

## **Your Personal Brand – Your Personal Success**

Since pre-industrial times, branding has been used to develop strong, enduring relationships with customers. Diners at Mr Jones' pie shop knew that his pies came with real fruit and were always given to you with a smile. It made it worth the long walk and extra two cents.

Today, on a larger, more global scale, branding continues to provide those same benefits. Volvo is differentiated from other car companies by its promise of safety and security. Disney stands for family entertainment. Virgin is irreverent and risk-taking. But branding is not just for companies or products any more. In the new millennium, everything is a brand. London is the world's hippest city and Route 128 in Boston is "America's Technology Highway". Madonna, Martha Stewart and Richard Branson. Brand. Brand. Brand. That's right, branding is for people, too.

Personal branding is essential to professional success today. Gone are the days where your value as an employee or vendor was linked to your loyalty and seniority. Today, companies are in a constant state of reorganization in response to the rapidly changing demands of the market. This modifies the way you behave as employees or vendors. On a constant basis, you are working with different project teams, managers, and employees. In a sense, you are functioning like your own personal corporation. And that means that you have the same need to differentiate yourself and build demand for your services among your target markets.

Just as with corporate brands, your personal brand is your promise of value. It separates you from your peers, your colleagues, and your competitors. And it allows you to expand your success. Personal branding is not about building a special image for the outside world; it is about understanding your unique combination of rational and emotional attributes - your strengths, skills, values and passions - and using these attributes to differentiate yourself and guide your career decisions.

So, whether you are a senior executive, the president of your own business, or an employee of a company of any size, managing your brand is critical to achieving your professional goals. When you have built and nurtured a winning brand, you'll reap the many benefits, including:

- Understanding yourself better,
- Increasing your confidence,
- Increasing your visibility and presence,
- Differentiating yourself from your peers,
- Increasing your compensation,
- Thriving during downturns in the economy,
- Expanding into new business areas, and
- Having better, more interesting jobs and assignments.

**Here are three steps to successful personal branding:**

### **Step 1: Unearth Your Brand**

Give your brand context. Before you can clearly describe your personal brand, you need to look at the big picture: your vision, and purpose. Your vision is external. It is the essence of what you see possible for the world. Your purpose is internal. It is the role you play in supporting that vision. As Gandhi said, "We must be the change we wish to see in the world."

Additionally, your personal brand needs to be tied to your goals. Spend some time thinking about how you would like your life to look in a year. Two years? Five years? Be sure to document your answers. With your goals set down, and with a real understanding of your vision and purpose, you can begin the assessment process required to understand and develop your brand.

### **Know Yourself**

A successful personal brand is authentic. Thus, you need to know yourself before you can build a successful brand. If you are creative, dynamic, outgoing, and whimsical, you will not succeed by communicating the attributes of the predictable, the steady, and the focused. Much the same as Volvo is known for being safe, not for being a speedy sports car.

### **Know Your Competitors**

How can you stand out unless you know those among whom you're standing? In other words, who are you really competing against? Your current colleagues? A larger group at your current workplace? Others within your industry? Take another look at your goals, and take a closer look at your competition. If you see yourself making major career changes, your competitors are not likely to be your current colleagues. If you are planning a straight-ahead trajectory to a more senior position, it may be easier to identify the competition and their brand attributes.

### **Know Your Target**

To be successful, it's not enough just to have a personal brand. You need to communicate it to the right people. It would exhaust your resources to aim for the world at large. The key to successful personal branding is focus!

You may not be able to define your target too narrowly, but you should at least be able to identify specific people or characteristics of your target audience to help you define your messages. Just like Mattel knows that their target audience is glued to the television on Saturday morning, you too must understand how and where you can reach your audience.

### **Step 2: Express Yourself**

Describe the essence of your brand. From the results of Step 1 above, start to create a personal brand profile. List your brand attributes, create a brand statement and even your personal brand tagline. This will help you as you develop a plan to communicate your brand.

### **Find the Right Mix**

Once you know yourself, your competitors, and your target, you can identify the ideal combination of communications tools that reach your audience effectively. This can vary widely depending on your goals, but maybe you will want to write articles or contribute to your internal newsletter. Maybe regular speaking gigs are more appropriate for your brand. You need to evaluate all possible communications tools and select the right combination to reach your target audience.

### **Mark Everything You Do with Your Brand**

Whether you're giving a presentation, participating in a meeting, or writing a report, you never have to leave your brand behind. Always ask yourself how you can connect your brand to every given situation. Every meeting, every project, every business trip – every business meal!

### **Live and Breathe Your Brand**

Live in a state of inquiry for two weeks – to start. Question everything you do, every tool you use, every article of clothing you wear. Are they consistent with your brand? Do you have a WAP phone but use a printed calendar or a handwritten to-do list? Do you carry a briefcase? Make sure everything communicates the essence of your brand. Get used to living in the inquiry. It's a tool that will help you keep your brand clear, consistent, and constant.

### **Step 3: Evaluate and Evolve**

You've identified your brand. You've developed communications tools to reach your target audience. But how do you measure your brand success?

The key is putting metrics in up front. If you are an employee of a company, you can use performance evaluations, and informal feedback from managers and peers. Find a group of people to use as your focus group: trusted people who will provide truly honest feedback, perhaps your mentor or a performance coach. If you are a consultant, provide your clients with feedback forms after every project. Request feedback on your web site. Get as much Input as you can, to make your output as strong as it can be.

### **Evolve**

To remain relevant to their target audiences, all strong brands evolve with the times. This could mean line extensions (Starbucks is now serving teas; McDonald's is offering salads). It could be modifying the ways you communicate your brand (moving from a printed resume to a resume on CD). It could mean augmenting brand attributes as you continue to grow in your career (much like Volvo has been adding style to safety in the design of their cars).

Whatever course you take, make sure your brand continues to be authentic, differentiated, and consistent.

In a world where cities, wars, CEOs, politicians and highways are branded, you need to think about yourself in the same terms. So build and nurture your brand. There are three simple steps leading you along one clear path to success.