

## Personal Branding

By Bill Gaffney

The topic for this article came to me in a rather curious way. An email posting on job-search strategies appeared on one of my networks. One of the strategies mentioned was “personal branding.” This sounded like an interesting concept, and I turned the email back to the group, asking for some clarification on the subject. As we all know, one nice thing about belonging to networking groups is that you will always have the opportunity to collect others’ interesting thoughts and opinions. In response to my own email, I received an email from a businesswoman in Chicago, Helene Sigman, who offered to speak with me and share some information on this topic. She has an extensive background in corporate identity, branding, marketing, and communications, and gave me some good solid information I thought would be of interest to you. So, I asked her to write a column. Here are her thoughts.



### Personal Branding: What Does It Mean?

The first step is to define what a “brand” and “branding” are. Definitions in the dictionary that apply to this topic for “brand” are:

- a name, usually a trademark of a product or manufacturer
- a distinctive type of something

A good definition of “branding” is:

- the use of advertising, distinctive design, and other means to make consumers associate a specific product with a specific manufacturer

With that in mind, let’s take a look at how this applies to you and creating your own personal brand. Whether your goal is securing a new job, changing your career path, getting a promotion at your current company, or leveraging your value for salary negotiations, personal branding is an important component in helping you accomplish your goal. Communicating your personal brand is the most effective way to get employers to notice you. It includes not only what you can do for a company, it also includes how you do it, such as using a unique methodology that you yourself created. As with a company brand, whatever your unique personal brand characteristics are, they should be:

- distinctive
- relevant and
- consistent

### Personal Branding Defined

Your personal brand is your trademark and makes you unique and distinctive from others in your experience and talent area. Personal branding creates your unique value proposition for potential employers and helps set you apart from your

competition. As all of us know, it’s a competitive job market. We have to be creative and use productive methods to define our unique talents to employers, and accomplishing this within 30 to 60 seconds can be challenging. You want to be remembered for your specialized knowledge or talents and create instant recall when information on your specific topic arises.

An interesting and relevant example of this is the image Chicago is trying to create as part of its efforts to secure the 2016 Olympics. Other contenders have planned facilities for the games outside the city itself, as was the case in Beijing. Chicago, on the other hand, plans to host the games inside the city itself, along its beautiful lakefront. This will become the distinctive value driver or brand attribute for Chicago and is reflected in their slogan, “In the center of the city, in the heart of the nation.”

### Defining Your Value

Defining your unique value, just as Chicago has done as a contender for the Olympics, is key to your personal brand. Here are a few methods you can use to help establish yourself.

#### *Be a thought-leader:*

- Get to be known as someone with expertise and knowledge in a specific area or industry
- Become someone who others seek out when they need information on a specific topic

#### *Be a connector:*

- Be someone who has contacts, connections, or information that can assist others with their needs

#### *Be a process person:*

- Create a process or methodology for executing your work that defines value to the company or your department in areas of time or cost efficiencies



## Career Tips

### How Do You Do It?

The best way to start defining your personal brand is to think about the juncture of your passions and your talents. Here are a few questions you may want to ask yourself.

- What invigorates you about your work?
- What company information or specific expertise do people come to you for?
- What do your colleagues say about your contributions and work?
- Have you created systems or processes to facilitate your own work, or departmental efficiencies that help your work group?
- What career accomplishments are you most proud of?
- What challenges have you overcome, and how did you do it?
- What are your natural talents?

If you get stuck, it may be helpful to ask colleagues what they consider to be your value proposition. One important key when defining your personal brand is that you make it brief and memorable. You want to create quick recall. Because when colleagues think or hear about that particular topic, you want them to think about you and your unique personal knowledge or attributes that are the foundation of your personal brand. Even if you have a diverse background, the more targeted and succinct you can be about your personal brand attributes, the more you will be thought of in your specific area and considered for any new role you seek.



### Expressing Your Personal Brand

Your resume and all your job-search information should support your personal brand and reinforce the value that you can bring. When reviewing your final draft, make sure it supports your unique value proposition. The same principle

holds true when networking and conducting business. Make sure that you're expressing yourself in the same supportive, brief manner in a way that's centered on your brand attributes. Consistency is important in maintaining your personal brand. You can build your personal brand by writing articles,

newsletters, and blogs that demonstrate your knowledge. Speaking engagements are another way to demonstrate your expertise. Your whole demeanor, which includes your style when networking and conducting business — whether in or out of the office — must also reflect the personal brand you want to relay.

Rising above your competition is an important aspect in today's competitive business environment. Establishing your personal brand will help you in accomplishing that goal. Being distinctive, relevant, and consistent are the characteristics that successfully establish your personal brand and help you achieve powerful results.

### Author Information:

Helene Sigman is an award-winning corporate branding and marketing communications professional with 20+ years of experience helping Fortune 500, small to mid-size businesses, and nonprofit organizations leverage their brands in the marketplace. Her talents focus on external and internal branding and communications to harness customer and employee loyalty.

Helene's corporate brand expertise has assisted businesses in increasing their marketplace recognition and reputation. She has worked with the American Hospital Association, Ameritech, BP, the Chicago Board of Trade, and others.

Helene has taken her expertise and applied it to a creative methodology that helps establish individual brand value drivers for defining your distinctive personal brand. This methodology assists leaders, job seekers, and company employees to launch and market their specialized personal brands to leverage marketplace and career success.

*To learn more, contact Helene at 312/550-3168 or helenes1@aol.com.*

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