

Personal branding for career success

Why personal branding?

In a 2012 Wall Street Journal article, personal branding is ranked just after clear communication as one of the four must-have job skills that today's professional should possess. Unfortunately, most people tend to associate personal branding with politicians, famed athletes and celebrities. Contrary to popular belief, personal branding is no longer reserved for these public figures. It is crucial in today's highly connected environment that job seekers create and build their personal brands. This is because if well positioned, a strong personal brand can help individuals to achieve success in their careers.

Just like Rome, a strong personal brand is not built overnight. Regardless whether the person is a straight-talking entrepreneur, flamboyant celebrity or technical guru, one needs to invest time and effort to ensure his image is always consistently positioned to portray the desired image to the public.

What's personal branding?

From a job-search perspective, personal branding when done properly helps to differentiate the candidate from the rest of the pack. In the job market, the difference could mean whether you are invited to the job interview or identified for senior roles. Instead of pursuing personal branding for the sake of doing it, one must first dig deeper to understand his/her core values and goals in life. What is it that you want others to remember you for? Fundamentally, it's discovering your own DNA - what you represent and believe in. It is important to stay authentic and real. Do not create a façade as this is not sustainable, and remember that once you are exposed, the backlash is often more detrimental than not having an identity at all.

Developing your personal brand

Sometimes, people's impression of you is different from what you are trying to project. This is often the result of not communicating your unique personal traits clearly to the target audience. Once you have defined your unique personal brand traits, you will need to develop the core message and communicate it clearly across the different platforms. Some

materials that will help to strengthen your messaging include a well-written profile and resume, a well-taken photograph in the appropriate attire, and the icing on the cake - a respectable email address. Remember that consistency is crucial to any successful personal branding endeavour.

Personal branding online

Today's technological advancements have made personal branding within reach for most people. Social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and your personal blog are excellent platforms to establish your personal brand. It is through these touch points that you increase your contacts and build your network. Never pursue personal branding half-heartedly nor try to do a rush job because a good personal brand takes time to build and maintain. There is no instant personal brand, but rest assured the efforts will reap rewards later when your personal brand is established.

The other key element of having a strong personal brand is to protect it. You must be mindful of the content that you upload to the social networking sites. Some individuals prefer to have separate accounts to help them determine what's available to the public and what's restricted to close friends only. Ensure that you post deliberately - little comments on various topics help others to understand your worldview and perspective on things and build your brand. But the key is to never post something that could return to haunt you later and tear down your brand, no matter how seemingly harmless. You want to safeguard your image and brand, as it is vulnerable as it is powerful. And also, should you feel uncomfortable of how you are being portrayed in your friends' Facebook pages, request them to remove it. Remember once it's up on the Net, it's there forever.

Personal branding - more than online

But personal brand building is more than having an online presence; you need to market yourself offline as well. This includes attending networking sessions and corporate events. Not everyone is comfortable talking to strangers but it's a skill that any executive should possess if you want to build a credible personal brand. One of the best and credible ways of building your brand is having others talking about you. Nothing beats a positive recommendation from a third party.

Nurturing your personal brand

In today's job market, personal branding is vital. Your personal brand is not cast in concrete, but is dynamic and evolves with you over time as you enter different life stages. So do not be think of it as a daunting task, but rather, take small steps one at a time. Now is as good a time as any to start small and build up slowly. As one grows older and goes through various life experiences, one will mature and so too the personal brand. There is no need to be a copycat or take extreme measures - just remember to be consistent and true to yourself; moderation is the key. As wine matures with age, so too the value your personal brand will gradually increase over time.