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Digital You

Real Personal Branding in the Virtual Age

William Arruda • ATD © 2019 • 150 pages

Career / Personal Branding

Take-Aways

- Personal branding makes a difference in today's digital economy.
- Stage one: Explore and refine the "Real You."
- Stage two: Convert the Real You into the "Digital You."
- Stage three: Create an appealing online presentation with the "Visual You."
- Stage four: Transfer the Visual You into the "Social You."

Recommendation

William Arruda observes that many professionals attempt to promote themselves online without first defining their personal brand and what that brand represents. As a result, many digital profiles are inconsistent and offer unclear messages. Instead, he says you must spend time discovering the “Real You” by exploring your passions, values and goals before posting your profile online. Arruda offers practical advice to companies and employees for creating a personal brand and showcasing it for the digital age.

Summary

Personal branding makes a difference in today's digital economy.

Tom Peters created the concept of personal branding in the late 1990s. By the time the term circulated widely, most working professionals focused on advancing themselves in corporate offices and their communities. They changed jobs infrequently, and thus lacked interest in generating personal professional labels as part of their careers. In addition, the tools people widely use today – the internet and the mobile phone – had yet to change how businesses and professionals communicated.

Career instability, economic downturns and increased digital communication, however, made corporations and their employees rethink personal branding, as they realized its benefits in and out of the office. In fact, the changes that technology thrusts upon businesses today – with the overwhelming volume of digital communication and the rise in remote work opportunities – push most workers and employers to seek ways to differentiate themselves in a rapidly changing global economy.

“How can you become a remote-but-visible, high-tech, high-touch, remote-yet-embedded, independent-but-loyal, video-producing, content-generating brand ambassador for yourself? The key word is you.”

Significant changes in today's workplaces influence how employees perceive personal branding. For example, not only do younger workers change careers more often, but companies themselves lack tenure; workers find themselves continually planning for their next opportunities. Likewise, hiring managers often use internet searches on job applicants to form first impressions prior to any face-to-face interviews. Workers therefore must be digitally astute and perform the necessary tasks to create a clear and consistent online image.

Companies, too, benefit from employees developing personal brands, since this helps promote their corporate identities. Firms understand that digitally savvy employees are more apt to follow digital trends in their industry, keep abreast of technology changes and produce more innovative ideas.

Personal branding focuses on finding your true identity – the traits and interests that help you to thrive in your career – and promoting that identity. While today's digital methods differ from those used when personal branding first emerged, the focus remains the same – authenticity and visibility. The four stages of developing and promoting a digital personal brand – the “Digital You” – start with defining the “Real You” and progresses to learning how to selectively communicate that personal brand to a wider audience.

Stage one: Explore and refine the “Real You.”

The lure of digital communication causes many to push for digital visibility before determining what image they want to portray. This leads to their sending an unclear, random and untargeted message. Beyond poor messaging, not understanding yourself impedes finding a good career fit. Before advertising your brand, focus on what your brand represents: Determine who you truly are.

“You must know yourself to grow yourself. That means being introspective. Strong brands know their values and passions, they have documented their goals, and they’re fully aware of their superpowers – their signature strengths.”

Successful personal branding relies on authenticity and begins with personal discovery. Look introspectively to explore your personal values and passions and to discover what makes you unique. Once you discover your individual strengths, incorporate these into your daily activities. Disney, for example, brands itself as “family entertainment,” and integrates that into every facet of their business.

Personal branding also relies on understanding how the public perceives your message. But you must first determine which public matters; that is, you must select your target audience – senior managers, industry colleagues, work associates and social media leaders – the people positioned to help promote you and your personal brand. Shift your mind-set to this target audience’s perspective to examine whether your personal brand demonstrates genuine:

- **Purpose** – Who you are.
- **Performance** – What you have achieved.
- **Perception** – What others think of you.

After you take the time to discover your brand and absorb constructive feedback, create your personal story to communicate your brand. Combine your accomplishments with your passions and differentiators to construct a compelling narrative, a message designed to attract followers. Create narratives that resonate, with as a short, arresting tagline; a brief pitch that leaves a positive, memorable first impression; selective opinions voiced during meetings; and your carefully constructed bio on LinkedIn.

Stage two: Convert the Real You into the “Digital You.”

You already have digital versions of you, whether you curate it or not. Explore, identify and understand your profiles that already exist online, so you can modify your online content and control your digital first impression. Second, you must ensure this profile speaks your narrative to your target audience with a consistent message. Audiences favor brands that deliver consistency – think Starbucks – thus in developing your personal brand online, ensure the message remains the same across all online media outlets. In addition, remove any unflattering or incorrect entries, if possible, or overshadow them with more positive content.

When people use Google to find information about others, they judge the results based on these five measures, known as the “Google Quotient”:

- **Volume** – How much content displays?
- **Relevance** – Does the content matter?
- **Purity** – Does the content stand out?
- **Diversity** – Is there variety in content format, such as video and presentations?
- **Validation** – Do outside sources, in the form of testimonials or recommendations, confirm the content?

The first two measures – volume and relevance – form your critical digital presence for your target audience.

“Your first impression is more and more likely to be formed online. That means your digital brand needs to be as magnetic, human and engaging as the real you.”

Professionals rely on LinkedIn as a primary online networking site. Once you build and refine your personal profile, posting on LinkedIn allows you to communicate your crucial first impression to a wide audience.

Important factors you must consider when posting on your LinkedIn profile include credibility and likability. Profiles that score strongly with these two attributes create a strong, positive first impression and capitalize on the benefits LinkedIn offers. You can evaluate how well your profile delivers on these two factors by assessing whether you offer a compelling and consistent message through the LinkedIn categories: summary, headline, headshot, contact details, experience and endorsements.

Stage three: Create an appealing online presentation with the “Visual You.”

The more professional your online presence, the more compelling your online message. Adding visuals to your online profile creates an emotional and intellectual connection with your target audience. LinkedIn research demonstrates that adding a professional photo to your online profile significantly increases the likelihood of gaining positive attention and retention. When adding a headshot, ensure it shows you in your best light by posing solo professionally in a current photograph. Provide different images for different sites to guarantee variety in search results and to convey the right tone for your selected audience. Remember that a professional headshot in your online profile plays a critical role in today’s world of remote working and global offices.

“When it comes to helping people get to know you in the digital world, pictures and videos are potent communications vehicles. They help you convey your humanity, your message and your style.”

Infographics add additional credibility to your online profile. These online canvasses – that combine text with images – convey a compelling narrative. Other, more subtle ways to develop your personal brand identity and deliver a clear, consistent online message include visual elements, such as color; font choice; backgrounds; email signature; and audio elements, such as introductory music and two-to-five-minute scripted messages.

Adding video to an online profile, both real-time and recorded, provides the biggest boost when building your personal brand. Video resonates with viewers, builds trust and delivers value. In real time, online meetings give people presence, especially with the increase in remote work opportunities. Recorded online video gives you a medium with which to differentiate yourself and provides recruiters opportunities to

evaluate potential candidates. Though you once faced cumbersome tasks to add online video, high-quality cameras and YouTube now ease posting relevant, compelling content. Specific methods professionals use to benefit from video include providing team updates; welcoming or inviting new members to an organization; summarizing published white papers; and submitting proposals.

When you effectively use online video, you send a powerful message to your target audience that showcases your personal digital brand.

Stage four: Transfer the Visual You into the “Social You.”

To become a distinguished digital brand, one that attracts followers, take your message to social media. Reach out to form targeted relationships with your selective audience and become a brand in demand. Ensure, however, that you broaden your focus beyond your peers to include variety in your connections – this creates greater visibility. You generate a far-reaching and visible network by connecting with:

- **The past** – People in your past provide a first step in growing a digital audience. Include co-workers from your previous jobs as well as those you’ve met in volunteer and social activities.
- **The present** – Build your network to include your target audience – the senior managers, colleagues and influencers who will help you advertise your digital brand. Use LinkedIn filters to open your network to relevant members and send connection requests.
- **The future** – Create systems that allow your connections to grow. For example, add people immediately upon meeting them, and use your existing connections to generate new ones. Use LinkedIn to organize your growing network. Nurture these relationships and allow them to promote your strengths.

“Personal branding is not a onetime event. You change, the work landscape changes. Everything around you changes. Your brand must evolve to remain relevant.”

Deliver value to your digital brand and remain visible; this involves attending to the “Five Ate Plates” of personal branding:

- **Update** – Post comments on social media outlets, cite recent relevant publications and attend networking events.
- **Create** – Add relevant and targeted white papers, write blog posts, and digitally publish your in-person presentations.
- **Curate** – Share online links and highlight passages you find relevant.
- **Restate** – Repurpose your own material in different contexts to fit different online platforms, such as Twitter and LinkedIn.
- **Evaluate** – Use metrics to assess what works; for example, ask if your outreach has grown your audience, increased your visibility, sparked interest among influencers in your industry or offered increased opportunities.

You need not limit personal branding to business owners and individuals navigating their career paths. In fact, companies rely on social media leaders at all levels of their organizations to stay relevant and help sales

and marketing, public relations and recruiting. By becoming a brand ambassador for your team or division, you gain visibility for your group while promoting yourself and your career within your organization.

About the Author

Best-selling author **William Arruda** is a motivational speaker and authority on personal branding.



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