BIZCOMMUNITY

The relevance of personal branding and marketing

By Donna Rachelson

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We are all branded whether we like it or not, and if you don't take responsibility for branding and marketing yourself, others will do it for you.

Personal branding focuses on your uniqueness or your USP (unique selling proposition), how you position yourself relative to colleagues and competitors and how you are able to 'package' yourself in an authentic and noticeable way that makes you stand out.

There is a strong case for personal branding whether you are an entrepreneur or work in a corporate environment. When you think of your personal banking service or accounting firm, you generally think of your personal banker or accountant rather than the institution they represent.



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What differentiates you?

Many people haven't thought through what makes them unique and distinctive. What differentiates you from all the millions of other financial advisors, accountants or bankers out there? What makes you stand out from the clutter? If I own a corner café and you own a corner café, what's going to make someone go to your corner café as opposed to mine?

Once you have identified your USP and established the type of personal brand you want to create, it's important to ensure that you demonstrate the characteristics of your brand (your brand promise, as such) in everything you do.

The concept of positioning your brand is an important one. Personal branding can be likened to mental real estate (a concept that was first proposed by Peter Montoya), which seeks to find out which area in other peoples' head you occupy.

People are always interested in the stories we tell about ourselves. When you talk about yourself, do you reflect your brand in the best possible light? How do you effectively demonstrate that your business experience positions you in the best possible way?

The process

If you've given thought to your unique characteristics, the values that form the foundation of your brand, as well as ways in which you add measurable value, you are in a far better position to make yourself stand out. This is, however, only the first part of the process. Once you've defined and positioned your personal brand, you need to consider how to go out and market the brand in a way that is authentic and builds credibility.

Authenticity is so vital. Everything you do needs to tie up in terms of the message you're giving about your brand. You can't spend so much time on branding yourself and developing a fabulous positioning that you forget to deliver. Awesome brands always deliver.

Once you've created a personal brand, you need to focus on the five pillars of personal marketing: Learn how to create an awesome impression; build and protect your reputation; nurture and build relationships; embark on a personal visibility campaign and use others to promote word of mouth advertising about yourself.

Top tips

Here are five top tips to build your brand:

1. Get feedback from others about how they perceive your brand.
2. Really understand your uniqueness and what makes you an asset to your business or organisation - play on this; build on it and communicate it consistently.
3. Determine whether you are memorable and what you can do to become more memorable. Make sure everything you do has a 'unique' touch. Take it a step further: understand what the unique aspects are of what you do that people will talk about.
4. Develop a story about yourself and how you got to where you are today. Ensure it is compelling and evokes an emotional reaction from others. This doesn't mean being untruthful, it simply means learning which information to highlight and which unnecessary details to cut out.
5. Assess and develop your online branding. Start off by Googling yourself and assessing the results. If you're on Facebook, clean up - take off any unflattering or compromising pictures. Get active on LinkedIn, especially as it's the largest professional social network available. Use the digital space to increase your visibility.

ABOUT DONNA RACHELSON

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