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Blue Papers



Your Reputation - Your Brand

## Branding: It's personal

With every brand we encounter, we have certain expectations. We base our opinions of brands on our past experiences with them, taking into account the logo, packaging and what we've heard others say about that product or service. Emotions and feelings are often evoked by brands, as well. Subsequently, what we buy and how we use it is swayed by these brand expectations.

Businesses of all sizes should take considerable care to accurately and strategically develop these expectations of themselves and their products or services in the minds of their consumers. In other words to protect and develop their reputation. Yet, it's just as important for individual professionals to undertake similar efforts where their own reputations are involved. This has come to be known as personal branding.

"Regardless of age, position in the company or the industry in which we work, all of us need to understand the importance of branding," said Tom Peters when he first coined the term "personal branding" over ten years ago.

"We are all CEOs of our own companies; ME, plc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You. It's that simple—and that hard. And that inescapable."<sup>1</sup>

While the concept of personal branding is not new, the landscape has changed as has the immediacy of personal brand management. In the age of Google™ and social networking, it's more important than ever for the individual to proactively take control of how they wish others to see them both in-person, and online.

What's more, for those looking to market themselves as professionals and thought leaders, the digital age has revealed a myriad number of ways for self-promotion. Personal branding has become a means to be found and heard online that ultimately can lead to job offers, business and personal relationships and new clients. Even if individual branding is not a priority for you, it's almost certain to be a priority for someone competing with you within the industry in which you work.

This Blue Paper® will address branding from this personal perspective, offering an introductory overview that touches on how to define your own personal brand.

## Defining brand, beyond the fluff

<sup>1</sup> Peters, Tom. "The Brand Called You." *FastCompany.com*. 31 Aug. 1997. Web. 06 Sept. 2010. <<http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/10/brandyou.html>>.



Branding is a term that gets thrown around a lot. It's also one of those words that has a somewhat elusive meaning—it can mean many things to many people. For the most part, though, a brand can be defined as a perception or emotion that is maintained by a buyer that describes their experience when doing business with an organisation (and/or individual) or consuming its products and services.<sup>2</sup>

A brand is the culmination of visual identity, experience and feeling; it's a relationship and the very embodiment of what businesses and their customers value. A brand is how a business tells consumers what to expect and brands that fail are brands that say one thing, but deliver something altogether different.

A personal brand is no different, except that the business is You and the product is your work, the services you provide and the way in which you interact with others. Personal branding is taking a stance on who you are, what you stand for, what value you offer to others and how you manage the expectations of those you interact with both professionally and personally. It is about holding yourself, your work and your communication with others to a certain set of standards.

In addition to sharing virtually the same definition, successful business brands and personal brands also consist of similar factors. Factors that branding expert and president of Reach Personal Branding™, William Arruda, defines as “The Ten Cs of Branding.”<sup>3</sup>

### 1. Competent

You can't build a brand—personal or otherwise—around ineptitude. Just like a business, a personal brand should be built on what you know best. No matter how wonderful the packaging or how great the website, if the brand can't deliver on promises it will fail. Brand yourself in the areas that you know best—be authentic.

### 2. Credible

It's not simply enough to be competent. You should be believable in delivering on the promise of your brand. This often goes hand-in-hand with competency. It would hardly make sense for Gap™ clothing to expand into auto manufacturing because they've only ever branded themselves as fashion experts. In your case, don't say you're something you're not.



<sup>2</sup> McNally, David, and Karl D. Speak. *Be Your Own Brand: a Breakthrough Formula for Standing out from the Crowd*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2003. Print.

<sup>3</sup> Arruda, William. "The 10 Cs of Branding." *MarketingProfs*. 19 Sept. 2006. Web. 06 Sept. 2010. <<http://www.marketingprofs.com/authors/693/william-arruda>>.

### 3. Clear

Strong brands are clear about what they are and what they are not. Where personal branding is concerned, this also means describing yourself in concrete ways—calling yourself a “guru,” or a “tsar” isn’t clear about anything other than your own high opinion of your work. Successful brands understand their unique promise of value and it’s this promise that sets them apart.

### 4. Compelling

If you are successfully branding yourself, you know what your focus is and who your audience is. Successful brands also have the chameleon-like ability to alter their value or proposition message to appeal to specific audiences. Personal brands should follow suit.

### 5. Consistent

Who you say you are, what you value and what you do all need to come full circle in order to be taken seriously. That’s not to say you can’t change. Madonna is the perfect example of this: She reinvents herself with each album she produces. She changes consistently—when she releases something new, it’s already known before it hits the airwaves that it’s unlike anything she’s ever done before, but it’s always clearly Madonna. Be mindful of this consistency when creating your own personal brand.



### 6. Constant

Brands are always visible to their customers and prospects—they don’t go into hiding. This factor is even truer in the case of the personal brand. Whether updating social networks, networking in-person or producing new content to appear in search engine results, you are always remaining visible to potential clients, employers and others.

### 7. Confident

Strong brands are not wishy-washy. They make decisions with conviction and deal with the consequences—positive or negative. Personal branding is all about owning who you are and what you do. Work it!

## 8. Connected

Strong personal brands are connected, not just visible. This means that you're actively building relationships with others both on and offline. Once again, the digital age has taken this factor to the next level for personal brands. Personal websites and blogs, along with sites like Facebook<sup>SM</sup>, MySpace<sup>SM</sup>, LinkedIn<sup>SM</sup>, Twitter<sup>SM</sup>, Plaxo<sup>SM</sup>, YouTube<sup>SM</sup> and others provide the perfect opportunity to connect with like-minded professionals and clients while making personal connections, too.

## 9. Committed

Branding is not a one off thing. It's ongoing and it evolves over time. Successful personal brands have the commitment of the individual, just as successful brands have the commitment of their CEOs, management teams and brand guardians.

## 10. Current

Relevancy is key when relating to others. Successful personal brands make the connection to their relationships very clear, not only stating what others can expect of them but how this can be of benefit to them.

In essence then, your personal brand is the perception others have of you—it's your reputation. While you can manage this brand and your message, at the end of the day it truly lies within the eyes of the beholder ... or the Googler.

This is why it's important to set the stage for your reputation—for your personal brand—to prime your audiences for what to expect from you, as a friend, a professional or a like-minded campaigner perhaps.

## Why does it matter?

Personal branding holds great value. Just like a business's brand is used to leverage sales and loyal customers, a personal brand is used to leverage employment and loyal relationships.

More specifically, managing a personal brand in a way that is true to an individual can offer three core benefits:

- **Visibility**

A consistent reputation helps position individuals for recognition. It's easier for others to put you into context when they can relate you to your personal brand. Eventually, it becomes almost impossible to tell which came first, the branding or the reputation: John Grisham, best-selling author; George Clooney, American movie star; Paris Hilton, famous ... why's she famous again?



- **Trust**

When someone provides you with expectations as to what it's like to work with them and these expectations are met or exceeded, trust is gained.

- **Marketability**

Picking specific qualities and goals you have and using branding as a means to say "this is what I stand for and who I am" makes it easier to provide evidence that you qualify for certain relationships.

Seth Godin, author of "Lynchpin" and social media expert succinctly explained the consequences of lax personal branding in the digital age in a recent blog post<sup>4</sup>:

"A friend advertised on Craigslist for a housekeeper.

Three interesting CVs came to the top. She Googled each person's name.

The first search turned up a MySpace page. There was a picture of the applicant, drinking beer from a funnel. Under hobbies, the first entry was, "binge drinking."

The second search turned up a personal blog (a good one, actually). The most recent entry said something like, "I am applying for some menial jobs that are below me, and I'm annoyed by it. I'll certainly quit the minute I sell a few paintings."

And the third? There were only six matches, and the sixth was from the local police department, indicating that the applicant had been arrested for shoplifting two years earlier.

Remember: Google never forgets.

Of course, you don't have to be a drunk, a thief or a bitter failure for this to backfire. Everything you do now ends up in your permanent record."

Case in point: If you're not conscientious about what information is out there that stands to impact your credibility as a professional or even just as a person, you stand to be negatively affected by this messaging. The housekeeping prospect



<sup>4</sup> Godin, Seth. "Personal Branding in the Age of Google." Seth's Blog. 28 Feb. 2009. Web. 06 Sept. 2010. <[http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths\\_blog/2009/02/personal-branding-in-the-age-of-google.html](http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2009/02/personal-branding-in-the-age-of-google.html)>.

cited by Godin could be a really nice person, fully capable of getting the job done, but that doesn't matter. Brands often have little to do with reason and everything to do with perception.

## Defining your brand

Dan Schwabel, personal branding expert, says that the single biggest mistake people make in personal branding is branding themselves just for the sake of doing it or failing to take the time to learn about what's in their best interests.<sup>5</sup>

To actively create your personal brand, start by seriously considering what it is you want to be known for and where your reputation currently stands. This consideration is often referred to as brand discovery, or the defining of your personal brand.

"Brand discovery is about figuring out what you want to do, setting goals, writing down a mission, vision and personal brand statement," said Schwabel.<sup>6</sup>

This discovery process is all about taking ownership of who you are and what you do in order to position your personal brand in the minds and opinions of others. Start this definition by establishing the following aspects of your personal brand:

- **Your roles**—what is your relationship to others? Boss, employee, client, consultant, father, mother, etc.<sup>7</sup> Be sure, though, not to box yourself into any one role—because no one person ever fulfills just one role. Your brand is a culmination of all that you do.
- **Your goals**—what is it that you're hoping to accomplish, personally and professionally?
- **Your standards**—how do you do what you do? Do you deliver high-quality work, are you creative, efficient, reliable? Take the roles you've defined and develop standards that you are not only seeking to be known for, but that you're willing to hold yourself accountable for.<sup>8</sup>



<sup>5</sup> Schwabel, Dan. "Personal Branding 101: How to Discover and Create Your Brand." *Social Media News and Web Tips*. 2009. Web. 06 Sept. 2010. <<http://mashable.com/2009/02/05/personal-branding-101/>>.

<sup>6</sup> Schwabel, Dan. "Personal Branding 101: How to Discover and Create Your Brand." *Social Media News and Web Tips*. 2009. Web. 06 Sept. 2010. <<http://mashable.com/2009/02/05/personal-branding-101/>>.

<sup>7</sup> McNally, David, and Karl D. Speak. *Be Your Own Brand: a Breakthrough Formula for Standing out from the Crowd*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2003. Print.

<sup>8</sup> McNally, David, and Karl D. Speak. *Be Your Own Brand: a Breakthrough Formula for Standing out from the Crowd*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2003. Print.

- **Your style**—how do you communicate, relate and interact with others? Are you enthusiastic, warm, caring, confident, assertive? Your style is all about the emotional image portrayed as you interact with others.<sup>9</sup>
- **Your values**—what matters to you? What is important to you, personally and professionally?  
“A successful brand is an accurate, genuine representation of the substance at the core of the originator, be it a business or an individual,” says Karl Speak, author of “Be Your Own Brand.” Speak explains that all brands have values and all people have values. Personal branding starts with, and continuously loops back to, the way you integrate your values into your life.<sup>10</sup>

After establishing these aspects, it’s necessary to then use them to create an emotional connection to your personal brand for others. As previously mentioned, this emotional tie is a pivotal factor in the success or failure of any brand.

In a recent study at the Stanford University Graduate School of Business, assistant professor of marketing, Jennifer Aker, reported on the results of a quest to determine the dimensions of brand personality.<sup>11</sup>

After using what behavioral scientists call human personality variables, researchers set out to relate personality traits—like fun, kind, diligent, etc.—to brands. Initially, they found hundreds of personality traits that consumers used to described brands, but quickly realised after analysing data that these traits could be boiled down to five distinctive factors: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness.<sup>12</sup>

Using this knowledge, connect the aspects that you’ve defined for your personal brand to one of these five emotional factors. This will be especially helpful when messaging your personal brand.

“When you honestly assess the primary emotional payoff another person gets from being in a relationship with you,” said Speak, “You can target your brand-building actions for maximum efforts.”

<sup>9</sup> McNally, David, and Karl D. Speak. *Be Your Own Brand: a Breakthrough Formula for Standing out from the Crowd*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2003. Print.

<sup>10</sup> McNally, David, and Karl D. Speak. *Be Your Own Brand: a Breakthrough Formula for Standing out from the Crowd*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2003. Print.

<sup>11</sup> McNally, David, and Karl D. Speak. *Be Your Own Brand: a Breakthrough Formula for Standing out from the Crowd*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2003. Print.

<sup>12</sup> McNally, David, and Karl D. Speak. *Be Your Own Brand: a Breakthrough Formula for Standing out from the Crowd*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2003. Print.



## The personal brand promise: Messaging your brand

As a personal brand is developed, begin with the end in mind, making sure that you follow through on your promises.

Many people develop a personal logo, a colour palette unique to their blog and website and used on CVs and covering letters but there's more to personal branding than the visuals. Messaging your brand is also about pitching your brand. This pitch is made in how you carry yourself and how you interact and communicate with others.

### How you carry yourself

There's much to be said for nonverbal communication, no pun intended. Your posture, gestures and facial expressions need to reinforce your verbal communications and support your overall personal brand in order for you to be credible and consistent.

With the prevalence of social networks, blogs and photo sharing sites, it's also important to make sure that the images you share of yourself and others online are consistent with the way in which your personal brand has been developed.

### How you interact and communicate with others

There are infinite possibilities for communicating who you are and what you're all about to others. Tom Peters recommends getting yourself out there to take advantage of as many opportunities to communicate your personal brand with others as possible. From teaching to public speaking to networking to utilising social media, it all counts.

"Everything you do and everything you don't do or choose not to do, communicate the value and character of your brand," says Peters. "Everything from the way you handle phone conversations to the e-mail messages you send to the way you conduct business in a meeting is part of the larger message you're sending about your brand."<sup>13</sup>

Part of communicating your personal brand to others comes in upholding a brand promise. A brand promise is a statement that businesses often use internally to focus efforts on what a brand should deliver to satisfy needs in the real world.<sup>14</sup>



<sup>13</sup> Peters, Tom. "The Brand Called You." *FastCompany.com*. 31 Aug. 1997. Web. 06 Sept. 2010. <<http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/10/brandyou.html>>.

<sup>14</sup> McNally, David, and Karl D. Speak. *Be Your Own Brand: a Breakthrough Formula for Standing out from the Crowd*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2003. Print.

Brand promises help define your actions in relation to your commitment to others. They often serve as a way to measure accountability and the success of a brand. Just like brands have different promises to different audiences, so too will your personal brand. Who you promise to be to your partner will differ slightly from who you promise to be as an employee, even though these promises are all built on your values, style and standards.

Take a few minutes and jot down three or four sentences, in your own words that gives a feel for who you are, who you serve and establishes your strengths and attributes with others. In addition to becoming your mantra, this statement can also be used on your CV and included in your profile on social networking sites and blogs.

## Protecting your online presence

When Peters first presented the idea of personal branding, the Internet was still very much in its early stages. Personal branding was then about in-person brand experiences—who we met, who received our CV, etc. Today, however, personal brands take on a life of their own with the help (or hindrance) of social media.

“The ubiquity of social media tools has made personal branding even more pervasive, powerful and efficient,” says Arruda. “Personal branding has moved online.”<sup>15</sup>

It’s more important than ever to seize control of your image and reputation online; don’t end up like the housekeeper in Godin’s blog post.

To get started on the right path, Arruda outlines five steps for building your brand online<sup>16</sup>:

- 1. Be real before being virtual**

Go through the personal branding process we outlined previously and get comfortable with who you are. Compile what you’ve identified as your attributes and your brand statement and keep them close at hand as reminders of who you are setting out to be.

- 2. Know where you are**

Conduct an Internet search right now. What results do you see?

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<sup>15</sup> Arruda, William. “The 10 Cs of Branding.” *MarketingProfs*. 19 Sept. 2006. Web. 06 Sept. 2010. <<http://www.marketingprofs.com/authors/693/william-arruda>>.

<sup>16</sup> Arruda, William. “The 10 Cs of Branding.” *MarketingProfs*. 19 Sept. 2006. Web. 06 Sept. 2010. <<http://www.marketingprofs.com/authors/693/william-arruda>>.



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According to an ExecuNet study, 87% of executive recruiters use the Web to research job candidates. Understanding how you appear in search results can help build the ideal plan for showcasing your value.

Social networks are so prevalent that employers are likely to expect you to have a profile or account—by allowing them some access (such as, using your real name on Twitter or allowing your Facebook profile to be found in Google searches), you are also generating controlled returns in search results. That, combined with the creation of content such as blog posts, articles and press releases written by you or pertaining to you, will help to reinforce and somewhat control your personal brand online.

### 3. Start with the basics

While surely ideal in the digital age, there isn't necessarily a need to have your own website or blog. Arruda does, however, recommend starting with the purchase of your domain name (even if you don't want a website) to take ownership online, and establish social media accounts if you have not already done so. Many people find success these days in developing simple, one-page sites that are featuring their virtual CV and contact information—these sites are a great way to produce relevant content while promoting you at the same time. As a means of monitoring the conversations taking place about you online, be sure to also establish Google Alerts to stay informed and be responsive if need be.

### 4. Connect real with virtual

Integrate your worlds completely. You're online brand should reflect your offline brand and vice versa to bolster each other. What's more, the sites and networks you are in online should promote one another, too. For example, post slides from a presentation on your LinkedIn page and promote speaking engagements on your blog. Again, social media and online networking are perfect tools to accomplish this.

### 5. Enhance and maintain

Once the basics are in place, it's time to step it up a gear. Expand communications to encompass other areas and explore thought leadership as a means of declaring and owning your personal brand.

Following these five steps is a great way to hone in and take control of your personal brand online. Make sure to move forward aligning the 'offline you' with



the 'online you' and become dedicated to engaging and developing relationships with others through your personal brand.

## Aligning with your business's brand

Speaking of alignment, not only will personal branding help an individual find employment, it can also create a synergistic relationship between one's personal brand and an employer's business brand—offering enhancement and benefits to both brands.

Internet retailer, Zappos®, is the perfect example of a successful brand that takes an aggressive stance in hiring only employees that have personal brands that are aligned similarly with the culture of the organisation. The alignment begins with the hiring process—every candidate participates in two sets of interviews. The first interview is a standard interview with a recruitment manager and his or her team to determine if someone is qualified for a position. Then, the HR department conducts a second set of interviews that aim to determine if someone fits with the Zappos brand and culture.<sup>17</sup>

Once hired, every employee—from top level executives to the factory floor—must attend the same culture training that goes over the company's history, customer service policies and the long-term vision and goals of the company. At the end of the first week of training, Zappos provides something almost unheard of: Employees are offered \$2,000 on the spot to leave if they don't want to work for Zappos or do not feel up to dedicating themselves to the culture.<sup>18</sup>

The result is a strategic mesh of personal brands with corporate brands, ensuring a fruitful and mutually beneficial relationship ... not to mention a widely successful business plan.

## Measuring your brand

A brand is a broad thing to measure, but that does not mean it's impossible. What's more, measurement, as in all areas of marketing, is crucial to future success. How will you know to change something if you don't know what isn't working?

In measuring personal brands, there are both direct and indirect tools at your disposal. Direct methods can come from Google Alerts—how many are you receiving and how relevant are they? Other social media measurements work



<sup>17</sup> Hsieh, Tony The. "Your Culture Is Your Brand." Blogs | Zappos.com. Web. 07 Sept. 2010. <<http://blogs.zappos.com/blogs/ceo-and-coo-blog/2009/01/03/your-culture-is-your-brand>>.

<sup>18</sup> Hsieh, Tony The. "Your Culture Is Your Brand." Blogs | Zappos.com. Web. 07 Sept. 2010. <<http://blogs.zappos.com/blogs/ceo-and-coo-blog/2009/01/03/your-culture-is-your-brand>>.

great here, too, such as monitoring who is linking to your website or blog and how often, website and blog traffic and social media mentions. Indirect methods involve assessing feedback from others, professional milestones such as bonuses, salary increases and title changes.

You can't always control your brand, after all you do not truly own it. But you can take the reins to shape it and to develop relationships that will come full circle to further define your brand. Go ahead, make it personal and remember: People buy brands.



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