

Your Personal Brand

Selling Yourself and Your Value Proposition



Wal-Mart. McDonald's. Southwest Airlines. Accenture.

When you hear these names, certain images or ideas form in your mind. You, as an MBA graduate, understand this as branding and you understand the value of it in Corporate America. So why is it that you have not yet established your own personal brand?

A personal brand is how you want people to remember you and the impression that you display. An example of someone with a strong personal brand is Sarah Palin. Love her or hate her, she has a brand. Her tailored suit, her feminine shoes, the way she styles her hair, even her eyeglasses are part of her image. Then consider the way she speaks, including her accent, pace, tone, and word choice. When people think of her, they have an idea in their head of who she is and what she is capable of doing. You want to create that image for yourself as well, so when you walk into an interview or business meeting, people have an immediate and positive impression; and that brand is consistent each and every time they interact with you.

Why You Need a Brand

It may seem that personal brands are intended only for the rich and famous, but it is important that you have a brand if you want to be a successful business person.

Going back to the Sarah Palin example, think about her career. She is not known just as the former governor of Alaska or former running mate of John McCain. She is a politician. Start thinking of yourself in this same manner. You are not defined solely by your current position; you are an individual comprised of a unique set of skills, education, and experiences.

How to Discover Your Brand

So, now you know what a brand is and why you need it – but how do you figure out what yours is? The key here is to determine what it is that makes you different. When you apply for a job as a marketing executive, you are competing with hundreds of others who have similar education and credentials, so how do you stand apart from the crowd? With your brand, of course!

Think about the qualities or traits you have that others do not. Have you had really unique employment experiences? Have you travelled extensively? Been in the military? Taught courses? Do you have interesting hobbies? When considering how you are different, consider also how it can relate to the type of jobs you hope to have in the future. For example, if you have backpacked through Europe and interacted with a culturally diverse population, you can use that experience as a benefit to employers

when looking for positions in HR recruiting. Going through this process, list the features that set you apart and the benefit your potential employer would gain from it, once you get started the examples will flow. Remember, keep it to things that make you different. A degree from an Ivy League school is great, but a lot of your competition probably has the same credential. If you have an Ivy League degree, but come from a small town in Arkansas, now you have a differentiator!

Promoting and Using Your Personal Brand

So now you have your brand and want to put it to work for you. Where should you be promoting yourself and your brand?

The Basics

Business Card – If you're between positions or still a student, create a professional-looking business card for yourself. On it put your brand such as, "Experienced Sales Guru" or "Marketing Maven" whatever describes what you do, not your title.

Resume and Cover Letter – Work your brand into these documents. You will likely be publishing your job title(s), but in descriptors, be specific and include your differentiators. Remember to customize these documents to each position you apply for.

Other Familiar Options

LinkedIn – Have your title on your profile represent your personal brand, versus your current or prospective job title. Use keywords to make it searchable and include an image that reflects your brand. If you're in a creative industry like advertising, you can have a more creative image whereas someone in venture capital may stick to the professional-look of a pinstripe suit and tie look.

Portfolio – Do you have an online portfolio or samples of your work? Reflect your brand here through your web design. You may need to hire out this piece, but be clear with your design concept that you are looking for a specific brand. You may even go as far as to use colors that match those of your top-choice employer!

Where Else Can I Spread the Word?

Blogging – It seems that everyone has a blog these days. If you're doing it, start creating posts that put you in the position of "expert" so when companies look for qualified talent, they will see your contributions to the professional knowledge base. Just make sure your style of writing reflects your personal brand, whether it is personable, professional, creative, or otherwise.

Video – Don't forget YouTube! Get yourself a camera and create a video portfolio. Are you a great public speaker? Can you talk someone's ear off? If you have a way with words and want to go out on a limb, create a video resume of yourself. But again, stick to your brand!