

IN FOCUS: PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

CREATING AN IMPACT WITH PERSONAL BRANDING

Most of us want to increase our credibility, visibility and reputation within the industry in which we operate. Here, we summarise the advice given by **Dawn Winder** at the recent event for the faculty's Women in Finance (WIF) networking group, when she explained how to achieve just that... by creating a strong personal brand.

When you think of someone you admire in your industry, or even your own organisation, what springs to mind? Is it their skill, reliability, sense of fair play, fearlessness in expressing an opinion, talent for innovation? Whatever the handful of attributes you identify, that is their 'personal brand' (PB), based on how you expect them to behave and who you know them to be.

And as communications expert Dawn Winder explained to the WIF networking group, you too have a personal brand. But you need to develop that PB diligently if it is to represent what you truly stand for: neglected or ignored, it could quite easily become either contradictory or just uninspiring, killing your credibility in the workplace. For example:

- you may be enthusiastic, creative, sociable, forward thinking, but if your PB is communicating something different – such as being temperamental and

unconventional – then you are not being consistent and the result will be confusion; or

- you might have the objectively desirable attributes of application, dependability and attention to detail but, without positive personal branding, be perceived as a boring 'jobsworth'. Yet, with the right PB, those qualities would make you the employee/colleague of choice whenever a complicated project needed meticulous handling.

Through communicating your value to people you want to work with, you can develop a brand that is the 'number one' choice, just as larger corporations and celebrities do, so that clients and employers can identify and relate to you on a professional and personal level.

Your aim, Winder explained, should be to be selected by a client or employer through your reputation and network. However, as establishing that networked

reputation takes time, she stressed the importance of building your brand before the need to promote it arises.

Brand 'You'

The concept of personal branding is not new, Winder pointed out. Leading management guru Tom Peters emphasised its importance a decade ago, stating in his book *Fast Company*, that: 'regardless of age, regardless of the business we happen to be in, all of us need to understand the importance of branding. We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You.'

Nor is developing a PB rocket science: much of what it involves you will already know, or have been told, that you should be doing. The only hard bit is putting in some work on yourself, which nobody but you can do. In the end, personal branding is about taking control and moving beyond being just technically proficient at your job.

Building your brand

Your personal brand needs to be formed organically, and then used as a way of delivering your unique message time after time. But where do you start? We have all heard of brand Beckham (a celebrity brand), or of Volvo (a commercial brand), and know exactly what they represent (let's say glamour/bling and dependability respectively). But how can something that is used for celebrities and leading

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corporations be employed by the less high-profile?

Your PB is what people see of you as a result of what you project to them by communicating – and acting on – your personal vision, values, skills, passions and attributes. What it emphatically isn't, is contrived – ie, the result of creating or moulding yourself into someone you think you should be. And it is certainly not about being arrogant or egotistical. Your brand should be authentic and true to who you really are.

According to Winder the key, as with the most successful commercial brands, is finding and sticking to a few key attributes which you feel are authentically 'you', and for which you want to be known. And then you must make sure that everything in your behaviour reinforces that brand identity (including, in this information-rich attention-poor era, your voicemail message and the tone of your emails: they are both reminders of your PB).

Winder provided a checklist (above right) of all the things you should be doing on a continuous basis to identify, refine and reinforce your PB. She also provided a list of suggested reading to inspire you in finding and promoting your PB (see www.icaew.com/index.cfm?route=154253). And, for the fainthearted, she took the pain out of getting started by offering the following four-step month-long programme to kick-start what should then evolve into a career-long personal brand development regime.

- 1 Discover – find out what you are good at (your assets), how you work (your work delivery and style), what your standards/ethics/passions are, and how you relate to others. Your brand is based on you, so to build a strong one start understanding the things at which you are naturally gifted, including your skills and past experience.
- 2 Communicate – assess your current network, create a list of key contacts, connect with someone inspiring and identify others who you admire and would like to meet.
- 3 Define – list the needs of your market, discover what problems you can solve, identify what you can write about (to raise your profile) and how you can increase your network.
- 4 Create – build a strong online profile, set yourself personal

CHECKLIST

- Discover your strengths
- Know your attributes
- Stand for something
- Identify your vision
- Get feedback
- Find your passions
- Define your marketplace
- Take control
- Be distinctive

branding goals, read some inspiring books and contribute to a worthwhile cause.

By managing your brand in this way, Winder concluded, you will be able to stand out and be seen for your assets, reputation and expertise.

People in your network will do the work of 'selling' you because they will want to be associated with a strong dynamic brand. ■



Dawn Winder is founder of i-define living limited. She provides consultancy and coaching, in-house training and keynote seminars. www.i-define.co.uk

FACULTY WEB LINKS

- 'Making the right impression' – *F&M149*
www.icaew.com/index.cfm?route=152140
- 'How the FD can create a better impression' – *F&M101*
www.icaew.com/index.cfm?route=119019
- 'Creating an impact with personal branding' – *webcast*
www.icaew.com/index.cfm?route=152352