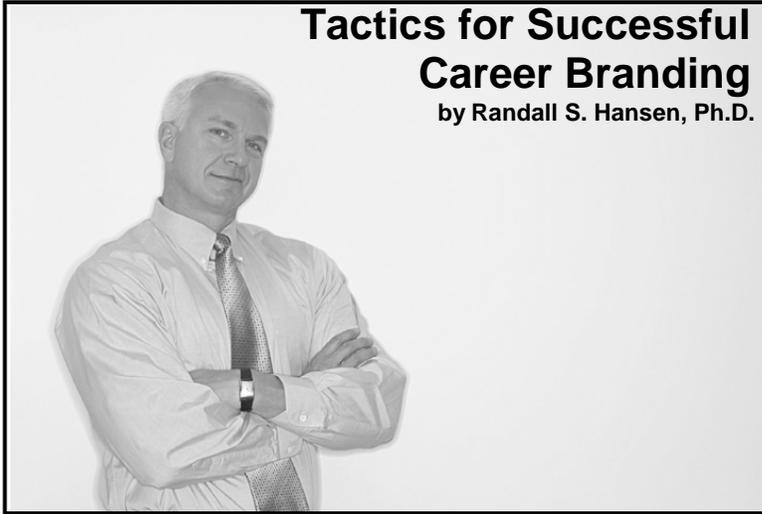


Building Your Brand:

Tactics for Successful Career Branding

by Randall S. Hansen, Ph.D.



What is it that all successful companies have mastered—and what job-seekers looking to advance in their careers need to master? What is it about Coca-Cola, Microsoft, Starbucks, Disney, and McDonald's? What makes a consumer buy one product over another—and makes one job-seeker much more sought after than others? The answer is marketing, but more specifically, it is the power of branding. And branding isn't just for products anymore.

Branding can be described as many things, but it's best defined as a promise... a promise of the value of the product... a promise that the product is better than all the competing products... a promise that must be delivered to be successful. Branding is the combination of tangible and intangible characteristics that make a brand unique. Branding is developing an image—with results to match.

Branding (some call it self-branding when talking about individuals) is essential to career advancement because branding helps define who you are, how you are great, and why you should be sought out. Branding is your reputation. Branding is about building a name for yourself, showcasing what sets you apart from others, and describing the added value you bring to a situation.

Most job-seekers are not proactive in establishing and building their career brand, letting their actions speak for them when seeking promotions or new jobs. But why not take the time to master some very basic tactics that can help build your career brand and make you a much more attractive employee or job-seeker? Remember, if you don't brand yourself, others will for you. And while you may be happy and secure in your job now, you really never know when that will change.

Management guru Tom Peters, writing in his book *The Brand You50 (Reinventing Work): Fifty Ways to Transform Yourself from an "Employee" into a Brand That Shouts Distinction, Commitment, and Passion!* states: "Regardless of age, regardless of position, regardless of the business we happen to be in, all of us need to understand the importance of branding. We are the CEOs of our own companies: Me, Inc." He adds, "You're not defined by your job title and you're not confined by your job description."

This article takes you through five easy tactics for building and strengthening your career brand.

Gain Experience/Track Accomplishments

Building your brand begins with tracking your past accomplishments and gaining strategically important new experiences. Your accomplishments are the foundation of your career brand.

But before you seek out new work, take the time to plan and focus on what you want your brand to stand for—and develop a strategy for gaining experience in areas of your brand in which you are weak.



So, besides doing your job, ask for new and challenging assignments that will build your brand. Consider freelancing or consulting. Use volunteering to gain experience. If you're a student, seek out multiple internships.



Complete Education/Training

For many careers, a minimum amount of education is necessary, but to excel in your career you may need to complete additional education, training, or certifications. Getting additional education can greatly enhance your career brand.

It may be hard in terms of time and finances, but find a way to do it. Some employers even offer an educational reimbursement benefit.

If you are unsure if you need more education—and you probably do—seek out a mentor, someone highly respected in your field (who has branded himself or herself well), and ask for advice.

Promote Yourself

You can have an amazing brand, but if no one knows about it, you are not going to have much success with your career development. And no one more than you has more reasons to promote your brand.

Throw modesty out the window? There is a fine line between bragging and promoting—and you need to learn it—but it's always better to err on the side of promoting your brand than not.

One of the oldest tools of promotion for job-seekers is the resume, and you certainly need to start there by listing all your key accomplishments, skills, and education on your resume. You may even have your positioning statement (qualifications summary) on your resume... but don't stop there.

Begin developing two career portfolios—a print one and an online one. If you don't have a personal website, now is the time to buy a domain (such as myname.com) and let the world read all about the benefits of your brand. Your portfolio should include all important brand artifacts: resume(s), mission statement, detailed accomplishments list, samples of work, articles and working papers, speech transcripts, awards and honors, testimonials, and more.



One interesting trend we've seen is of employers "Googling" the names of prospective job-seekers—typing each name into one or more Internet search engines—and basing initial candidate screening decisions partly on the number (and quality) of hits for each job-seeker. The lesson? Your brand needs to have a strong online presence.

And finally, don't forget to promote your brand on the job. Workers often assume the boss knows your accomplishments, but often times s/he does not. Certainly at review time, have a list of all you have achieved since your last review, but also consider finding ways to let the boss know your successes throughout the year.



Become an Expert

Nothing builds credibility in a career brand more than establishing yourself as an expert in your field.

Start by writing articles that showcase your knowledge—and getting them published (ideally) in noteworthy media outlets. Consider self-publishing.

Seek out conferences and meetings where you can give speeches and presentations.

Play up awards and other recognition that can help label you an expert.

Get quoted by offering your thoughts, ideas, and opinions to journalists and reporters.

Consider constructing a professional website where you can publish all your articles and speeches.

Build Relationships

Nothing in marketing is more powerful than a promotion tool called word-of-mouth, which can be defined as what people say about you.

Thus, nothing is more powerful in building your career brand than what your network of contacts—your friends, colleagues, customers, clients, and former bosses—say about you and your set of skills, education, and accomplishments.

And keeping your network strong involves nothing more than relationship building. Keep in good contact with your network and be sure they know of your most recent successes.

But the best brand-builders don't stop with their current network; these folks are in constant network-building mode. Search out new professional associations as well as the growing number of online networking communities.

Final Thoughts

Once you identify and build your brand, remember to continue strengthening and protecting it. There will always be competing brands (job-seekers) ready to fill any gap you leave behind. You are indeed founder and CEO of Me, Inc., and the more you do to cultivate your career brand, the more successful you'll be with your current employer and in the job-search.

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