

Personal Brand (July 2019)

Personal branding—is everyone doing it? The answer is most likely yes—even if we are not being intentional about it. Managing one’s personal brand, especially in the form of an online presence, is almost obligatory in today’s professional world.

In the past, personal branding was thought of more as reputation management—and was something that politicians and high-profile personalities and executives considered, but not so much the rest of us. But with today’s plethora of online communication tools, personal brands are much more widely developed and easier to ascertain.

Implications for Business

Employers are using information accessed through personal brands to help with recruiting. Some use the information to find candidates that are aligned with their goals and values. In the current hiring climate, where many job postings receive hundreds of applicants, a personal brand can help employers narrow their focus. They can more easily find the candidates who are the best fit. A personal brand can demonstrate a potential employee’s interests, initiative, and drive. Also, an employee who has a strong personal brand will most likely represent the company’s brand well, too.

Job seekers, likewise, can use personal brand to attract employers’ attention and interest. A strong personal brand helps candidates stand out and puts their best traits in the forefront. Recruiters often use social media to find potential employees, so a profile that promotes a personal brand can be beneficial. Also, the actions taken to build a personal brand can be valuable work experience. For example, if a job seeker writes a blog to build his/her brand, that skill might come in handy for a future position.

Entrepreneurs need to understand and build personal brands, perhaps more than anyone else. Often, an entrepreneur’s personal brand and company brand are one and the same. A great example of this is [Seth Godin](#), a writer, entrepreneur, and marketing guru famous partly because of the personal brand he built through his blogs and various websites. When trying to build a company and increase a customer base, entrepreneurs need to promote themselves and the purpose of their companies. This can help them to grow and attract investors.

While it is clear that a personal brand can benefit individuals and businesses alike, it also presents challenges. If someone’s personal brand doesn’t resonate with a certain audience, it could alienate customers or employers who otherwise might have considered working with that individual. S/He may be counted out before being given a fair chance. Personal branding also brings risks when it comes to maintaining the brand image over time. If you do not actively work to build your brand, or if you make a mistake or engage in something unsavory, your personal brand could be damaged irreparably. Finally, building a personal brand takes time, effort, and sometimes financial resources. It may not be worth the return on investment.

Implications for the Classroom

A personal brand is the way someone promotes and establishes him/herself to be marketable to employers, clients, colleagues, and other audiences. It can also be a tool for communicating your core beliefs and values. Your personal brand is the way people remember and recognize your identity. It is influenced by the person's focus and goals. A strong personal brand can help you stand out. It sets individuals apart from the crowd when they are seeking a job, obtaining clients, networking, or growing their careers in other ways. Personal brand is conveyed in the way a person presents him/herself visually, in his/her communication, and in his/her actions. Social media plays a large part in crafting personal brand through the content that is posted and shared.

Students should consider the personal brand they are already building. Is it one that would be attractive to employers? Why or why not? Students should also consider ways they can start to build a personal brand now. Encourage students to think about people with strong personal brands and how these brands have led to success. Students should also discuss the negative effects of the current emphasis on personal branding. Is personal branding genuine? Does it reduce a person's individuality and personality?

To help students consider their own personal brand, have them form groups of two, with each partner sharing their perception of the others' personal brand. Students can also share ideas about how to promote certain aspects of one's personal brand.

To learn more about personal branding, consider the following resources:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/goldiechan/2018/11/08/10-golden-rules-personal-branding/#677ca24c58a7>

<https://www.quicksprout.com/the-complete-guide-to-building-your-personal-brand/>

<https://www.northeastern.edu/graduate/blog/tips-for-building-your-personal-brand/>

<http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20170723-the-case-against-personal-brands>

Reader Comments

Rusty Poeppelmeier, a Bond Manager with Liberty Mutual Surety in Cincinnati, Ohio had the following comments after reading our Action Brief on personal branding:

The proliferation of social media has provided new platforms and made it easier for individuals to brand themselves. LinkedIn has also digitized the résumé and made it easy for job seekers and fillers to connect. For students, the most important thing is to avoid branding themselves with a virtual livestock brand—a permanent mark that follows you everywhere. Overstating your experience and skill set can be equally as problematic. A good interviewer will easily see right through that so don't assume you can slip it past them. It is all too easy to make a joke or comment that could come back to haunt your image later that can't be taken back. It is easy to be pulled into the politics of the time but hard to explain a profanity-laced rant five years later in an interview.

I would learn to use these new tools to brand yourself in a positive light rather than turning it into a report card on the quality of your opinion and temperament. What you choose to not say is just as important as what you do say. It is also a good personal report card on how well you collaborate and communicate. You can't win your way in the board room with intimidation or profanities. It might win the occasional battle but eventually you will sink your brand like the Titanic.