

# BRAND YOU

IT'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO ESCAPE THE POWER OF BRANDING IN TODAY'S WORLD. INDEED, IT'S BRANDING THAT HAS LIFTED ORDINARY PRODUCTS, LIKE SPORTS SHOES AND COOLDRINK, TO GLOBAL ICONS LIKE NIKE AND COCA COLA. AND A PERSONAL BRAND CAN DO THE SAME FOR YOU.

'A brand is more than simply a product: it's the relationship or experience a person has with that product,' says Jenny Handley of Jenny Handley Promotions, co-author of *Raise Your Game*. As such, your personal brand is about how people relate to you, and building value. 'Branding is incredibly important, given the competitive nature of our organisations. Simply put, you need a distinctive edge – and that's your brand.'

Seen another way, says Robin Wheeler, author of the INSIGHTS series of books, a personal brand places you firmly in the business context, as branding is the language that modern-day companies speak. But if that sounds cold and heartless, it's not: 'Building your personal brand is, in fact, a wonderfully creative and rewarding process. It's also intensely spiritual, as you're engaging in soul-searching to find out who you really are. In doing so, you're translating your inner mystery, and applying it to practical business situations; in short, aligning your inner values with your outer reality.' This is why a personal brand is so powerful, Wheeler argues: 'It allows you to be yourself for a living.'

## Root your brand in authenticity

Handley agrees that the strongest brands are rooted in authenticity; after all, wouldn't you be disappointed to buy a Coke only to find that it left your thirst utterly unquenched? From a practical perspective, too, it makes sense for your brand to be a sincere and honest reflection of yourself, for the simple fact that it's not something that can be switched on and off as the mood takes you. Everything you say and do – whether you're at a party, on the sports field or in the office – should be a facet of that brand.

That's why Handley and Wheeler insist that a great deal of building your personal brand has to do with self-knowledge. For Handley, the process starts by setting aside time to consciously think about who you are. 'Think about the things you love, think about what makes you succeed. If you get stuck, consider the positions you held at varsity, like editor of the student paper – ask yourself why you were given those positions, and why you were good at them.' This process will help you identify the traits that make up your character. Don't dismiss any of them – even a seemingly frivolous characteristic, like fun-loving, can be an asset in the business world: it makes you easy to get along with, and possibly a strong team player. 'A particularly effective exercise is to draw up three columns. In the first, note down your strengths, in the second your challenges, and in the third, consider things you could do differently,' Handley suggests. The latter could be as simple a gesture as taking a different route to work, or

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*Robin Wheeler, author of the INSIGHTS series of books.*



talking to someone new – the benefit being that you are broadening your exposure, and that means getting your brand out there to more people. There's another advantage to this approach, in that it helps to build your confidence – another key part of brand building. 'Being confident means believing in yourself, and that means that other people will, too.'

Wheeler, too, sees the establishment of a personal brand as something that starts with 'a conscious decision'. For him, the process starts with taking stock of your external situation. 'But don't just look at what's around you: think like an entrepreneur, and try to get a sense of the bigger picture. In other words, think about your situation at work. Go beyond the things you are told to do to truly understand your context and the possibilities it offers.' Now, look inward. Think about the things you value, and strive to create alignment between your core beliefs and external reality.

What comes next is crucial: an articulation of your mission in life. Wheeler recommends formulating 'an immediate, strategic' tagline that succinctly describes who you are, what you stand for, and what value you bring. Handley concurs that a personal slogan is an essential component of personal branding, for several reasons: not only does it provide colleagues, employers and clients with a unique summary of your outlook; it

also proves that you've taken the time to ponder these issues, and that you take yourself seriously – and that's very powerful indeed. More than this, by using your tagline as frequently as possible – on all email communication, for example – it will become integrally associated with who you are. Choose something positive and impactful, and whenever people hear those words, they'll think of you.

Of course, it's all very well to have a personal brand – but what about making sure that other people know about it? This is why networking is so important. And it's not simply about forging business connections – although, yes, these will prove invaluable in the future. Rather, says Wheeler you should strive to simply have conversations and build relationships. If the opportunity does arise to help someone, grab it – the favour may well be returned one day.

An even more effective way to get your brand out there is through writing, Wheeler maintains. Whether it's for industry publications, your company newsletter, your personal blog or websites, writing is not only an extremely powerful branding mechanism, it is true to the spirit of sharing knowledge and vision. 'I advise everyone to write a book – it's like your brand taking full flight with the ultimate business card,' Wheeler says. ■

## MARKETING 101

Once you've established a framework for your brand, think about how you can present it practically.

Concentrate on the day-to-day things that build your brand, Handley advises: how you dress, and how you speak to people. 'Remember that every interaction you have contributes to the impression people have of you, so keep this in mind. Make sure that you use the proper register for the person you are talking to: don't use SMS abbreviations if you're writing an email to your boss.'

Another tip is to dress the part. Yes, this can be difficult: if your personal brand is grounded in authenticity, then the temptation may well be to let the 'true you' shine through with your flair for fashion. But try to rein in this temptation, Handley advises: when dressing for corporates, it's best to err on the caution. This means that your style should be more conservative than flamboyant, but there are areas where you can express your individuality: accessories, for example, are a great way to dress up an outfit with a splash of colour or design that reflect your personality.

Business etiquette is yet a further area in which your brand will be put to the test. The subtle, unwritten rules of business behaviour can confuse newcomers to the corporate world, Handley points out – for example, when do you use a traditional handshake? If you're lucky enough to have access to a mentor, observe their behaviour for clues, and make the most of your induction period to watch how people interact. Failing that, Handley says, simply sitting in a corporate coffee shop, and taking note of people's body language, will give you valuable insight in this regard.