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## Bringing Your Personal Brand to Life

*An effective brand communicates your distinct value.*

The pervasiveness of social media makes personal branding a powerful career management tool. In fact, personal brands are no longer novel; they are necessary.

Similar to a commercial brand, a personal brand effectively communicates your distinct value and sets you apart from your competitors. Your brand is effective when it becomes the means through which people seek your knowledge, expertise and talent. In other words, it is the unique promise of the value for which you are known. When a relevant opportunity arises, those familiar with your brand will connect the opportunity with your value.

### Maintaining Authenticity

Establishing a brand requires a thoughtful process. It grows over time, and it is up to you to carefully cultivate it. At the foundation of any personal brand is authenticity. As you fulfill the promise of your brand, your peers and employers will continually validate and evaluate you—and your brand will absorb those descriptions. Thus, when you begin conceptualizing your brand, focus on your most appealing and powerful attributes—the qualities that truly define you.

In doing so, it is important to maintain a balance of hard attributes—the

competencies and skills for doing a job—and soft attributes—those that build an emotional connection with your audience. A personal brand should not be an austere representation; your soft attributes will make a lasting impression. For example, you can brand yourself as the familiar “persistent employee.” Or, instead, you can present yourself as a “spirited contributor.” The vibrant description in the latter example is more likely to command your audiences’ attention.

### Using Traditional Tools

With authenticity as your guidepost, start your branding process by developing a professional biography. This narrative should delve beneath the mere facts of your work history. Use it as a way to explain why you accepted certain positions, how you performed and what specifically motivated you. This biography is a relevant depiction of you professionally but through a personal lens. The goal is to captivate your audience by creating a vivid, emotional connection.

Your biography can be a productive basis for developing several important tools, such as:

- **Personal brand statement.** A personal brand statement refers to your vision, goals, values and

passions. It should clearly explain your approach to problem solving and meeting needs. It is short and concise, and helps people decide if they should pursue you in greater depth. Analogous to the tell-me-about-yourself statement in traditional networking situations, a personal statement generates warmth and exudes sincerity. A well-prepared statement can be readily used in any interaction, be it in person or online.

- **Brand profile.** Your brand profile expands on the concepts and themes introduced in your statement. Profiles become useful in shaping a personal Web page or cover letter. When you live what you say, your profile can be a gauge in evaluating assignments or job offers.
- **Resume.** The best opportunity to capitalize on your brand via your resume is through an executive summary that appears near the top of the page. Your personal brand statement can come into play here. While you want to delineate your relevant competencies and skills throughout your resume, you also want to use it to highlight why you are uniquely qualified for the position, what distinct value you present and what makes you the person an organization wants to hire.

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- **Interview.** The interview is the culmination of the branding process. It provides the opportunity for you to deliver face-to-face that which separates you from the rest. Be prepared to provide concrete examples or illustrative stories that support and reiterate the values and passions that are integral to your personal brand. With more organizations relying on behavioral interviewing, you should anticipate questioning along these lines.

### Understanding the Power of Social Media

Beyond the more traditional career management tools described above, social media play what many see as the most significant role in disseminating

your personal brand. Whether purposefully cultivated or not, most people have some degree of an online presence. Regardless of how negligible your activity seems, everything is “discoverable.” For example, I helped a client with an online audit of herself.

In a Google search, we found a website that covered her activity at an open forum, where she delivered a plea for the continued funding of research and services for a specific chronic disease threatened by state budget cuts. My client feared that some of the organizations she was interviewing with would not look favorably upon her involvement; she was deeply concerned that information about her personal activities was so readily available to the public.

Similarly, be aware that all activity related to blogs, Twitter or Facebook—even when it is just “for fun”—can be easily accessed by those in your professional life. Thus, take charge of your presence by managing it. Create a personal website that reinforces your brand through your personal brand statement, brand profile, resume and biography. Provide links that connect to articles or documents you have written, have been quoted in or simply find interesting. The options are endless and can help create a cohesive, detailed and readily available platform for displaying your brand.

LinkedIn is another useful online tool for bolstering your brand. The format of the website provides simple ways to put forth your value

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proposition or personal brand statement. You can include a photo to personalize your profile, link to your online portfolio or personal Web page, and participate in discussion boards hosted by LinkedIn. In my own work, I have found online discussion groups in general, and LinkedIn groups specifically, to be an excellent forum for sharing my point of view. This is just one simple but effective way to position yourself as an expert or thought leader in specific areas. As you engage in these discussions, just be certain that any content you post is authentic to you and reflects your brand.

#### **Keeping It Clear and Consistent**

Whether you are promoting your personal brand online or through

more traditional career management methods, keep in mind that clarity and consistency are essential to creating an effective brand. Your authenticity will be readily evident if you are clear in your branding—not just by boldly explaining who you are but also, by design, who you are not. For example, if you want to convey that you do not value exclusivity, you will communicate that you have worked in a collaborative environment in which you maximized benefits to your stakeholders and to shareholders.

A strong brand is stable and communicated consistently, regardless of the medium. Whether it is your voicemail, email signature or a business card—or more detailed

tools such as a cover letter or resume—the same themes will be obvious to your audience.

You will only be “branded” if you are constantly on view to your target audience, so make yourself known. The goal is to extend or reinforce your brand at every opportunity without negating it. As with traditional networking, it’s not the people you get to know as much as it is the people who get to know you. ▲

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