

## Brand: You

How to build a personal brand to differentiate yourself and create demand for your services.

By William Arruda

Photo by Getty Images

In the past, workers and suppliers were valued for their seniority with a company and their loyalty to it. But times have changed. Now, businesses are in a constant state of reorganization in response to the rapidly changing demands of the market. That changes the way you, as a worker or supplier, must behave. As you work with project teams, managers, and colleagues, you are, in a sense, functioning like a mini corporation. And, like a corporation, you need to differentiate

yourself and build demand for your services in your target markets. You do that with a personal brand, which distinguishes you from your colleagues and competitors and promises value just as a corporate brand does. Personal branding is not about creating an image; it's about understanding your unique combination of attributes—strengths, skills, values, and passions—and using those to differentiate yourself and guide your career decisions.

If you're **creative, dynamic, outgoing** and **whimsical**, you won't succeed by presenting yourself as **predictable, steady and focused**.

Whether you're a senior executive, the president of your own company, or a worker at a small organization, managing your brand is critical to achieving your professional goals. Building and nurturing a winning brand will help you

- understand yourself better
- raise your confidence
- increase your visibility and your compensation
- thrive during economic downturns
- expand into new business areas
- attain more interesting jobs and assignments.

Follow these steps to successful personal branding.

### Step 1: Unearth your brand.

Before you can clearly define your personal brand, you need to look at the big picture: your vision and purpose. Your vision is external; it's what you see possible in the world. Your purpose is internal; it's the role you play in supporting that vision. Gandhi said, "We must be the change we wish to see in the world."

In addition, your personal brand should be tied to your goals. Think about how you'd like your life to look in a year. Two years? Five years? Be sure to document your answers. With a good understanding of your vision, purpose, and goals, you can begin the assessment process required to develop your brand.

**Know yourself.** A successful personal brand is authentic, so you must be honest about who you are. If you're creative, dynamic, outgoing, and whimsical, you won't succeed by presenting yourself as predictable, steady, and focused.

**Know your competitors.** How can you stand out unless you know whom you're competing against? In other words, who are you really competing against? Your colleagues? A larger group at your current workplace? Others within your industry? Consider your goals: If you plan to make major career changes, your competitors aren't your current colleagues. Once you've identified your competitors, determine their brand attributes.

**Know your target.** To be successful, you must not only have a personal brand, but also communicate it to the right people. Aiming at the whole world will exhaust your resources quickly. The key to successful personal branding is focus.

Barbara Bix, founder of the business development and marketing firm BB Marketing Plus, has defined her target as follows: executives in firms or business unit directors who sell advice, data, or technology; have fewer than 50 employees; earn from US\$1 to \$10 million in revenue; command an average sales price of at least \$30,000; and depend on senior managers, or perhaps a single salesperson, to get new business.

You may not be able to define your target as narrowly as Bix has, but you should at least be able to identify specific people in or characteristics of your target audience to help you focus your messages.

### Step 2: Express yourself.

From the results of step 1, start to create a personal brand profile. List your brand attributes, create a brand statement, and generate a personal brand tagline. Each of those will help you develop a plan to communicate your own brand.

**Find the right mix.** Once you know yourself, your competitors, and your target, you can identify the ideal combination of communications tools to reach your audience effectively. Those can vary widely depending on your goals; examples include writing articles, contributing to your company's internal newsletter, and attaining regular speaking gigs. Evaluate each communication tool to select the best combination for reaching your target audience.

**Mark everything you do with your brand.** Whether you're giving a presentation, participating in a meeting, or writing a report, always bring along your brand. Ask yourself how you can connect your brand to every situation, from a project to a business meal.

**Live and breathe your brand.** Question everything you do, every tool you use, every article of clothing you wear. Are they consistent with your brand? Do you have a WAP phone but use a printed calendar or a handwritten to-do list? Make sure that your brand is clear and consistent.

### Step 3: Evaluate and evolve.

You've defined your brand and identified communication tools to reach your target audience. Now, how do you measure your brand success?

**Evaluate.** The key is establishing metrics up front. Two tools available to you as a worker are performance evaluations and informal feedback from managers and

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peers. Find a group of people you trust to give you honest feedback, and use them as your focus group. If you're a consultant, provide your clients with feedback forms after every project. Also request feedback on your Website.

**Evolve.** To remain relevant to their target audiences, all strong brands evolve over time. That could mean creating line extensions (Starbucks is now serving teas; McDonald's is offering salads) or modifying the ways you communicate your brand (moving from a printed resumé to a resumé on CD). It could also mean augmenting brand attributes as you continue to grow in your career—much like Volvo has been adding style to safety in the design of its cars.

Whatever direction you take, make sure your brand continues to be authen-

tic, differentiated, and consistent. In a world in which cities, wars, CEOs, politicians, and even highways are branded, you need to think about yourself in the same terms.

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## Brand Profile: Pat Hume

Here is one person's example of personal branding.

Pat Hume is a leader who cares deeply about the people on her team. She is warm, open, and honest and inspires loyalty among all who work for her. When she changes jobs within her organization, there is a line of people outside her door wanting to make the move with her.

Pat believes in open communication among her staff and colleagues. She has implemented innovative activities to ensure that. One example is "Chat with Pat," meetings with business partners to get honest feedback. Another is "Chug and Hug," a social event each Friday when members of her team gather on the balcony outside of her office to drink beer, talk, laugh, vent, share, get to know each other, and, yes, hug.

Here is how Pat describes her personal brand.

**Brand attributes.** Relationship builder, global, warm, sincere, credible, visionary.

**Vision.** A world where people live together with mutual respect and collaborate on programs to build a better future.

**Purpose.** To be a leader in every activity I undertake (business, social, community), bringing humanity into each project.

**Values.** Respect, sharing, communication, fun, relationships, commitment, trust, loyalty.

**Powers.** Motivation, energy, leadership, warmth, confidence, openness.

**Passions.** Family, developing people, giving back, social activities, community, global involvement.