

The History of Personal Branding

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This is how it started...

There was a time when people named their businesses after themselves. They stood behind the product they built and the service they provided.

They had pride in the quality of their work.

These people didn't read personal branding books. They didn't use Twitter. Even as early as the 1850s, personal branding was just how you did business.



It began with our grandfathers.



My grandfather knew about personal branding. In 1953, my grandfather opened Jimmy's Drive In (see above) and Jimmy's Car Wash in Panama City, Florida (both of which are still fully operational money makers). The above is my Grandfather's business card, he died in 1963 after opening 15 restaurants and 2 car washes before he was 36 years old. His businesses are still run by my Dad and Uncle. They're some of the oldest car washes in the country.

His face and signature were on the menus and advertisements, and his fans were sold from the moment they received their first bit of service. People like my grandfather understood the value of the “1,000 True Fans” philosophy before it had even been materialized.



They understood that everything hinged upon fans who believed in their brand.

The brand became huge!



All the great companies that came out of the early 1900s were built from a strong personality who stood behind a product and pushed the industry forward.

Consider those individuals behind Ford Motor Company, Sears & Roebuck, J.C. Penney, and J.C. Whitney (just to name a few).

Then we forgot...

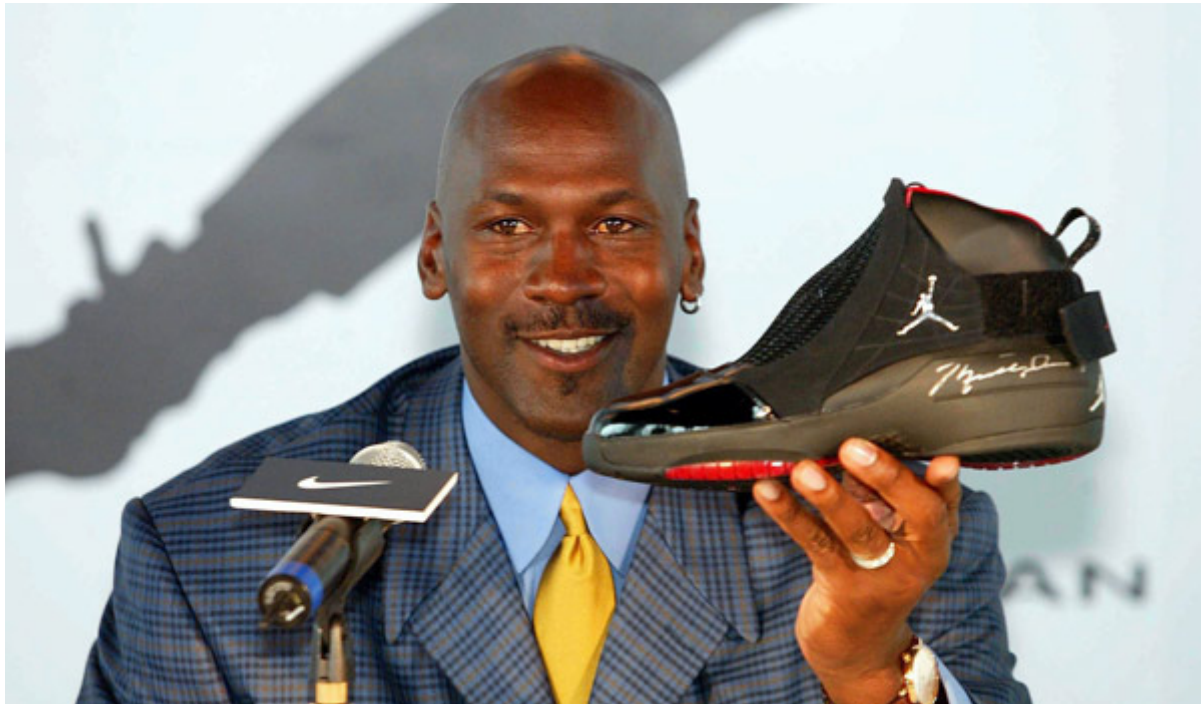
We forgot about being original. We looked to copy the larger, more successful companies.

The names of their owners were forgotten. Businesses became faceless.

Personal branding and “putting yourself out there” was looked at as being weak and unprofessional.

To love a product, we have to believe in it.

Just buy a face, The Product Endorsement.



Someone had to stand behind the product.

The product needed a face.

These corporations hired spokespeople and sought out the name licensing of others to sell their wares and services. Michael Jordan and Kathy Ireland endorsed products for a paycheck.

The Realization.

Consumers realized these spokespeople were just there for the money.

Britney Spears didn't actually make the Pepsi; she made hits.

They had been tricked!

They wanted to see the craftsmen who made their cars, not the celebrities who got paid to be in the commercial.

The Revival.

We're seeing a revival of consumers who buy based on quality, not proximity, price or what's on TV. Business owners are standing up to bring quality back to the market.

These brands tell a story and don't bother capturing a whole market, but rather serve a small group of loyal customers.

Business owners are focusing on happiness, their product and its sustainability, with less focus on hockey stick growth and big budget marketing campaigns.

Today's Lesson.

What's the takeaway from this? What can we learn from the mistakes of past generations?

Let's start with this: your product is much more about you and your story, than your logo or your Facebook fan page.

Be relentless in your kindness and let it show through in everything you produce.



Post Author

I co-founded the coolest company you've never heard of and we build simple accounting software. My tweets are crude, unfunny and usually annoying. I love my family more than breathing and I build

