THE FOUR ESSENTIAL C'S OF PERSONAL BRANDING

Differentiate or Die. Never has Jack Trout's insightful witticism been more relevant than in today's overcrowded brand marketplace. One thing is certain: in order to stand out, you have to stand for something. You really have to know yourself. A successful brand is authentic and confident – it doesn't hide behind false promises or vague innuendos.

Personal branding is not just about building an image to portray to the public; it is about understanding your unique attributes, skills, values and passions and making sure these permeate every aspect of who you are and what you do. Ask yourself, "What is my unique promise of value?"

There are four "must haves" in order to build a powerful personal brand. I call them the "Four C's of Personal Branding." Without these, you will have a hard time attracting clients, enhancing visibility, boosting revenue and thriving in a challenging economy:

Clarity: You must be crystal clear about who you are and who you are not. A successful personal brand is true to who you really are. Volvo is about safety not speed, Four Seasons is about luxury service not affordability and Disney is about family entertainment, not slasher films. If you are outgoing, quirky, creative and high energy, you will not succeed by communicating the attributes of calm, steady, professional and reserved. You also want to pinpoint your target market and figure out what's most important to them. Before you can move forward in the branding process, it is imperative to spend a good amount of time with this first C, as it will be the foundation for everything you do from here.

Communication: Once you have a clear understanding of who you are, what you stand for and who you are trying to reach, you will be much better equipped to communicate your message to your target market. Your brand needs to be visible to those who need to know about you. Consider all possible communication tools across multiple marketing channels (both online and off) and select the combination that works best for you. Perhaps you enjoy blogging and writing articles. Maybe you enjoy social media and want to build a strong following on Facebook and Twitter. Or you feel that speaking engagements and workshops are more appropriate for your brand. Whatever the case may be, you will want to put together a communication plan for your brand that puts you out there in front of your target audience.

Connection: People want to do business with those that they know, like and trust. As a powerful brand, it is your job to make an emotional connection with your target market. How do you do this? It is imperative to focus on benefits and results, not features. Your ideal client doesn't want to know what you do, they want to know how you can help them and what the results will be from working with you. For example, if you are a financial planner, your client doesn't want to know what accounts you can open for her or that you're available 24/7, what she really wants deep down is to know that you can help her put her two kids through college and help her to retire by age 55 so that she can finally take that six month European bike tour she's been dreaming about for 10 years. If through your unique promise of value you are able to appeal to someone's pain and passion, then you will have a powerful brand indeed. As you connect with others, remember the acronym WIIFM. The client always wants to know, "What's in it for me?"

Consistency: Your brand attributes and values must permeate everything you do. If one of your key brand attributes is "zen personality" and your brand color is purple, then you're not going to send out a screaming loud direct mail card in bright orange and red. You wouldn't host a salsa dancing party with flamenco dancers for your clients, but you might sponsor a lecture at a Japanese tea garden. It is imperative that there is a brand consistency with everything – from your logo and collateral materials to how you conduct meetings and how you dress on a daily basis. Always ask yourself, "Does this represent my brand attributes of x, y and z?"

If you take your time with these four essential C's of personal branding, then you will be well on your way to understanding yourself better, enhancing your visibility, reaching more ideal clients and building a thriving business.

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