

Developing your personal brand

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In a world that has 'six degrees of separation' between you and a potential employer or client, building a personal brand is essential. Your appearance, actions and words are your 'brand' and they affect how others perceive you and how they engage with you.



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According to Wikipedia, six degrees of separation is the theory that everyone and everything is six or fewer steps away, by way of introduction, from any other person in the world, so that a chain of 'a friend of a friend' statements can be made to connect any two people in a maximum of six steps.

In today's digital and connected world, people have an opportunity to make judgements about you before they actually meet you; they may see something online or be part of a conversation where your name comes up. This suggests that you need to manage carefully what the world sees and therefore thinks of you.

First impressions

First impressions transmit powerful messages. While an individual's perceptions should be based on what a person knows rather than how he or she looks, most people form an opinion about another person when they first meet and it usually relates to the other's appearance. It takes only a few seconds to form a first impression and more than half of that first impression is based on appearance. This is a good place to start when building your personal brand.

Managing your physical appearance:

Professional dress is critical in business. The way you package yourself sends a message about you, your skills and your organisation. You need to dress in a way that reflects what you want people to think of you. This does not mean spending thousands on designer clothes. It means wearing clothes that fit you well, wearing makeup and blow-drying your hair if you work in a corporate environment, carrying a file with notes and business cards rather than scrambling around with a loose pile of stationery. Keeping track of the most acceptable trends and international standards for professional dress earns you respect and provides you with a competitive edge. Executing this knowledge sends the message that you are as up-to-date in your appearance as you are in your business skills.

Managing your introductions

An elevator pitch is a brief, persuasive speech that you use to spark interest in what you do. You can also use it to create interest in a project, idea or product – or in yourself. A good elevator pitch should last no longer than a short elevator ride of 20 to 30 seconds, hence the name. It should be interesting, memorable and succinct. In addition, it needs to explain what makes you – or your organisation, product or idea – unique.

Mondtools.com suggests the following steps in developing your elevator pitch:

1. Identify your goal eg do you want to tell potential clients about your organisation? Do you have a great new product idea that you want to pitch to an executive? Alternatively, do you want a simple and engaging speech to explain what you do for a living?
2. Explain what you do in an interesting and memorable way and show how you add value eg you could say, “My company writes mobile device applications for other businesses.” However, that is not very memorable. A better explanation would be, “My company develops mobile applications that businesses use to train their staff remotely. This results in a big increase in efficiency for an organisation's managers.”
3. Communicate your unique selling position eg you could say, “We use a novel approach because unlike most other developers, we visit each organisation to find out exactly what people need. Although this takes a bit more time, it means that on average, 95% of our clients are happy with the first beta version of their app.”
4. Engage with a question eg “So, how does your organisation handle the training of new people?”
5. Practice, practice, practice until this all rolls off your tongue seamlessly.

Managing your online presence

Social media can be a very powerful tool for building your brand; it is easily transferred from one person to another through ‘Likes’, ‘Shares’, ‘Retweets’ and ‘Endorsements’. The success of many people and businesses alike is based on ratings and these ratings are visible for whole communities to view. This is the way of the future. Take care to develop a personal profile on appropriate social media platforms, create a virtual portfolio of evidence of your successes and only post content that supports the brand you want to portray.

ABOUT DEIRDRE ELPHICK-MOORE

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