

PERSONAL BRANDING.

A brand is what people say, feel and think about an organization or a person. It's a set of mental and experiential associations that, when taken together, tell the story of who you are.

There is no question that future job-search success depends on building and developing your career brand. Landing a job involves more than searching for the right opportunity. It requires selling yourself as the ideal candidate to employers.

Creating a professional brand will help others see you as a prominent expert in your industry. Your skills, Personality and values all tie into your personal brand to help employers know what is important to you, what you're good at, and what you're able to bring to their organization. Your career success depends on a personal brand, which includes your reputation, your network, and your value to a company.

Job seekers can leverage the same strategies companies use to brand products to brand themselves, including social media. All you need to do is package and present yourself in a way that grabs employers' attention and markets you to others.

MOTIVATION TO GET YOU STARTED?

1) Step up to stand out;

In today's marketplace, it's tough to stand out. Good grades and lots of extracurricular activities won't guarantee that you'll land the job of your dreams, or that you'll even land an interview. There are many qualified candidates out there.

The secret to standing out is to impress recruiters with the unique and authentic you—in person, on paper, and online.

2) Your personal brand matters;

Your brand is your reputation. It's your calling card. It's what you're known for and how people experience you. It's about bringing who you are to what you do and how you do it.

Delivering your brand clearly and consistently will create a memorable experience in the minds of those you interact with and can open doors to new opportunities.

3) Make your plan

This personal brand experience is your opportunity to learn more about yourself so you can identify your unique skills, strengths, and talents. It's your chance to tap into your values and passions to find your purpose.

These areas form the foundation of your personal brand and can help you chart a course for your career and can position you to reach your goals.

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF YOU IN PERSONAL BRANDING?

1. Be authentic.

Before you even think about your personal brand, you have to think about whom you really are and what you really want. What have you accomplished so far? What are you passionate about? What are your goals? If you find it difficult to analyze yourself, ask friends or relatives to describe your best qualities and greatest achievements.

2. Learn how to introduce yourself.

Once you're more clear on who you are, the next step is being able to communicate that to others. "Tell me about yourself" is a much harder assignment than it seems, especially in professional situations. Learn how to concisely, confidently say your name, your recent history and your goals, then practice, practice, practice until you're comfortable telling your own story.

3. Show your confidence.

While it's never a good idea to project arrogance, many students and people blunder on the side of self-criticism. Even if you feel inexperienced or awkward in professional situations, never make fun of yourself or put yourself down. If you project confidence and comfort with yourself, others will be comfortable with you.

4. Develop the tools of the trade.

Just as a company or product needs marketing materials, you need various items to "market" yourself to recruiters, networking contacts and others. These materials include your CV, cover letters, email address, voicemail message, online profiles and website or blog. Every representation helps to reinforce the brand you want to present, so be professional and consistent across each medium.

5. Show your cards.

Business cards are a great way to show your professionalism and desire to keep in touch with the people you meet, and they are increasingly popular among career-minded students. Don't worry if you don't have a title or company; just print simple, professional-looking cards with your name, phone number and email address and, if you'd like, your college and major.

6. Dress for success.

Make sure your personal appearance matches the image you want to project. Find out

what kind of clothes are appropriate for your desired industry and invest in the best you can reasonably afford. When in doubt, follow on the side of formality. A great strategy is to have one or two reliable, high-quality outfits that are appropriate for a job interview or professional event and keep them clean and pressed at all times.

7. Build a professional online image.

Everyone is Googling everyone else these days, so be vigilant about your online identity. Even if your social network settings are tight, take down any photos of partying, drinking or “unprofessional” behavior just in case.

Then, enhance your brand online by creating a strong profile and becoming active on LinkedIn, the professional social network.

8. Take a writing class.

Even in the days of IM, texting and Twitter, writing and speaking skills still matter. Use proper grammar, capitalization and spelling in all professional communications (that means never use LOLs, BRBs or ROTFLs!).

9. Ask for feedback.

Find a professional you trust—a friend, relative, professor, etc.—who will be sincere with you and ask this person to tell you if there are any areas where you’re getting in your own way. For instance, do you say “like” or “you know” too much? Do you come across as hyper, entitled or uninformed? If necessary, take a class or get some coaching in any area where you could use some polish.

10. Reassess your personal brand regularly.

Your experience, ideas and ambitions are going to evolve as your career develops, so make sure your personal brand is keeping up. Just as you should regularly update your CV, remember to regularly revisit your self-introduction, wardrobe, online profiles and other elements of your personal brand every few months. Be flexible. “Brand you” is always a dynamic work in progress.

FIVE BRANDING TIPS TO HELP YOU POSITION YOURSELF FOR CAREER SUCCESS:

1. Discover your brand.

Your goal as a job seeker is to obtain employment related to your passion.

“The core of your personal brand should be a well elaborated idea of your skills, knowledge, background and professional ambitions.” The first steps are to figure out what you want to do, to establish goals, and to develop a plan that will help you to get there. Make sure your strengths and assets match how others perceive your strengths and assets. It’s all about sending a clear message to employers about what they will be getting by hiring you.

2. Create your brand.

Develop a personal “branding tool kit” that consists of a professional-looking business card, a well-crafted CV and cover letter, and references. These tools should offer critical information about your academic and professional background and accomplishments. Be sure to customize them to each targeted position based on job description keywords, required qualifications, and the nature of the company.

3. Develop a personal style that stands out from the crowd.

Dress to impress! Even an email address can pose a great branding opportunity. Use your firstname.lastname@. In an interview, ten times! The best communicator is the one who gets the job, rather than the most qualified candidate. People are judged based on first impressions, which typically occur online with a Google search. Your personal brand is all about whom you are, what you have to offer, and what you want to be known for.

4. Showcase your brand to employers.

Social media is the best place to establish an online presence and gain greater visibility

with potential employers. Depending on your interests, you may want to develop an e-Portfolio, a website, a LinkedIn profile and/or a Facebook page to become more visible. These tools will help you to create your own advertising, to search for jobs, or to meet other professionals in your industry. A blog will help make you more visible while lending your expertise in your interest areas. This is one way to position yourself as an expert. Google yourself. Employers do!

5. Networking is one of the most direct and effective means of developing a personal brand.

Leverage networks online and through personal connections to reveal job leads. Use your contacts to connect with influential people in your desired industry. Personal branding is a critical component of any career. Personal branding uses a combination of technology and resources that will increase your visibility and awareness as a candidate. These tips will help you in landing your next job.

TOP 10 ONLINE BRANDING TIPS.

Make no mistake about it: your professional networking contacts are Googling you. Your online image is incredibly important, and your web-based networking activities can make or break your job search.

Here are 10 tips for professionalizing your virtual presence:

1. Google yourself.

Google your own name and make sure the results reflect the image you want to project. If you don't show up in search results or you don't like what appears, update or modify.

2. Email impeccably.

Email is a very important component of your online image. Since this is likely the primary way you'll interact with networking contacts and potential employers, make sure you always communicate in writing like the professional you want to become. Answer all emails within 24 hours and use proper grammar, spelling, capitalization and professional etiquette at all times, even if you're responding from your Tablet, smartphone, BlackBerry or iPhone.

3. Make sure your social networking profiles can be friendly to check.

According to a 2009 CareerBuilder survey, 45% of employers admitted to using social network scouting for applicants as part of the employment process. Would you be comfortable with a recruiter or other professional looking at any of the content you've posted online? If not, change it.

4. Become an active user of LinkedIn.

LinkedIn is the largest professional social network, so you need to be part of it. Set up a complete profile including keywords; a recruiter might use to find someone like you. Then connect with everyone you know by uploading your email contacts to see who's active on LinkedIn. Next, join groups (starting with your college alumni group) to build your connections and visibility.

5. Tweet.

While Twitter, the micro-blogging site (in which each 140-character message is called a "tweet"), seems playful to some, to others it has led to job offers and much more. Twitter is a great resource for following industry leaders, career experts and recruiters tweeting out real job opportunities. Follow people you admire, and then jump into the conversation on topics related to your professional interests or personal passions.

6. Bring offline relationships online.

Spend 30 minutes a week sending a few “hello” emails to people you haven’t spoken to in a while—former classmates, internship colleagues, family friends, etc. Ask your connections if there is anything you can do to help them, and update them on your news or career goals.

7. Share your professional status.

A great way to stay on other people’s radar screens and further build your personal brand is to update your status on Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter at least once a week with some career-related news. Tell people about events you’re attending, major projects you’ve completed, professional books you’re reading, successes you’re celebrating or any other news that you would tell someone at a networking reception or on a quick catch-up phone call.

8. Get some online bylines.

Review books on Amazon.com, and other online platforms or comment on news articles and blogs related to your industry or interests. Sharing your point of view (as long as it’s appropriate!) is a terrific form of networking and brand building. Note that for maximum exposure you should register to post any articles, comments or reviews with your real name and not a username.

9. Add links to your email signature.

Once you’ve built up a professional online presence, make sure you don’t get lost in cyberspace; you have to direct people to find you.

Include a link to your favorite pieces of online content or the URL of your Website, LinkedIn, Facebook, Google or Twitter profile in the signature line at the bottom of your email messages.

10. Stay diligent about your online presence.

Just like the web itself, your online image is a never-ending work in progress. While you don't have to monitor your online identity minute-to-minute, you should check in on your virtual self regularly. Set up a Google alert on your own name (including any misspellings or nicknames). This is particularly important before you venture out on an informational interview or formal job interview, when others are more likely to be checking you out online.

TOP 9 WAYS TO BE OPEN TO OPPORTUNITIES & CHANGE.

Change is the only constant thing in life...and in your career. Never let yourself become too comfortable and complacent.

HERE ARE 9 TIPS TO KEEP YOU ON YOUR TOES:

1. Do one thing every week to advance your career.

Spend some time each week (or each day if you're actively job hunting) reading a career advice blog, working on your public speaking skills, taking a new colleague for coffee or doing anything else to help your career prospects. Just like getting good grades or learning an instrument, being successful in your career requires daily commitment and daily action.

2. Cast a wide net.

Think broadly about all the career paths that are open to you. Don't unnecessarily limit yourself to "rising up the ladder" at a big corporation or pursuing a career based on your college major. If you're willing to be flexible, there are endless career possibilities, and we don't even know yet what jobs will arise thanks to new technologies and new markets. Think broadly and keep your eyes and ears open for new directions.

3. Get in the know.

Set up free, online keyword news alerts for employers, industries, products, events and people related to your current industry and any industries you want to explore. This will ensure that you're the very first to know about new opportunities. Plus, if you decide to make a career change, you'll have a head start on learning about that career direction.

4. Study the stars.

Pay close attention to the people you admire in your industry or elsewhere. Search their online profiles, read their articles, follow their tweets, watch what they wear and how they speak. You can learn a lot by studying and emulating the actions, attitudes and relationships of leaders and luminaries.

5. Be a leader.

Of course you don't just want to watch the stars; you want to be one! Raise your hand for opportunities to join new projects, gain new experiences and meet new people. If you have an idea for a new solution to a problem, research it and share your findings.

When you join a professional association, volunteer to lead a committee. Leadership positions are crucial to building experience, getting noticed and earning increased responsibility.

6. Keep in touch with the people you meet.

Spend maybe 30 minutes a week sending a few "hello" emails to people you haven't spoken to in a while—friends at other colleges, former teachers or employers, family friends, etc. Ask your connections if there is anything you can do to help them, and ask them to keep an eye out for career opportunities that might be a good fit for you.

Seventy to eighty percent of jobs are found through networking, so the more people you know—and who know you—the more opportunities you will be exposed to.

7. Pack your bags.

Business happens everywhere, so don't limit yourself to one location or even one country.

Many successful professionals will tell you that an overseas assignment provided their greatest professional development. Be open to relocation to another town, another state or another continent.

8. Be more than willing to learn.

If people consistently tell you that you need a certain degree, a certain class credit or a certain skill set to attain the career you want, take the advice seriously. With online and distant learning, community colleges and corporate training programs, you can find almost any course you need to fit your schedule and budget.

9. Don't be afraid to fail.

Failures will happen to you during your career, and probably already have. Some employers won't hire you. Some "dream" internships will be disappointing. Some bosses won't promote you.

Congratulations! Once you've got some certified failure experience, you'll be better at knowing how to recover the next time it happens. Failing isn't much fun. But real failure comes from never trying something in the first place.