

Paper CD04

Accelerate Your Career: Build Your Personal Brand

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ABSTRACT

How do you present yourself online? In a world dominated by social media, we all have a personal brand. You might have created a LinkedIn profile, when you first started working, but does it reflect who you are now? Just as a company has a website as its front of house to clients, your presence online is your front of house but are you sure it's helping? This paper will explore some of the ways you can enhance your personal brand, by evaluating your current presence and how simple changes can ensure that you are at the top of the recruitment pile either within your current company or outside. This paper will demonstrate how to avoid common pitfalls and ensure that you are seen positively. Learn how to embrace the power of social media and show not just your colleagues but your social community who you are.

INTRODUCTION

With our personal presence now more than simply meeting someone face to face, it is a good idea to ensure that your online persona is the equivalent of having polished shoes and tidy outfit for an interview. Yet often, with the pressures of trying to keep up with our workload and our life outside of work our professional online presence is often neglected. However, it is worth bearing in mind that even before a new employer has read the CV you carefully crafted and sent to them, they will have already completed a Google search of your name and found your various online profiles. It would be naïve to think that your Facebook profile and Twitter presence are not found alongside your LinkedIn profile (never mind Instagram, Google+, YouTube and so on). So what are you doing to protect yourself and your identity? How can you use these key platforms to your advantage whilst maintaining your integrity?

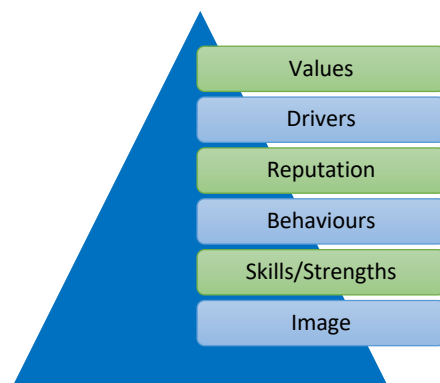
WHAT IS A PERSONAL BRAND?

When we think about 'brand', we think about things like Apple, Samsung, Nike, BMW etc. How they make themselves stand out in the crowd isn't just about image. In fact, it's much more than that. When we buy an Apple product, what are we actually buying? The product? Its reputation? Its image? Its values? What does it say about us as the purchaser? If we take this and extend it to ourselves, what are we asking an employer to buy? Are they buying your intellect, experience, values, personality? Ultimately, no matter what area of industry we work in, people buy people from people. In order not to be another bland, faceless CV, we have to transform ourselves into a memorable and stand out brand with a set of values that match that of the company or, more importantly, the people that we want to employ us.

There are two parts to your brand. The tangible aspects: qualifications, knowledge and experience and the intangible aspects: your personality, attitude, values and the other things that make you unique. You need a good balance of both to ensure that you rise through your company (focusing on the same kind of key drivers that you would for a business) or get that new position.

THE PERSONAL BRAND PYRAMID

The best way to consider personal brand is to think about it as a pyramid (Holloway, Page 17) [1]:



Personal Brand Pyramid

- **Values**
Your values relate to your personal moral compass. Conveying them in your online presence takes time and careful curation, hence the reason they are at the top of the pyramid.
- **Drivers**
These are your motivations to succeed or to take a particular path e.g. why do you want to work in clinical research?
- **Reputation**
Your reputation is what you are known for and if there is one thing you want to communicate clearly, this is it. When your name is spoken, what do people think?
- **Behaviours**
These are the outwards displays of your values and drivers and linked to your personality.
- **Skills/Strengths**
Your natural talents, behavioural or technical with the addition of your knowledge and experience.
- **Image**
This is where people access your brand for the first time. It is the foundation or the packaging of your brand: your look (clothes, body language, eye contact etc) and then how you sound (tone of voice, volume, language choices).

The top 3 items on the pyramid are the intangibles, those things that are harder to pin down and maintain. The bottom 3 are the ones that you have the most control over but have to be maintained both on and offline. For the purposes of this paper, I will only be considering what you can do online to present a great personal brand through LinkedIn and Twitter as these are the two main platforms used in our industry.

BUILDING YOUR ONLINE BRAND

Before you start changing anything online, it's worth stating the obvious: **Lock your Facebook profile down.** In other words, make sure that the only thing that is visible to a potential employer is your profile picture and cover photo. My advice, unless you are using Facebook for professional work, is to have a profile and cover photo that are not of you but of something linked to your personality (a cartoon character, favourite sculpture, etc). It keeps your profile anonymous and safe from potential image theft etc. Do the same with all social media, where you are posting about your activities outside of work. It's probably also wise not to connect to your senior managers and work colleagues on this platform (unless you are actually spending time with them outside of work). Why? Here's an example:

A work colleague goes up against you in an interview for an internal position. They get the position, you don't. Your partner posts on your Facebook page that the company are idiots and you should have got the job. Every one of your Facebook 'friends' at the office reads this and someone passes it on to your line manager, resulting in you being disciplined for bringing the company into disrepute.

Although you didn't actually post it yourself, you are the public face of that message and in a worst case scenario could result in dismissal. In terms of that key 'reputation' part of the pyramid, your integrity would plummet. Don't mix work and pleasure. Simple.

LINKEDIN

In a professional capacity, most of us use LinkedIn to connect with colleagues and people within our industry. However, it is often clear that once a profile is created it is left neglected until we change jobs. LinkedIn, for many of us, is the one place where want our managers to see us and with that in mind, the first thing we see is the image and the headline. Firstly, make sure your image is a professional picture taken against a neutral background. It should not be your holiday snap or a photo that is more than 10 years old. The last thing you want is for someone to say to you, 'Oh, you don't look like your LinkedIn photo!'. Equally avoid semi-naked holiday images, quirky photobooth pictures, badly composed out of focus shots, and family photos. None of these convey the idea of a professional coming to work.

Secondly, the headline. You have 120 characters to 'sell' who you are, so those words shouldn't be wasted. The scientific community is pretty conservative when it comes to self-promotion. Perhaps this is because we feel that qualifications alone should be enough. However, the fact is that you are already competing in a world where everyone has phenomenal qualifications and additional supplementary domain relevant learning. So what value can you bring to your future employer or your current employer so that they notice you online? Be precise and think about the keywords in your headline that will convey who you are and that recruiters might be looking for in their searches.

Here's mine as an example: Delivering a strategic marketing vision | Brand development | PR writer and News hound |

This headline is not something that should stay static. Change it every three months regardless of whether you are actively job seeking. Depending on the role you are looking for or if you are not appearing in searches, you may want to adjust more frequently. LinkedIn gives you regular updates on your search appearances and, if you are actively looking for promotion, you should be paying attention to this.

The next section is the summary section. It consists of 2000 characters and you can see the first 200 when you land on the page. The summary needs to convey what you do, now. It should be tailored to whatever you have going on. This is a living document. Don't just leave it. An employer is going to pay attention to the skills and experience you have now. Make sure it's concise, clear and easy to read. It is a mistake to think that if you overload this part of your profile with keywords, you will gain more traction and fool the search engines. It won't work and, potentially, could result in recruiters sending you emails when you are not the right person for a role, meaning you miss the important email for the job you do want. So what are the right keywords? Take a look the profiles of people who have the role you're hoping to move into, what do you see on there? Look at the adverts for roles you want and the job descriptions. You can scan these through, or use something like Wordle (<http://www.wordle.net/>) or Word Clouds (<https://www.wordclouds.com/>) to give you an idea of the most common keywords.



Word Cloud for Marketing Job Descriptions

It is good practice to make sure recent, relevant projects are included in this section and that you have included any relevant website links to publications, articles, or blogs that you have written. You want them to be noticed not lost at the end of your profile. Finally, it's a good idea to have a call to action at the end of your summary. If you are actively searching for a role, add your email at the end of this section. Using InMail costs recruiters and will certainly prevent a senior manager, who is not a Premium Member of LinkedIn, contacting you. On the subject of Premium Membership, unless you are in sales or actively recruiting people, you do not need to be a Premium Member. You will get much more value out of the platform by using some time to create an interesting profile.

If you refer back to the Personal Branding Pyramid at the start of this paper, you will see that the bottom 3 stages: image, skills/strengths, and behaviours will be covered by the Headline and, to some extent, by the Summary. The other stages will be created through the content you write, share and like. In fact, this is where you can show your values, your drivers, and build your online reputation. Be careful. Do not like something that could potentially be seen by your employer that may question their values or the values of the company you work for. However, LinkedIn is a great platform to share good practice and ideas but the important thing is to share the content in a timely fashion. You need to show up on a regular basis, just like you would if you were meeting people face to face and get engaged with trending topics. In our industry, there is some fantastic content where companies and individuals solve problems and raise current challenges. Get involved and discuss them, or post an article on your feed. A good way to encourage others to engage with your content is to use a striking image that stands out and just like on Twitter, you can use hashtags to see what else is trending by clicking on a hashtag in a post. Crucially though, be authentic. Take time to build a reputation; so when you finally meet a potential employer, the person you have created online will not be dissimilar to the one that you are presenting at interview.

TWITTER

If you don't yet have a Twitter profile, you may be missing out on a fantastic source of news. It doesn't have to be all consuming but when you consider that the regulators are regularly posting news updates and announcements, you may well find that you can make use of the newsfeed if nothing else. Whilst it might not seem obvious, it also gives you an opportunity to build a following of like-minded professionals who can support and advise, if you use Twitter properly.

A couple of points to consider, you may want to have a professional profile and a purely personal social profile. Go back to that Pyramid and consider how you are going to utilise Twitter to build your personal brand. However, this comes with a warning, if you are not going to spend time on it and respond in real time, then don't bother. Think about where your online presence is going to give you greatest benefit. For instance, here at PhUSE, there are constant updates during events from the events team, from presenters, from influencers and attendees. That word influencer is crucial; a successful Twitter presence creates a persona that delivers interesting content and engages in discussion. You will have to spend some time being part of discussions and create expectations around your responses, in other words you develop your following based on tweeting top content. If you can't do that regularly, don't choose Twitter as your platform.

Your Twitter handle for a professional profile will need to be your name, which is fine if you have an usual name like mine. If not, you will have to play with using an underscore (_) or using your initials etc. Like LinkedIn, you have a profile description that you create which is limited in characters but unlike LinkedIn, it's quirkier and more personal, so it's an excellent opportunity to demonstrate your drivers and values. A couple of examples:



In terms of image, best practice would be to use the same picture as the one you have used on LinkedIn, so people can quickly recognise you. However, do not use your company logo and, if you want to avoid any confusion, make it clear that you are presenting your personal opinions and not that of the company you work for, if you refer to them at all.

One of the features of Twitter which is incredibly useful is the pinned tweet. This holds a tweet in the top position on your timeline and you should spend some time considering an appropriate article that you have posted online or a recent story that you want to link to that would appeal to your followers or conveys your values. Equally, if you have a charity that you support and want to build a following around that then pin it at the top of your feed. If you're not sure what to post, leave it and add something later. Update your pinned tweet every 3 months at the very least.

So what should you be tweeting:

- Sharing information – this is about spreading reach of materials you are interested in and to help build a following
- Engaging with people – Listening to and responding to tweets starts to demonstrate your knowledge as an expert. So choose carefully and maintain the high ground in a debate
- Social chat – this is simply about communicating interesting things about your day etc but don't get drawn into this as it can be time consuming and you really want to focus on the first two

Bottom line, you need to create interest. If all you tweet is mindless drivel, it will do nothing for your personal brand. Therefore, don't go on Twitter, just because everyone else appears to be there. However, it can be a good fun and is not as formal as LinkedIn and is a great way to create an online personality. Get the balance right between, sharing, engaging and being sociable. If you decide that this is a platform you want to use, then you need to promote it e.g. put your handle in your email signature. Use hashtags, like #EUConnect18 and search for the hashtag so you can engage with others, chatting about the same subject.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately creating a personal brand comes down to being consistent across whatever platforms you decide to use. There are plenty of tools you can use to manage your personal brand and social media activities but no amount of shouting will have any effect, if you don't show up and be part of the conversation on a regular basis. If you want to take it further, developing a Blog to support your ideas and presence might take time but will create great content and get you noticed. You don't have to go full out and create a separate Blog if you know your time is limited. Consider starting small, writing short articles that you can post on LinkedIn that are on subjects that you know are relevant for your audience or that might show a senior manager that you have some great ideas to solve a challenge within your workplace and share it with your colleagues.

Remember, maintain your integrity, be clear, be consistent, be unique and you'll be well on your way to developing a top personal brand.

REFERENCES

[1] Jennifer Holloway, *Personal Branding for Brits*, Spark Publishing, UK 2012, ISBN 978 0 9575428 0 8

SUGGESTED READING

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