

101
LESSONS

Creating Your Personal Brand



- ✓ Capitalizing on the "U" in Unique
- ✓ Using the Web to Enhance Your Brand
- ✓ The Role of Networking in Personal Branding

What Is a Personal Brand?

In today's competitive workplace, distinguishing yourself significantly from your peers can be a challenge. However, in magazines, as with many other industries, it's not just about "getting a job"—it's about building your own personal brand. But what does that mean—"personal brand"? Much like the brands that we all know, such as Coke, Nike, or McDonald's, your personal brand in the workplace is a combination of the product you offer (i.e., your job performance), the values that you embody, and how the two work together to create the "wholeness" that is you.

A personal brand is much more than a job title: It's a holistic look at your goals, passions and values and how those figure into—and enhance—what you offer an employer. Oftentimes, it's the individuals who truly know what makes them interesting, compelling, and differentiated who stand out from their peers. These people capitalize on their differences, parlaying them into an advantage. A person's brand can be the thing that gives an ad sales executive a competitive edge or an editorial assistant's ability to catch the eye of the managing editor.

Of course, a personal brand is only as good as the reputation you are able to build around its unique promise of value—and what you ultimately deliver. Consequently, authenticity and honesty become the most important building blocks for your personal brand.

Why Is Personal Branding Important?

No matter where you are on the corporate ladder—starting out, a rising star or an established leader—personal branding is absolutely vital to your success. After all, numerous others may have your job title, but only a few might share your vision and appreciate the particular talents you offer. If you connect with the individuals and companies that value your "mission" in the world, you will have a much greater chance for success. No full-proof path exists for building a personal brand, but you can take steps that will help you create the best personal brand for you.



1. Create Your Personal Brand

First, you need to create a branding plan for yourself. You start by evaluating what your current reputation is and compare it to what you'd like it to be. Then identify qualities that make you unique and how they might be valued by an employer. Helpful hint: Examining who or what you don't want your personal brand to be like can reveal what you do want. Just flip these negative qualities around to find the positive.

Ask yourself:

- What are my strengths?
- What am I already known for?
- What am I passionate about?
- What would I really like to accomplish in my life?
- What am I truly good at?
- What contribution can I make?
- How do I define success? What does success mean to me?
- What do I want my legacy be?
- How would I like to be remembered?

You'll be promoting your personal brand for many years, so make sure you identify qualities that truly embody your personal brand.

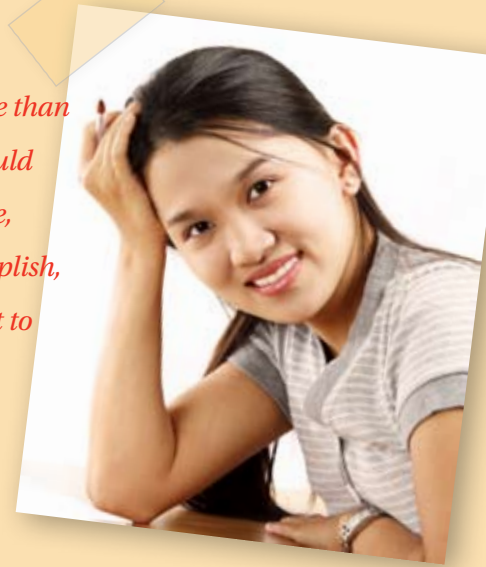
2. Boil It Down

While you're brainstorming your personal brand, it is helpful to write everything down. You will want to create a statement that encapsulates everything you want your brand to be. This will be your "personal mission statement."

Examples might include:

"I am an effective and efficient production manager who remains calm no matter what crisis arises."

Your brand is much more than just your job title—it should evoke your purpose in life, what you want to accomplish, and the impact you want to have on others.



"I am a highly qualified, proven, results-driven executive who wants my legacy to include mentoring young talent."

"I am a passionate, people-oriented leader with solid business acumen, a strong work ethic and integrity."

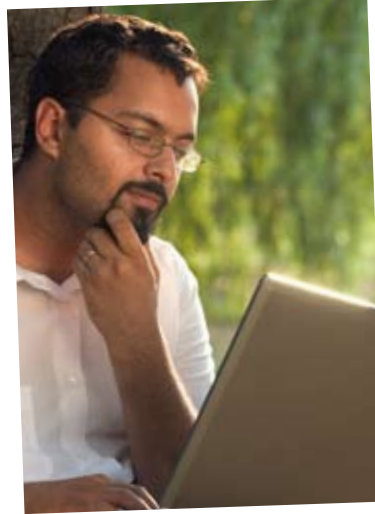
Once you have drafted a personal mission statement, define specific goals and objectives as they relate to your career development. In order to reach these goals, you need to create a measurable action plan to accomplish your goals/objectives. This is how you will get from "A" to "B" to "C"—all the way to "Z". As time passes, you will want to revisit your mission statement, goals and action plan because they will need to be adjusted as you evolve.

When choosing your brand, don't let your job title dictate who you are. Your brand is much more than just your job title—it should evoke your purpose in life, what you want to accomplish, and the impact you want to have on others. Also, your brand does not need to showcase every aspect of yourself. A brand identity that displays your every interest rarely works. However, if done correctly, your personal brand's reputation and credibility will help you stand out from the crowd, and create an environment in which job opportunities come to you.

Also, it might be tempting to try and mold yourself into a brand that fills a void in the marketplace. But don't just pull a brand identity out of the air. You will either be found out or the day-to-day grind of living without authenticity will wear you out. Either way, you will lose "brand equity" with your audience. Your brand should be a natural extension of yourself.

3. Listen to Feedback

Once you've worked on your brand identity, you need to get input from those around you. Build your own "board of directors" (i.e., mentors, peers, friends, family) to give you feedback on your branding plan and how you are putting it into action. Branding is ultimately about communicating your identity; thus it is crucial that you know how it is being received in the minds—and hearts—of others. After all, without input from the outside, you only have half the picture of your brand.



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4. Distinguish Your Brand

What need can you satisfy better than anyone else? The more you are able to distinguish your brand, the more you potentially will be able to find someone to pay you for it. Look at the market—read the news, websites, newsletters, etc. and find out what the status quo is so you can capitalize on what makes you special.

5. Do Your Homework

Go to a good search site and enter keywords related to your brand identity. Check out how those sites embody the qualities of your own brand. Note the ways that these sites present themselves and think about how you might do the same for your own brand online.

Promote Your Personal Brand in a Variety of Ways

NETWORK

Networking is key to creating a personal brand—not to mention it is the best way to stay current in your particular area in magazines as well as find out about new opportunities. However all too often, people only make the initial contact and do not follow up, missing the opportunity to capitalize on branding themselves positively and memorably.

How can you brand yourself effectively and create a mutually beneficial relationship at the same time? Try the following strategies (adapted from Monster.com's Monstertrak):

■ **Ask to keep in touch:** Almost everyone will say, "Yes," because they want to help you and know you might be able to return the favor someday. So after you've spoken to someone, send a quick thank-you note and tell the person you'll keep in touch. Then, do just that. Follow up every month or six weeks with a quick e-mail or phone call. Let the person know what's new with you and then ask how things are going with him or her.

■ **Offer your help:** You might think you have nothing to offer your networking contacts, but that's not the case. We

all know people who might be able to help others. Furthermore, we all stumble upon information that might be useful to others. You provide help in return for having received it, plus you once again brand yourself favorably in the person's mind.

■ **Go where your networking contacts are:** Join appropriate organizations or professional societies. You will increase your knowledge of the field and put yourself in a position to be seen and remembered.

■ **When you land an internship or new job, tell your networking contacts:** Everyone likes to know when he or she has helped someone reach a goal. Once you land the internship or job you were shooting for, tell your contacts what's happened. Thank them again for their help, and offer them your help if they should ever need it. This strategy gives you another opportunity to brand yourself in the minds of your new networking contacts.

Networking is a time-intensive, long-term strategy, and branding yourself via networking generally takes an even larger investment of your time, effort and patience. However, networking is key to your success, not just for short-term payoffs such as internships and jobs, but also for long-term stability and opportunities.

6. Seek Professional Help

Through the branding process, you may want to get professional help. Career coaches excel at helping clients formulate and promote their personal brands. You can also visit discussion forums on branding-oriented or career development websites that to get further feedback on your personal branding efforts.

7. Once You've Created Your Personal Brand, Keep It Current

Keep up with the latest advances in technology or other areas of knowledge that may be of particular importance to your brand. If you don't, you run the risk of becoming "stale"—you need to show that your brand is an evolving entity.

Oftentimes, it's the individuals who truly know what makes them interesting, compelling, and differentiated who stand out from their peers. These people capitalize on their differences, parlaying them into an advantage.

Promote Your Personal Brand in a Variety of Ways

THE INTERNET

The Internet allows you to use a wide range of tools to communicate their personal brand to a well-defined target audience. Key steps toward making sure your personal brand is seen include:



In today's market, if you don't show up in Google, you don't exist.

Google yourself. In today's market, if you don't show up in Google, you don't exist. That's a reality in the new world of work. Clients, colleagues, hiring managers, executive recruiters and employees are all using Google to learn about you. To get a stronger presence on the web, you can:

- **Create a profile on social networking websites** such as Facebook and LinkedIn. These sites allow you to publish your biography, connect with other people in the system, and be found by people who need to know you. You should try to have a professional profile at all relevant social networking sites.
- **Create a website and/or blog**—In all your communications, you can refer people, including colleagues, potential clients and employers, to this site even if only in your e-mail signature, so they can get a fuller picture of your personal brand.

Contribute to e-mail newsletters and discussion forums.

Get online media exposure by creating e-books or podcasts or writing free articles.



Branding Yourself for Success

We all know the power of brands: They are easily recognizable, stand for something, represent certain qualities, and stay true to their values over the years. Similar to how some of the largest companies in the world build their brand recognition, you can do the same—whether you are entering the job market or want to advance your career. Put the steps to personal branding into practice and you will become the success you were meant to be.

For more information on achieving your goals in magazines, please visit www.magazine.org/diversity.

Sources for "Creating Your Personal Brand" included:

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1365/is_8_32/ai_83317318; *Black Enterprise*, March, 2002 by Ann Brown; <http://www.marketingprofs.com/7/brand-yourself-competitive-job-market-collier.asp?sp=1>; "How to Brand Yourself in a Competitive Job Market: Q&A with William Arruda" by Mack Collier, August 21, 2007; <http://content.monstertrak.monster.com/resources/archive/jobhunt/keepnetworks>