CREATIVE BRIEF - JAN 2026

30-Day LinkedIn Traction



Executive Summary

In January, I boosted visibility by 36.4%, engagement by 52.1%, and maintained a 1% conversion rate. Here's what I did and what I would do differently.

Thirty days offers ample time to jump-start your business on LinkedIn. But it can take some trial and error. **This document combines a 30-day period of posting, commenting, and connecting with objective marketing research to develop a stronger strategy.** Both components matter. Practical application tests theory and enables you to rule out underperforming methods. Outside reach offers alternatives and validation.

Engagement means more than impressions, but conversion is still king. Visibility without ties to cash flow mean little. I attempt to address this.

At the same time, no guide can guarantee a fully-booked calendar. But this will provide insight into tactics and best practices for the LinkedIn algorithm in 2026. Here, I'll highlight:

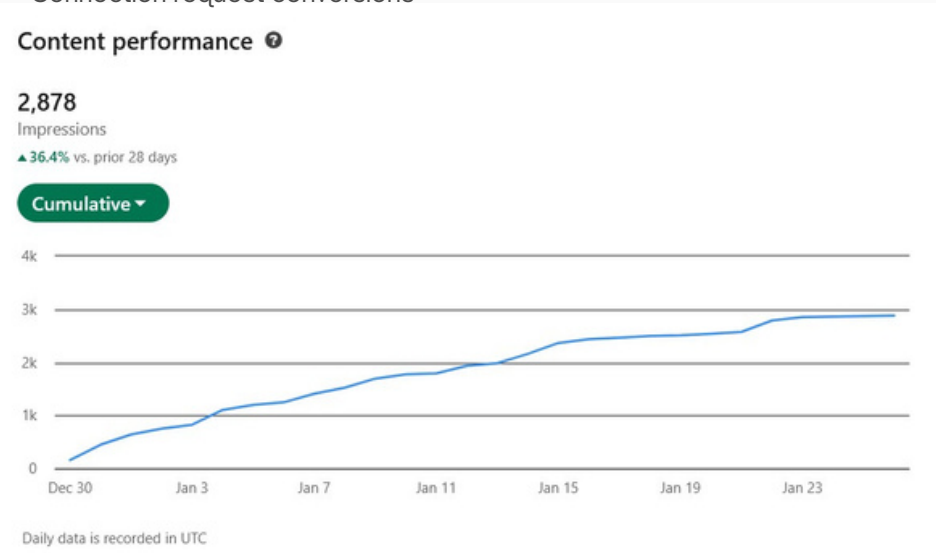
- What I did
- Frameworks for realignment
- What media types perform better
- Strategies for interaction
- Algorithm ethics

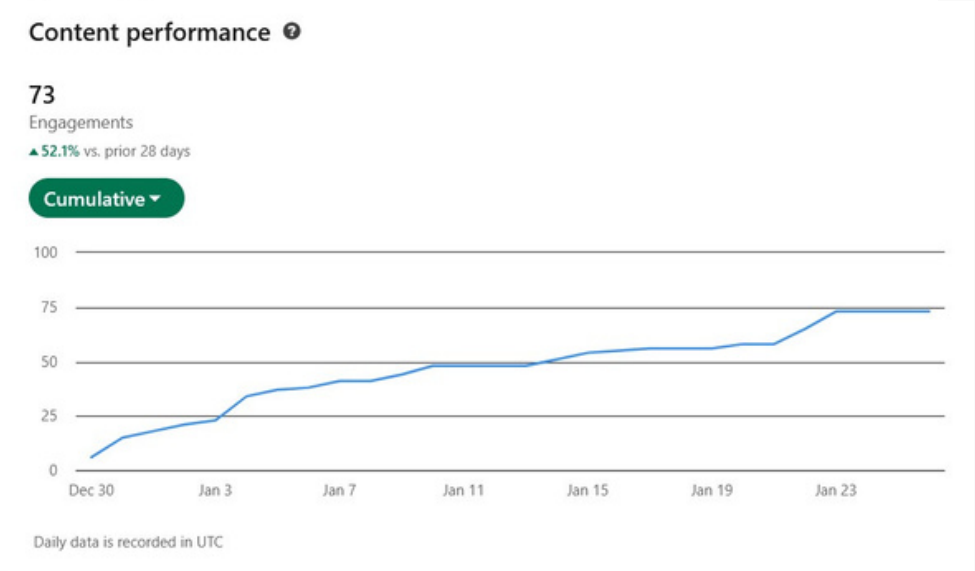
PREPARED BY
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A Review of January 2026

Let's start at the beginning. Since this was the initial LinkedIn test after a long-break, I focused on changing only a few variables. Primarily, I tested:

- Whether or not hashtags are really useless
- Picture versus text
- Testing calls to action (follow, newsletter, ebook)
- Commenting reach
- Connection request conversions





January Top Posts

Out of the 14 posts in January: Pictures and hashtags won out in terms of engagement.

Conversions (discovery calls booked) stemmed from direct outreach via connection requests.

Top Posts	Media Type	Reach	Engagement	Hashtags
My greatest accomplishment wasn't my career...nonprofit	Photo + text	481	14	**Yes**
LinkedIn posts arguing for or against AI typically fall flat...	Text	287	6	**No**
This finance writing book is in its final throes of developmental edits.	Text	257	8	**Yes**
I'm well overdue for a little self-promo	Photo + text	180	13	**Yes**
Finishing up client work, then editing my finance writing book...	Photo + text	132	11	**Yes**

This is a snapshot of what worked. Let's jump into the specifics, and what I'd change going forward.

A little misaligned

My primary viewers matched my target audience. But messaging was...messy.

The sample size is small and the margins are narrow, true. But there were clear winners in this month's posts:

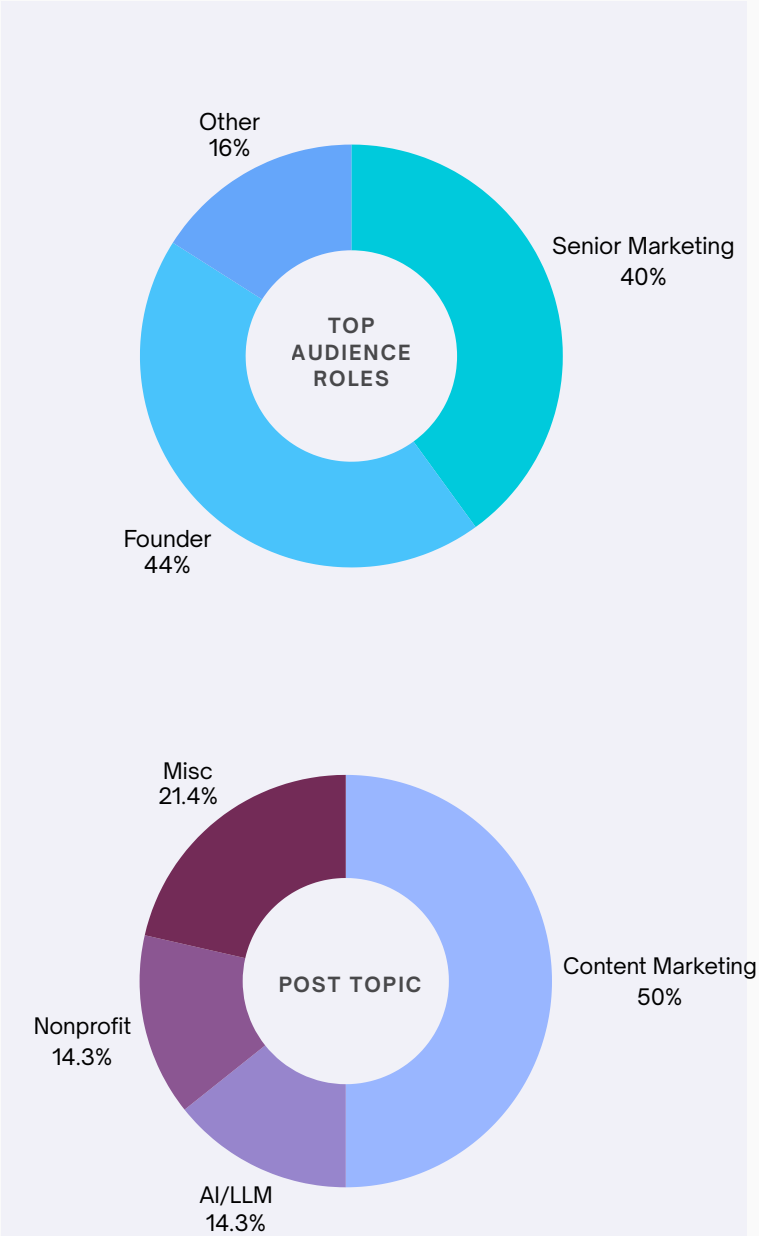
- **Images**, particularly those with people in them, typically **outperformed in engagement.**
- **Hashtags didn't seem to matter** too much, but 5 out of the top 6 posts used them.
- **Post engagement and impressions didn't translate into conversions – and it's clear why.**

Looking back at my post history, it's true impressions were down. Prior posts easily accumulated 700 to 900 views.

But a major issue was this: Lack of contextual unity.

I wrote about content. But I also discussed my nonprofit adventures. Comments jumped from economic outlook to politics.

All of these topics align with me, as an individual, but the LinkedIn algorithm functions on a single context. Deviate too much, and your credibility is questioned.



What's wrong with 50%?

I drafted all of the content marketing posts at the beginning of the month. They focus primarily on the marketing aspect, the *Problem/Process/Proof* dynamic of working together. They were primarily text-based.

None of them made it to the top 6 posts.

The off-the-cuff posts about nonprofit work, AI/LLM, new year's resolutions, etc. all scaled better. As a writer, I can say these posts had better stories and more eye-catching visuals. I even got some traffic back to my website (but not much, only 2.88% as opposed to December's 0.72%).

But I imagine having 50% of posts aligned with different topics and outcomes didn't help my primary posts or conversion rate. Our profiles are products and the algorithm isn't trained to cross-categorize us.

I would do some things differently, such as:

15	10	ALL
POSTS	VISUALS	NICHE SPECIFIC

NO AI THEMES

AI-RELATED POSTS CAN GET TRACTION. MOST ARE NOISE.
DON'T USE IT UNLESS IT'S ABOUT A CLEAR TACTIC.

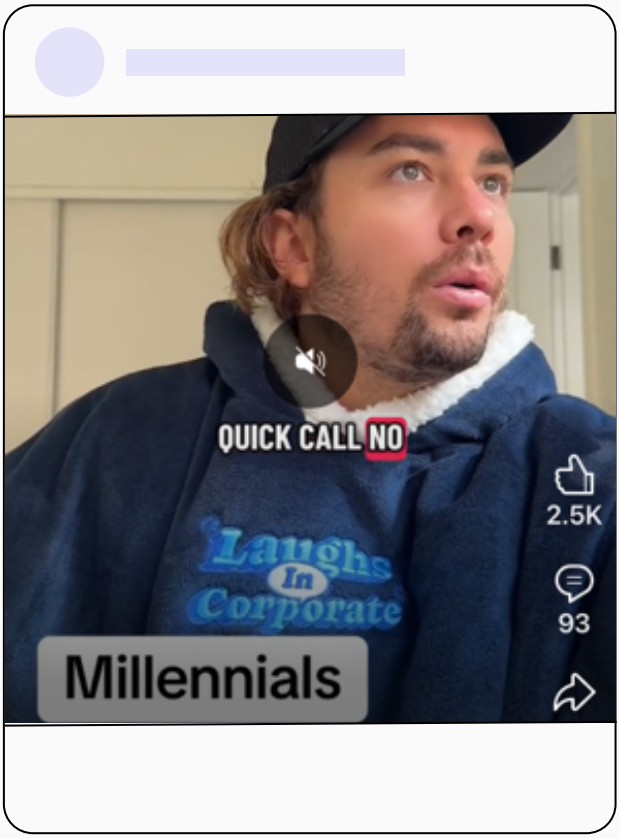
But I'd also focus on better leveraging framework.

Frameworks for alignment

I didn't just post content, I reviewed what's already in the ecosystem. Most copywriters and marketers are familiar with the AIDA paradigm by St. Elmo Lewis: **Attention, Intent, Desire, Action**.

But when looking at content, specifically video content on LinkedIn, I started also evaluating posts through the lens of **Audience, Behavior, Emotion (ABE)**. This is another way to decode **who the content is for, what action is desired, and what emotions they are appealing to.** The ABE framework is more of a quick shorthand or background for AIDA. Together, you have a fast way to evaluate content.

Example Post from Cruz Corral using ABE



A: Corporate, remote workers

B: Engagement, sharing

E: Humor, belonging-ness, shared frustration

Going forward, I would write the AIDA and ABE analysis for each post before scheduling, including "off-the-cuff" ideas.

Unified message, diverse media

Social Media platforms continue to push for video, but it's not my forte. That said, there's a number of media types I didn't use and should have.

- **Niched infographics**
- **Document sliders**
- **Occasional polls**

Photos outperformed text posts. I considered creating videos, but they would take more time to produce and are uncommon in my niche. Therefore, in the next few months I would focus on the above media types.

However, "just add different visuals" isn't enough. Design matters. I would use the **CRAP** design framework for this: **Contrast, Repetition, Alignment, and Proximity.** Paying attention to these four factors can help you to create graphics that stand out. If you don't have an eye for design, use a Canva template and keep these principles in mind before finalizing.

Why these content types?

Plain photographs did well, but studies have shown that others do better.

According to Chris Donnelly's research into the 2026 algorithm the following drastically outperformed text posts:



Donnelly's report is superb in terms of tactics, although I have had some contrasting experience. For example, he notes that hashtags don't matter and should be removed. I found that 1-3 hashtags still improves visibility.

He also notes that posts should be longer. **Posts with a character count between 1,200 to 3,000 generally perform 31% better.** So it's not an either-or option when it comes to media and text: It's both.

Another interesting find about media: **Attaching links in the original post work**. Donnelly notes that posts with greater than 3 links have **210% higher reach**.

Other studies confirm many aspects of Donnelly's report and my personal experience. Agropulse, for example, shows that images do 11% better and carousels do 7% better than text posts. They still lean heavily on videos, claiming a sound video post can give a 69% performance boost.

Buffer also advocates for the use of PDF Carousels, reporting that this format gets 3x more engagement than videos and 6x more than text-only posts.

Comments get you further

Most of my comments and views didn't come from posts but comments. I had several comments that generated responses, page views, and thousands of additional impressions.

However, like with my posting history, I allowed myself to get distracted. **I didn't comment strategically.**

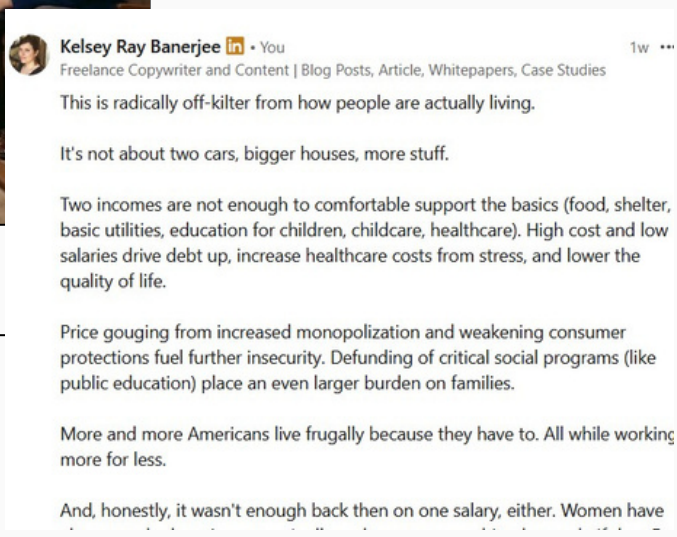
Every single study listed in the media section also confirms that commenting drives LinkedIn growth and visibility.

Example Post Comment: When what "works" doesn't convert



I left a comment (below) to the post on the left. **It generated 3x as many impressions as my top monthly post and the same amount of engagement.**

It was strong, but not strategic.



Writing better comments

Like with alignment, there's a framework for reviewing comment suitability. I call it A(A)WE.

- **Authentic** – Is it what you really think?
- **Analytical** – Is it factual?
- **Wise** – Is it inspire reflection?
- **Emotional** – Does it invoke the emotional response you want?

You'll notice **analytical** is in parenthesis. And it is because I have learned the hard way that facts rarely move people. They believe what they believe because of a visceral experience or family belief; **it's rare that facts and statistics are useful in the comments section**. It has nothing to do with intelligence and everything to do with emotion.

Numbers are eye-catching and can stimulate conversions in posts and long-form content. Use them when necessary in comments, but don't count on them.

I would also recommend **concise comments, but don't rephrase the post.** Offer a real viewpoint from your experience.

And while it's easier than ever to engage in arguments, **civility wins out on LinkedIn**, where decorum matters more than being right (not that this is something you can prove in a comment, anyway.

Real Quick: Reflecting on the Algorithm

I want to take a moment to discuss something which often feels unfair, especially to people with multiple interests or businesses: **The algorithm can only contextualize one topic per profile.**

The math indicates that the more you talk about one category, the more of an expert you are. It's a bummer.

This leads to a few potential roadblocks for creatives or complex companies. **You must decide to segment your interests per profile or campaign. This can easily add hours to your workload, if you aren't careful.** It can also lean to content saturation, burnout, and boredom.

This is where commenting becomes easier than developing new posts.

But that isn't the only issue.

There's ethical questions, too, around defining yourself or your brand by one singular topic.

For example, a nonprofit focusing on food security may be penalized for discussing climate change, although these two are connected.

A business leader with a sustainable clothing shop may be discouraged from posting about her favorite fiction book-list, even though it inspires her creativity.

The algorithm catalogs profiles like commodities. That's not an issue I can change, but I can acknowledge it.

I think we should be conscious of when we decide to send messaging that we are "one thing" because this can be limiting for authenticity at home, as well as become restrictive when we try to juggle all the pieces of ourselves. It's a flattening experience, especially in light of political and economic chaos.

Advancing on LinkedIn means narrowing down your online identity. It can be helpful to establish a way for a more multidimensional connection, if that's missing from your professional life.

To sum it all up

January is just the beginning. I expect the LinkedIn team will continue to tweak the algorithm. But there are some evergreen takeaways that have worked in the past and will likely continue to be successful:

01 **Measure messaging against a framework.**

Alignment is key if you want your posts and comments served to the right audience. Use AIDA, ABE, and A(A)WE to evaluate messaging.

02 **Experiment with media formats.**

Every niche is a little different and you'll want to test different formats. Use the CRAP framework to ensure visuals are readable and optimized.

03 **Comment strategically.**

I would recommend targeting specific niches and influencers in your industry to maximize reach. Aim for at least 5-10 comments a week.

04 **Narrow your focus.**

When revising your profile or drafting post topics, keep topics well-defined. Broad outreach is too vague to be meaningful.

05 **Record your progress.**

Keep a simple spreadsheet of results on a monthly basis. Focus on engagements and conversions over impressions.

Thank you!

Thank you for taking the time to read this report. If you have any questions or would like to discuss further, please don't hesitate to reach out.

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