

A Leader's Brand

Stand out in your industry

By Jeremy Miller

The Internet age could also be described as the age of curiosity. With the power of Google, your customers are searching for more and more information on you and your family business. Too often they don't find much. Maybe a corporate biography, a quote in a press release or maybe even the stats of a marathon you ran 10 years ago. Whichever it is, your customers aren't finding the kind of information that reinforces your brand or the business you lead.

Now more than ever before, personal branding is a must. You know your customers want to know more, so satisfy their curiosity. Help them to get to know what makes you remarkable, and how you and your family built such a successful business.

Personal branding is easier said than done. It isn't about starting a blog or hiring a publicist. It is about defining what makes you remarkable and packaging it for the public. Packaging yourself is the most difficult part of personal branding. Why? Because you have to say "no." You can't be all things to all people, which means you are going to have to make choices and some of them will be hard.

Start by asking yourself some basic questions:

1. What do you want to be known for?
2. What is unique about you and really stands out in your business life?
3. What value do you bring to your customers?
4. What value do you bring to your company and its core stakeholders?

Use these questions to stimulate ideas and come up with a brand statement that best describes who you are and how you contribute value in business. The statement will read something like, "I am a [insert a statement of what you do here], I create value by [add a statement of how you are remarkable here]." You will know you are onto something when you can define how your personal brand makes you money.

Once you can define how you create value, you can move onto the fun stuff: promotion. Getting known is the reason to brand yourself, and it plays right into your customers' innate curiosity. Since personal branding plays on your strengths, use your natural talents to promote yourself. If you are a great networker – network. If you are a great writer – write. If you are a great presenter – get speaking gigs. If you have a marketing department – task them to promote you. That's the benefit of being an entrepreneur. You have choice.

Marketers like Seth Godin and Guy Kawasaki have propelled their brands to great heights through their blogs. They have combined their writing skills with the ease of publishing a blog to build huge audiences. Beyond blogs,

the web is full of great promotional tools. You can take your networking skills to LinkedIn or Facebook. You can even take your presentation skills to create a podcast or series of YouTube clips. If you aren't into the Internet, get belly-to-belly with your audience. Attend networking events and other social events to let people know you are out there. It is really exciting to think of all of the options you have to promote your brand.

It doesn't matter how you promote yourself, as long as it is consistent. Personal brands gain strength through repeat exposures. One impression is an anomaly, and has very limited impact. As you gain more opportunities to connect with your audience the more they will be able to identify and connect with you. Ultimately this builds trust, and the ability to call upon these people when they are needed.

Personal branding is not a one-shot deal. You will continue to refine and evolve your brand over time. Yet if you take the time to build your brand conscientiously it will be a powerful asset in your business. It will draw customers to you, and help to connect your employees to your organization. The ultimate benefit of personal branding is freedom. When your brand evolves you will have the freedom to grow the type of business that fits you.

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