

A high-contrast, black and white photograph of a sports car, likely a Lamborghini, with its rear light bar illuminated in a bright orange-red glow. The car is positioned diagonally across the frame, with the rear wheel and light bar being the most prominent features. The background is dark and indistinct.

Creating Your Personal Brand

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Introduction:

Starbucks, Victoria Secrets and UPS are clear examples of good branding. When you hear their names, you can easily envision their businesses. You form a picture in your mind of the way each looks and performs. For well branded entities, your expectations are typically congruent with the branding they have developed. Individuals have their own branding too and in the business world, personal branding should be intentional and methodical acts.

Do you already have a Personal Brand? You absolutely do. You may not know it yet and you may not have consciously tried to develop it, but you certainly do! Your personal brand is simply the way you are perceived by others. (For purposes of this book, we are looking in particular at how you are perceived by others in your industry or profession.)

What you eat, where you live and what you drive are parts of your personal brand. Likewise, so are your educational background, your areas of expertise, what you wear to work, your system of morals and values, the vocabulary you use, your disposition, etc. Collectively, these are called your personal brand attributes. Selecting and portraying the “right” chosen brand attributes is a little trickier. It requires consideration, intent, and attention to continual implementation. For our purposes, it is about creating and broadcasting a professional name and image for yourself that will assist you in achieving your goals.

In his book The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing, author Al Ries defines personal branding as the process that takes your skills, personality and unique characteristics and packages them into a powerful identity that lifts you above the crowd of anonymous competitors. Its purpose is to create a better perception, not a better product. It’s about wielding influence in your profession.” Peter Montoya, a recognized leader in Personal Branding, defines it as a personal identity that stimulates precise, meaningful perceptions in its audience about the values and qualities that person stands for.

To be sure, be aware that a personal brand is the public projection of certain aspects of a person’s personality, skills or values; it is not the entire human being. Confusing the two often causes people to fear that they must give up being a “real person” in exchange for creating a personal brand, which isn’t the case. A personal brand is the enduring perception of the person, not the actual person.

Benefits of Personal Branding:

You have witnessed many brands throughout your life. Some were more notable than others, but they help you identify with someone and how they want to be perceived. Look at Anthony Robbins, the great motivational speaker and Life Coach; clear, articulate, focused, strong, the list goes on. How about Richard Simmons; energetic, cheerful, optimistic, a go-getter. Both of these people know how to walk, talk, and dress the part to make one believe in them and their purpose. They stimulate precise, meaningful perceptions in their audiences about what they stand for.

Further examples are Willie Nelson's personal branding. It creates a clear image of who he is and the world his product belongs with. The same holds true for Warren Buffet and Oprah Winfrey. The personas they have created, respectively, present consistent images of who they are (or at least, who we are to see them to be) and what they represent.

Let's take a look at one more: Martha Stewart. Martha Stewart is the symbol of all things gracious and beautiful in the home. Through her growing empire of television, magazines, books and retail presence, Stewart has built a personal brand that is simple and extraordinarily powerful: the fount of all knowledge about making the perfect home.

Just as their branding helped define who they are and helped them get to where they are now, your personal branding is valuable to you and your career in a great number of ways. For starters, a consistent personal brand will help increase your confidence. You will know who you are, what you stand for and how you should act in order to be perceived according to your ideal picture. This confidence will help you make many decisions and assist in keeping you on a stable track. It will help you stand out in a crowd and gain the recognition of others. Through that, you will typically gain more visibility. Others will want to get to know you. Good branding can also enhance your prestige. When that happens, quite often it can attract the "right people" and more opportunities as well.

Your branding will help differentiate you from your competition. Throughout your career, you will be compared to others. That is just the way it is. But if you can define yourself as competent, morally upstanding, trustworthy, dependable, etc., for example, then you will likely have an advantage before someone even thinks to begin comparing your technical skills to another's.

Take the stereotypical used car salesman as an example (apologies to any used car salesmen taking this book). Faced with someone who fits that stereotypical profile and someone who seems more, let's say, "dependable and legitimate", would it be safe to guess at who you would choose to serve you, the consumer, before even knowing which one has better technical sales skills or actually knowing which one possesses more knowledge about the vehicles on the lot?

Likewise, you add a perceived value to what you are selling (or doing). Sometimes that perceived value lets you charge a premium. For example, assume you went to visit an accountant in a nice class A building, met his polite receptionist, shook hands with him as he greeted you in a nicely pleated suit, a great looking tie and freshly polished shoes, were led to a comfortably lit elegant conference room and discussed your tax matters while sipping cool water that his receptionist brought to you in a heavy crystal glass. Now picture stopping in to see an accountant in a "tax-mill" located in an average looking strip mall. You go in, grab some water in a paper cup from the cooler, and an unassuming receptionist points you to a cramped cubicle where you meet a man wearing khakis and golf shirt. Who do you expect to pay more for the preparation of your Tax Return? Who do you automatically assume knows more? Does that expectation have anything to do with their actual knowledge? You have no idea of the depth of their knowledge yet. No, it all has to do with what their overall branding suggested.

To be fair, the "tax-mill style" individual could have been the business's owner, perhaps employed twice as many staff members as the other accounting firm had, may have three times the work, twice the experience ... and may have intentionally branded the way he did to attract a certain type of clientele. Quantity of clientele over quality of clientele, perhaps. The point here is that while both scenarios may be legitimate business tactics, it is their brandings that leads to certain perceptions and makes it more acceptable (since it is expected) for the first to charge a premium. As an employee, the same can hold true for your earnings-potential. Similarly, how you are perceived can enhance your authority, believability, and leadership role.

With this introduction, let's now turn our attention to Peter Montoya's Eight Laws of Personal Branding in the next chapter.

The Eight Laws of Personal Branding

Law 1 - The Law of Specialization:

(In general) a great Personal Brand must be precise, concentrated on a single core strength, talent or achievement. You can specialize in one of many ways: ability, behavior, lifestyle, mission, product, profession, or service. In most cases, this means you don't want to be seen as a Jack-of-all Trades or as a chameleon, changing colors constantly.

Examples: Joan is the go-to person if you need to develop a spectacular Marketing Plan. Or, Jim has an uncanny ability to take disorganization and develop rock-solid processes. Perhaps, Ted is the man that can teach you how to close difficult sales.

Law 2 - The Law of Leadership:

Endowing a Personal Brand with authority and credibility demands that the source be perceived as a leader by the people in his/her domain or sphere of influence. Leadership stems from excellence, position, or recognition.

Bill Gates is a classic example. He was known for savvy as a sharp businessman with great technical abilities. As the Founder of Microsoft, he had a keen sense of what the world needed in terms of product and capability and knew how to fill the right roles within the organization he envisioned. His knack for getting others on board with his vision gained him the respect and recognition of the computing world and the business community at large.

Law 3 - The Law of Personality:

A great Personal Brand must be built on a foundation of the source's true personality, flaws, and all. You've got to be good, but you don't have to be perfect.

We have seen many personalities throughout the years guilty of indiscretions or exhibiting character flaws. It shows they are human. Look at Tennis Star John McEnroe, a former number 1 world class US tennis player, with a laundry list of trophies and awards. Known for his outstanding ability to play the sport, he was also known for his controversial displays of anger and rage. A serious "flaw", but he was, and still is, respected world-wide for his skills. In a way, his flaw also became part of his branding.

Law 4 - The Law of Distinctiveness:

An effective Personal Brand needs to be expressed in a way that is different from the competition.

If there are many clones, no one sticks out. You need to be different, memorable. You can have a Firm full of managers, but the one that sticks out may be the one that is known for approachability, concern, fairness, and the ability to transfer technical skills. Differentiation is why Tony Robbins sticks out from competing with Life Coaches and Motivational Speakers.

Law 5 - The Law of Visibility:

To be successful, a Personal Brand must be seen over and over again, until it imprints itself on the consciousness of its domain or sphere of influence. Visibility creates the presumption of quality. People assume because they see a person all the time, he/she must be superior to others offering the same product or service.

This is pretty self-explanatory. It is about making more than just an impression. It is about making a LASTING impression. In fact, a lasting impression which creates legitimate expectations that your brand satisfies, consistently.

Law 6 - The Law of Unity:

The private person behind a Personal Brand must adhere to the moral and behavioral code set down by that brand. Private conduct must mirror the public brand.

How many politicians have we seen that took nose-dives from the top of the political ladder because of indiscretions in their private lives? One can't profess to be morally upstanding and then practice immorality when they think no one is looking. This speaks to their credibility. You must pay attention to congruency in order to be the "real deal".

Law 7 - The Law of Persistence:

Any Personal Brand takes time to grow. Stick with your Personal Brand, without changing it; be unwavering and be patient.

One needs to be clear here; it takes time to develop your Personal Brand. You will go through periods of trial and error, just as you will modify and update along the way. If you want to constantly make progress and move forward with your goals, then consistent learning and improvement, for example, are essential. What this law is suggesting is that one doesn't

continually change their branding before the tree has an opportunity to develop and bear fruit. Rebranding is legitimate, but an undefined brand that is continually in flux will not set root in anyone's mind.

Law 8 - The Law of Goodwill:

A Personal Brand will produce better results and endure longer if the person behind it is perceived in a positive way. He/she must be associated with a value or idea that is recognized universally as positive and worthwhile.

It is possible to brand yourself as a thug, but that branding would be of no benefit to you whatsoever. Personal Branding focuses on the positive aspects of a person. What one can do, how he or she can do it, how reliable or intelligent they are, whether or not they can solve a problem you have, etc. People tend to look for the benefit their association with you can have, not what harm knowing and trusting you can produce.

Keep these eight Laws at the top of your mind. With these building blocks in place, we will now turn our attention to how to create your brand.

(continued on next page)

Defining Your Personal Brand

Remember that your brand is about the perception of you and the value you provide. Your brand is built on your characteristics and attributes. You possess characteristics, such as personality, skills, profession, interests, accomplishments, lifestyle, possessions, and friends. These help people decide whether or not they like you.

Your attributes are the main characteristics that instantly signify powerful benefits to your target market and are the foundation of your brand. Your single most powerful attribute is your leading attribute and must be emphasized. It should be the first idea that enters someone's mind when they think of you.

The process of inventing your brand starts with a self-assessment. Ask yourself the following questions and be painfully honest with yourself:

- What personal attributes are worthy of promoting?
- What are my challenges?
- In what areas could I improve?
- What are my brand assets?
- What are my brand deficits?
- How do I want to be perceived?
- Do I overpromise and under-deliver?
- Am I reliable?
- Am I confident/do I promote confidence in others?

Next, ask your friends/co-workers/family how they currently perceive you. Ask:

- How do you perceive me?
- How do you think others perceive me?
- What do you believe are my top three personal strengths?
- What three areas in my life need improvement or development?
- Am I a team player/leader?
- Am I reliable?
- Am I manipulative or sincere with others?
- What else should know about how I am viewed by others?

Now, in A Business Sense, Ask Yourself These Additional Questions:

- What persona do I want/need to exhibit?
- Do I dress the part?
- Do I speak the part?
- Are my mannerisms congruent with the persona I wish to portray?
- What continuing education should I invest time with?
- Am I aligned with the right people?
- Am I confident?
- Who would I consider to be the model of what I wish to portray?

Sum it up:

Spend (invest!) some time with the results of your inquiries and begin to define the personal branding you wish to develop – who you are and how you want others to see you. Use the SMART acronym below for this process. Then, explore how you can make your refined brand known to your market and act on it with consistency.

Specific: Understandable and simple to communicate to others

Measurable: Can be checked and tracked

Achievable: Can be reached, not “pie in the sky”

Relevant: Allowing you to stretch, but still reasonable

Time-bound: Set in a framework of completion; accompanied by a due date

On the following pages are worksheets for you to download and use. Download them now, before going any further. You are on your way to developing your Personal Brand!

In the chapter following, we will discuss ways to promote your brand.

PERSONAL BRANDING DEVELOPMENT WORKSHEET

Self-Assessment:

What personal attributes are worthy of promoting?

What are my challenges?

In what areas could I improve?

What are my brand assets?

What are my brand deficits?

How do I want to be perceived?

Do I overpromise and then under-deliver?

Am I reliable?

Am I confident/do I promote confidence in others?

Ask Friends/Family How They Perceive You:

How do you perceive me?

How do you think others perceive me?

What do you believe are my top three personal strengths?

What three areas in my life need improvement or development?

Am I a team player/leader?

Am I reliable?

Am I manipulative or sincere with others?

What have I not asked you that you think I should know about how I am viewed by others?

In a Business Sense, Now Ask Yourself These Additional Questions:

What persona do I want/need to exhibit?

Do I dress the part?

Do I speak the part?

Are my mannerisms congruent with the persona I wish to portray?

What continuing education should I *invest* time with?

Am I aligned with the right people?

Am I confident?

Who would I consider to be the model of what I wish to portray?

The Next Step:

Next, spend some time with the results to your inquiries and begin to define the personal branding you wish to develop – who you are and how you want others to see you. Use the SMART acronym for this process. Then, explore how you can make your refined brand known to your market and act on it with consistency.

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WORKSPACE

Promoting Your Personal Brand

Now that you have narrowed down who you are and how you want others to see you, it is time to discuss ways to promote yourself. Keep in mind too, that you will refine your branding proposition as time progresses. Just remember, it is a refinement process, not one in which you make major changes on a consistent basis. If you subsequently find that you need an entirely different brand, it must be a process that is carefully undertaken over an extended period of time. Very gradual is best. For that reason, it is highly recommended that you spend a fair amount of time now determining the base layers of your brand.

The promotion of your Personal Brand is based on a Statement that you started making in the previous chapter. It is the base theme that acts as a point of checks and balances against all that you will do going forward. This Statement and its promotion should communicate who you are, what you do, what substantiation you have (accolades, awards, reputation, etc), how you want to appear, what qualities you want to be known for and what your passions are. Your Statement of Personal Branding should also imply a sense of value to your targeted employers/customers so they see you as someone they simply cannot go another day without. Review what you have written so far and revise as necessary.

Once you are comfortable with the Statement of Personal Branding you have developed, you will want to incorporate elements of it into your “personal commercials”. You might do this by creating a slogan and possibly an icon that will come to people’s minds whenever they think of you. These will create name recognition, educate people on what you do, and get you noticed. Can you think of any popular slogans that people generally associate with their respective companies? Many people devise personal slogans and put them in the signature plates of their emails.

A personal slogan must:

Either tell people what you do and for whom you do it; “Network Consulting for the Semiconductor Industry.”

-or-

Tell them what you do and the benefit of your services; “Legal Representation that Keeps Divorce Civil.”

It is not enough to simply be a name people know; you have to be known for something. Begin using these on everything, your business card, stationery, personal brochure, personal postcards, handouts at speaking engagements, etc. (Before we go any further, be sure of this: that first and foremost you must walk and talk your personal brand. Only once you start

doing this, will any of your other efforts make a difference.)

Typical Branding Materials:

- Business Cards – Name, Logo (Icon/Slogan), Contact Info, Website
- Stationary (letterhead)
- Resume – sales document
- Personal Brochures – for building rapport, lets people know you and feel a sense of connection to you and builds trust. Not a sales document – it lets you reveal yourself as a human being, rather than telling your accomplishments.
- Personal Postcards – help you to stay in contact with your network in a more personal way and be the person they think of when they need what you have to offer, build goodwill.
- Website – can include all the above
- Networking – choose a couple groups, but not too many. Don't forget, the idea is to gain visibility, establish your presence, and help others and to provide referrals. If you do these things, return referrals will come.
- Email – include your logo, title, and any personal slogan (see above)
- Press kit – press release, personal bio, brochure, photo (sometimes), business card and a cover letter explaining who you are and why you're sending them this info.
- Social media – Invest some time into a well-crafted LinkedIn page (LinkedIn is for professionals). Facebook is also suggested for a Company Page but be very careful about your personal page. The quality of friends and posts they submit to your page will all play a part in others' perceptions of you.
- Seminars – hold your own and/or have guest speakers.

Positioning & Visibility

Begin positioning your brand in your target market (your industry). Depending on the type of branding you are working on, this could include whether you advertise that you are a member of various professional organizations, such as on your LinkedIn page and website. It also includes who you have referral agreements with, how visible you physically make yourself and at what types of meetings, clients, events, etc.

Create a loyal following. In order to be a strong brand that people keep coming back to you need to focus on adding value to your clients experience with you or in other words give people what they want and make them feel special. There are millions of people and brands out there vying for people's attention. Make sure yours is one that not only stands out but also is an easy yes for people. If there are 10 consultants available to work with, the one

who offers the most care, support and service will usually be the busiest, as opposed to the ones who just invoice and then log off once session is up. How can you make working with you an easy yes?

Develop strong business relationships. It is so important to seek out the right people and then build relationships with them personally and professionally when you are growing your personal brand. One of the keys to building strong relationships is trust. Always make sure that you deliver more than you promise, are reliable and offer a great service instead of just expecting people to help you out.

You can join online groups with like-minded people. Facebook, LinkedIn, or any one of the multitudes of forums that now exists on the Internet. They all have one thing in common, to bring people together. Join some, and DO NOT simply become an observer; contribute and take part. People like leaders, doers – a brand and a person with something to say.

Image is one of the most important aspects to any successful brand and especially when it comes to you and the way you present yourself. Think about what sort of image you want your brand to have and then make sure that you are embodying that yourself. There isn't anything superficial about this; the way we present ourselves speaks volumes about us. Whatever industry you are in, you need to look the part. Present yourself for the position you want to be in!

Get featured in the media if possible. You can have the best business in the world or be as fabulously talented as you like but if people don't know about you, it is like shouting in a noisy, crowded room. You know what you're saying but no one else does. Perhaps write an article for a trade journal if appropriate.

Look for websites, blogs and newsletters that are relevant to your field that you would like to appear in. Spend a few hours on this either using Google or going to a bookstore (if you ask, they can give you a list of titles in different subject lists).

Develop a collaborative mentality. Rather than seeing other businesses and people as threats, see them as opportunities to create mutually beneficial relationships with. For example, a Financial Advisor might want to team with an Accountant under a collaborative where each try to refer the other as an expert – something you are trying to do through your personal branding.

Importantly, use several branding channels and synchronize. You want there to be a synergy between the different venues you use and the materials you present as well.

Appearance Counts

Your appearance is as much a part of your personal branding as anything we've discussed to this point. If you want to promote yourself as a professional, you should dress sharply, be well groomed, have good posture, appropriate mannerisms, and exercise a proper vocabulary. It is hard to be taken seriously if you use a limited vocabulary, a lot of slang, hunch over, not make eye contact and are trying to cover up the fact that you didn't wear matching socks today. Likewise, an ice-cream vendor is expected to look like, well, an ice cream vendor – not a stockbroker.

Presuming that you're aiming for a position that includes greater responsibility, dressing for the life you aspire to means demonstrating attention to detail, particularly as it relates to proper fit. It is not just physical fit that is important; it is about psychological fit, which means that your clothing represents your values and personality, and a situational fit, which means your look complements your role and the occasion.

Everything you wear conveys information about you. For this reason, you need to understand the foundational details of a well-dressed individual. Be realistic and honest with yourself about what fits your body and what doesn't. Do your research by shopping without buying.

Learn what brands and designers cut their garments in a shape most similar to your body. Successful people connect well with others through their writing, speaking, and nonverbal communication. They recognize that their clothing and grooming are nonverbal tools they can control to help them achieve their goals and ambitions.

What you wear and how you wear it has a domino effect. This is referred to as the universal effects of image. This phrase is appropriate because the way you look affects the way you think about yourself, feel about yourself, speak and conduct yourself and even the way others react or respond to you. Color is an important aspect of your personal brand as well.

As concerns communication, be aware that a UCLA study has shown that 7 percent of WHAT came across to a listener depends on the content of what we said (the actual verbal communication), 38 percent depended on HOW it was said (the speaker's tone, voice, accent, etc.) and the other 55 percent depended on how the person LOOKED when communicating (was visual)!

Even the car you drive is a reflection of your personal brand. It is hard to promote the appearance of a powerful, successful corporate executive if you drive a beat-up pickup truck just the same as it is difficult to present yourself as a devoted head of a charitable

organization for the poor if you are driving a new BMW. It is true that there often is no connection, but appearances are what they are and, as we've discussed, part of branding has to do with expectations.

With that, we will conclude this chapter with a few examples of common mannerisms you need to be careful about:

- foot-tapping
- chewing the inside of the cheek
- biting fingernails
- greeting everyone with a hug or handshake as the incorrect greeting
- an obviously nervousness smile or chuckle
- tossing or leaning of the head
- lowering the eyes flirtatiously or timidly
- lack of eye contact
- running fingers through hair
- snapping fingers or cracking knuckles
- blowing breath out through the mouth in exasperation
- leaning
- slouching
- sarcastic expressions or eye rolling
- being a "time-checker" while speaking or being spoken to
- pointing
- turning your back on people when in a group
- wiping perspiration or wringing your hands
- using uh-huh and uh-hum often

You may have noted some mannerisms you currently possess at times. It is a part of the "natural us", so be cognizant of them and you won't go wrong.

(continued on next page)

Conclusion

Congratulations! You have made it to the concluding chapter. In this book, we discussed personal branding, why it is important and how to start down the path of developing your own Plan.

We discussed Montoya's Eight Laws of Personal Branding. These were the Laws of Specialization, Leadership, Personality, Distinctiveness, Visibility, Unity, Persistence and Goodwill.

In general, we walked through defining your overall aspirations, conducting research by questioning others, determining your brand attributes, assessing your current state, creating your game plan, and managing your brand. You were also presented with a worksheet to aid in the assessment and identification process.

You should now have the tools to proceed effectively. We wish you the best of luck now and in the future for your success and thank you for taking this book.

Good luck!

The End