduate recruitment. This event was designed to build student skills using a two-stage approach: an initial two-hour seminar with an expert panel, held in second semester, followed by a two-hour hands-on workshop for students to develop their personal LinkedIn profile. A research assistant was employed to gather materials in order to structure the event, prepare a 'How to' booklet for attendees and evaluate feedback from the two events. An expert LinkedIn profile writer and careers consultant was engaged along with a professional photographer to provide students with a career-ready headshot for their LinkedIn profile.

## Evaluation

Qualitative and quantitative feedback was obtained from participants after each event.

The MaCa event targeted to final year students was well received and the content was viewed as building on the second-year MaCa. Students felt the final year MaCa provided them with useful information to help them in their job search ( $\bar{x}=4.39$ ) and were willing to recommend their friends to the next event ( $\bar{x}=4.30$ ). However, students were still not very confident about their career path and job search in general ( $\bar{x}=3.96$ ). Content on LinkedIn was viewed as highly valued and should be expanded on at future events. Requests for more events focused on highlighting the experiences of alumni, providing networking opportunities and information sessions designed for international students

The LinkedIn workshops received great feedback from attendees and there was strong agreement that attendees would recommend the workshop to other students ( $\bar{x}=4.90$ ). Students strongly agreed that this workshop helped them become more confident in developing LinkedIn profiles ( $\bar{x}=4.62$ ) and using it to apply for jobs ( $\bar{x}=4.57$ ). All parts of the workshop (profiles, profile summary, connecting people...) were evaluated as helpful and interesting and suggestions focused on having a series of workshops around related writing skills (blogs, CV, letters...) and functions of LinkedIn.

Student attendance at each event was lower than anticipated. Approximately 45 students and eight staff attended the final year MaCa. Forty-three students booked into the subsequent LinkedIn workshops however, final attendance was lower at 31 attendees. Finding a suitable time to hold each event when a suitable room was available proved to be a challenge that may have affected attendance. In response to this a yearly timetable of MaCa events is being developed for 2016 allowing longer lead times in planning the events and advertising them to students.

## Future directions

Based on the success of the MaCa events developed within the PDF, it is envisaged that a series MaCa events will be held with one event tailored to each program stage (first-year, second-year, final-year). In 2016, this will encompass developing a MaCa for the first-year cohort. Focusing on building a strong cohort experience and enhancing student employability, the planned series of MaCa events will progressively deliver information and support to students at the stage in their academic career when it is most useful.

## Project 2 - Look to an Accounting graduate career: Creating a professional digital presence

### Project overview and rationale

In 2014, one of the School of Accounting's significant innovations was to introduce a speed interviewing day with employers (similar in concept to speed-dating) to improve student understanding of employability, develop their skills and connect them to possible employers. This initiative was a success.

To further expand on this idea in 2015, a digital personal branding expert was engaged to run a workshop in creating an effective LinkedIn profile, stage one for staff and stage two for students. Students were then encouraged to create their profile throughout the year with an optional submission to a "competition" with some small prizes to be judged by the expert and key College/University staff (stage three).

It was envisaged that the learnings from these two discipline-based projects will be utilised to inform and develop a more widespread online employability focus across all the Bachelor of Business programs and therefore will have significant impact.

The following events were undertaken:

- Stage 1: Staff Workshop and Training

The Staff LinkedIn Workshop (Accounting) was held on June 9th, 2015. Nine staff members attended the 2 hour Workshop in room 80.08.009. Karalyn Brown ran the workshop.

It was intended that accounting staff trained in the June 9th Workshop will have the skills and knowledge to participate in the Student Workshop (stage 2) and form a panel to judge the LinkedIn Profile competition (stage 3). Staff were also offered more individual feedback on their own LinkedIn profiles to develop better networks, for both them and their students (stage 5).

- Stage 2: Student Workshop (Target Year 2-3)

Bachelor of Business (Professional Accountancy) student LinkedIn workshop ran on July 31st from 1.30 to 3.30pm. The event has been promoted by the College to the Co-op students attending the Careers Fair at the Melbourne Town Hall that morning. The LinkedIn workshop could have attract 40-60 students, but only 10 students and two staff members attended that afternoon. Karalyn Brown ran the workshop again. To enable greater reach to our student population some of the concepts covered will be prepared for Orientation Week presentations (stage 4).

- Stage 3: Competition Judging Panel and Awarding Prizes

Karalyn Brown ran the panel on October 13th 2015, with two RMIT staff members. Three competition entrants were judged based on predefined criteria and understanding the principles of a good profile. A point and comment system is used to provide feedback. The judging panel reviews the top 5 highest scoring profiles, and provides feedback on why they were effective.

- Stage 4: Informing Students on LinkedIn during Orientation Week (Target Year 1)

Preparation of PowerPoint slides to be used during orientation week to inform new students about LinkedIn and its potential to help them before and after graduation.

- Stage 5: Staff Follow-Up and Individual Profile Review

The Staff LinkedIn Individual Review sessions held on December 8th, 2015. Six staff members attended a 30 minute review session in room 80.011.073, to understand how to better their LinkedIn profiles. Karalyn Brown ran the sessions. Feedback from staff was very positive.

## Evaluation

Qualitative feedback was obtained from participants during stage two. Students found the workshop helped them discover how to better present themselves on LinkedIn. They discovered the growing importance of the platform, and where it could possibly lead them. They also learnt about the employer perspective, and what they are searching for from new graduates. Students indicated they now acknowledge the importance of an online presence, and had more knowledge on creating an effective profile for opportunities in the accounting profession.

## Future directions

Based on the success of all stages we expect to on a regular basis inform students during Orientation Week about LinkedIn and its potential for them (stage 4). This will start in 2016 and continue every year. Also accounting staff that are now trained to run workshops on LinkedIn specifically for accounting students can do so during the Careers Fair week held annually at the Melbourne Town Hall.

## Project 3 - Building staff and student capacity across Bachelor of Business programs in the effective use of professional online networking platforms

### Project overview and rationale

To more broadly embed the importance of digital platforms for building a professional profile and building professional networks across the Bachelor of Business Programs the third project took a whole of college approach and focused on a skills' building approach. This will allow the targeting of a wide cohort of students to emphasise the importance of their online professional presence and provide skills to develop such a presence as they move towards graduate employment.

A series of events were planned by the Director, Undergraduate programs in the first instance. To engage the student population more broadly it was thought that running the events through the newly formed Business Students Association would bring both attention to the association and a more student centric focus to the planned activities. A series of three sessions were scoped using Karalyn Brown as the facilitator. They included a more general presentation about LinkedIn, networking opportunities, use of LinkedIn by recruitment personnel and the basics of forming a strong profile presence. This was a larger group and designed as an introduction where those with interest could develop their profile through a second hands-on session in the form of a workshop. Two of these practical sessions were run where students began to think, design and develop their profile with expert support and guidance.

Based on the interest shown by the different groups of students, it was decided to create some digital resources so the project intent could be spread in 2016. This resulted in the recording of nine short voxpops with Karalyn Brown answering key questions that students have about LinkedIn. These videos can be used individually or as a group to support students' understanding of their online professional presence. Currently they have been adopted and used in the "Business Skills" program being developed in the College of Business and will be housed on the planned Undergraduate homepage.

### Outcomes and impact

One presentation and two follow up workshops were held, which was open to all College of Business Students. The number in attendance at these three events was lower than expected possibly partly due to the week of the semester that they ran in. The presentation had an attendance of about 60 students and the workshops around 40 in total.

## Evaluation

The Business Students Association designed a simple survey to solicit feedback from the student participants at both the presentation and one of the workshops. Some of the key questions were about whether the participants' confidence in the use of LinkedIn had improved after attending the session (figures 1 and 2).

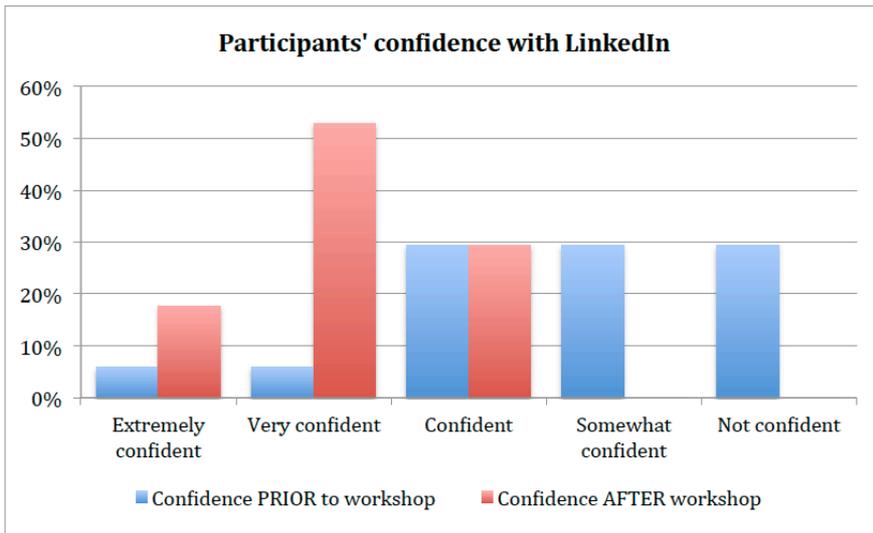


Figure 1. Participants' perception of their confidence level (session 1 - presentation)

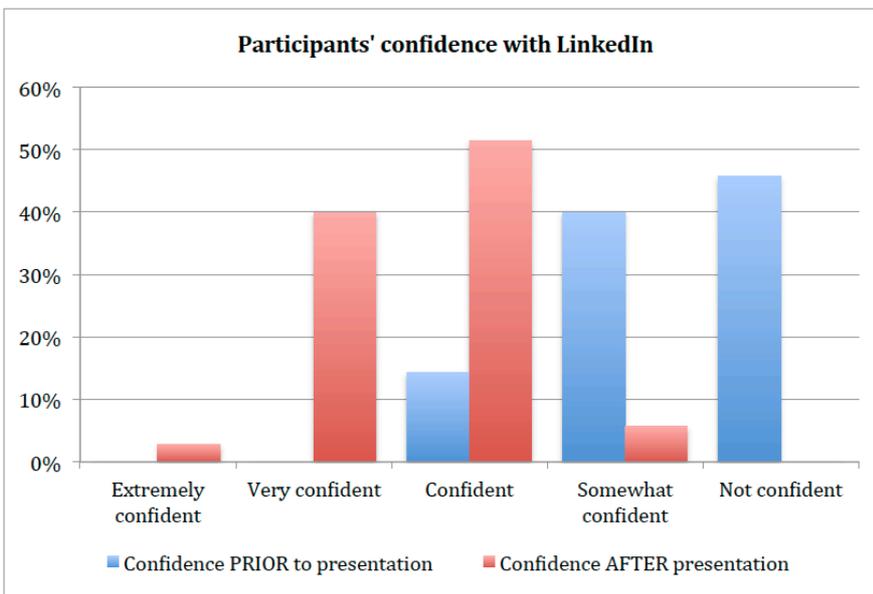


Figure 2. Participants' perception of their confidence level (session 2 - workshop)

The responses indicated that the confidence levels of the participants improved after each session. To attend a workshop the student had to have first attended the presentation so it appears that the presentation improved confidence which was further raised by their hands-on session.

Participants were also asked whether after the session whether they felt they were in a better position to use LinkedIn, the presentation session group (Figure 3) reported that 97% where either in a better position or a much better position and in the workshop session group, 100% reported the same (Figure 4).

Are they in a better position to use LinkedIn?	Count	Percentage
A much better position	23	66%
Somewhat of a better position	11	31%
My position hasn't changed	1	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	

Figure 3. Participants in presentation session responses to whether post session they were in a better position to use LinkedIn.

How did the workshop benefit participants?			
Are they in a better position to use LinkedIn?	A much better position	17	100%
Did the event meet their expectations?	Yes	17	100%
Was the event helpful and worthwhile?	Very helpful and worthwhile	17	100%

Figure 4. Participants’ in workshop session responses to whether post session they were in a better position to use LinkedIn.

General feedback also asked whether the students felt that the presentation session met their expectations (Figure 5) which most, 74% said that it did.

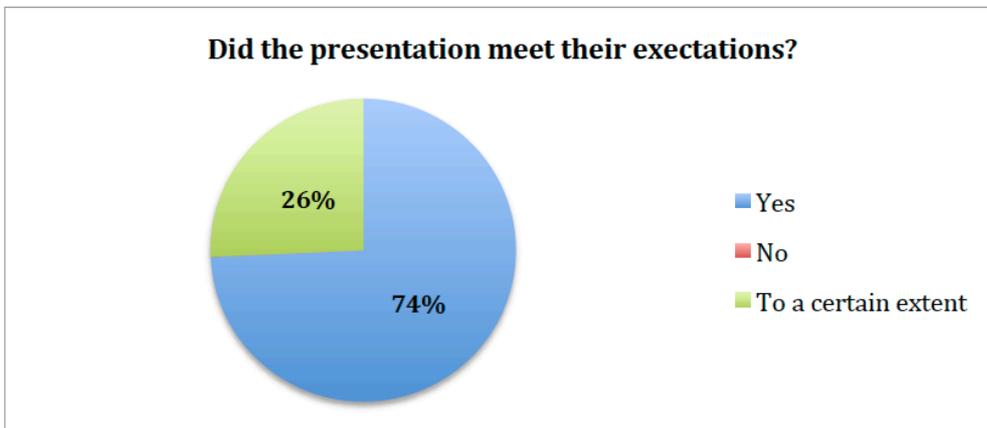


Figure 5. Participants’ satisfaction of the presentation session

Qualitative feedback was also gathered which provided key input into possible future directions and initiatives that could be undertaken. Participants were keen to express interest in one-on-one assistance or consultations to create or improve their LinkedIn profiles. They therefore found the workshop style sessions more helpful than the larger presentation style. They expressed the need for more support for international students as well as those who are applying for graduate positions.

### Future directions

Some of the considerations for future work in the space will be how to provide longevity to the work that has already commenced, either through a continued schedule of events through the Business Students Association, the creation of some new practical, digital resources, or a combination of both so we can reach students both in Melbourne and offshore.

### Summary and conclusion

The College of Business has been undertaking significant work in the skills and employability space over the past 10 months; however this current project has provided some key insights which can further expand and enhance that work.

Specific initiatives to expand and deepen the already successful Marketing and Accounting majors careers events are being considered as well as how we can scale initiatives around the use of LinkedIn across more of the College and especially to our student studying at one of our global partners.

### Acknowledgements

The team would like to offer their thanks to the following people and groups:

- All of the students that participated
- The Business Students Association
- Staff of the School of Accounting and Economics, Finance and Marketing
- Ms Karalyn Brown
- RMIT University Learning and Teaching.

## Appendix A - Promotional material for School of Accounting LinkedIn event

### Event: LinkedIn Workshop for Accounting Students

#### Details:

Friday July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015

Location: 80.08.10

Time: 1.30 to 3.30pm

#### Topics covered:

Where are graduates typically finding jobs.

Why a LinkedIn profile is important.

How accounting employers use LinkedIn to find staff.

How students/graduates can network on LinkedIn to find a job.

Best practice samples of LinkedIn profiles.

**A competition involving LinkedIn profile judging by experts with prizes up to \$500 (eVouchers) will be announced at this event.**

#### Presenter: Karalyn Brown

##### Biography

Karalyn Brown is the Founder of [www.InterviewIQ.com.au](http://www.InterviewIQ.com.au)

She is a social media influencer, engaging people on topics around careers, people, HR and management. She has written for the Australian, the Sydney Morning Herald, CareerOne, Management Today, Recruiter Daily, Recruitment Extra and HR Leader. Karalyn has featured on Mashable, the BBC, Sky News in The Australian Financial Review, The BRW, News Online, The Daily Telegraph, The Age, Anthill Online, Cosmopolitan, Voyeur Magazine, and Latte Magazine.

She has also co-authored a book: "What do employers really want?" and regularly talks jobs and how to find one on ABC radio with Tony Delroy.

Karalyn has headed up recruitment practices in the private sector and the managed the recruiting team for a large NSW government utility. She's also sat on private and public sector interview panels as an independent and assessed as an expert in several assessment centres.

## Appendix B - Promotional material for BSA College of Business event

# BOOST Your LinkedIn Profile

**BSA**  
RMIT

 With more than 9 in 10 companies using LinkedIn to recruit for new hires you need to stand out of the crowd

Presented by Australia's MOST connected woman on LinkedIn, Karalyn Brown 

**LinkedIn Presentation:**  
**How to BOOST Your LinkedIn Profile**  
Monday 28th September (Week 10)  
4:30pm - 6:30pm

### LinkedIn Workshops

**Workshop 1:**  
Wednesday 30th September  
3:30pm - 5:30pm

**Workshop 2:**  
Thursday 1st October  
4pm - 6pm

To register go to:  
The RMIT Business Student Association Facebook Page  
 [www.facebook.com/BSARMIT](http://www.facebook.com/BSARMIT)

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