

Introduction

We live in an attention economy, where the most valuable commodity you can acquire is the mindshare of your customers. Where once upon a time all that was required to win was to outspend the competition with billboards and advertising or join the right agency, today's vendor demands more if you are truly going to stand out from the crowd.

Richard Branson knows this, Steve Jobs knew this and Jamie Oliver definitely lives this – that in order to cut through the noise you need to understand how to find and amplify your personal voice. What does that mean? It means you need a bulletproof personal brand.

There are two levels to a world-class personal brand. The first is image – the way you present yourself to your customers, the more superficial elements that are traditionally associated with the term 'brand'. The second, and far more powerful level, is your influence.

So what is influence? The most common definition is: *"the capacity or power of a person to be a compelling force on or produce effects on the actions, behaviour, opinions of others"*. That type of commitment takes more than a business card.

The person with the most influential personal brand is the most trusted person in the field, the 'go to' authority in their space and the obvious choice that rises above the noise. However, most importantly, brand influence is the single largest factor that will determine whether your time is spent 'attracting' new opportunities in the future as opposed to 'chasing' them. To put it bluntly, it's the most valuable asset you will ever own.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach, no single set of instructions, the power of a personal brand lies in its authenticity, it represents who you are and what you as an individual. However, the tips that follow outline a number of pillars you need to address when embarking on your personal brand journey; your unique value proposition, understanding your customers, how you demonstrate your value proposition through every touch point and how you create meaningful relationships that will create advocates for your brand. These points act as a guide and are to be molded to fit you!

So what can you do to create and master your own powerful personal brand?

The top 5 fundamentals of a personal brand

These five elements create the groundwork to build a solid personal brand, each help build the foundation of your success and ensure you are in a position to grow your influence.

Clarity

Determining your unique value proposition is the heart and soul of your personal brand

The saying goes 'If you try to speak to everyone - you will be heard by no one'. This is why knowing what your point of difference is compared to your competitors is the key to building a powerful personal brand. Whether you specialise in selling warehouses, shopping centres or office buildings, determine what part of the market you can own. Stop trying to speak to everyone and start being heard as the 'go to' expert in your field.

Stand Out – Complete a marketplace review. Look at competitor websites, articles and advertising. Do they all look and sound the same? Are they all claiming to be the area expert? Write down what makes you different from them. What 'one thing' can you become famous for? Remember a strong value proposition is one that is clear and memorable, keep it simple and authentic.

Go Deep – now you know what your point of difference is, you need to develop an understanding of your ideal customers, the people you truly think you could serve best. A great way of going deep is by looking at your past customers and identifying common traits. What were they looking for from their agent? Were they in a particular industry? Were they a particular age? Turn these characteristics into a portrait of your ideal customer, everything from the area they live in to the media they consume. By getting really clear and building a picture of the type of customers you want to work with and who you can serve best you can become really targeted with your communications and how your brand shows up for them.

Get Inspired – Think about strong personal brands in other industries; Richard Branson, Jamie Oliver, Steve Jobs. Which of these personal brands do you think would really appeal to the customers in your area of the market? Think about how they would approach creating a personal brand in real estate and jot down some ideas that you can start implementing.

Credibility

Demonstrating why you are the expert in your area builds trust and credibility

Now that you have clarity around the area of the market that you want to nail it's important to start building your credibility so that when your market comes looking for you they're convinced by the information they find.

Map Your Story – A great place to start is with a brand story map and it's simple to do. Take one piece of paper and write down your target audience, the one thing you want to be famous for, and importantly, three reasons why you are the expert! Awards, past experience and impressive sales stats are all great things to include.

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Build Your Footprint – The research shows that the vast majority of prospects make their decision based on a “digital interview” before first contact is even made. That basically boils down to a Google search! So what does your digital footprint say about you? Identify a few people in your life who don’t know what you do and ask them to digitally interview (Google) you. Could they tell what niche you own? Could they say what makes you stand apart? Could they even find you? Look at your website, your LinkedIn profile, your agency profile on realcommercial.com.au and start updating these pages using your brand story.

Build Your Accolades – What activities can you undertake that will build your credibility? Applying and winning respected industry awards is a great way to demonstrate your expertise – look at local business awards and real estate honours associated with your industry and determine what you need to do to be a contender.

Community

Create a loyal tribe and your influence will grow

Now that you have built your personal brand story and you have a credible digital footprint within your niche, it’s time to grow your sphere of influence by proactively creating a community that can act as advocates for your personal brand.

Measure Your Engagement – People with strong personal brands know that it’s better to have a community of 500 that responds and acts, than 50,000 that send you straight to spam. To get a clear picture of just how much work you need to do to actually engage your tribe keep a monthly track of all your channels – email, LinkedIn, Facebook, and databases are good places to start. Measure how many of your community are commenting, sharing, emailing and interacting with you.

Get Amongst It – A strong personal brand is always proactively growing its sphere of influence. Take the time to find out associations your target audience are part of and increase your network by applying to be a member. Repeat this process for any LinkedIn and Facebook groups they are a part of. Pay attention to the type of conversations they are having and then contribute with the knowledge you have that can add value – maybe there is a thread on commercial property investment yields, or the commercial hot spots in Australia. If taking part face to face, make sure to bring your business card and familiarise yourself with your brand story map so you can answer any questions they may ask about you.

Harness Advocacy – A strong personal brand grows exponentially through word of mouth, and you can harness the power of word of mouth too! Contact your most active community members and ask them if they’d be willing to recommend you; to their friends, colleagues and on popular review sites. Send them the material they will need to tell your story well i.e. brochures - and don’t forget to thank them – communities thrive through reciprocity, value and trust.

Content

Create value by delivering quality content to your customers

You have created your tribe, and identified the members who can act as advocates for your personal brand. But as your sphere of influence grows, how can you keep them engaged? The secret lies in creating quality content such as blog posts, newsletters and social media posts that are tailored to their needs.

Find Pain Points – Don’t get caught in the trap of sending out standard ‘updates’ containing company news. Strong personal brands engage their tribe through regular content that delivers genuine value to the reader and the most viewed and shared content usually solves a specific pain point that’s focused on their needs. So where

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should you start? Go to your customers, their forums or social media platforms and ask what's keeping them awake at night - Do this regularly and you will build up quite a collection of problems you can solve!

Deliver Value – Each month choose one of your recorded pain points and generate ideas on how your knowledge and expertise can address this via a blog post or newsletter.

Get It Out There – Once you've created an amazing piece of content it's time to get it out there and in as many ways as possible. A great blog post that is rich in content can be uploaded onto your website, condensed into a series of engaging Facebook posts, turned into a handy fact sheet or reformatted to create an infographic. Pull out 4 or 5 key points within your article and post these individually across your social networks, make sure to add a picture that relates to each point as people engage with images more than words. Pull out any interesting facts of figures and lay these out in a pdf, where design is involved it's great to get a professional on board, reach out to a local designer and ask if they can turn these facts into an infographic that is engaging to look at. Include this in emails to your clients, on your social media and on your website. This way you get as many people engaging with each piece of content as possible, maximising its impact.

Contribution

Create meaningful moments with your customers that will surprise and delight them

What can you contribute to your customers that they will want to tell their networks about? Strong personal brands go above and beyond the usual call of duty, by doing this you create a personal legend that your customers will talk about for years to come.

Listen Carefully – Tune in to each interaction with your customers and notice the little things. Are they foodies? Do they travel a lot with work? Sending a link to a cookery blog you think they will love, or a travel kit that will help them stay comfortable on their next trip will make them feel valued. Take a look at your database of customers and identify who you are working with right now that you can surprise and delight in a way that shows you really know them – then do it!

Pick A Currency – The strongest personal brands know that out spending the competition means nothing, you need to out contribute. The most valued (and underutilised) currency in an age of limited time and attention isn't money, it's knowledge, access, time, insight and energy. You can use these to strengthen your personal brand by identifying an act of service that you can inject into your process that goes beyond the simple bottle of wine and instead uses a more valuable currency. Create and document this in your systems so that it becomes part of every customer's experience with you.