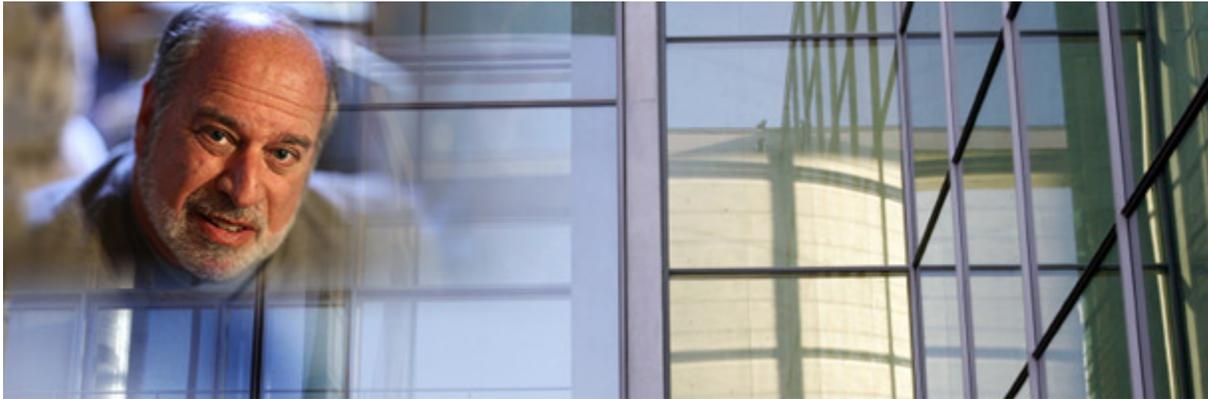


LinkedIn and Lynda—Perfect Together? (Jul 15)



by Marc Rosenberg

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“This seems like a natural. Adding a training and skill-development function to LinkedIn can only enhance its value as the go-to online professional networking site. It also provides LinkedIn members more reasons to use the site over the course of their careers, not just when they are looking for a job. That said, here are six things to watch out for.”

Like most LinkedIn members, I recently received this email ad:

An email advertisement for Lynda.com. At the top left is the LinkedIn logo (a blue square with 'in' in white) and at the top right is the Lynda.com logo (the text 'lynda.com' with a registered trademark symbol, and 'A LINKEDIN COMPANY' below it). The main body of the ad features a woman with long brown hair sitting on a blue couch, looking down at a silver Apple laptop. To the left of the woman, on a dark blue background, is the text: 'Marc, enjoy free access to lynda.com'. Below this is a paragraph: 'We've joined forces with lynda.com to provide opportunities for our members to learn new skills online and advance their career. To celebrate, here's 21 days of free access to thousands of courses.' At the bottom left, there is a yellow button with the text 'Try it free' and below it, 'Offer expires in 7 days'.

The online social media giant, focused primarily on professional career development, communities, and networks, has acquired Lynda.com, an online eLearning provider that focuses on skill building. Check out their [video announcement](#) along with this [industry analysis](#) of the deal.

To understand whether this marriage will work from a learning perspective, it's important to first understand the partners.

LinkedIn, as you well know, has evolved into the primary social network for careers and jobs, and for connecting professionals with each other. It is rich with discussions, groups, and other features that can provide a treasure trove of content and ideas that can help you in your work. But LinkedIn always seemed to lack a way for members to skill-up quickly. Sure, they can ask their peers questions, read posts and attached articles, and hold conversations, but there was no easy way to access integrated training on a specific topic.

Enter Lynda. Focusing on software, creative, and business skills, it provides thousands of courses developed by an army of outside contributors. Lynda says it vets its "authors" for teaching skills and subject matter expertise, and carefully monitors subscriber reviews and purchasing decisions.

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That said, here are six things to watch out for:

1. **Course quality.** Despite assurances, there are surely courses in the Lynda "library" (I like this term much better than "catalog") that are poorly designed, inaccurate, boring, etc. Lynda must put quality front-and-center in their value proposition. This means constantly rejecting bad products and culling the library of courses that have outlived their usefulness or should never have been there in the first place, *even if they are popular*, and replacing them with better product.
2. **Business model.** Lynda is profitable. Its legion of course authors are independent contractors, paid in part based on the number of "views." The good news is that in paying contributors, Lynda has leverage over the quality of what they will accept (how well they do this is key). However, this requires Lynda to charge for their services, and while this has been successful for them, it is contrary to the expectations most LinkedIn members have—justified or not—that it all should be free. Perhaps a premium LinkedIn package (paid) might have unlimited access to the Lynda library (with possible special deals for organizational memberships).
3. **Talent management.** It isn't far-fetched that LinkedIn might want to get into the talent management business to round out its suite of career development, networking, and training. It could focus on competencies but this would require rigorous needs, capability, and performance assessments, tight cooperation with professional disciplines, as well as specific, targeted training. And, the training would have to be more than just videos, focusing much more on certification (see next). Issues of learning management (e.g., LMS), security, and reporting would also have to be addressed. A tall order.
4. **Certification.** Lynda does not offer any certification, at least not yet. This is probably a good thing in that certifying performance based just on video-based courses is loaded with problems, and because Lynda itself is not claiming to have the subject matter expertise to be a credible certification agent. Will legitimate certification agencies and academic institutions connect with Lynda to provide accredited courses? We shall see.
5. **Overall strategy.** LinkedIn works as a social networking and collaboration site *first*. Its strength is *informal learning*. This should not change. If it starts to look like a training site, if courses overtake networking, the uniqueness of this marriage would be lost and I'd look for a divorce. That said, it would be awfully nice if LinkedIn members and groups could easily integrate selected Lynda offerings directly into their discussions and other activities.
6. **Lynda as a separate service.** In addition to enhancing the LinkedIn experience, it's likely Lynda will remain a stand-alone online training provider. As such, it joins a chorus of companies seeking

to provide additional training options to organizations, or, in some cases, replace internal training efforts. The challenge for the training industry is not how to keep clients and companies from going around training departments to Lynda (too tempting; they most likely will), but how to be sure simply watching Lynda training videos doesn't provide an easy (and invalid) path to performance certification.

I've heard Lynda referred to as everything from the "YouTube of training" to a real breakthrough in education access. Time will tell, but there have been many similar efforts in the past and most results have been disappointing. For LinkedIn, the Lynda.com acquisition looks like a very good move to provide more services for members rather than simply being seen as an online resume. It expands their learning and performance ecosystem. But if LinkedIn treats training like they treat endorsements, which have become quite trivial (in my view), the courses will become increasingly meaningless. It's not how many courses you have; it's how valuable they are.

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