

The Importance of Personal Branding:
How to create and maintain a successful personal brand

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

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Science in Graphic Communication

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June 2014

ABSTRACT

The following project explores the importance, development process, and maintenance of personal branding. The studies apply to Cal Poly juniors and seniors who are looking to make them stand out from their peers in the professional world. Having a personal brand allows for one's individuality and creativity to speak for itself when presented to employers. Personal branding means something different to everyone; this project will help better understand the definition of having a personal brand.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

In a rapidly growing and increasingly competitive market, one must think about how they will stand apart from everyone else. By creating a personal brand, one's work can become recognizable once a consistency is established. Some people, however, do not know how to create their own personal brand or do not think they are worthy of having one. Others are unsure of how to market themselves and create a brand that they are proud to share. But creating a personal brand is much more important than people think. "Dan Schwabel, one of the nation's experts on personal branding, describes it as "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 leveraging it across platforms with a consistent message and image to achieve a specific goal"(Vitberg, 2009)." "In other words, a personal brand is a perception in the minds of others - a perception you can help create and control - that there is no one in the marketplace quite like you. Creating a personal brand is the best way you can stand out and prosper in an increasingly noisy and fast-paced business-development world (Vitberg, 2009)." Creating a personal brand can be a method of personal discovery. Whether a brand is created personally or with the help of a designer, it is most important that one's personality and values are shown through the design. The purpose of this research is to explain the process for developing a personal brand and how having a brand can benefit someone in the professional world.

Significance of the Research

Personal branding is relevant to people of all ages. However, some people might find personal branding more convenient for their lifestyles. Some consultants only like to work with people that have a more corporate background because it is easier to teach branding techniques to corporate employees (Lair, 2005). Other consultants say that everyone “has the ability to do the soul searching required to become a brand. To be able to look at oneself honestly and openly is the most powerful and important skill in becoming a good personal brand (Lair, 2005).” Although the branding market is available to people of all demographics, there can be certain disadvantage to older people.

However, “Kaputa, a self-described company and personal branding strategy coach has developed a personal branding seminar specifically for the 50+ market (Lair, 2005).” It is important to keep branding alive no matter what your age is because one can always been seen as a valuable commodity to the market. Although the target audience of personal branding is the individual themselves, the supporting audience is the people the branding is reaching. “Consultant Jan Austin states that ‘everyone must learn to use unconventional methods in order to stand out and command the attention of one’s audience’ (Lair, 2005).” It is also possible that one will target their brand for the audience that they wish to pursue. A personal brand will be built from an individual’s identity, but it should be relevant to the job market they are trying to break into.

This study of personal branding will benefit anyone who wishes to create more of an identity for them within the market. A personal brand should target an individual’s interests and create a bond between their job and personality.

Purpose of the Study

Personal branding is the way that an individual wants to be portrayed to the world. Branding is important because it creates a consistency through one's pieces of work. Creating a brand can be difficult because it involves showing oneself through a logo or in a few words. This will be the first impression that others will refer to. Once a brand is created, it must be implemented into your work and then maintained. With the competitive market that is out there today, having a strong personal brand can be what sets one apart from the rest. Social media and marketing have completely changed the traditional branding model. It has changed the mantra to "it's not who you know, but who knows you" (Vitberg, 2009). The workflow of creating a personal brand involves the understanding of what a personal brand is, the role of personal branding, learning to create and develop a personal brand, and how to maintain this brand called you.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Today most people have an understanding of what personal branding is, but most don't know how it came about. "Personal branding was invented in 1997 by Tom Peters when he said, 'we are the CEOs of our own companies...our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called you' (Shepherd, 2010)." Although some people hire others to create a brand for them, the best branding work will come from the individual themselves. "Personal branding represents a self-centered and highly individualistic approach to self marketing. (Shepherd, 2010)" Tom Peters, author of *The Brand Called You*, describes how personal branding has become increasingly popular in the digital age (Labrecque, 2010). Personal branding was once seen as a way for celebrities and politicians to make themselves better known throughout the world, specifically using social media and the web. But online tools have given everyone the power to create a brand for themselves and market their own brand to the world (Labrecque, 2010). "Advocates or personal branding recommend that a personal branding message be clear and consistent. Consequently, difficulties may arise if a person wishes to create multiple brands for different audiences. (Labrecque, 2010)"

What Does It Mean to Have a Personal Brand:

A personal brand is meant to be the virtual you. "Relationship is the key word in defining either a business brand or a personal brand. In both cases the brand recognition is an iterative process with an emotional component that describes the total experience of

the relationship” (McNally & Speak, 2004). When a client looks at your brand, they want to have a connection and relate to you and your work within a few seconds. “The word ‘brand’ does not mean the logo or marketing slogan. Rather, it is the repeated experience with a product that develops an emotional connection (McNally & Speak, 2004).” Having a personal brand will distinguish one from other people in the market and allow you to stand out as more of individual. “The key premise of personal branding is that everyone has a personal brand, or what Tom Peters calls ‘a sign of self-distinction’ ... ‘if you don’t brand yourself, someone else will’ (Shepherd, 2010).

Personal branding is meant for an individual to create a sense of self-worth in the market. “In personal branding, there is no employer attachment, but rather an individual is selling herself rather than a company related brand (Shepherd, 2010)” (Labrecque, 2010). With the power of the web today, having a personal brand means “creating and maintaining social and networking profiles, personal web sites, and blogs, as well as using search engine optimization techniques to encourage access to one’s information” (Labrecque, 2010). Search engine optimization is a way for a web page to generate a lot of views. This is done with un-paid search results, which can include putting key words in a webpage to create a higher search outcome. Labrecque said, “there are many reasons people create a personal brand including “dating, establishing friendships, or simply for self-expression.”

“In an academic context, self marketing is most clearly seen in the support provided by career specialists in educational institutions for graduates looking for a job or planning a career, as it is in the activities of numerous employment agencies. (Shepherd, 2010). Personal branding is becoming highly encouraged for all demographics for

business and social mediums. “Whether you’re a corporate executive, business owner, or freelancer, you can gain power and prestige by branding yourself. Branding means equating your name to a certain topic, product or service. Through branding, your expertise is transformed into a valuable commodity. (Brown, 2002)”

The Role of Personal Branding:

Having a personal brand is not limited to a certain person or audience. A personal brand will benefit anyone who wishes to be more publicly noticed. “The goal of all advertising is brand image retention. Customers remember who are and what you stand for (Pilcher, 2007).” “Similar to product branding, personal branding entails capturing and promoting an individual’s strengths and uniqueness to a target audience” (Kaputa, 2005)(Labrecque, 2010). Most people can agree the role of a personal brand is to attempt to set oneself apart from their competition or peers. “Personal branding is essentially an attention-getting device, and is frequently sold as the key to helping the aspiring professional to achieve competitive advantage in a crowded marketplace (Shepherd, 2010)”.

“Some personal branding consultants are careful to suggest that personal brands should only be constructed after analyzing the market and one’s competitors, and others suggest that personal branding should be pursued within a specific business niche (Shepherd, 2010).”

“Well known author and consultant on personal branding, Peter Montoya, suggests that a personal brand describes the quintessential you; it reveals ‘your strengths, values, goals and personality’, and tells people who you are, what you do and why you’re unique. It adds value to who you are, and provides competitive marketing advantage, by summarizing the current you ‘in a compelling and persuasive manner’ (Shepherd, 2010).

How do you create/ develop a personal brand?

When creating a personal brand, it is important to allow your personality to be visible. In most cases, you're putting yourself into the world to be recognizable and need to consider how you want to be perceived. "Personal brands are distinctive, relevant, and consistent while your values and commitments are distinctive. It is not a veneer, but "results from understanding the needs of others, wanting to meet those needs, and being able to do so while staying true to your values." Relevance is a process that starts by asking what others need, value, or expect. Consistency 'is a hallmark of strong brands.'(McNally & Speak, 2004)" Creating a brand requires you to think about yourself in ways you might not have before. You must pick apart your relationships, standards and values. Considering what value you see most dominant, and "from here you can develop your brand platform and promise" (McNally & Speak, 2004).

There are a few steps you can follow to create a good brand for yourself. First, discover what you want your brand to be by knowing your passions and what you're good at doing (Brown, 2002). "Your brand should be a natural extension of yourself—but not every aspect of yourself. A brand identity that displays your every interest rarely works. (Brown, 2002)" Bob Baker, author of *Poor Richard's Branding Yourself Online* suggests creating a BIS. "BIS stands for Brand Identity Statement and spells out who you are and what you do. The ideal BIS should be short and specific, while indicating a clear benefit. (Brown, 2002)" A common mistake people make is to identify their job title as who they are. You should step back and look at what you want to accomplish in the future and what impact you'd like to leave later on (Brown, 2002).

The second step is to know if your brand is marketable. It's important to know if your brand will be able to satisfy customer demands and if they are willing to pay for your services. You "should examine the environment and what's in demand (Brown, 2002)." Make sure you do research to know your competition and what else is available in the market at the moment. Norma Hollis, founder and CEO of Black Speakers Online says to listen to the feedback from the consumers. However she says to "not try to appeal to everyone. 'Focus on a niche market and narrow it down. The more you narrow it down, the more of an expert you'll become on a specific topic.'(Brown, 2002)"

The third step is to seek professional help. There are career coaches that can help promote your brand and get an outside perspective on your brand development (Brown, 2002.) The last step in developing a successful brand is promotion. Use all the resources you have available and take advantage of local opportunities. Baker (2002) says, "the internet offers a mountain of opportunity for sensible self-promoters who have a clear brand identity and a well-defined target audience. The low cost of entry makes it ideal for marketers who prefer to use creativity instead of cash to promote themselves."

As the visuals of a personal brand are being put together, "you want the logo to be unique, but not too unusual or complicated. Make sure that whatever is being used in the name and logo is something people can immediately see and know and recognize, so when a brand is built, one's equity will stick and not fall apart. If you're too similar or too different, people won't remember you. It's a tough balance" (Pilcher, 2007).

“Building your brand takes time, patience and focus. You want your outward appearance, words, tone of voice, etc. to represent an accurate picture of the inner you” (McNally & Speak, 2004).

Marketing Your Personal Brand:

“Brand positioning refers to the active communication of one’s brand identity to a specific target market. Individuals use brand positioning to highlight their positive attributes that are of value to their target audience while at the same time differentiating themselves from other individuals in the marketplace (Labrecque, 2010). “For personal online branding, brand positioning occurs through impression management” (Labrecque, 2010). It is important for the individual to weed out what is truly important and what is not aligned with their branding strategy.

With social media and marketing, it’s about being consistent and frequent updates and interactions. One must commit to keeping their personal brand up to date and a representation of themselves. Although it’s important to stay frequent, it’s more important to stay relevant (Vitberg, 2009). The work that is constantly being published with one’s brand name on it should be meaningful to the brand that they are trying to build and market. Social media is a great way to get one’s name out into the market place. Including Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and blogging websites, there are many platforms in which someone can promote themselves to the market in creative and informative ways.

Can there be negative connotations to a personal brand?

It is argued that it is not always necessary to have a personal brand developed. If you are truly talented and have a name for yourself in your profession, people will seek you out because they have heard positive things about you (Shepherd, 2010). Although this might be true, it is difficult to see how a personal brand can affect you negatively. It is just another way for you to promote yourself and put some of your best work on display to confirm the positive facts or to promote yourself to people who may not have heard about you.

Another form of “deception found in personal branding involves the raising of expectations by personal branded business individuals among their clients. When an individual supplies a product or performs a business service that falls short of the expectations formed by their brand image, the client can expect to feel short-changed” (Shepherd, 2010).

Conclusion:

Personal branding has become increasingly popular, as digital technology has evolved. Having a personal brand is becoming more common among people when it used to only be thought of for people of a certain stature. It is important to create a brand that speaks to the individual and accurately represents themselves and the person they want to promote to the market. A personal brand is a great way to put oneself on paper and have a creative representation that can allow you to have consistency through displayed work and projects. By creating a personal brand it allows a closer look at what values or characteristics one will find important. Once a brand is developed the most important part

is maintaining it. A brand will be started but never finished and it is extremely important to grow with your brand and keep it up to date. A personal brand is more than a marketing statement; it is how you want to be known and recognized as.

Chapter 3

Research Methods and Procedures

One of the best ways to present oneself in the workforce is by having a strong personal brand. The consistency of a personal brand will allow one to put themselves apart from their competition. When a strong personal brand is created, it truly allows someone to show their unique qualities and skills to market themselves. In creating a personal brand, it is important to aim your brand in the attempt of attracting the companies you wish to seek attention from. A personal brand should follow one's lifestyle and career changes. The purpose of this research was to explain the process for developing a personal brand and how having a brand can benefit someone in the professional world.

The audience that was studied in this research was Cal Poly students that are entering or currently in the workforce. It is important for these students to learn about the importance of having a personal brand and the benefits and recognition it can bring to themselves and their work.

In collecting data it is important to have reliable and recent sources that will make the research stronger. Primary data was collected by working closely with Kristen Machamer and developing a personal brand for her and her business. Interviews were also conducted with Cal Poly students that have had experience or would like more help with personal branding. Some of the best information can be collected first-hand because one can learn information beyond the questions they ask.

The collected data was compared to the secondary research found regarding personal branding. It added credibility to the findings and bolstered the argument for the importance of personal branding. After the data was analyzed, it showed that most students do not understand the importance of having a personal brand. There is a small group of students that have a brand and carry it throughout their work and understand the how having consistency will benefit them in the workforce. Overall, Cal Poly students would have a competitive edge if they were tied to a personal brand and could stand apart from their competition.

Chapter 4

Results

In data collection from Cal Poly students, there was a consensus about knowledge of personal branding; students in more artistic majors have learned about the importance of branding in courses and find that having a personal brand is important. Students in other majors did not find branding as important and most said they have limited knowledge about what a personal brand is and why it is important. Data was collected through multiple methods to get a wider variety of answers. These methods included an online survey, which was created, and available to juniors and seniors at Cal Poly, attendance at an Alpha Phi sorority meeting and, to receive personal answers to questions regarding branding, an interview was conducted with Graphic Communication student, Adam Houghton. Additionally a personal brand was developed for a local San Luis Obispo woman, Kristen Machamer.

Online Survey Collection

Below are the questions asked in the online survey:

1. Are you a junior or senior at Cal Poly?
2. What is your major?
3. Have you applied for a job with a personal resume?
4. Is your resume designed with a personal brand or identity (such as a logo)?
5. Have you ever taken a course or class that has assisted you to design a resume or brand yourself?

6. Have you felt that having a personal brand/ identity has helped you in the job search?
7. What do you think is the importance of having a personal brand?
8. What is your knowledge of personal branding?
9. Do you think personal branding is important in the professional world?
10. How would you utilize a personal brand as a student and as a professional?
11. Of the three resumes below, based on just branding and appearance, rank the examples from favorite to least and explain why you chose that order.



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education

California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, California
Bachelor of Science: Journalism
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To be conferred: March 2014

journalism

Account Intern
January 2014- Present

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work experience

Restaurant | April 2013- Present

* Server, hostess, to-go server, and checker (handling cash drawers and filing reports)

technology

Video editing/production: Adobe Premiere, iMovie, Windows Movie Maker
Print and web design: Adobe InDesign, Illustrator, Photoshop, and WordPress
Social networking: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, blogging forums
Other: Microsoft Office

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Social networking: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, blogging forums
Other: Microsoft Office



Due to repetition, below are the most common answers that were provided from the survey questions:

1. Both juniors and seniors participated in the survey: 75% seniors and 25% juniors
2. Majors that participated in the survey were: Graphic Communication, Agricultural Business, Recreation, Tourism and Parks Administration, Business, Nutrition, Journalism, Political Science
3. All participants have applied to a job with a personal resume
4. 70% of participants said their resume was designed with a logo, and they all designed it themselves. 30% did not have a logo
5. 60% of participants that took a course to help with branding took GrC 218. The other 40% have never taken a course

6. Of the students that said branding has helped in the job search, some said a brand, “gives personality, helps a resume to stand out, it’s aesthetically pleasing for the employer and makes it easier to read and understand, and giving a sense of personal touch shows you have style and care about your job.”
7. All of the answers to this question said that having a personal brand separates you from other applicants and expresses who you are.
8. The knowledge of personal branding was split between educational and common knowledge of branding, and those who have little to no knowledge of personal branding.
9. All participants said personal branding is important in the professional world—it helps one to stand out and distinguish them from the rest.
10. Participants said they utilize a personal brand in their resumes, cover letters, business cards, and personal websites
11. Of the three resumes provided, the 80% of the participants ranked them #1, #3, #2 from favorite to least. The answers all were in regards to aesthetics and felt the most attracted to the color and white space in the first resume provided. Participants agreed that the second resume was not laid out in a logical way, and was unappealing to look at in comparison to the other two options.

Alpha Phi Sorority Meeting

Alpha Phi is one of the top sororities on campus at Cal Poly. Every Sunday night they have required meetings for all the members. To get some input on personal branding from upperclassmen members, a meeting was attended on April 20th. A minimized

version of the online survey was handed out due to time constraints and to evoke more meaningful answers from the girls. After going through all the results received from 42 girls, there were commonalities between the answers.

With such a variety of majors within the sorority, it was interesting to find that 87% had a basic common knowledge of what personal branding means, but they did not know how to get a brand started on their own. 75% of the results said that it was important to have a personal brand because it sets you apart from other applicants or peers when applying for jobs/ internships. The basic knowledge of the design importance of a personal brand was to keep it simple, not too colorful, and be representative of your personality. One of the best answers received for how to utilize a personal brand as a student and professional was, “As a student, my personal brand is crucial. It goes on my resume and cover letter and it tells a lot about me. I believe that it has helped me land many internships and is crucial in my job search. It gives me credibility. As a professional, a personal brand will give me credibility among my peers. On my business cards or letter head, I think your personal brand is indicative of your level of professionalism.”

Overall the girls in Alpha Phi supported research that most people do not truly understand the importance of having a personal brand. They had a lot of common knowledge, but very few had taken classes or have had assistance in creating a personal identity. When the girls were asked whether they would find a course specifically for personal branding beneficial, all of them said yes, and they wish there was a resource readily available for them.

Interview with Adam Houghton

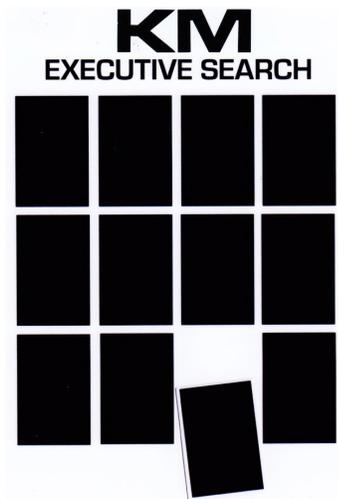
On the other side of the spectrum was talking to a student that has years of experience with developing and maintaining a personal brand. Adam Houghton is a fourth year GrC student who has taken courses, has been self-taught, and has had both successes and failures with personal identities. He believes that having a personal brand is important because it is an initial visual that reflects who you are. He has designed and re-designed his personal brand multiple times until he has felt it accurately describes him as a designer and professional. When Adam was asked what his experience had been with developing personal brands, he said, “Treat it like any other design job. Brainstorm, do drafts, keep working it until you feel it fully represents you without being too much. Create unique color palettes to make yourself stand out even more, without being too over the top.”

He has taken courses to assist with the beginning stages of developing a brand, but he has done a lot of research on his own, searching for inspiration and created brands for himself and colleagues. Although Adam has done multiple drafts, he has made sure to stick by his personal identity while looking for jobs as he is entering the professional world. He advises that everything given to a professional should have your mark on it, if applicable. It never hurts to over brand, as long as you are staying consistent with what you are producing.

Talking to Adam in comparison to the girls of Alpha Phi, it was interesting to see the difference between a designer’s perspective on the importance of branding and then a general knowledge of personal branding.

Developing a Personal Brand for Kristen Machamer

Students aren't the only people seeking personal branding advice to help establish themselves and their business. Kristen Machamer, spouse to a Cal Poly professor, was also looking to develop a personal brand to make her aspiring business more attractive to clients. Kristen had a limited knowledge on how to create a successful personal brand. Her business, as an executive search agency, works closely with client to business relationships. An initial attraction is important for her company to thrive and appeal to potential clients. In the multiple meetings with Kristen, a new logo was created with a color palate, her resume was redesigned to include her logo and branding, and a business card was created. Below are the before and after logos for Kristen's executive search agency.



Since the development of her brand, Kristen has implemented this logo throughout her professional work and said she feels more professionally established. Below are her business card and resume to include the branding.



Working with Kristen on developing her brand provided insight on how limited her knowledge was creating and maintaining a personal brand. This project proved that not everyone is able to create their own brand, but with a little bit of help, anyone can market themselves in a more professional and appealing way.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

Personal branding has become increasingly important in the past 17 years within the professional world for people of all ages. In 1997 when Tom Peters introduced the idea of having a personal brand, he changed the way people were viewed and marketed in industries. He emphasized the idea of having individuals be the head of their own identity. Since personal branding was introduced almost two decades ago, it has shifted from being a suggestion to a necessity in the professional world.

Even though there has been a general increase in knowledge in regards to personal branding, there are still many people who don't see the importance in developing a personal identity. Recall that Peters calls branding 'a sign of self-distinction'... if you don't brand yourself, someone else will. Based on the findings of this research, participants with a background in design or communications had a better knowledge of how to develop and maintain a personal brand, as well as why having a brand was important. Participants that have an education in other majors had less knowledge about branding and did not see the importance of creating an identity when entering the job market. When surveying Cal Poly juniors and seniors, the students that did not have a background in design wish there was an opportunity for them to learn more about personal branding. There are limited classes offered for students in creating a personal identity, but these courses are only offered to students within that major. If there were a more accessible resource available in regards to branding and identity, Cal Poly

students would be able to gain knowledge and advice on creating and maintaining a personal brand.

The primary and secondary research collected for this paper agreed that having a personal identity is the best way to be set apart from the competition in the workforce. A personal brand showcases an individual's strengths and personality to be more appealing for an employer. Professors, students, and authors all agree that a personal brand adds value to who you are and allows for employers to better remember who you are. Your personal brand should be a natural yet creative extension of yourself to leave a mark in your industry.

Maintaining a personal brand is just as important as the creation. Making sure your brand is consistent throughout your identity pieces and that it accurately reflects who you are, is important in having a strong brand that people will remember and see as relevant. Since social media is such a strong part of today's culture, it is also important to keep your brand consistent and clear among social media sites, especially ones that are used in a professional way, i.e. LinkedIn. A personal brand will help with expanding your personal and professional network. Since networking is one of the most important aspects of job seeking today, maintaining and sharing your brand will show help companies remember who you are and show you as an individual.

Overall, the importance of having a personal brand is to stand out from your peers and establish a creative name for yourself. By comprehending what a personal brand is and learning how to create and maintain it, one will understand how this brand called you will benefit themselves in the professional world.

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