



# TAKING YOUR PERSONAL BRAND FROM 'NOW' TO 'WOW'

When you Google yourself, what's the first thing that comes up? Is this image consistent with how you want to be portrayed? **Nikki Heald**, managing director of Corptraining, explains the importance of consistent, personal branding

## DISCOVERING YOUR PERSONAL BRAND

Today, it's more important than ever for you to make your brand stand out. The term personal branding is certainly not new and has been bandied around for many years. Simply put, it relates to the way you market 'you' to the outside world. It's about your professional profile and reputation. It's about the value that others perceive you possess.

Branding incorporates reputation and credibility. It influences whether people will buy from you, do business with you or even want to associate with you. If you want to stand out from competitors and position yourself to win then developing, fine-tuning or tweaking your current brand is the way to go. Yes, the good news is that you can shape and control your brand.

Personal branding should be an integral part of your overall marketing strategy and if you don't particularly like the term 'personal brand', then substitute it for another term like personal visibility, personal perception or professional profile. Ultimately, it doesn't matter what you call it; the fact is, there is a proven link between projecting a professional image and success.

Celebrities are good examples of personal brand managers. They work tirelessly and consistently to promote their visibility in their fields of expertise. They find ways to be unique and memorable. However, you don't have to be a superstar or celebrity to build a strong and unique brand proposition.

Whether you wish to market yourself for a new career, increased sales or diverse opportunities, it's essential that your brand is genuine and promotes authenticity. How well you know yourself is vital. Do you have a strong sense of your professional message? Do you know your brand story? Do you communicate your brand consistently using multiple sources?

Identifying what distinguishes you from others is no easy task, especially in the world of marked competition, but it's unquestionably worth the investment. For those of you who own a business perhaps, you've spent loads of money on marketing campaigns to promote your business, but consider the last time you invested in you?

## WHERE DO I START?

The first step is to reflect upon your current brand and then determine whether this is your 'ultimate' or 'desired' personal brand. Ask others around you for feedback – clients, colleagues and your

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management team. What words do they associate with you? What do they believe are your strengths? What areas do they perceive you may be able to develop? What makes you different from others?

A clear understanding of what your brand looks like now as opposed to what you would like it to look like in the future allows you to identify those gaps that will require your attention.

Generally speaking, the identifiable gaps will fall under one of the 5 Keys to Personal Branding that I have developed and use in my workshops:

1. **Presentation** – dressing to reflect your position and meet client expectations. Good grooming, hygiene and presenting an image that conveys credibility.
2. **Communication** – how you position yourself verbally, non-verbally and in written communication. Ensuring your online presence communicates the right messages.
3. **Behaviour** – how you conduct yourself at business events, meetings and day to day interactions. Demonstrating courtesy, respect and correct protocol for the situation.
4. **Skills** – ensuring you keep your knowledge and competencies up to date. Be top of game in what's happening in your profession through training, mentoring and coaching.
5. **Service** – providing an exceptional level of service to both internal and external parties. Do what you say you are going to do and find ways to delight your clients.

After careful analysis of these five core areas and discovering the gaps, the next step is to determine what action you plan to undertake to take your brand from 'now' to 'wow'. Remember, this will take time, energy and effort; it won't happen overnight.

## SOCIAL MEDIA & BRANDING

The growth of LinkedIn, Twitter, blogs and Facebook has made it even easier for prospective clients to research you; and believe me, they will. In this digital day and age, people rely heavily on social media and what you post is of interest to them. People are using Google personally and professionally on a daily basis.

The first thing to do online is to find out what is being said about you and what information comes up in searches. Google your name and see how you go. What do social media sites reveal about you? Does the content support the brand or perception you wish to convey to others? Could they be

updated or improved to enhance your online image? The reality is that you will lose control of how you appear online if you are not the one in charge of managing your presence. Be mindful of what you publish or post.

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**Nikki Heald** is the managing director of Corptraining, established to provide dynamic and modern training solutions appropriate to the insurance and financial service industries. Nikki co-authored the book "Views On The Way To The Top", publishes numerous articles and her input is sought from various media channels. For more information, visit [www.corptraining.com.au](http://www.corptraining.com.au)

From a business perspective, LinkedIn's powerful position in search engines will mean that your LinkedIn profile will probably come up first. Make sure you have a professional photo that creates a great first impression (not a dodgy one taken after a few ales), provide all necessary contact information, customise your profile URL, load your summary, skills and work history, add recommendations and honours or awards you have achieved.

Social media is just one way to promote your visibility and whilst blogs, articles and LinkedIn assist with this, video is the future of personal branding. Take time to create some short videos (ideally, no more than 90 seconds) about who you are, what you do and the value you are able to offer. Load them onto You Tube, your website, LinkedIn or other relevant sites for current or prospective clients to view.

### BROADCASTING YOUR BRAND

So after all the time, energy and effort you've invested into cultivating your ultimate personal brand, you need to do something with it, otherwise you've effectively wasted your time!

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS... DID YOU KNOW?

From a career and social perspective, first impressions count. They also impact on your personal brand. It only takes a quick glance, for a few seconds for us to size each other up. While we may like to perceive ourselves as being non-judgmental, unfortunately we are. With each new encounter we evaluate and are being evaluated, so it's essential to generate the right impression, particularly from a sales perspective. Generally, people buy from people they like. Additionally, how you are perceived internally is important if you want to progress in your career or be exposed to new or exciting job opportunities.

Reflect on your current brand and the impression you would like to convey to others. Consider your clothing and general appearance. Do you dress to reflect your role and meet your clients' expectations? We know that not every situation in business requires full corporate garb; however, being well groomed and appropriately attired puts you one step ahead. Be mindful of your non-verbal cues and build on your first impression with a warm handshake and smile. We've all received the wet-fish or limp handshake at some point and never remember it favourably. Finally, ensure that your verbal communication backs up your professional image and demeanour. Use language that is suitable, professional and free from any technical jargon or slang. Three simple tips to get your impression right:

1. **Immaculate presentation and grooming**
2. **Open and approachable body language**
3. **Appropriate and friendly speech**

There are countless ways to communicate your value to both internal and external markets; don't be shy - it's your time to shine and get your name out there. Here are a few ways that you can build your presence: sponsorship, community involvement, networking, hosting an event, chairing a meeting, getting involved in committees, writing articles, newsletters or a book, producing a white paper or speaking at events.

Remember, discovering or enhancing your personal brand is not difficult and impacts significantly on sales and career advancement. Your individual marketing campaign is essential to building credibility and confidence but must be backed up by consistent, day-to-day action. Have fun! **MPA**