



Making the Brand: A Guide to Personal Branding

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Michael Jordan's "Jumpman" logo on every pair of Air Jordan sneakers sold. Beyonce's signature vibrato voice. The moniker "Prince." All of these tangible and intangible characteristics have helped to develop each of these individuals as a **brand**.

A *brand* is formally defined as a name, sign or symbol used to differentiate one product and its source from its competitors. Without branding, people would not be able to tell one product from another.

In the context of **personal branding**, this concept is even more important as individuals try to rise above the clutter of the job market and industry competitors in order to occupy a unique space in the mind of another person or group. And while we typically associate branding and brand management with products such as Colgate toothpaste or fast food chains similar to McDonald's, all brands have three enduring qualities: *visibility and recognizability; freshness and relevancy; and consistency*. An individual who is successful at mastering these increases his or her chance of standing out above the crowd!

Visibility and Recognizability

One of the easiest ways to obtain visibility and recognizability (and this may sound ironic) is to be seen. We live in a digital age where technology makes this exceptional easy. Major social media tools such as Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube and Twitter offer users an opportunity to build personal and professional profiles that can be viewed by millions around the globe. No longer are you bound by time and distance. You can establish new professional relationships with the push of a button. You can further establish your name by purchasing a domain name and building a personal website independent of your social media profile (e.g. www.yournamehere.com). Additionally, join the major trade association connected to your industry. Don't just be a member in name-get out and network!

Find some aspect of your personal style or service that will make others remember you. This is doesn't mean wearing a purple suit to the next conference. This does mean a developing a unique slogan or logo for your business. You can also make a lasting impression because of your professional demeanor.

Freshness and Relevancy

The most enduring consumer brands are ones that have managed to remain fresh and relevant through the years. From Coca-Cola to Nike, this is especially true. For individuals, freshness and relevancy comes in the form of learning new

technologies to promote your personal brand, staying current with new trends in your industry, and listening to and responding to the changing needs of your target market.

Consistency

Perhaps the biggest criticism consumers have about product brands is their lack of consistency. Product quality may vary with each production run. The level of customer service may depend on whether someone was able to their time-off request approved before you called in for assistance. For individuals who are trying to excel at personal branding, there is no such thing as being fashionably late for a client meeting. Changes to your service offerings should be implemented with proper planning and with your target in mind. Conduct follow-ups when you promised. The same energy you displayed to getting a client should be the same energy you use to maintain the relationship.

Conclusion

So what's in it for you? The promise of success awaits those individuals who can be visible and recognizable to their customer base, remain fresh and relevant in an ever-changing world and consistent despite those changes. And no, you may not have the big budgets afforded to companies to attend every professional conference, but do as much as you can afford. Your future depends on it. Get out and interact with your target market and industry peers. Evaluate emerging trends carefully and adopt only the ones that make sense for your business model without alienating relevant constituencies. Be consistent in all aspects of your business. When you've mastered each of these, you're on your way to mastering personal branding!

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