Verify, Then Trust

Verification of LinkedIn Profiles

Verification of profile picture
Reverse image search on sites such as Google, Bing, TinEye or Yandex. If same picture appears under another name, this is a red flag.

Conduct several Google searches of name along with other details mentioned in the profile (i.e. name of individual and name of current company they represent, name of individual and name of university they graduated from, name of individual and city they claim to live in, etc.). If you cannot find any other mention of this specific individual separately from the LinkedIn profile, this is a red flag.

Number of connections
If profile has less than 100 connections, this is a red flag. Caution: as it is very easy for fake profiles to accumulate over 500 connections along with numerous endorsements, do not assume that such profiles are automatically real.

The "About" section
How well is it written? If it contains spelling and/or grammatical errors, it is likely fake. You can also copy and paste this section into LinkedIn's search tab to see if any other profiles surface with this same exact wording. If so, this would be a red flag.

Conduct a general overview of the individual's career progression
Does it flow well and make sense? Or does it appear very disjointed and illogical? Latter case would be a red flag.

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Verification of LinkedIn Messages Having Links and/or Attachments

Only trust such links/attachments if they are sent to you by someone you know and trust
If you don't know and trust the sender, it could be a phishing attempt.

When in doubt
Contact the party through some other means than LinkedIn messaging to verify that they sent it to you.

Verification of Requests for Information (for research, employment, etc.)

Exchanging information
Never provide information to anyone you have not verified.

Be cautious of anyone claiming to have lived, worked, or studied at the same location that you have
If any of your social media accounts display this information, they may be using it to develop trust and a rapport.

Be cautious of anyone using a referral from someone you know
They could have easily identified that person as one of your contacts and made up the referral. Verify with that contact that he/she has actually made the referral.

Individuals (especially recruiters) claiming to represent a company
Conduct online research for additional validation of such status and/or contact that company by telephone.

Test the veracity of the person
Without interrogating them, elicit details regarding the location they claim to be calling from (i.e. weather, neighborhoods, landmarks, sports teams, etc.) and verify via online resources.

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