

6. Managing the personal brand

Managing a personal brand appears to have at least two dimensions: (1) keeping it up to date given changing circumstances and (2) measuring its effectiveness. The individuals we interviewed mentioned the dynamic character of personal brands without our prodding, but the idea of measuring effectiveness was one they considered only in response to a direct question on that topic.

6.1. Adapting a personal brand over time or circumstances

Comments on the chameleon nature of a personal brand were common. However, several individuals said their brand evolved not because of shifting circumstances, but because “I could see that what I was doing wasn’t working, so I changed it.” One sales representative had a clear description of that process:

I was in my mid-20s, and I was always the guy with the joke. Now I’m in my early 30s and I’m a family man and father—that’s my brand. I offer serious advice about a big-dollar commitment. So I’m not the guy with the joke.

6.2. Measuring the effectiveness of personal brands

About half the respondents offered specific answers when asked how they measure the success of their personal brand. [Table 2](#) categorizes answers as tangible, which most were, as well as those intangible/less concrete. Several measures of effective personal brands mentioned “how quickly are your calls answered” or “when you lose your job how quickly do you get another one.” Others were

Table 2. Measuring the effectiveness of a personal brand

<i>Tangible measures</i>
How quickly customers return your phone calls
How easy it is to get appointments with prospects
On LinkedIn, whether you are trending up or down
When you lose your job, how quickly you get another one
How many referrals come your way
Your sales results
How much repeat business you get
How often you are referenced and quoted
Promotions
The same way you measure the value of your corporate brand
If you make more money in sales than the salary of the CEO
Money my clients saved because they used my services
Accolades, awards, and trips
<i>Intangible measures</i>
People like working with you
You get compliments
You humble yourself and ask your boss and mentors how you're doing
Your client smiles when he/she sees you

variations on sales success—referrals, repeat business—or variations on client success to which the respondent's organization contributed.

Intangibles were offered as well. One sales manager, asked how she measures the effectiveness of her personal brand, used an anecdote:

My supervisor sent me an email about a suggestion I had made. He said "I like it, so I'm sending it up the chain to my vice president." And then he added, "I knew you were the right person for this job."

Another response encapsulated the value of a personal brand: A sales representative thought a minute about how he measures its effectiveness and then said, "My client smiles when he sees me."

7. Recommendations for personal branding

Working from interviews intended to be only exploratory, we hesitate to generalize from our results. However, with the caution that we interviewed a small, non-random set of individuals, we did learn that strategic personal branding, intentionally

matching values and competencies with the priorities of one's organization and one's customers, can pay off. That result leads to four recommendations.

7.1. Balance respect-building and relationship-building

Our first recommendation arises from the fact that those we interviewed created personal brands more often to demonstrate competence than to build relationships, but few set out to do both. We believe that ideally a personal brand should offer both of these pathways to success.

Focusing on one or the other is understandable. For those who currently emphasize only competence—or only relationship-building—it may be natural to recall triumphs based on one's current brand and assume that it is therefore optimal. However, we advise managers, executives, professionals marketing their services, and students seeking such roles to consider broadening their personal brand. Doing so, after all, means broadening one's own set of strengths. Organizations and MBA programs both may want to offer coaching on how to proceed.

7.2. Bolster personal branding with organizational supports

A second recommendation concerns the need for organizations and educators to consider all the roles they might play in personal branding. One respondent waited until we concluded his interview, then asked: "Why isn't my company asking me these questions?" We note that companies may have dress codes, policies concerning on-the-job smoking, drinking, or talking to the press, and very likely policies on social media use. However, because all of these issues are subsets of personal brands, managers might want to use that term, ask employees how they can be helpful, then offer coaching and sensitize employees to the realities of aligning personal and corporate brands. MBA programs can do the same.

At the same time, it seems wise to recognize that a personal brand is just that—personal—and may be valuable not only as a route to success but also as a fallback after job loss or as a path to career flexibility. Thus, personal branding is both a marketing issue and a human resources issue, and any survey or policy should incorporate both perspectives. While managers may learn a great deal from asking employees about their personal brands, they may also want to interview customers or clients, asking them to describe the personal brands of the company representatives with whom they work.

7.3. Embrace flexibility

Third, we recommend flexibility when considering the relationship of personal brands and the corporate brand. While conflict between the two will help neither the individual nor the company, personal brands can enrich and stretch the corporate brand and should be encouraged to do so. A regional sales manager recounted an attempt to sell into a billion-dollar company for the first time. He said, “The reputation of our company got us an appointment, but then it was up to two of us to build the relationship that would lead to the first order.”

Flexibility rather than uniformity in the branding of employees can prove useful in another way. A manager with more sophisticated understanding of personal branding can strategically approach diverse personal brands of employees. Sales teams are often developed based on complementary skill sets, but can also be developed to juxtapose complementary personal brands. One team member may display the kinds of brand characteristics that in [Table 1](#) we label as emphasizing competence, while another displays those we label as relationship-building. While it would be desirable for one individual to excel in both dimensions, efforts to see that a team does so can produce the same outcomes.

7.4. Measure, assess, and adapt brands over time

Finally, we suggest that individuals measure the effectiveness of their personal brands and modify them when necessary. Managers can encourage employees to evaluate their brand and can set up systems for the organization to do likewise. For salespeople, decreases in order sizes will prompt attention, but a decrease in referrals or even followers on social media may not. If such responses to a personal brand are perceived as valuable, tracking them becomes part of good management. Even the ability to gain a premium price can be a measurement of the effectiveness of a personal brand.

Likewise, astute managers will recommend monitoring internal indicators of skillful personal branding. If employees fail to achieve cooperation or to progress in the organization, it may be easier and more effective to discuss such failings in the context of personal branding rather than personal deficiencies. Changes to personal branding are more easily coached and encouraged. Organizations can help any employee by pointing out that he or she has what amounts to a workplace identity and that, like any brand in the marketplace, it needs to be formed strategically, using a process like the one described

here, but also frequently evaluated—and sometimes improved.

8. Personal branding in the long run

Despite differing opinions around the topic of personal branding in recent years, the perspective that we adopt here—that everyone has a personal brand as a result of first impressions, personality traits, communications with others, and more—behooves all of us to address the status of our own personal brands. Does the brand you currently have communicate the right message? How can it be refined? How does it fit with your employer’s organizational or product brand?

Beyond the need for individuals to monitor and moderate their own personal brands, companies need to be prepared to address employee personal brands in ways other than defensively. For the sake of both company and workforce fulfillment, managers should be prepared to support employees in developing personal brands that benefit both the individual and the overarching organizational brand. In the long term, personal brands and company brands need not battle against each other, but can find ways to support each other to achieve mutual benefit.