



Personal Branding – A Reality of the World 2.0

The professional world as we knew it is long gone and all the rules are being rewritten. Our lives are changing; our long-term goals are changing; even the way we interact with the world around us is changing. Competition is an active component of all aspects of our lives. We want to be faster, better and more efficient, and one area where this wish manifests is our career. The current troubled economic climate creates new challenges and, at the same time, immense opportunities for professionals looking to ignite their careers, or start their own business.

It is an undeniable fact that brand identity surrounds us. Defined by things like our toys, clothes, and relationships, our brand identity helps us define ourselves to our peers and the world we interact with.

Branding is no longer limited to business entities; it applies to personal entities as well. For businesses, a strong brand image ultimately leads to increased awareness in their target marketplace, and repeated business from their customers. For individuals, it leads to more personal and professional opportunities.

The Concept of Personal Branding

The core attributes of a strong brand have not changed; however, brands today and branding in general, reaches deeper into everyone's activities. Branding became a social feature more so than a business one. We're living in an "anytime, anywhere" access paradigm as Web 2.0 technology enables 24/7 social and business interaction. This makes branding ourselves as a valuable asset as a "**must do**" and can be the difference between winning and losing opportunities.

What Makes a Good Brand

In our changing world of opportunity, inventing and re-inventing ourselves provides mastery of our own destiny. Personal Branding is viewed as the only viable way to deal with the contemporary professional world.

Successful Personal Branding relies on the image of an independent, resourceful, creative, and aggressive professional. Personal Branding requires discovery and development of our unique qualities as a viable product. Become the "go-to person" in your competency area. Individuals should embrace the challenge, using Personal Branding as a success strategy.

Good branding identifies the qualities and characteristics that differentiate us from our competitors or colleagues. Compelling personal brands do not happen by fate. They take thought, planning and a purpose. They attract and inspire



followers, influencing how they perceive us. They must be authentic, original, consistent, likeable, and flexible.

What is your brand about?

Developing and promoting our brand requires we identify what we are proud of. Then we must become relentlessly focused on our value-add. Finally, we must shamelessly market our value-add to our target market.

It is our duty to create the perception of a trustworthy brand. So start by performing a personal inventory or a personal SWOT analysis. Identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities for growth, and threats (yes, threats) in building and maintaining our brand. Identify the core theme from life's experiences and develop these core themes into personal and professional learning elements.

In conducting our personal inventory, we must ask ourselves questions that will craft our mission statement and become congruent with that statement. Such questions include, but are not limited to:

- a. Who the heck are we?
- b. Do we remain true to ourselves always?
- c. Do we deliver on-time value?
- d. Are we reliable?
- e. What values, beliefs, or principles guide our decisions?
- f. What inspires us? Is it passion? Is it emotion? Is it money? Is it ego?
- g. How is our inspiration relevant to our career and life goals?
- h. What do we do well that we can exploit?
- i. What do we not do well that we want to improve and exploit?
- j. What are we willing to do to establish our brand?
- k. What are we willing to sacrifice to establish our brand?

Answering these will define and clarify our remarkable, measurable, distinguished, and distinctive value.

The Making of Our Brand

There are many components to our brand, with each carrying considerable importance. Remaining consistently active on and offline will keep our brand visible. Our portfolio, the mirror of the brand, should contain a personal presentation often represented in any of the following:

- CV/Resume
- Personal Plan/Business plan
- Personal Values Statement
- Personal Introduction letter
- Website – a powerful PR tool that establishes us as a real brand
- Social Network profile – offers visibility



- Special interest groups
- Blogs
- Published Articles
- Public Presentations
- Volunteer Groups

One or more of these tools are required to become a successful brand. Vital to our branding campaign, they will help us stay visible and find the right market for our brand. When shamelessly promoting that brand, everything we do or choose not to do, communicates the value and character of our brand.

The brand must be consistent to be respected. It must be compelling to become likeable and well known. Our colleagues, customers, business partners, and future contacts must see the reliable value of our brand for it to succeed.

Keeping Our Brand Flexibility

Brand flexibility keeps it fresh, original, and leads to loyalty from our target audience. Therefore constant feedback is a must, if we are to stay on message. We must seek honest feedback on our performance, our growth, and our value. This ensures we have a strong position to achieve our goal of more interesting and more profitable opportunities.

Conclusion

In the end, success comes down to:

- **Controlling our personal brand perception** – our personal brand is a reflection of our own perception of ourselves and other’s impressions of us. The way others describe us is based on the experience they’ve had with us. Therefore, it is vital to work towards ensuring that both our perception and the world’s perception of us are positive ones.
- **Gain confidence in ourselves** – confidence will greatly influence our ability to communicate, and our opportunities for success in life. We need to constantly remind ourselves of our past successes, confront our insecurities and be thankful for what we have. Instead of concentrating on weaknesses, remember our strengths, embrace ourselves, and our true potential. If necessary, find a positive role model for inspiration.
- **Be persistent** – if we are confident in our brand, we are more willing to do what it takes to sell it. Setting a goal, deciding the best time to pursue it, being prepared and following up are important aspects when striving for success.

Personal Branding is for those of us who want to create a powerful presence and a memorable identity that will have a positive effect on the world. Remember, a powerful brand is one that leaves others with a positive perception.