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We've devised a handy infographic with 11 tips for how you can build your own online brand! Check it out by going to bit.ly/LDRBrandonline

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By LINCOLN BENBOW editor@leaderonomics.com

BRANDING is probably one of the hottest marketing buzzwords to come about. That's not a casual statement either. Many people will acknowledge that they are their own brand, but then go about living their business lives as if their brand doesn't really matter.

The truth is that brands do matter. Whether it's a business or yourself that's on offer, you need to be doing all you can to enhance and display it.

If branding didn't matter, why would someone like Ralph Lifshitz not start his career by designing clothes?

Instead, the first thing he did was to change his name to Ralph Lauren, creating a brand that is known worldwide.

This should lift the idea of creating a personal brand above practically everything you do, but the truth is that most people don't take the time to promote the biggest thing they have to offer – themselves.

The importance of the personal brand has taken on a newer and more vital role thanks to the digital age and there are many ways to go about creating yours. Below are some tips to create a personal brand that will impress.

IRRESISTIBLE YOU

The plain truth is that good branding gives your potential employers irresistible reasons for working with you.

Getting people to want to know and work with you happens because you have given them reasons to do so.

You've given them what they need to engender trust and make them decide to do business with you over anyone else.

A PERSONAL BRAND TO FIT THE DIGITAL AGE

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BRANDING IS NOTHING NEW

One startling misconception that many people have is that branding is something new. It's not. It's there just as it always was, but with the power of the digital age, it's taken on more importance.

Why? Because a brand is something that stands for you in the mind of the prospect.

A brand seeks to create a better perception, not a better product. As a result, your role is to make the changes necessary to create that better perception. And that's where the so-called digital revolution will put wings on your message. So, how do you do all that?

Creating a personal brand is simple. Notice that the word easy was not used. The truth is, it's not easy, but it is simple.

It begins to take form when you actively decide that you are ready to create a brand and sit down to plan it out. Ask yourself some probing questions to find out how you want your brand to come across.

Firstly, what could potential employers currently think of you? If you are honest with yourself, chances are that your first response is correct.

Now, what do you want them to think of you? That difference between their perception and their reality is what you need to work on. When you have determined what that difference is, that's what you need to begin projecting to everyone around you.

MARKETING YOUR BRAND

Let's start with an example of your new marketing approach. Specifically, from now on, selling your product or service is only half of what you need to do.

The other half is selling yourself. You want to be the person that people think of when they think of everything positive that you are now in the minds of others.

And once you become all of those things, people will naturally think of you as their go-to person.

PROMOTE YOURSELF

An interesting point about communication is that once people hear from you and you get a good response, they will want to hear from you again.

So why not take advantage of that by letting them know what you are doing? You've been allowed into their personal space, so why not look good for them?

Why not let them know what you're doing via Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and every other medium you can get to.

Social media can be a curse for the uninitiated but, for you, it could be the best way to show people who you are, what you do and how you do it.

Think carefully before posting anything on social media whether it reflects your brand in the right way, in order to create an online brand that people can use to make accurate judgments about you.

Once you've created a personal brand you're happy with, it will likely bring you more success than you thought possible.

By MINDA ZETLIN editor@leaderonomics.com

WHAT do Steve Jobs, Walt Disney, and Donald Trump have in common, besides the fact that they were, or are, incredibly rich and successful? They all used their vibrant personalities to create incredibly successful companies – companies whose customers have been just as attracted to the man behind the brand as they were to the products themselves.

And yet, these men did not always have typically lovable or admirable personalities. Jobs, famously difficult to get along with, was actually put on the nightshift at Atari, supposedly due to disgusting personal hygiene.

Disney was often accused of anti-Semitism, and acted as an Federal Bureau of Investigation informant during the McCarthy era. And Trump ... well, don't get me started.

Whoever you are, you're probably at least as appealing as these men, and we live in an age that loves offbeat characters.

So why not let your unique personality and life story become part of your business image and use your own story to connect with customers and the public?

That advice comes from Sherry Beck Paprocki, a personal branding expert, speaker and the author of Content Marketing: 50 Ways to Tell Your Story.

"Every businessperson has a story that is deeply rooted in their own personality," she says. "Understand that your business's personality is tied to you, both as a professional and as an individual person."

You can make the most of this dynamic by developing your own public personality, story, and personal brand. Here's how:

1 INTERVIEW YOURSELF

"Take 15 minutes to think about your authentic business story," Paprocki advises.

Like any good interviewer, you should write down some notes that will help you gain a better understanding of yourself and your business.

"First, explain your business in a sentence or two," Paprocki says.

"Then explain why your business is different from others in the same niche, why your personal expertise is important to your business, and how you excel within your industry.

"Finally, write a sentence explaining why your customers should appreciate your expertise."

2 INTERVIEW OTHERS

"Believe in others' opinions," Paprocki advises. "Ask your best customers why they do business with you. Now, incorporate their answers into your business's story."

You should always believe the good things people tell you about your business and communicate that same message to prospective customers.

3 REVIEW YOUR STORY OFTEN

Paprocki suggests doing this every week. Your story will change over time as new insights, and input from others help you sharpen your vision of your business personality.

Update your story to keep it fresh and compelling.

4 DO WHAT COMES NATURALLY

When it comes to letting your personality shine, you shouldn't have to step too far out of your comfort zone.

It's smart to do what will make you feel most at home and relaxed.

"Attend a gala only if you're comfortable in a tuxedo or evening gown," Paprocki says.

"If sport is important to you and your clients, host a match viewing somewhere. If you're more comfortable at local gatherings of a club or society, then attend those meetings on a regular basis."

Wherever you go, work the crowd and make sure to have fun. She says: "Potential customers will sense your ease and be drawn to your warmth in whatever setting works for you."

5 CHOOSE YOUR SOCIAL COMFORT ZONE

Follow a similar approach to social media, Paprocki advises. "Use Facebook, if that's the medium that makes the most sense to you because friends and family gather there often," she says.

"Blog on LinkedIn if you have advice that others can use. Tweet if you're at the forefront of your industry and paving a pathway that others will follow.

"Use Instagram if you have a visual business.

"There's no need to have an engaging presence on all social media but, in today's world, it's important to choose a social network that you engage with at least a few times each week."

All of this will be much easier if you're happy to be there.

6 STAY FOCUSED

Building a personal or business brand is a matter of consistency, so focus is important, according to Paprocki.

"Review your business story and grow one brand at a time," she says.

"If you're a restaurateur, don't splinter yourself by developing six semi-successful restaurant brands. Focus on your main business brand until it is significantly successful before you consider a new direction."

7 DON'T BE BASHFUL

If you're anything like me, you were trained at a young age not to brag or call too much attention to yourself. Try to forget that training.

"Successful business owners must talk about themselves," Paprocki says.

"If you don't, no one will believe how much passion you have for your business. If you've won an award, call the local newspaper editor.

"Do you have an area of expertise that can benefit the local news? Write an email introducing yourself to local editors and television-station news producers.

Let them know you're available for interviews and seasonal ideas."

8 SHOW YOUR APPRECIATION

"Find excuses to give a shout-out to others, whether it's a local letter to the editor or a post on Facebook, a personal thank-you note or a dozen roses," Paprocki says.

"Take a moment to let your inner gratitude show through when a friend, a co-worker, or a client does something nice for you."

Being known as someone who is thankful and thoughtful is a great way to boost your personal brand. Plus, it's a great way to be.

9 CELEBRATE YOUR OWN UNIQUENESS

You got where you are because of who you are. Never forget that, and let whatever makes you you, shine through.

"Different is good," Paprocki says. "No matter where you are and what you are doing, revel in your own uniqueness. Don't try to be like everyone else."

Minda Zetlin is a business technology writer and speaker, co-author of The Geek Gap, and former president of the American Society of Journalists and Authors. To connect with Minda, email editor@leaderonomics.com



6 WAYS A LEADER SHOULD SHOW UP

By JEFF BOSS editor@leaderonomics.com

HOW a leader shows up is everything. Tired after a rough night's sleep? People don't care. Having a bad hair day? Oh well. Angry from that last conversation you had with a colleague? Get over it.

The attitude you display, the words you speak, the body language you exude and the scornful faces that you don't think anybody else sees (but of course they do), all contribute to the value – or lack thereof – that you, as a leader, create for others.

We have all experienced good and bad leadership.

In the SEAL teams I saw, solid frontrunners became even stronger leaders because their values and ethics defined them and their personal brand inspired others.

Conversely, I also saw others "float" to the surface, because they knew the right people, conformed in the right way or avoided the right amount of risk (typically, all of it) that made their leadership efforts appear godlike.

No matter the reason, when you show up in front of your people, it's game time and there are certain expectations a leader should uphold:

1 DRESS THE PART

It's a saying I learnt in the navy that irks me to this day but unfortunately, it's true: "Perception is reality."

People tend to assume what they see is what they get.

So if you act like a leader but dress like a cartoon character, chances are you won't be taken too seriously.

Dressing the role also puts you in the right mental state, because feeling like a leader is a precursor to acting like one.

2 PLAY THE ROLE

The common perception of a leader is one that is extroverted, confident and speaks well in public. If you're in a leadership role and do not see yourself as any of the above, fix it.

One tip is to picture in your mind a leader whose behaviour you want to role model – someone who epitomises what "right" looks like.

When the spotlight is on you, imagine yourself as that person.

3 SHOOT 'EM STRAIGHT – AVOID THE BS

People can detect this a mile away, especially if they are sceptical already.

For instance, there are two groups of followers when it comes to leadership – people who buy into what you're selling and those who still need convincing.

The former already knows that leadership holds their best interests at heart, while the latter remains undecided for a myriad of reasons.

It could be flashy vocabulary that reeks of show, promises that appear unattainable or coming across as too nice, too helpful or too perfect (not that any of these are negative, but too much of any one thing is just that – too much).

4 ACCEPT DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

Authentic leaders operate without boundaries when it comes to answering questions.

They know that transparency and inclusion breed trust and innovation, and if they want their people to have the right context when making decisions, then it is critical to communicate the right information.

Sharing knowledge is valuable but passing the right information to the right people can transform a culture of mediocrity into one of authority.

Of course, if classified information precludes you from answering, let your people know.

Understanding why an answer can't be specified is better than speaking in generalities.

A concerted effort to answer tough questions demonstrates a commitment to your people.

5 JUST LISTEN

Sometimes, the best thing a leader can do is just listen to issues and challenges.

Demonstrate your interest by actively taking notes and then follow up with an action plan.

6 BE CANDID

How you present yourself on stage, in a meeting or in a hallway encounter should be consistent and authentic, because the second you appear as anything less is when your people raise the red flag and begin to question your next move, which only proliferates from there.

Mitigate this by being self-aware of not only the words you say but also how you say them relative to the context of the audience.

Authenticity speaks to who you are and anything less gives rise to scepticism and raised eyebrows.

No matter where you go, make sure you show up with the right "leadership hat" on, because a leader's work is never done.

Jeff is a former Navy SEAL who helps business teams find clarity in chaos. He is a contributor at Forbes and Entrepreneur.com, speaks at the Harry Walker Agency, and recently authored "Navigating Chaos: How To Find Certainty In Uncertain Situations". This article first appeared on Entrepreneur.com. To get in touch with Jeff, e-mail us at editor@leaderonomics.com

