



**Personal
Branding
is for Everyone**

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Overview

Think Steve Jobs, Jeff Bezos, Sir Richard Branson. What comes first to mind in each case – the person or their brand? Everyone's talking about personal branding. A Google search on the term throws back "About 315,000,000 results (0.48 seconds)." But what's it really all about?

Let's break it down to simplify it: "Personal" means individual, or private, while "brand" means identity – meaning literally anything that makes a person, product, or company stand out from the rest. Put them together, and it essentially means individual identity. There you go. Personal branding is the feeling you evoke in people based on the simplest of your actions, all of which represent you. It could be what you express, what you share, or even how you engage with others.

This book gives you an inside peek into the world of personal branding, and why it's more important than ever now. What if, instead of having a C-suite comprising a handful of carefully honed talent in your company, you had an entire handpicked workforce of talented thought leaders who're all expert at one or more things? That's what personal branding is about – it's about bringing out the best in people and leveraging it to advance careers as well as company objectives.

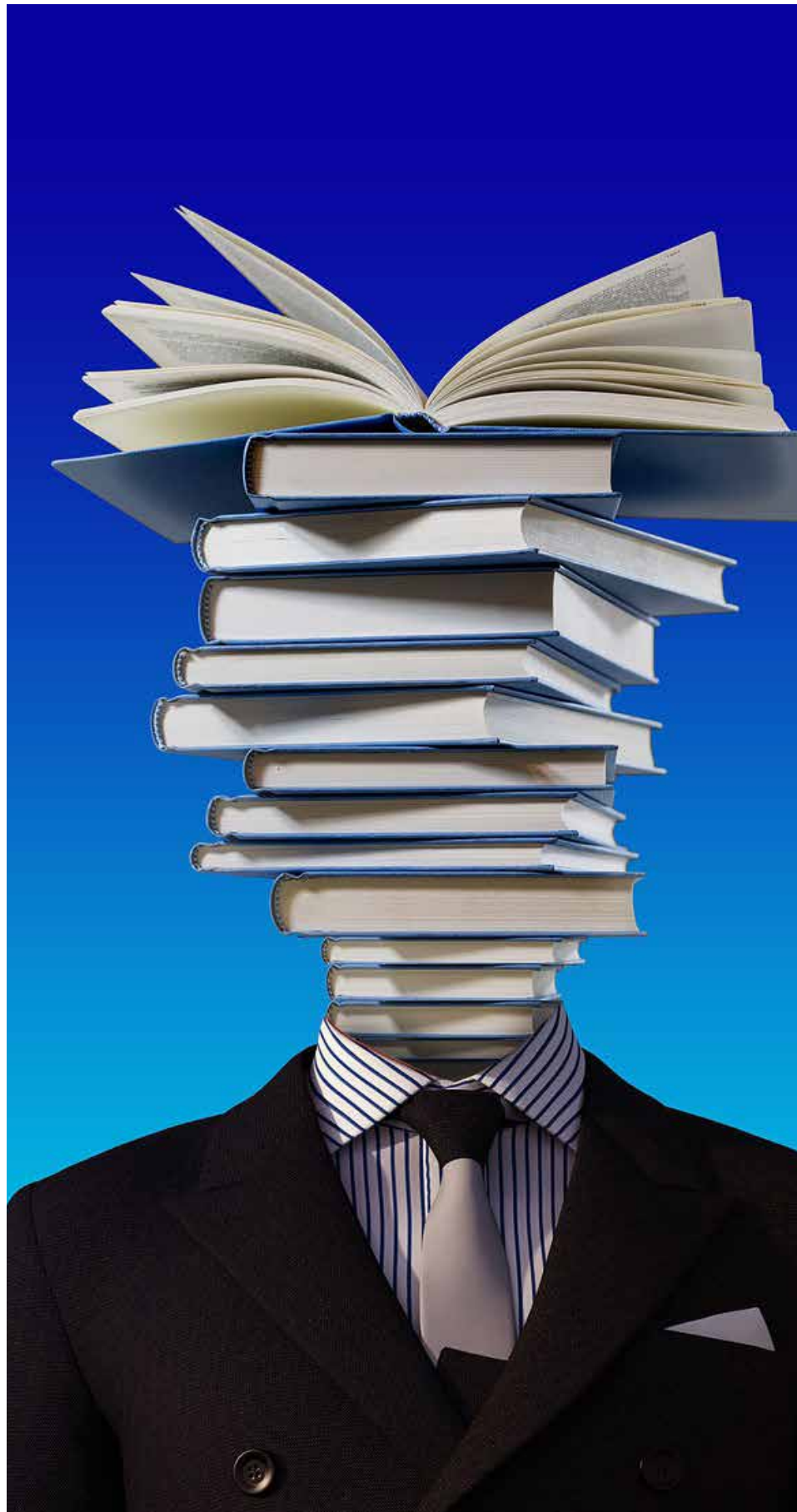
Win-win? Make it yours.



What's the sudden hype about?

Why exactly is personal branding all the rage right now? The truth is, it's always been inevitable. Whether you like it or not, you already have a personal brand. The omnipresent digital world, not to mention social media, accelerated content sharing, constant noise of news (notwithstanding its authentic or fake nature), and easy access to tools and apps meant to aid instant sharing of the tiniest of thoughts and opinions are all contributing to a living, breathing image of you. One that's always visible, and being constantly processed by your whole world of viewers.

As Amazon chief Jeff Bezos so eloquently put it, "Your brand is what people say about you when you're not in the room." The question is whether you want this brand to have a life of its own, or to leverage it to create the best authentic image of yourself.



The secret sauce to awesome personal branding



So wait. Have you had your 15 minutes of fame yet? It's way back in 1968 that Andy Warhol had reportedly said "In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes" – perhaps unwittingly alluding to the truth about personal branding. It's now 2019. Where do we stand? Does personal branding really mean that everyone can get famous? What's the secret sauce to awesome personal branding? Let's take a look at some of the more famous examples of people-brands, and what made them:

▪ Oprah Winfrey

One of the leading ladies of personal branding, she's among a select few in the world who everyone knows by the mere mention of her name. Known far and wide for her compassion, warmth, and her innate ability to challenge people to bring out the best in themselves, Oprah has also managed to leverage this personal branding to rake in the billions (Forbes estimates her net worth at US\$2.5 billion). According to Oprah, being true to your intentions and maintaining consistency are critical to successful personal branding.

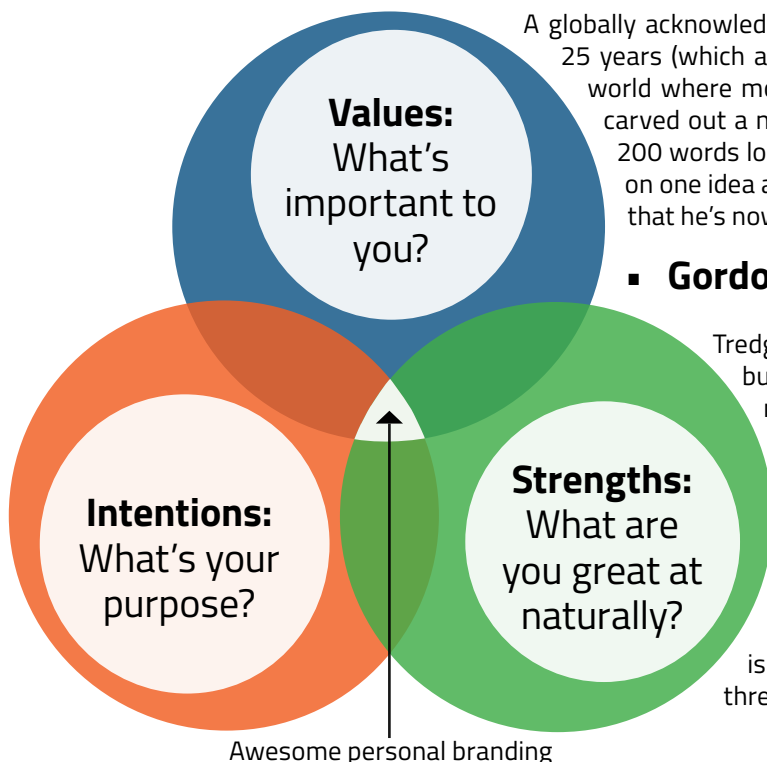
▪ Seth Godin

A globally acknowledged marketing influencer, Seth has built his reputation over 25 years (which also saw him publish over 20 thought-provoking books). In a world where most people want to create 2,000-word-long blogs, Seth has carved out a niche for himself with his mastery of bite-sized posts. About 200 words long, each post portrays a distinctly succinct style and focuses on one idea at a time. His inimitable style has created such a strong brand that he's now synonymous with short posts.

▪ Gordon Tredgold

Tredgold, a transformational leadership expert, runs his entire business world around his persona – besides a website that's his namesake, he also has a number of videos on him explaining varied leadership concepts. He consistently leverages his leadership strengths and expertise in line with his brand image, and his robust social presence and personal branding have established him as a strong influencer in the leadership niche.

From the above examples, it's clear that personal branding is essentially the sweet spot that exists at the intersection of three things – your strengths, your intentions, and your values.



Awesome personal branding



“Show me the money!” Personal branding for your career

Cut to business. What’s different in the corporate world today? Why’s there a need for personal branding in your career? The answer is simple – in today’s hectic times, companies no longer have the luxury to take risks with absolute strangers. It’s much more practical for recruiters to evaluate candidates based on their social media profiles than via their resumes, which reveal precious little about them. On the other hand, posts on social media reveal a lot more about their ideas, beliefs, and potential offerings.

Simply put, employability is in, employment is out – which means that there’s been a distinct shift in focus from the notion of knowledge, skill, and capabilities to actual practice. Like the popular Jerry McGuire quote goes, “Show me the money!!!” is the new corporate mantra. Companies are now no longer interested in what people claim they’ve done or can do, they’re much more excited about finding out what they’re capable of via authentic sources. In fact, a 2018 CareerBuilder survey has shown that seven out of 10 employers screen candidates using social media during their recruitment process.

Personal branding, when leveraged effectively, positions people strategically in the corporate world – allowing them to not just gain visibility and stand out from the crowd, but also convince prospective employers about their employability.

What does personal branding do for a company's brand?

Personal branding isn't just beneficial for individuals, it's also extremely useful as an extension of corporate branding. In other words, companies should promote a culture of personal branding among employees because it's good business – here's a laundry list of reasons telling you why:

- **There's a widespread distrust of advertisements:** A large majority of millennials in particular don't trust advertisements, and as an extension of that, the brands that create them. It's much easier to believe and trust people than faceless brands. Thus, people help personalize brands. In fact, this is also one of the major reasons for the immense popularity of effective influencer marketing these days.
- **Personal branding increases company brand awareness:** Whether you're posting socially, networking at a conference, or simply sharing ideas with a prospect, you're casting out a wider sales net for your company. Not to mention, you're increasing customer trust – thus enhancing brand trust, image, and reach for your company. The presence of individual employees online also ensures company brand visibility, which enhances top-of-mind recall. Thus, champion employees become brand ambassadors of the companies and brands they work with. They help brands reach more people, fostering believability and engagement with corporate and brand content. Finally, they establish thought leadership within as well as outside their organizations.
- **Customers are less anxious when speaking to non managers:** A well-executed personal branding strategy that ties in with overall company branding allows customers to recognize how talented and informed a company's employees are. Thus, when they need support, they're less likely to be cranky, in turn meaning that they're less likely to escalate/ demand that they be put through to someone "in charge." Personal branding oozes the ability to take charge.



How do you build a personal brand?

Personal branding is all about making people sit up and notice you from within a sea of competitors. Admittedly, that's no easy task – or maybe it's just about getting a few simple things that commonly go wrong, right. Here's that list of things:

1. **Be authentic.** Yes, we're harping on this one. Can't stress it enough. It's also the easiest and best way to have a genuine personal brand that automatically stands out from the rest. After all, who can be you better than you yourself? Monica Lin, Marketing Head at Popular Demand, says, "People can see right through a disingenuous act." Copycat branding is a complete turnoff, and in fact instigates the audience to call you out for it.

If you're an established expert on something, that alone will offer you a solid base to build your brand and reputation on.

2. **Identify your audience and build relationships with them.** Relationships are critical to building a brand. After all, brands are nothing without customer trust, and trust is based on long-term commitment. How do you get there? By empathizing with your intended audience. So the first step is to identify your audience. No one in their right mind wants to serve everybody. Zero in on the ideal personas you want to cater to – who's interested in what you offer? Who'll pay (or influence someone who will pay) for what you offer? Hack your way to people who will generate returns in one form or the other.

Next comes empathy. Find out what their problems are, what they feel about them, and how they're trying to address them. Once you've done that, work out how you can make the situation significantly better. Guess what? The relationships will follow.

3. **Tell your story.** This is the age-old sales hook. If you don't have that hook, you've already lost most of your potential audience. No one's interested in listening to

tirades about your brand, so weave a story around it – one that your audience relates with and prompts them to engage in return.

This by itself creates a self-sustaining model for your brand, because once you've hooked your audience and established that vital connect, they'll keep coming back for more – setting the perfect base for advocacy in the long term.

4. **Stay focused and consistent.** This is critical. Pick a key message, and stick to it like your life depends on it. Never lose sight, never waver. The best way to accomplish this is to resist the urge to dive right in, and to instead take your time finding a message you can naturally relate with and stick to. This message can change over time, but only in the long term. For the same reason, it's a good practice to focus on just one key message at a time – it avoids dilution as well as confusion.

Another benefit of focused messaging is that it ends up defining you, which makes it much easier for others to define you as well. This consistent focus on a niche topic makes you that much more memorable – and recognizable – in the community that you're targeting. Carry this forward and remember to ensure that your personal brand promise remains consistent offline as well, or you'll end up with the authenticity problem described in point 1! Bottom line – consistency is key.

5. **Walk the talk.** As mentioned earlier, it's extremely difficult to sustain a personal brand if you demarcate it from yourself. So just as it's important to make choices that come to you naturally when you're in the deciding phase of your brand building, the reverse is also true. Start making conscious choices that reflect your brand in personal life as well. In other words, your lifestyle should be an extension of your brand.

It might seem a little difficult at first, but if you've done steps 1 and 4 right, you'll find that this comes easily.



Conclusion

Personal branding can't be achieved overnight. It's a long-term plan, one that constantly evolves in tune with changes in your business and personal environments (the latter could simply be a result of growth). You just need to keep at it, both in terms of commitment and consistency, and you're bound to see positive results.

And while even the best experts who've built the most awesome brands know that there are no hard and fast rules to create the perfect personal brand, being unique, positive, relevant, and helpful goes a long way in creating a strong, effective brand that opens up a sea of opportunities...a brand that's all the difference between "I'm sorry, you're...?" and "I just don't know what I'd have done if it weren't for you."



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