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By Hazel Cunningham

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About the Author

Hazel Cunningham says that many people find that their enthusiasm, knowledge and strong work ethic is not enough anymore to keep them moving toward their personal and professional goals anymore.

Everyone has more competition, whether they operate their own business or work for someone else.

She saw that everyone around her was having to work longer hours just to try to maintain the lifestyle they had.

But, that was often not enough as many factors which they had no control over could bring their plans undone.

People that are employed by others, like Hazel was, are possibly under the greatest pressure. There are no life-long jobs any more.

Hazel says that personal branding can help us to get attention for our skills and the value we offer.

She has filled her ebook with low-cost and no-cost ways to connect with potential clients and employers and impress them.

Hazel believes that personal branding can help almost anyone to achieve their personal and professional goals.

Hazel says that it's something which many people find hard to do effectively and without turning people off.

Hazel shows how to avoid the pitfalls and present yourself in a credible low-key way which can get great, lasting results.

What I will show you is not about hyping up a false image or trying to hide anything.

These tips will help my readers improve their chances of getting better results and rewards more in line with the effort which they put into their work.

Introduction

Whatever business you are in or what you aspire to achieve, you can increase your chances to reach the highest levels by applying these tips to brand yourself as the resource that your potential customers or employers should get to solve their problem or improve the results they are getting.

Like everyone in my area, you are probably facing more competition and other pressures than you ever have had to at any time in the past.



**Are you almost
invisible?**

By any realistic assessment, getting to the top is likely to require even more determination and effort in the future too.

And, just staying at your present level of achievement is not an option.

There is no longer such a thing as a permanent job.

Many people are finding the skills which they have learned are less in demand.

We must keep up with the rapid improvements in technology or find out opportunities rapidly diminish, because evolving technology is taking

over many specialized tasks and there are also many more people competing for the jobs which are available.

Employers are faced with greater numbers of qualified and eager applicants than ever before and are also trying to keep staff at a minimum number to keep costs down.

These businesses are believed to be the reason that so many people develop serious stress and other health problems which also affect their relationships and general self confidence.

These developments don't just affect individuals. The effects are felt by everyone that associates with these people. Over time, they also impact on the wider community.

Personal branding is a valuable tool which anyone can use to their advantage.

Individuals can use these techniques to be recognized for their ability and accomplishments without offending or disadvantage to anybody else.

Branding yourself can help you improve and expand your business connections through personal contact, meetings and the Internet as well.

I hope that the tips and strategies which I share with you will re-enforce your self-confidence and also improve the rewards and satisfaction you get from your professional and personal activities.

Hazel Cunningham

What Brand do You Wear?

You probably have a few brands on you already; the clothes you wear the car you drive and others.

But the most important brand you wear all the time is the impression which other people get about you through your personal or professional encounters. That makes a statement which you are affected by even though you may not realize it.

Set the Stage

Your ability can only shine if your customer sees it in a positive way.

It's a bit like putting some food on a scratched plastic plate or one made from expensive china. If they don't like the plate, they probably won't stay for the meal.

What do your clients see when you meet. I remember one businessman, when they were talking about an over-eager salesman who had approached each of them, saying to my husband, "I don't even like the way he walks toward me!"

That salesman would have almost no chance of ever selling anything to them, would he?

Focusing on Them

For your brand to have a positive effect on your life, you must ensure that it is known by the people and organizations which you want to interact with.

Being recognized as a credible person with the skills and integrity they need to solve their problems will require an ongoing effort and close attention to those factors which are part of your brand.



Focus is one of the most important factors in establishing yourself as the best choice for any project or position.

When someone needs your help or input about an important matter, (if it matters to your client or boss, then it is important to you!) Just giving it your full attention will help you to make a valuable contribution.

Using you as a sounding board will also help them to think more clearly about their problem. So, even if they find the answer to that particular problem themselves, you are likely to make a lasting, positive impression.

Many people find it very difficult to focus on one thing for even just a few minutes. Their minds wander and that is usually easily observed by the people they are working with.

Don't think this is a fault; it's just the way we have been thinking all our lives. We are also influenced by the great number of things which compete for our attention.

I believe that we can improve the quality of the ideas we produce as we increase our ability to focus on one important thing over time through regular practice.

But, you should not try to be fully engrossed in a difficult problem for too long at one sitting.

This can have bad effects on your ability to produce good results and even affect your general health.



It's a good idea to put no more than, say, thirty minutes of concentrated effort into a serious mental task and then take a short break.

Try it and you will probably find that you are starting to feel a bit tired even after that relatively short time.

But, the ideas which you produce will probably be better than you might get if you strained to focus on the matter for two solid hours.

It's important that the shorter period has no interruptions if possible. Each time we are distracted and have to refocus our energy and attention back on something, we need at least five minutes to get back to speed on it.

This, according to the time management experts, is the reason why many people fail to manage their time efficiently.

If you can't organize a full thirty minute session without interruptions, perhaps because of the requirements of your job, try a shorter session. When you see the benefits that come from that, you may be more motivated to try for a longer session.

Stay Real to get Real Results

Some people, probably without meaning to, tend to assume a superior attitude when they are offering their knowledge and experience to their clients.

That may work for some who have an established reputation but it can reduce the strength of the connection which they have with them.

This can mean that the clients are likely to move on when they hear of other capable people with similar skills and better interpersonal skills.

It is also likely to negatively affect the word of mouth which they spread about that person and the quality of their experience.

If you are exceptional, that's great. But, let your clients discover it for themselves through the results you get for them rather than from you pointing it out to them.

That way, it is very likely that they will become enthusiastic walking advertisements for you.

That's the way to fill your order book and eventually get higher fees as well.

Step By Step and You are There!

One of the most common and important qualities in the more successful people I know and read about is that they are consistent. Like the tortoise in the fable, they keep going and they have a strong focus on the destination they set for themselves.

Consistency and integrity are guaranteed to move anyone forward faster and more surely than any other strategy or promotional activity.



Everybody has to face problems and disappointments which affect their progress.

One friend told me that he used to dwell on those until he found that this reduced his ability to deal with the current challenges he had.

“I wasted energy on constantly reviewing battles I’d already lost.”

“This affected my outlook and how I dealt with my co-workers and potential clients.”

When I realized how much this was slowing me down, I started to consciously focus on the current situation and my customers’ needs, rather than just my own.”

“My productivity improved and so did my results!”

“My improved attitude drew more customers to me and made for a much better work environment.”

People may not care about the disappointments you face in your working day, but they tend to notice and appreciate how well you deal with them.

Self Evaluation

This step should be done on a regular basis, so that you can work out whether you are making the sort of impression you need to.

You need to take some time to make a clear-eyed assessment of what you want to project as your particular qualities which are likely to attract the people you want to work for or with and the impression which you are currently giving them.



You can either type this into a new file on your personal computer or write it into a notebook which is small enough for you to carry with you so that you can refer to and update it when you want to.

I like the notebook method for this but you can choose either way and change to the other if that seems more your style after a fair trial.

The first thing to do is to write down what you believe other people think of you as a possible supplier or work colleague right now.

Then, please write in nine words or less, write why they should deal with you rather than someone else that offers a similar service.

The next step is to review your answers to these questions and then list what you can do to move closer to the brand which you want people to see you wearing.

You must be careful to focus on methods like those I discuss and explain in this ebook, which will not compromise your personal values.

The impression you want to give to other people should be closer to what you perceive as the 'real' you than the one which has already spread before you were aware of the effect of your reputation in your community could have on your attempts to reach and even surpass your current personal and professional goals.

Two Questions to Improve Time Management

Many of us are wasting a lot of valuable energy and irreplaceable time every day.

To stop the drain and start making better use of these resources, I suggest that you write this sentence on a card and put it somewhere that you will see it regularly every day.

Will doing this move me closer to my goals?

If the answer is, "yes.", that's fine.

Now, you need to know whether this is your best choice. Ask yourself the other question.

Is there something else which would give me better results?

Sometimes, you will have a few options which either will give a quick benefit or perhaps some that offer more benefits in the long-term.

These questions will not always give you complete definitive answers but they will help you to focus on what's really important to your continued progress.

You also need to relax at times and indulge in some activities which you like but which don't have any major benefits. Just make a conscious decision about when and how much time you use for them so you have enough time to easily finish all the things you need to do.

That way, you will make smoother and quicker progress and also appreciate the relaxation activities even more.

Three Vital Steps to Success

There are three parts to launching your successful personal brand.

I call them, “**plan**”, “**prepare**” and “**power up**”.

You must ensure that you give enough attention to each stage.

It is also very important to follow the same order as I suggest or I could almost guarantee that there will be unexpected problems. In some cases, those might set you back a very long way.

Plan

Your level of success with your branding usually depends to a large degree on how well you planned your campaign before you did anything else.

The time and thought you invest in your planning would be much less than would be needed to change the effects of a campaign that started badly and created a bad impression for whatever reason.

This should be a private session where you sketch out:

- Q Your situation
- Q Your assets
- Q The obstacles
- Q Your goals and aspirations
- Q Your target(s)
- Q Your timeline
- Q Your milestones

The most important thing is to try to get honest view of those factors.

The best way I have found to do this is to mentally look at ourselves from outside of our bodies. I don’t mean anything like astral travel, just a change of mental focus from looking outward and looking at ourselves as if we were an external observer.

This may seem a bit difficult or too theoretical, but it is fairly easy with a little concentrated effort.

Also, it will become easier you will get better results as you repeat the exercise from time to time.

That’s because almost all of us are inward focused because we are most interested in everything around us from the point of view, “How does that affect me?”

You’ve probably heard about everyone’s favorite radio station, WIIFM (What’s in it for me?!)

The other benefit from this technique is that you will probably start to make better connections with other people in all areas of your life because you will be more outward looking.

Your Situation

You need to take note of what your situation is right now.

That will involve some hard thinking and may be uncomfortable when you start to develop a more realistic picture of your situation.

But, you need to clearly understand:

- ? What resources, both material and emotional, which you have or are developing
- ? What you want to achieve
- ? What current or potential problems you need to know about and deal with before you can expect to make any significant progress
- ? The timeline which you have worked out for this venture.

This step will give you a firmer base for your future ventures and save you time and stress every day through the rest of your life.

I am not saying, you won’t have stress or ever waste any time – we’re only human.

They are part of everyone’s life and viewed as temporary bumps in the highway of life.

Your Assets

This is where you look at what are your greatest strengths that will be useful to the people you deal with.

Before you can start, you also need to get a realistic and full view of those things which might get in your way.

The Obstacles

Are there any areas which you need to improve before you will be in a position to give the level of service which you will promise to your clients or employers?

There are two things to think about this.

We need to list these factors and deal with them as soon as possible.

We must not let them delay our taking the next step toward our goals. If we do, we may, like many people I know, never get to the next step.

Your Goals and Aspirations

This is also a good time to refine your own personal and professional goals. Some people have too many things on their minds which make it impossible for them to progress toward any of them.

Sometimes, we might find that a few of our dreams and goals are probably unobtainable and the time we devote to thinking about them reduces the likelihood of our success in other areas as well.

To start turning some of your most important dreams into goals, set out a realistic timeline for you to accomplish it. I'll explain more about timelines in the next section.

If, like some people I know, you decide that you have too many goals to work on at this point, try to sort them into groups where achieving each small goal will improve your ability to work toward the next one.

If you try to reach goals in different areas at the same time, you will slow your progress and not improve your skills to the same extent.

Your Timeline

As I suggested in the previous section, everyone needs a timeline to measure their progress against. The length of the timeline might be based on your own experience with similar projects in the past or on what your client or your colleagues say it is likely to take to produce the desired result.

I always look at a timeline in part as a challenge. I try to supply the work sooner than is expected but only when I can maintain the expected level of quality.

You always, of course, have to take into account the schedules of other people that are involved in the project, including suppliers of materials which you need to use.

Some people use computer programs to record their progress and keep notes about it for reference when they get similar tasks in the future.

I still use a printed organizer because I used one for years.

But, the appearance of new machines with expanded communication options has convinced me that my husband will have to buy me one this year.

Although I don't do as much work as when I was employed full-time, I can see many uses for an iPad or something similar in our new situation.

Prepare

Your Target(s)

Your next step should be to decide where and to whom you will offer your skills.

After your review in the plan section, you should have a better idea of what you like to do and what you have the experience and training to do well.

Now, you will be ready to carefully examine what opportunities exist in your area which would give you enough of a return to meet your financial and personal goals.

Your Milestones

You will need to decide on where you will put a few markers on your timeline

so that you can gauge your progress towards accomplishing that particular goal.

This is essential for keeping you on track.

Having intermediate points marked out along your road will also give you opportunities to take a short pause and to assess whether:

- ? You need to put more effort into this project so that you can improve your rate of progress
- ? You have any potential problems with the project which need to be addressed before you go any further.
- ? You are maintaining good contact with your client or employer about progress on this project

The last step before actually starting your project should be to check that you have your resources and your lines of communication with all those involved in place.

Power Up



When you have covered the points which are listed above, you should be ready to start your project.

The time which you have invested in your preparation for the project is never wasted. It's a very important part of your plan and almost ensures a better outcome for you and the people that you work with.

Tip: I suggest that you record some notes about each stage of the projects which you do. These will be a handy reference when you are assessing the time and other resources you may need for similar projects in the future.

Using the Internet to Spread Your Brand

You have probably been using the Internet for some time for personal interests and business contacts and research.

I find that many people do not realize that they can harness the power of the Internet for promoting themselves and their own careers or businesses.

If you are not yet comfortable with using the Internet for more than email and viewing various sites of personal or business interest to you, don't worry. You can learn as you go. That's what I did.

There are also a few potential drawbacks to keep in mind.

Don't mix business with pleasure. By that, I mean you should keep your personal sites free of any mention of the company you work for and especially, the people there.

Always check if the company has a policy about this for their employees.

The other thing which has brought problems to many people is that they have done or said something online which has upset people and that behavior has had some impact on the online image of the business they work for or their own business activities.

Remember that anything you put on the Internet:

- Can and will be copied and displayed elsewhere, possibly by someone that wants to cause problems for you.
- Will never disappear entirely. So, for instance, if you work for Company A and write something less than favorable about Company B, that may cause you problems now or even five years in the future when you are working for Company B and someone digs up the old material.

Just keep in mind that you are a representative of your business or the company you work for even outside work time.

Here are some brief tips about Branding yourself with the Internet.

Your Own Web Site

There are many advantages to setting up your own web site. If your name is available as a domain name (the address of a website like johnsmith.com), I suggest that you grab it even if you don't want to use it for promoting yourself or your business activities.

This helps to ensure that it will be available if you decide to use it for private or business reasons at a later time. It also prevents someone else claiming it.

Don't use any site which other people own and operate as a replacement for having your own web site. For instance, a blog on Blogger.com is easy to set up and less worry to maintain, but you do not own it and could have the service withdrawn at any time.

Many services where you can set up your web site or blog (an online diary) for free also require that you give them rights to use your material without any compensation to you. Always check the Terms of Use before you sign up. It's too late afterwards.

You could lose the blog or web site and the material you have put there overnight if they decide to remove your access. You may also find that their site disappears at some time in the future, taking your material away.

If you develop a strong following on a site such as Facebook and then want to start a web site of your own, you may find that many of the people who connected with you on the other site never get around to visiting the new one which you set up.

It is very important that you keep the information you put on the Internet current and correct.

That's why it is advisable to start slowly and only expand the number of places on the Internet where you create a presence after you are sure that you have time available for more than you are already doing.

You can pay someone to prepare your web site. Some people pay a college graduate with computer related qualifications to produce their web site. That can work out fine and save you some money.

Whoever you hire, you must be able to trust the person that does this for you. You are not only relying on them to produce quality work that will be an asset to you and your business, but you must be sure that everything which they put on the web site is accurate and does not infringe someone else's legal rights.

For instance, you must check that their design is original. This can be very difficult because of the huge number of sites and services on the Net. The best suggestion I have is to check their references carefully. Look at other sites they have produced. Talk with their previous clients if possible.

You have to have a written contract which ensures that they pass all rights in the content and design of the web site to you.

Make sure that the design and all the content will appeal to your customers.

You also need to be sure that you or someone you hire can maintain and update your web site without any difficulties.

The eBookwholesaler member that supplied this ebook to you can also suggest some books which can help you if you want to learn more about the Internet and having your own web site.

Web 2.0 for Social and Business Interaction

A recent development which is offering many opportunities, while also creating some traps and difficulties for us, are the Web 2.0 sites, such as Facebook and LinkedIn.

Web 2.0 is a term used to refer to the many web sites which encourage social interaction between people that have similar backgrounds, interests or desires.

They are a development from the bulletin boards, forums and chat rooms which have been popular through the years that the Internet has been publicly accessible.

The Web 2.0 web sites have the benefit of the latest technology.

This, along with their focus on sharing people’s information to a much greater degree than was generally acceptable before, enables the companies to provide much more interesting experiences for their members.

There are dozens of sites attempting to make an impact in this area and more are launching almost every day as others drop out of sight.

The most interesting for business people at the time of writing my ebook is LinkedIn. Despite the ever-growing competition and evolving technology, I believe that LinkedIn will continue to evolve and be successful for some time to come.

Most people are aware of some of the privacy implications of using sites like these. But, you should read and be sure you understand the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy for each of the sites you interact or make any public statements or give out information.

You will realize then that your safety and privacy are entirely your concern. No-one else and no organization will accept any responsibility for anything you put anywhere on the Internet.

Use the About box on your Facebook page to point to your web site and/or your blog if you have them.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is described as a Web 2.0 social networking web site, and regarded by many as particularly important because it is focused on helping business people to make good connections with new people who are involved in the same type of business activity and improve the connections which they already have.



Using LinkedIn as part of your personal branding strategy is quickly becoming one of the most popular techniques of all. Although there is very strong competition among these types of web setups, LinkedIn appears to be likely to thrive for

some time to come.

There are well over 70 million members in LinkedIn and the service supply has many features which will help you.

There is an application with for use with some of the most popular phones, including the BlackBerry and iPhone.

As well as using LinkedIn to connect to and improve your interaction with individuals that might be interested in your services, it is also a means of connecting with groups of people that are related to your niche.

There are probably thousands of groups on the LinkedIn system and you are allowed to connect to as many as fifty. But, I suggest that you start with just one or two that you think might be the best fit for your particular interests and abilities.

To ensure that you do not damage your reputation at this early stage, you need to be an active participant in the groups which you join. If you are inactive or only participate when you have something to promote, your value to the group and its potential value to you will rapidly diminish.

Within reason, the more connections you make through a service like

LinkedIn, the more value you will get from it.

Provided you are seen as a credible and helpful person by those that you connect with, LinkedIn can be a valuable source of potential clients and business associates.

Maintaining and improving your activities through LinkedIn will take some time and effort but the potential rewards will make that very worthwhile.

With all these services that are springing up, you must take care that you don't reveal information which might be misused for identity theft or other illegal activities.

But, it's important that you give sufficient information in your LinkedIn profile so that it will cover all those areas which you are currently involved with all have relevant experience of in the past.

Many people just put the bare essentials such as their current employment or most recent projects in their profile. This, of course, will limit the number of opportunities for making new valuable connections with people that check your profile. If they don't see that you have previously worked in other areas which may be more relevant to their needs, they will quickly move on to check somebody else's profile and experience.

LinkedIn are very progressive in adding new features to their service and tweaking those already available to make them more useful to users like you.

Check the information on the site and ask some of the people or groups which you connect with about their recommendations and experience with these features. That has two benefits; people you are connected with will appreciate an opportunity to help you and hear their knowledge and it will also save you time because they will help you locate the best of the new features in a much shorter time period.

One of the more popular features on LinkedIn is LinkedIn Answers. You can use this to broadcast a business question to your own connections and the rest of the LinkedIn membership as well.

There is also an option to just send your question to specific people that you

are already connected to. A question which you circulate in this way does not appear anywhere else on the site.

The question is should fit one of these three general categories:

A **knowledge** question would reveal or confirm some facts about a particular business matter.

An **experience** question asks for feedback from people that have used a particular technique, tactic or service.

An **opinion** question asks for feedback about the potential of a tactic or idea, based on the other members’ experience even if they might not have actually use that particular tactic or idea in that way it themselves.

Asking questions does not just give you a quick way to get help with the problem, it will probably give you a much wider range of views than you would get in your area or at a conference.

Facebook

Facebook is a phenomenal success, and may possibly have more staying power than many of the other top sites. The founder, Mark Zuckerberg, was the Time magazine 2010 Person of the Year and there is a movie currently doing good business which tells one version of the early development and launch of the web site.



One estimate I read was that more than half a trillion (500,000,000) people have joined the web site by October 2010.

Close to sixty percent of the current active users are believed to sign in to Facebook every day.

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg believes that we will continue to share more and more information.

That suggests it is critical that anyone who values their public profile will need to stay, as far as possible, in full control of it.

Facebook is popular with many business people though it began and in basically a site for social interaction.

Facebook provides the means to expand our networks of close friends, people that we connect with because of a common interest and a growing number of casual connections.

It is important that we guard our more sensitive information carefully as there have been instances of both accidental and malicious misuse of personal information.

Facebook is probably the most important social site for social interaction on the net at the moment but it is also one that every business person should consider joining.

Despite the potential problems, I believe that we should learn to use these resources so that we can both expand our networks and protect (as far as

possible) our brand.

Some people are claiming that a significant percentage of the Facebook Members that have registered that they like your business are potential customers but you must be careful how you interact with them. Blatantly commercial contact will backfire badly.

Using Facebook is a topic which I cannot cover in depth here. Watch the changes which are introduced. Some may require quick follow-up.

In 2009, Facebook offered Web addresses within Facebook which could include your name. These were recognized as having great potential.

They were offered at no charge which made them even more desirable.

Of course, a lot of people were disappointed when the name they wanted was already taken or unavailable, sometimes for legal reasons) but I doubt that many of them stopped using Facebook.

Before you start to build your presence on Facebook, you should work out the people that you want to connect with through it.

You can't expect it to be an effective business promotion tool if much of the material which you post is for your family or your ten pin bowling team.

You need to carefully consider what information you share with your friends and their friends through Facebook.

Plan how your Facebook identity and activity will help you to move closer to your goals?

If you are already using Facebook, have you considered what effect it may have on your goals and the image which your business contacts would gain from it?

I suggest that you don't rush to expand the number of connections you make through Facebook or any of the other Web 2.0 sites.

Look for quality people who are in your area of business. You may be pleasantly surprised at the connections which occur if you work carefully step by step.

Follow the same security protocols which you would with any other public site. Remember that any information which you make available to even one person through these sites can be spread without your knowledge or permission instantly. Anything which you put on any web site can be copied and may be misused.

This is the current reality but it should not stop you from making yourself more visible through these sites.

It is becoming common for employment agencies to search Facebook and similar sites for information about applicants. That means that you need to be as open and honest as you can about what you say on that site or any other.

It has been reported that some people have revealed things about themselves or the business they work for which has caused embarrassment and even difficulties with their future employment.

Be confident and responsive, but proceed with all due caution.

Business Cards That Work

It amazes me how the business card has survived almost unchanged despite the onslaught of so many exciting and innovative advances in technology.



Some people think that the business card can be replaced entirely by other means of contact. But, my experience is that it is still an indispensable tool.

I'll give you some suggestions in this chapter to help you make the best use of this 20th century promotion tool now and in the future.

Unless you are an experienced designer or very talented artist with access to high end printers that can produce commercial quality cards, I strongly advise that you do not try to produce your own cards just to save a few dollars.

Although there are many computer programs that can assist you to some extent with both design and production of your cards, they cannot completely remove the learning curve, and you would have to invest a lot of time in learning to use them to produce even an adequate card.

If you decide to create and make your own cards with your own computer equipment, please use quality heavy card for them. Avoid the thin, perforated sheets of cards which are sold for printing business cards on. Your cards must convey a professional image.

Before you give away even one card check that:

- Your cards have no errors. It is almost essential to get someone that is not familiar with what you put on your cards to check for errors. Many people can miss errors on their own cards and written material because they are too familiar with what they expect to see.
- You cannot see through the cards when there is a light behind them.

- The ink does not fade. This used to be a big problem with some inks used in some small computers but most of the well-known brands are okay. It's still worth checking,
- The ink does not rub off on your hands or clothing even if the card is wet. You may think this is unlikely but many cards are exchanged or read when people are at a bar or a social or business event where drinks are available.

It's a good idea to look at as many different cards as you can and even scan through a book about designing cards for ideas before you contact a printer.

Your first question should not be, "How much can I afford?", but, "What are other people in my field of operation using?"

Gather as many business cards from your colleagues and competitors as you reasonably can. You should try to get a card which is as good as those used by the most successful person in your area.

Unless you feel it is appropriate for the business you are in, I would avoid unusual type styles or colors.

I have seen a few business cards that are in an unusual size or shape. Unless you have a very good reason for choosing something like that, stick with the commonly used size for your business cards. That will probably be cheaper to produce and, even more importantly, they will be easy for clients and other contacts to store for future reference. If they don't fit their card index or wallet, they will probably be discarded.

If you want a colorful card, think about using colored card stock with black print.

Always focus on the effect the card will produce when you give it to someone. If it's hard to read or does not have all your contact details, they will probably put it aside and never look at it again.

Fancy fonts, colors and shapes do not say anything about your creativity, just that you got your cards produced by an innovative printer.

Many people have reported a good response to putting their picture on their

business card. The quality and appeal of the original photograph will be a major influence on the card's success.

The other important consideration is what you will have printed on your card.



Some people use too much text, trying to use the card to sell for them. The card should just make it easy for the other person to contact you and give them some reason why they should.

This is where you can display a little of your own creativity.

Avoid tired phrases and clichés that have been used by many people in your industry. Your potential clients have seen them too many times and the card will not grab your prospect's attention unless you think of a clever twist. That can be very effective.

Some people put a calendar or some useful tips relevant to the prospect's business on the back of their card. This can help to make your card be kept in their wallet or diary instead of being secreted with all the others in a business card folder.

I always offer my prospects at least a couple of cards. At the very least, they can file one at their office and carry the other with them. But, when I offer them the extra card, I say, "Maybe you might like to give this card to somebody who might also be looking for help with the same problem?"

When you have your cards, do your best to get rid of them as quickly as you can. But, please make sure that you only offer them when it is appropriate.

Logos

If you are promoting yourself or your business, you should get your own logo.

You may need some professional help for this. Just putting a geometric shape or a picture behind your company name and calling it a logo might work.

But you will be seeing that logo many times every day of the week. It will also become part of every type of promotion that you do. Ask yourself if your quick and simple creation is good enough to represent you and your business through the next year or more?

These are some of the important factors which will influence how effective your logo is.

It must not be too much like any other company's logo or illustration.

Keep your design as simple as possible. If it has too many parts, is too ornate all hard to read, people will not remember it.

The text should be easy to read even at a distance or if the person looking at it as minor vision problems.

Your design needs to be able to be readable even if it is enlarged or reduced. If there are any fine lines in the design or some parts don't have a clear division between them, they may become one big blob. This can also happen if you send documents by fax.

Light colors will not show up well or even disappear completely when the documents are scanned photo copied or faxed.

Check how your colored design looks when it is copied in a black and white photocopier or scanner.

Choose the colors in your design very carefully. You need to be sure that they complement each other. Be careful about using different shades of red and green because these may be a problem for people that have color vision deficiencies.

You should carefully check any symbols or gestures which you want to

include in your design to see whether or not they may have a negative meaning in some other cultures or communities.

Unless the concept of your design is more important than the message you want it to give your clients, make sure all your text is printed so that it may be easily read.

A good logo can be a valuable asset for your business. A small investment in getting it prepared by an experienced professional may pay off many times over in the years to come.

One last tip about your logo; I have found that most large and successful companies keep their logos small on your cards and other stationery.

This usually looks better and gives you more room to include all your contact information.

Changing Your Brand

Do feel that your branding is not in line with the current needs which you serve or no longer a true reflection of your organization?

Sometimes, you may want to change your brand to venture into new areas or to take account of changes in the niche which you are currently focused on or the expectations of your clients.

This is usually neither simple nor quick.

You will understand that this is a serious step and is also likely to involve substantial expense in the changes to your stationery, signage and uniforms if you have them.

You can also expect to have to invest time and effort in extra promotion of the new design and in explaining why you did it to your current customers and future prospects.

So, you need to carefully analyze the potential benefits of the change against the costs, both financial and emotional, of going ahead with it.

When you decide to make the change, prepare a plan that will ensure that you get the best value possible out of your new branding.

You also need to explore ways that you might keep your new branding recognizable and relevance to your market for as long a period as you can.

Don't try to rush ahead when you start promoting your new branding. Your clients will, like you, needs some time to adjust to the new focus and decide to accept it.

You may be able to make minor changes to your business focus without having to deal with the stress and expense of changing your brand.

Some companies change their branding when there is a change in the top management or when businesses are taken over or merged.

But changes in the executive staff are mostly an internal matter and there are better ways for them to make their mark then changing the sign above the front entrance.

It may be necessary to change the company's branding after a change of ownership but they should also consider whether that change is really necessary and not just do it automatically.

Remember that the company's old brand has probably built up some name recognition and goodwill in the community which it serves. This could be lost forever if the new branding does not quickly gain wide acceptance.

Define Your Brand

It is important to define what your brand represents and how you will support the impression which it gives to your customers and the rest of the community before you actually start to use it.

Every business needs to ensure that their brand is accepted as one which can be trusted, is innovative and high quality.

Here are some simple steps to defining the important parts of your brand.

I said simple, but it will not all be easy. There will be some effort and time involved if you want to get the best results from your branding.

1] Define what particular group you are focused on with your business?

You may, for instance, sell agricultural chemicals such as weed killers, fungicides and fertilizers.

That means that “agricultural chemicals” is your niche, but your actual focus may just be on home gardeners and the stores and nurseries which cater to them, or your business may supply the nurseries themselves and perhaps farmers with bulk quantities.

The sort of branding which you would need in these different areas may vary significantly if it is to make the best possible connection with your particular customers.

2] What particular skills and resources do you offer your customers to encourage them to call you first instead of any of the other people who offer similar services?

3] Do you make an extra effort to ensure that your customers and enjoy and benefit from doing business with you?

4] Do you help your customers with free advice based on your experience and training even if it is not always likely to produce any direct benefit for you?

5] The most important thing you need to define and actually put into words is the *needs* of your customers which you are focused on. For example,

Dominoes is one of thousands of pizza delivery services. But its focus, represented by its original slogan, tells every customer that they will get a hot pizza on time or it won't cost them anything! That was their original point of significant difference which became the basis of their ongoing success.

If you keep your focus on your customers needs, you will find it much easier to come up with an appropriate tagline.

Take your time about this. Write down as many ideas as you can. Don't be judgmental or critical of your own or anybody else's suggestions. Let the ideas flow freely because that will help everyone who is involved to be a willing supporter of what ever tagline is decided.

Good taglines are always simple and short. That makes them harder to think of but the effort is always worthwhile.

The Advantages of a Personal Brand

There are a lot of people that see branding as the answer to overcoming all the obstacles which they have. But, it is just another tool and you must realize that everyone will have different results. Take it slowly, planning each step and adjusting it as you see new developments.

Then, you can expect to make progress toward your personal and professional goals.

This chapter will show you some well-known and some less obvious, but valuable, outcomes which you can look forward to as you develop your unique personal brand further.

Powerful Profile: As your reputation grows, you will find that more potential customers will seek you out.

People may be persuaded to try something once through advertising or because of a special deal. But, if they don't have any particular preference for someone that they've bought from in the past or have a personal or business connection to, they will usually look for a brand which they have seen.

Customer confidence: Most people realize that anyone who has established their brand in the market place will be focused on their needs and have a strong desire to maintain that reputation.

This gives you an advantage which can mean people who contact you are already in a positive frame of mind about using your services or products.

Referrals: Your clients are likely to be more confident about referring their friends and business colleagues to you.

New business opportunities: When you have become more established through the work you do and the effect of your personal branding efforts, you are likely to find that other business people and organizations are more receptive to approaches from you. You are also likely to get more quality offers from other businesses, based in part on the strength of your branding.

Dealing with Bumps along the Way

To protect your brand and the progress you are making.

As you move forward and, hopefully, closer to your current goals, set a regular time at least every month, to review the results you are getting.

This will help you avoid small problems becoming major difficulties for you.

You should also ask for feedback from your customers and your boss if you have one. Just tell them that you would welcome any suggestions which could help you to give them better service. Many people will actually be reluctant to do so. They may have offered someone well-meant advice in the past and got a highly defensive or even hostile reaction.

If your own review or your request to those you do business with shows any areas which need improvement, don't be disappointed.

You should be glad that you have recognized the problem at an early stage and your customer will be impressed that you respond to their feedback promptly and professionally.

If there is more than one thing which needs adjusting, start with whatever factor is having the most significant effect on your customers or your company.

Don't try to make several changes at the same time because this is likely to reduce the rate and level of improvement.

Your goal is to ensure that you become at least competitive with the best of the other suppliers in your market.

Various things can have a negative effect on our business relationships.

You may find, after careful thought that you are trying to deal with either having too many customers or too many products.

You may be trying to do too many things for your customers or you have too many customers to service which can cause the overall level of service to degrade.

You might be able to give better support and make more sales if you

reviewed your prospect and customer files. Some of the people may not have ordered for a long time or still be prospects that you are spending time cultivating without any indication of imminent success.

If you can focus on your best customers and balance them with some new



prospects, you might get more sales and have a better retention rate because they appreciate the improved connection.

Many salespeople undervalue their current customers. It is usually much better and easier to get more orders from someone that has

already bought from you and got good results than to keep looking for new people to persuade to try your service for the first time.

My first sales manager told me to look at the potential lifetime value of a good customer and always treat every prospect with as much respect as your current customers.

This is easy to do and can have great benefits for your reputation and your business success.

Protect Your Brand 24/7

A friend told me about the valuable suggestion when he collected his van from the sign-writer.

Daryl started his own business just after leaving school. With help from his parents, he bought a neat, used van. Then, he had his girl friend, who was an art student, design a logo and paid the sign writer to apply it to his van.

The sign writer had started before computers became common in his industry. But he had adapted to the changing conditions and was very good with the vinyl computer produced signs.

When Daryl collected the newly decorated van, he asked Jim if he had any advice. Jim said that he should remember that how he drove his vehicle would affect the impression that people in the community would develop about him and his new business.

Jim said, “Having your logo on your van can be a great advertisement for you 24/7 but one small mistake, if you were to cut someone off at the traffic lights or lose your temper with someone that cuts you off, can damage your business reputation with people you don’t even know are watching you!”

That also applies to each of us. We should realize that our behavior outside of our working environment can impact on our business as well as ourselves personally.

Afterword

I hope that my suggestions will help you to reach your current goals and build your confidence so that you turn your dreams into future goals which you also achieve.

The biggest obstacles you face are probably somewhere in your own subconscious.

If that is your situation, start encouraging yourself and celebrate each small victory that you have. Don't dwell on past disappointments.

That is wasting time when you could be enjoying your journey through our wonderful world.

Good luck (but I don't think you'll need it!)

Hazel Cunningham

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