

Personal Branding for Professional Success
(Brand Development for Communication Studies Students)

A Senior Project Presented to
The Faculty of the Communication Studies Department
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Arts

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March 2011

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Origin of Topic Interest

”In a time of drastic change, it is the learners who inherit the future. The unlearned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.”

-- Eric Hoffer

Driven by society’s collective infatuation with innovation and its collective acceptance of the correlation between “new” and “better,” characteristics such as consistency and predictability are becoming less prevalent in society’s cultural, political, professional, and educational settings – change is becoming the defining characteristic of society today.

Change: “to make the form, nature, content, future course, etc., of (something) different from what it is or from what it would be if left alone; a transformation or modification; alteration; a variation or deviation” (Dictionary Reference). To change is to be aware and to be aware is to be open to and observant of ways to advance/succeed; advancement/success comes from the furthering of one’s education.

Change is omnipresent in the professional world; thus, one’s openness, eagerness and commitment to learn greatly impact one’s professional success. This knowledge inspired me to find a project topic that would not only teach/inform one about a “new” concept common in today’s workplace, but one that could also be developed into a practical communicative tool to be utilized in the professional world.

Narrowing down my initial topic of networking to that of personal branding, I feel that my topic selection is essential for professionally succeeding in today’s highly competitive society. Dan Schawbel, Managing Partner of Millennial Branding, LLC, “the leading authority on personal branding ... recognized as a ‘personal branding guru’ by

The New York Times” (Bloomberg), and author of *Me 2.0: 4 Steps to Building Your Future* states “It should come as no surprise that college graduates face intense competition for entry-level jobs. As the competition continues to heat up, a successful job candidate has to make a strong case why he is clearly the best person for the position” (40). Having a college degree and/or extensive resume does not guarantee anything for anyone today; thus, it is extremely important that one is able to market him/herself and persuasively communicate and uphold this “market image” in the workplace. Penelope Trunk, career columnist for *The Boston Globe* states that “In a world where there are no more corporate ladders to land on, [one’s] brand is the platform [one’s] career will stand on” (Schawbel 34) ... “Personal branding is the ultimate career catalyst. It will allow [one] to achieve [one’s] long-term goals in the short term...” (Schawbel 27).

Intended Purpose of Project

My project intends to constructively analyze the concept of personal branding. Such analysis will:

1. Dissect personal branding into its specific fundamentals/components
2. Display its importance (why it is necessary to have a personal brand); identify its effects within today’s professional world (case studies)
3. Establish how one can develop his/her own brand
4. Identify how one implements and communicates his/her brand professionally (brand awareness and upholding/maintenance)
5. Provide a Case Study (theory to practice)

I plan to begin my research by discovering the relationship between communicative style and personal branding – does one’s communication style affect

his/her brand, does one's brand affect his/her communication style, or is it a combination of both? The discovery of such a relationship will enable me to transition the acquired information (concepts) into application/utilization.

Personal Branding Defined

From Apple to Coca-Cola, to Disney, Marlboro, Nordstrom, Ford Motors, Lady Gaga, and Justin Bieber, society's materialistic obsessions have cultivated a culture that both unifies and divides itself with brands and branding. One can observationally conclude that brands have become the leaders and driving forces of today's society.

A brand, as defined by The Dictionary of Business and Management, is "a name, sign or symbol used to identify items or services of the seller(s) and to differentiate them from goods of competitors" (Bates). Personalizing this definition by identifying the power/influence of the consumer, brand consultant Collin Bates states that "a brand is a collection of perceptions in the mind of the consumer." Correlating consumer perceptions with consumer emotions, Dave Dolak, "The Marketing Guy who Drives Sells," identifies a brand as "a collection of feelings and perceptions about quality, image, lifestyle, and status ... brands represent intangible qualities."

Originating from the need to identify one's possessions and products as his/her own, branding gradually progressed into an act of acquiring product superiority among consumers (Dolak) – product identification transformed from a mark of possession into a mark of quality and value, elements that have come to determine a product's, and thus, company's preeminence/influence within society.

In 1997, Tom Peters applied the fundamental concepts of company branding to individual branding: "Big companies understand the importance of brands. Today, in the

Age of the Individual, you have to be your own brand” (Peters). Introducing the idea of “personal branding” in an article published in *Fast Company*, Peters identified the need to associate one’s self with quality and value, terms that reflect stability and loyalty, to succeed in today’s highly-competitive and constantly changing society: “The brand is a promise of the value you’ll receive” (Peters).

Personal Branding:

The process by which individuals and entrepreneurs differentiate themselves and stand out from a crowd by identifying and articulating their unique *value proposition*, whether professional or personal, and then leverage it across platforms with a consistent message and image to achieve a specific goal. In this way, individuals can enhance their recognition as experts in their field, establish reputation and credibility, advance their careers, and build self-confidence. (Schawbel 4)

Emphasizing the term “value proposition,” Schawbel’s extensive definition mirrors that of Peters’; both definitions derive from value-oriented premises.

Values: “the relative worth, merit, or importance” (Dictionary Reference). In correlation to personal branding, values are what define “personal”: “what is true to you or what gives your brand meaning”; thus, a value proposition is “what your brand stands for, including your appearance, personality, and skills” (Schawbel). One’s values “serve as a compass for [one’s] actions and describe how [one] behave[s] in the world” (The Coca-Cola Company) – one’s values establish one’s mission statement, which “declares [one’s] purpose as a[n] [individual] and serves as the standard against which [one] weigh[s] [his/her] actions and decisions” (The Coca-Cola Company).

Laura Ries, coauthor of *The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding* states that one's "...brand is powerful when it stands for a word in the mind of the consumer. It doesn't matter if that brand is a product, a company, or a person – the same laws apply. The key to success is a narrow focus, a good name, and a strong position" (Schawbel 50). Schawbel supports Ries' laws by identifying how one "need[s] to approach [his/her] career in terms of *differentiation* (standing out in the crowd) and *marketability* (providing something other people want or need)" (5). Both concepts emanate from one's passions, which hold the answers to the question, "why would people choose my brand over another's?"

The identification of individual values enables one to recognize his/her passions. Defined as "a strong or extravagant fondness, enthusiasm, or desire for anything; any powerful or compelling emotion or feeling" (Dictionary Reference), passion impacts the development of one's self-purpose by identifying one's unique and authentic attributes, strengths, talents, skills, likes, reputation, and knowledge/credibility. In conclusion, by understanding one's individual passions, one is able to confidently and successfully develop and market his/her personal brand: "A well-executed personal branding campaign creates a strong, consentient, and specific association between the individual and the perceived value they offer" (Schawbel).

The Importance of Personal Branding

Present-day economic conditions have greatly impacted society's current employment trends. Instead of learning to coexist and work collectively, today's businesses are materialistically driven to socially and economically out-compete one

another. This competitive nature, in addition to outside environmental influences, has generated a conglomerate operated economy. Consequently, employment after obtaining a college degree has transitioned from being a promise into being a privilege:

“According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, since 2007, unemployment among college graduates has increased from 2.0 percent to 4.6 percent, meaning the college graduate of today is twice as likely to be out of work as the college graduate of 2007. This is the same proportional increase in unemployment experienced by the general population. For the first recession in memory, employers are cutting positions at equal rates. Things are even bleaker for graduates younger than 25 just entering the job market. Not only is unemployment here 9.6 percent, roughly the same as the national average, but according to the annual Recruiting Trends survey conducted by Michigan State, adjusted starting salaries of college graduates have decreased almost \$2,000 since 1998 to around \$34,000.”

(Stamatakis)

Schawbel furthers Stamatakis’ statistical evidence with evidence from Dickler 2010 and Greenhouse 2009:


“The competition to get jobs is intimidating; more than a million graduates will be receiving their bachelor’s or master’s degrees this year and entering the job market. Overall, there are 14.8 million people out of work, which is 6 job seekers for every job ...” (24)

More recent statistics illustrating an increase in unemployment rates among college-degree students can be seen from data collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics:

Data extracted on: February 11, 2011 (6:42:10 PM)

Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey

Series Id: LNS14027662
 Seasonally Adjusted
 Series title: (Seas) Unemployment Rate - Bachelor's degree and higher, 25 yrs. & over
 Labor force status: Unemployment rate
 Type of data: Percent or rate
 Age: 25 years and over
 Educational attainment: College graduates

Download:  [.xls](#)

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Annual
2001	1.6	1.6	2.0	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.2	2.3	2.5	2.6	2.9	3.0	
2002	2.9	2.9	2.8	2.9	2.9	3.0	3.0	2.8	2.9	3.0	2.9	2.9	
2003	3.0	3.0	3.1	3.0	3.0	3.1	3.1	3.2	3.2	3.1	3.1	3.0	
2004	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.7	2.6	2.7	2.6	2.5	2.5	2.5	
2005	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.3	2.3	2.1	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.1	
2006	2.1	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.1	2.0	1.8	2.1	1.9	1.8	1.8	
2007	2.1	1.9	1.8	1.9	2.0	2.0	2.1	2.1	2.0	2.1	2.2	2.1	
2008	2.1	2.0	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.4	2.5	2.8	2.6	3.2	3.2	3.7	
2009	3.9	4.1	4.3	4.4	4.8	4.8	4.8	4.8	5.0	4.8	4.9	4.9	
2010	4.8	4.9	4.8	4.8	4.6	4.4	4.5	4.6	4.5	4.7	5.1	4.8	
2011	4.2												

Possible explanations for this unemployment increase are identified by researchers at Michigan State: "... employers consider students produced by universities today less qualified and less prepared than those produced five years ago. Other complaints are poorer professional demeanor, less accurate expectations of workload and lower skills and competency" (Stamatakis). Employers and business' human resource departments are now

"prioritizing college major, interview skills, and demonstration of initiative as main factors when deciding whom to hire ... they've de-emphasized GPA and emphasized communication skills [one's ability to write a descriptive email to one's manager, one's ability to present to a group of colleagues, one's personality, one's ability to deal with people, etc.] as the most important candidate qualities." (Schawbel 24)

To evade acquisition of this stereotyped reputation in the professional world, it is

important that upcoming college graduates define, construct, and fully implement for themselves their own reputation – their personal brand. In an interview conducted by Marshall Goldsmith, Hubert Rampersad, “an authority on authentic personal branding” (Marshall), said, “Especially in times of financial crisis [one] need[s] to be independent and redefine [oneself] in order to create and attract new creative opportunities ... as Albert Einstein said: ‘In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.’”

According to Schawbel, “[One’s] personal brand is a reflection of two perspectives – [one’s] own perception of [one’s self] and others’ impressions of [one]. People will label [one] throughout [one’s] life” (102). To avoid being commoditized by labeling stereotypes in the corporate world, it is necessary to create a personal brand where one’s predominate and unique attributes mirror crucial elements of the company’s organizational culture (interests, needs, and wants). Essentially, an ideal personal brand derives from the unification of organizational communication principles: “leadership, passion, teamwork, and confidence” (Schawbel 44); thus, when one possesses a personal brand, one is illustrating to the potential consumer, employer, that his/her skills and values align with the mission, vision, and values of the company. This alignment enhances one’s initial professional impression that he/she is motivated to work towards enhancing the organization’s interests instead of working to solely benefit his/her own interests (personal image, materialistic success): “A strong brand signals that [one] want[s] to build customer loyalty, not just sell product [benefit one’s self]. A strong branding campaign will also signal that [one is] serious about marketing and that [one] intend[s] to be around for a while” (Dolak). Furthermore, Schawbel states:

“Branding is a marketing concept that involves creating an image that

resonates with the attitudes, behaviors, and perception of the target market. A brand creates a connection as well as an experience in the minds of other people. A brand conveys a sense of trust, and [one's] favorite brands are like [one's] best friends – they never let [one] down.” (50)

Trust, a rarity in today's materialistic, egocentric society, is an organizational principle essential for company success. By displaying a personal brand, one is promising to “deliver value upon which consumers and prospective purchasers can rely to be consistent over long periods of time ... Brands create a perception in the mind of the customer that there is no other product or service on the market that is quite like yours.” (Dolak). One's personal brand credibility: trust, loyalty, commitment, and authenticity stems from the preliminary step of *Personal Discovery*: “The goal of this phase is discovery – to learn more about [one's self], where [one is] right now, and where [one] want[s] to be in the future” (Schawbel 100). This step makes one have to transition his/her current social, professional, and economical setting into futuristic goals, which enables one to uncover his/her core values. In essence, these values cultivate one's personality and mentality, which significantly impact one's decisions and actions. Liz Strauss, founder of SOBCon and Successful Blog states “... I have to know my core strengths and values, especially the one big idea – that value that wraps within it all other bits I believe in. Soon the folks who do business with me know that I'm the one they can count on to keep that promise. Branding is knowing who I am” (Schawbel 100).

Personal branding is the linkage between essential business opposites. A strong personal brand identifies one as being consistent and flexible – consistent in regards to individual foundations (one's unique values and promises) and flexible in regards to

adaptability (being able to apply one's foundations to changing environments: situations, people, places, ideas, technology/innovations, etc.). Such linkage ensures future profitability for the business upon hiring. In précis, Christopher Bilotta, co-owner of Resource Development Company, Inc. (RDC), correlates the benefits of personal branding with the perceptions of business proprietors. He states that personal branding:

“1. Increases self-awareness. [One] develop[s] a deeper self-understanding about what constitutes [one's] unique value, which helps optimize [one's] strengths.

2. Clarifies [one's] goals. [One] become[s] focused on what to achieve and what goals [one] must set to get there.

3. Creates visibility and presence. Once [one] know[s] what is unique and compelling about [one's self], [one] can use that information to successfully communicate to [one's] target audience.

4. Differentiation. [One] gain[s] the ability to differentiate [one's self] from everyone else who has [one's] job title or who says they are in the same business as [one's self].

5. More control. [One's] personal brand puts [one] in control of [one's] career, the projects [one] work[s] on, and how [one] want[s] to deliver services.

6. Creates wealth. Strong brands charge a premium for their products and services, and differentiated job seekers who know their value can command higher salaries.

7. Staying power. Strong brands are successful despite challenges and

downturns in the economy because they stand for something unique and are differentiated.”

Susan Whitcomb, founder and president of *The Academies*, expands off Bilotta’s list by correlating the outcome of personal brands to product brands: “[One is] the product, and the employer is the consumer ... A clear and compelling career brand helps employers perceive the benefits of [one’s product].” She states that a strong personal brand will “Make others aware of [one’s] expertise ... Create in the employer’s mind a compulsion to buy (hire) [one] ... Elevate [one] from the status of a commodity (in commodities, lowest price wins).”

Development of One’s Own Brand

Synonymous to reputation, personal branding is the amalgamation of publicly conceived images and notions derived from the social presentation of an individual. Simplistically, personal branding “refers to the way other people see [an individual]” (Marshall). Thus, when developing a personal brand it is essential to remember that the intended outcome of branding one’s self is to secure “... a powerful presence and memorable identity [within the professional world] ... and to have a positive effect on the world [as a whole]. A powerful brand is one that leaves others with a positive perception” (Schawbel 107). To obtain this “positive perception,” one must develop an authentic brand (Marshall).

A reflection of one’s true character, authenticity ensures that one’s brand does not solely focus on “personal marketing, image building, selling, packaging, outward appearances, and self-promotion ... [actions that] people [primarily] perceive as [being] egocentric and selfish” (Marshall). It instead influences one to incorporate his/her

“dreams, purpose, values, uniqueness, genius, passion, specialization, characteristics, and favorite activities” (Marshall) into his/her social presentation, which over time transitions into one’s personal brand. In conclusion, authenticity serves as the foundation for the development of an effective personal brand.

Successful personal brand development originates from the sequenced development of three elements, all which stem from principles of authenticity:

- “1. A strong personal value statement
2. A plan to differentiate [one’s] brand from that of the competition
3. A powerful marketing plan” (Schawbel 107).

Element one creates self-awareness – it makes one “define and formulate [one’s] personal ambition” (Marshall); it identifies “what [one] stands for” (Schawbel 107): “who you are, what you stand for, what makes you unique/special/different, and what your values are” (Marshall). As a starting point, one should identify all the brands he/she endorses, works for, purchases, and consumes, and then identify the dynamics behind each brand: “The total equity of the brands [one] choose[s] to associate with and support is reflected in [one’s] personal brand ... they are each unique components that make up who [one is] as a brand ... [they] are all part of [one’s] promise of value” (Schawbel 107-108). Secondly, one should brainstorm a list of all the things one excels at. Schawbel recommends asking oneself the following questions:

- “ * What makes me special?
- * What do people in my network think is special about me?
- * Have I ever been complimented for a particular skill or talent?
- * Is there something I do well and am passionate about?

* What achievements in my life am I most proud of?" (121)

From this list, one should circle those items one is most passionate about. Whitcomb offers a scenario to assist this process, "Pretend [one is] packing [one's] suitcase for an important business trip ... if [one] had room to take just one item (brand) with [one] in that suitcase, what would it be?"

Element two is the transition from identification to differentiation. Once one has identified who one is, what one's professional purpose is, and what one is committed to causing (Whitcomb) in the essence of a single phrase (personal value statement), one must determine the advantages, or differentiators, to that phrase. These advantages correlate to one's strengths, "exceptional abilities," and unique life experiences (Schawbel 120). Seth Godin's "purple cow" theory depicts this element: "Imagine driving down a highway, passing a farm, and spotting a purple cow. Wouldn't that be remarkable? To be a purple cow means to be indispensable, astonishing, and buzz worthy. [One] wouldn't react the same way if the cow had traditional black and white coloring" (Schawbel 120). Paralleling to the "purple cow" theory, "unique positioning," as defined by Whitcomb, advocates one to be a St. (pronounced "Saint"), as in the beST, firST, or moST: "[Is one] the best at creating product marketing strategies, [is one] the first to have mastered how to conduct electronic meetings for [one's] work team, or [is one] the most accomplished, award-winning sales professional in [one's] company/industry" (Whitcomb)?

Element three, brand marketing strategy, is the synchronization of one's personal value statement and brand differentiators into one "powerful core message" (Schawbel 121). This message becomes one's personal brand statement: "[One's] personal brand

statement entails the total of [one's] ambition, brand objectives, specialty, service-dominant attribute, and domain" (Marshall). The effectiveness/success of such a statement lies on its marketability – what makes it, thus one, compelling (Schawbel 121)? Further defining marketability, Schawbel says, "[One's] goal is for others to be drawn in by [one's] brand and want to invest in its success by giving [one] a job, venture capital, attention, or time" (121). Whitcomb recommends a statement that reflects a 3-Point Message, such as, "I excel at the 3 R's of sales: research, relationships, and revenue – I exhaustively research clients needs, build relationships based on serving those needs, and have a track recording of driving record revenue as a result." A 3-Point Message helps one derive a statement that aligns his/her strengths and values (personal brand) with the future employer's buying motivators (Whitcomb) – in regards to company success, what is the benefit of hiring this individual?

At this point, one's personal brand statement is merely an abstract concept; it stands as nothing more than a self-fabricated perception. Without a plan to introduce and implement it within the professional world, one limits his/her opportunities to develop and demonstrate supporting infrastructures (actions) that will enable the concept to manifest into reality – become accepted and endorsed by society. As Schawbel says, "[One] need[s] to give [the personal brand statement] shape in the form of a development plan. This plan will give [one's] brand a strategic framework ... it must be flexible, because the world around [one's] brand is constantly changing" (123).

In essence, a personal brand development plan is the translation of "[one's] personal ambition and brand into manageable and measurable personal objectives, milestones, and improvement actions in a holistic and balanced way" (Marshall); thus, to

construct a development plan, one must first define what he/she believes constitutes “personal ambition” (Marshall), or “personal success” (Schawbel 123). This definition arises from a situational analysis, or analysis of “where [one] currently [is] in life” (Schawbel 127). Here, one both analyzes and constructs a personal mission statement, vision statement, and value statement (Schawbel 127), which drive one to establish present (short-term) and future (long-term) goals. Schawbel states that “by creating goals, [one is] giving [oneself] something by which to measure success” (124). Ajay Pat, a professional sales manager, furthers the essentiality of establishing goals:

“In absence of clearly defined goals, [one] become[s] strangely loyal to performing daily acts of trivia. The path to [one’s] destination is not always a straight one ... The reason most people never reach their goals is that they don't define them, or ever seriously consider them as believable or achievable. Winners can tell you where they are going, what they plan to do along the way, and who will be sharing the adventure with them ... The value of an ambitious goal is not measured by what it will bring to [one]. The worth of a goal is measured by what it will make of [one] in the process of following and attaining it ... When [one] identif[ies] what [one] want[s] and [one] set goals, [one] give[s] [oneself] a sense of purpose; [one has] a specific reason for getting out of bed in the morning. A goal points [one] in the direction that [one] need[s] to proceed in every day. Without a goal [one] will wonder through life without passion or focus.”

When one is establishing his/her goals, it is vital that goals are “SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely” (Schawbel 124); this ensures that short-term

goals align with long-term goals – present decisions and actions assist the achievement/acquiring of long-term goals. Entrepreneurial expert, Frederic Premji, recommends working backwards when identifying and establishing one’s goals:

“Identify the end result [one] want[s] and then fill in the steps [one] need to take to get there ... Imagine [oneself] a year from today when [one’s] idea has come to fruition. What [does one] see, hear and feel? What, where and with whom is this idea taking place? How did [one] get there? What was the very first thing [one] did? Bring [oneself] back to the present, and now write down the following – what single thing can [one] do today, tomorrow and the day after to put that idea into action?”

Schawbel exemplifies an ideal personal brand development plan:

Figure 5.4. Sample Development Plan

Name: Dave Jordan

Age: 20

Occupation: Student at the University of Michigan

Life Goals:

1. To be the leading authority in Web strategy consulting for small businesses
 2. To be a respected and wealthy venture capitalist
 3. To be happily married with two children and live in Los Angeles, California
-

Short-term goals:

*** 6 months:**

1. Research the Web strategy-consulting field and take courses that will help me succeed in this field
2. Purchase a new suit for professional networking
3. Develop a professional blog and profiles on social networking sites
4. Work on improving my confidence and verbal communication skills for interviews
5. Get an internship in my chosen field

*** 1 year:**

1. Complete a successful internship and get an entry-level job in Web consulting
 2. Meet key people through blogging and social networking
 3. Improve my Excel, PowerPoint, and HTML skills
-

Long-term goals:

*** 5 years:**

1. Climb the corporate ladder in a respected Web development company
2. Build management and leadership skills from executive-level management courses, mentorships, and work experience
3. Continue to develop my brand through my website and blog and by attending various networking events
4. Find a brand niche, maybe as a dynamic, young web consultant expert who specializes in serving financial institutions

*** 15 years:**

1. Become a manager with several employees under my leadership
2. Work on establishing my own successful Web development company
3. Seek out investment opportunities in other key business ventures
4. Travel the world and speak to different colleges and companies about everything I've learned
5. Meet a woman with a great sense of humor and with whom I share interest and values and start a family

Each goal listed is an opportunity to implement and further cultivate one's personal brand; it both offers and creates opportunities for one to introduce (verbal communication) and validate (actions) his/her personal brand to the professional world.

Successful Implementation and Communication of One's Own Brand

(Brand Awareness and Brand Maintenance)

To successfully implement one's personal brand into the professional world, one must transition his/her development plan into a personal marketing plan. Defined as "a strategic way for [one] to utilize [one's] personal development plan toward achieving [one's] career goals" (Schawbel 125), a personal marketing plan allows one to introduce/position, deploy, and "strategically, consistently, and effectively" (Marshall) manage one's personal brand.

A personal marketing plan begins with a market and audience analysis (Schawbel, 128). This analysis identifies current market and target audience trends: conditions and demands, which allow one to assess the best approach for introducing and positioning his/her personal brand into the professional world (Whitcomb). Schawbel recommends

utilizing “SWOT: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats” (129) for this analysis because it enables one to see where he/she stands in relation to the current market – his/her competitors; SWOT aims to “maximize [one’s] strengths, reduce [one’s] weaknesses, identify opportunities, and stabilize threats” (Schawbel 129).

Mirroring the byproducts of a traditional commodity marketing plan, a personal marketing plan enables one to first, identify and then, unify “the four P’s: product, place, price, and promotion” (Schawbel 130) into a concrete entity – a personal brand – that showcases one’s present and future professional self. With “product” correlating to the individual: “instead of selling an object, [one is] selling [oneself] – [one] become[s] the product (Schawbel 131), “place” paralleling to “not only the location of companies for which [one] want[s] to work [but] also the venues where [one] will network and meet new people,” “price” associating to “[one’s] total net value ... [one’s] value encompasses [one’s] wealth of knowledge, title, skills, and experiences that [one] brings to the table, along with any additional awards, accolades, and accomplishments [one’s] amassed,” and “promotion” comparing to the “enhance[ment of one’s] visibility ... getting [one’s] brand known” (Schawbel 132), periodic review of the four P’s enables one to monitor, update, and adjust his/her brand to mirror the environmental fluxes/trends/changes; thus, one’s brand has the potential to be an incessant marketing success.

Personal brand marketing fundamentally comes down to visibility, or one’s ability to effectively utilize communication to publicly present him/herself – one’s direct and indirect social interactions with others in the professional world: “Visibility allows [one] to spread [his/her] influence ... Visibility creates opportunities” (Schawbel 14-15). Stemming from the phrase, “ ‘it’s not whom you know, it’s who knows you’ ” (Schawbel

82), the success of one's personal branding centers on the notion of networking and building relationships. Adopting offline and online personal marketing practices is essential for professional success in today's technologically advanced society: "Over the next five year, social media marketing is projected to grow at an annual rate of 34 percent, according to Forester Research ... Interactive advertising as a whole will reach \$55 billion by 2015, accounting for 21 percent of all marketing spending ..." (Schawbel 172). Online practices include participation in virtual/social media networks such as Facebook, MySpace, MyBlogLog, Ning, LinkedIn, YouTube, Viddler, Flickr, Del.icio.us, Digg, StumbleUpon, Twitter, FriendFeed, GoogleBuzz (Schawbel 163-164). It is key to remember that the effectiveness of one's personal brand and thus, professional success, depends on the consistency of one's self-presentation; meaning, one's online profile(s) must be consistent with one's offline persona.

Theory to Practice

(An Authentic Demonstration of Personal Branding Application)

During the research phases of my senior project, I conducted an interview with Kimberly Kelly, a personal branding icon in today's real estate industry, to obtain a firsthand account on the essentialness and usefulness of personal branding. Ms. Kelly is both a real estate agent and professional polo player. She was introduced to the sport of polo when she was an undergraduate student at the University of California, Davis. With very few women polo professionals in the world, she had to learn the business from the ground up. After working as a groom in Santa Barbara, New Zealand, and Argentina and starting two clubs in the Los Angeles area: Griffith Park and Winston Polo, Ms. Kelly moved to the desert so she could play polo professionally. Throughout her eighteen years

of professional play, she traveled extensively, competing on men's teams and the occasional women's tournament teams. While competing abroad in Kauai, Hawaii, Ms. Kelly received her real estate license. Deciding to quit touring, she returned home to La Quinta, California and began selling real estate. After accruing six years of realtor experience with Ryness New Homes (Greg Norman Estate: PGA West and Medalist Golf Development) and Coldwell Banker Real Estate, Ms. Kelly decided to join the resale market: REO's and Short Sales. Currently, having obtained her National Association of Realtors and HAFA Short Sale Specialist certifications, she serves as a certified realtor specialist for HK Lane Real Estate. She specializes in rural equestrian estates, large land parcels in cultivations, and custom golf course estates. On the side, Ms. Kelly takes part in buying, training, and reselling young horses for professional polo. In addition, she participates in local polo tournaments in Indio, California.

The sequence of my interview questions mirrored the three-step process of personal brand development: developing a strong personal value statement, creating a plan to differentiate one's brand from that of others, and implementing a marketing strategy (Schawbel 107). With this, I began by asking her to identify the trait(s)/value(s) – a personal value statement – she personally classifies as essential for succeeding in today's competitive and unpredictable real estate market. Defining success by one's rate of client referrals, instead of by one's specific number of homes sold, Ms. Kelly stressed the need to be a “professional team player”:

1. Professional: being viewed as a credible expert
2. Team Player: illustrating respectability, loyalty, flexibility, adaptability, reliability, commitment, and openness/willingness to share and exchange ideas;

actively listening, communicating constructively, demonstrating problem-solving skills, not being afraid to say “I don’t know”: “If I do not have an answer, I will admit it, and then do the research required to provide my Clients with the information they need” (Kelly).

Being seen as a team player enables one to develop a reputation of integrity, which is vital in an industry that handles financial deals involving hundreds of thousands of dollars. As Ms. Kelly said, “My clients become my friends, and we share a mutual trust and respect. My past clients' referrals turn into my current and future clients ... and friends.” Other traits she identified as essential for real estate success included:

1. Self-motivation in regards to perseverance (dedication, commitment, and persistence; not being afraid to try something new/not being afraid to fail and make mistakes, not giving up)
2. High self-esteem / social confidence / self-monitoring in regards to creating and maintain relationships (networking)
3. Education in regards to “staying ahead of the game” (keeping up with and adjusting to changing environments, trends, technology/innovations, people, circumstances, cultures, etc.)

The central concept of “team playing” served as a transition from step one (establishing a personal value statement) to step two (differentiating one’s self). Utilizing her professional polo experiences, specifically her team work experiences of being one of the world’s first females to professionally compete, to differentiate herself, Ms. Kelly chose to merge her polo identity/passion with her personal value statement: “ I use the same rules in my real estate dealings that I learned on the field – team, teamwork, team

player...” (Kelly). Articulating her values, passions, and strengths to her stakeholders (employers, competitors, and clients: buyers and sellers) through the notion of teamwork and the attributes associated with being a team player, she was able to distinguish herself from the other realtors and establish a recognizable real estate identity, which over time, developed into a credible reputation.

The word “reputation” directed us to the topic of communication, or step three, the implementation of a successful marketing plan: “A reputation originates from word-of-mouth – communication,” said Ms. Kelly. “Knowing how to effectively communicate with others is crucial in this industry – not just for the financial, property sale, but also for the selling of one’s self ... one’s personal brand portrayal, one’s reputation” (Kelly). According to Ms. Kelly, effective communication means properly adjusting one’s communication style to mirror the given context and/or person with whom one is communicating. By doing so, one is able to build rapport – leading to trust, perceived credibility, and the development of a stronger relationship –, which sequentially influences one’s networking and referral leverages.

Defining communication style by paralleling it to one’s continuous need to self-educate/update one’s self: read, research, question, etc., Ms. Kelly said that in such a highly technologically advanced society, nothing is ever constant or consistent for very long: “Change is everywhere and it seems to only be happening more frequently” (Kelly). With this, one must constantly be updating him/herself on society’s communication trends. She identified social media: blogging, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, FameGame, etc. as being a somewhat “omnipresent” communication style in today’s society. She stressed the importance of blogging, or development of one’s own website, stating that

the combination of its ability to virtually showcase one's passions and strengths (writing skills, creativity, competency in keeping up with communication trends, research/knowledge on specific topics of interest, etc.) and its outlet provisions for communication to take place, enables one, if utilized correctly, to attract and build an audience. By building an audience (website visitors are now regular readers/followers), one is constructing an online community, an additional place for one to promote and manifest his/her personal brand; as a result, one's audience market broadens – one now has the ability to reach out to and interact with individuals encompassing different communication needs, wants, and desires.

Concluding Assessment

By utilizing concepts from Schawbel's personal branding framework, I can assume the role of critic in Ms. Kelly's Case Study. In step one, the primary purpose is to derive "a single sentence that covers [one's] areas of skill and mastery and who [one's] target audience is" (Schawbel 248). Further explained by Michael Goodman, author of *The Potato Chip Difference: How to Apply Leading Edge Marketing Strategies to Landing the Job You Want*, a personal value statement is "an articulation of what you're all about and what success looks like to you" (Hansen). In critique of Ms. Kelly's personal brand development, although she has identified core values, she has yet to articulate:

1. A theme that arises from her past successes – what commonality/characteristics do her experiences share?

2. Her intended contributions – in an ideal situation, how does she see herself contributing best to all possible stakeholders (individually and collectively)
3. Her personal and career goals – where does she hope to see herself in the future (short-term and long-term)?

Such identification will enable her to coordinate and consolidate her values, strengths, and goals into a single statement.

In assessment of step two, Ms. Kelly's differentiating factor seems to limit her from expanding her target audience. Although her acquired reputable identification with the polo industry is ideal in the central valley real estate industry, where polo has become imbedded in the community's cultural foundations, polo's lack of national popularity severely restricts her audience niche. In order to optimize her real estate successes, Ms. Kelly should attempt to expand on her distinguishing factor by correlating it to the real estate market at large – what has she done, past and presently, to differentiate herself from the majority of the real estate community? The identification of specific examples will provide evidence to support her emphasis on what makes her different.

As a result of amending the products of steps one and two, Ms. Kelly will be able to generate a more specific marketing plan: “product, place, price, and promotion” (Schawbel 132). The development of a concise and precise personal brand will help Ms. Kelly identify which social media to partake in/utilize and the order in which to employ them.

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