



Five Ways to Create “Brand You”

By Catherine Kaputa

To be wildly successful in business, you need to have a distinct brand, or career identity, so that you can stand out from the crowd. You want your brand to stand for something that’s different, that’s relevant, and brings value. Self-branding means being able to articulate a simple, clear expression of who you are, doing it consistently, and delivering on it again and again, so that when people think of X, they think of you. Or when people think of you, they think of X.

To find out if you need to develop a stronger Brand You, answer these questions:

1. Can you explain your big idea clearly in a couple of sentences, so that people know what’s different, relevant, and special about you?
2. If people were to Google your name, would they find you and discover high-quality information about you and your accomplishments?
3. Can you clearly define your key target markets and the best way to market yourself to them?
4. Do you have a visual identity that is appealing to your target markets, consistent with your personal brand, and different from others?



5. Do your personality and your leadership styles engage others?

If you answered No to any of the above questions, you have more work to do.

Here are five tips for creating a stronger personal brand:

Keep your brand focused.

As a brand maven once said to me, “There is no ‘and’ in brand.” The more specifically you define who you are and what you do, the better your chance of selling yourself will be. It’s counter-intuitive because so many people think if they define themselves broadly, they’ll have more options. But the opposite occurs. If you come across as a Jack or Jill of All Trades, you will confuse people. People will wonder how good you are at any one thing if you are good at so many.

Make your brand different.

Being like everyone else will stunt your success. Ask yourself, “What’s different, relevant, and special about me?” When communicating your uniqueness to others, use analogies, such as “I’m a cross between X and Y” or “X on steroids.” Look at who you are, and then accentuate your difference. (In my book, *You Are a Brand!* there are a series of exercises you can do to figure out what makes you special and ways to differentiate your brand.) Find the “white space” – a brand position that you can own that is not associated with someone else.

When others zig, you should zag.

You’ll want to develop your own game plan for success – your own career path, visibility strategy, and credentials. Do different things than your colleagues and competitors are doing. For example, get involved in industry groups and nonprofits where you have an interest but aren’t overrun by other people from your company.



You can creatively add to your skill set to open new doors for yourself.

Create a memorable verbal identity.

Brands try to build a compelling brand story for their brands through commercials, ad taglines, sound bites, and web messages. Your verbal identity can help your brand, too. One of the hottest ideas in business today is using “story” to bring a company mission, project, or accomplishment to life. Stories have been powerful for centuries because they are a memorable way to convey complex ideas. Work on your communication skills so you are known for your adroit business stories and interesting presentations that people remember long after the PowerPoint slides end. Also, master the “elevator speech,” a thirty-second personal commercial you can use in networking and pitching yourself for a job or stretch assignment.

Create a powerful visual identity.

In many ways, women have an advantage here; they have many more “imaging tools” to work with, including hair, makeup, clothes, shoes, accessories, jewelry, and colors. (See my new book, *The Female Brand* (Davies Black, June 2009). But men have the size advantage, and that gives them a more authoritative image studies show. Like it or not, you are a package – just like a product on a shelf. Spend time thinking about how to make your image more powerful and distinct, whether it’s by working on your posture, or by updating your clothes.

When you start thinking of yourself as a brand, you discover how powerful it can be. Rather than being viewed generically as one of the worker bees, you’ll be someone who stands for something distinct and desirable – a brand. In today’s over-communicated society, the brands that stand for something relevant and build



positive perceptions are the ones that succeed.