

PERSONAL BRANDING

— WHAT, WHY AND HOW TO ...



BRANDING IS WHAT PEOPLE SAY ABOUT YOU WHEN
YOU'RE NOT IN THE ROOM

What is a Personal Brand?

A **personal brand** is, in many ways, like a corporate brand. It is who you are, what you stand for, the values you embrace, and the way in which you express those values. Just as a company's brand helps to communicate its value to customers and stand out from the competition, a personal brand does the same for individuals, helping to communicate a unique identity and clear value to potential employers or clients.

Personal branding is one's story.

That story can play an important role in establishing or boosting your career. In fact, an overwhelming 85 percent of hiring managers report that a job candidate's personal brand influences their hiring decisions. Your personal brand should highlight your strengths, establish a reputation, build trust, and communicate the unique attributes that you bring to your current (or desired) industry. Cultivated well, your personal brand will signal to employers whether you'll be the right fit for an open role. Tips for building your personal brand

Developing a personal brand might sound challenging, but there are incremental steps you can take to build credibility in your field. Here are ten tips to help you create an authentic personal brand—and amplify your career in the process.

A Brand Can Be Anything

We're used to thinking about brands in relationship to companies and products - think McDonald's or Apple. But nowadays, anything can be a brand. Even as an individual, you have a personal brand.

So, what is your personal brand? Whether you're known for your snaps or you're still using a typewriter, you have a brand that exists both on and offline.

Luckily, there are a lot of great tools and resources out there to help you with the personal branding process. Use them to leave the right impression on people who look you up online.

The idea of personal branding makes some people uncomfortable. But, if you don't take control of your personal brand online, then you are missing out on opportunities and letting others control your narrative.

Why Personal Branding Matters

When it comes to building a personal brand, some people dismiss the process as being too time consuming, or not that important.

It's true - you will have to devote time and energy into self-branding properly. But the idea that building a personal brand is not important is just false, and here's why:

People Are Googling You at Every Stage of Your Career



Regardless of your age or professional stage, someone is screening you online. What they find can have major implications for your professional (and personal) well-being.

Just consider the numbers. According to CareerBuilder:

"More than half of employers won't hire potential candidates without some sort of online presence today."

Don't lose out on an interview over something you can control - like your personal brand.

And if you're not looking to get hired and think this doesn't apply to you, think again. Especially if you own your own business or work as a freelancer:

"Over half of consumers have chosen to do business with a freelancer or company because of a strong, positive online presence."

If you aren't properly managing your online reputation, then you are actively losing out on business.

For freelancers and entrepreneurs, building a personal brand has never been more important than it is today. Anyone with access to the internet and social media can build an audience, position themselves as an expert, and start attracting clients for their business. And that's exactly what a lot of people are doing.

A recent study by [Upwork](#) revealed that the freelance workforce is growing at a rate **3x faster** than the overall workforce in the U.S. By 2027, freelancers are expected to make up the majority of the U.S. workforce.

While it's great to see that so many people are embracing their entrepreneurial spirit, this also means that every self-employed freelancer, independent contractor, and entrepreneur will soon face more competition than they already do. The key to differentiating yourself from your competition is building a **personal brand**.

The average person now switches jobs every 2-3 years and 40% of the workforce will freelance by 2020. This means that a strong personal brand is more important than ever before. In fact, the more successful you want to be, the more important personal branding becomes.

According to a recent study from Weber Shandwick:

- Global executives attribute 45% of their company's reputation to the reputation of their CEO. That's nearly half!
- Additionally, a CEO's reputation plays an important role in attracting employees to a company (77%) as well as motivating them to stay (70%).

How a CEO interacts online is directly tied to the success and appeal of a company in a major way.

Personal Branding Can Help You Take the Next Step

A strong personal brand can lead to:



- Interviews
- Job placements
- Promotions
- Partnerships
- Speaking engagements

Numbers aside, the most important reason to focus on personal branding is to help yourself. Think of this as building an additional channel for growing your own successes.

Personal branding is a painless step in working towards your goals. Regardless of your industry or professional status, your personal brand has the power to make or break all kinds of opportunities for advancement.

When building your brand starts to feel like a job, remember that it is an essential part of cultivating your career. And keep in mind that the greatest investment of resources, time and effort will likely come up front.

Building and optimizing new profiles, generating content about you and your work, identifying your goals, building a brand strategy - this can feel overwhelming. But once you've established a strong foundation, you'll have a roadmap to follow, which makes the whole process much more manageable.

Distinguish yourself from your competitors and take control of your personal brand with the following approach.

Audit Your Search Results

Before you start building a personal brand, you first need to know where you stand in search results. Google yourself so you know what others see when they look you up.

Don't worry about what you find. While some results may cause a knee-jerk reaction, keep looking. You must know everything that you're dealing with before you can come up with an effective personal branding strategy. Identify what search results or online content attached to you can damage your reputation.

Ten Tips for Developing Your Personal Brand

1. Figure out who you are.

To build a personal brand that accurately reflects your personal and professional identity, you first need to know who you are. Be introspective and create a list of your personal strengths and weaknesses. Ask yourself:

- In which areas of work do I excel?
- What motivates me?
- What characteristics have others complimented me on?
- Which projects have others had to help me with repeatedly?
- Which roles seem to drain my energy?
- Which projects can I spend hours on without feeling overwhelmed or tired?

If you're struggling to answer these questions, ask friends, family, and co-workers how they would describe you. A great online assessment tool is [Crystal](#). Once you're more aware of the different facets of your personality, you can decide how best to brand them.

Keep in mind that many people struggle to choose a specific niche because they don't want to limit themselves. Realize that your personal brand, like many corporate brands, will change as your career grows. The best strategy is to choose a particular area you'd like to focus on and let it evolve over time.

2. Determine what you want to be known for.

Your personal brand is more than a reflection of who you are today; it's a roadmap of where you want to go. In addition to understanding your existing skills and competencies, assess your strengths and weaknesses as they relate to whichever industry or career you want to break into next.

By doing this, you'll uncover the skills and traits that make you distinct, as well as the areas where you need to improve or gain new knowledge in order to advance. Forecasting where you

want to be in five or 10 years—and the attributes you want to be known for—can help you better determine what steps you need to take to get there.

3. Define your target audience.

One of the biggest mistakes you can make as you build a personal brand is trying to appeal to everyone. In reality, **not everyone is your ideal client.**

In order to attract your perfect clients, you must be willing to repel those who you do not want to work with. This means identifying a specific target audience and building a brand that is attractive *to them*.

It may seem counterintuitive, but if you try to be liked by everyone, you will attract no one. You must be polarizing in order to stand out. Not everyone that is exposed to you or sees your message will like you or resonate with you, and that is perfectly fine. You don't need to reach everyone to build a successful business. You just need to reach your perfect clients.

A valuable exercise that we recommend doing is creating your perfect client profile (sometimes called a client avatar). The more you understand about your perfect client, including their desires and challenges, the more prepared you will be to create products and services that they truly want and need.

Here are some questions to help you develop your perfect client profile:

- **Demographics:** what is their age, gender, education, relationship status, income, profession, etc.?
- **Desires and aspirations:** what is their desired future? What are their dreams, goals, and aspirations?
- **Pain points and challenges:** what are they struggling with? What is preventing them from achieving their goals?

If your goal is to reach hiring managers and recruiters, you might start by creating or updating your LinkedIn profile. Why? Because 92% of recruiters leverage social media to find high-quality candidates and, of those, 87% use LinkedIn.

4. Research your desired industry and follow the experts.

Find out who the thought leaders are in whatever field you're in, and don't just follow them, go online and find out if they have blogs, or where they contribute their thinking. Look for people who are successful and examine what they're doing.

In building a personal brand, your goal is to stand out—but you can't rise to the top without taking inventory of who's already there.

5. Create an irresistible offer

In order to build a profitable personal brand, you need to have something to sell to your target audience. You need an irresistible offer that helps your audience solve a specific problem or achieve a specific result.

A lot of entrepreneurs make the mistake of creating a product or service that *they* want, only to discover that no one else wants it or is willing to pay for it.

This is why identifying your perfect client *before* you create a product or service is so important. When you know exactly who you want to help, you can create an offer that is the perfect solution for them.

How to create an offer your clients will love:

The first step to creating an irresistible offer is to position yourself as a specialist and not a generalist. Promise your clients a very specific outcome, and design a specialized offer to help them achieve that outcome. A generic offer with a vague promise is definitely not irresistible.

Next, find the overlap between what you love, what you do best and what your ideal clients want most. Then create an offer that sits at the intersection of these criteria. We call this the **Irresistible Offer Formula**.

Irresistible Offer Formula:

What you love to do + What you do best + What your audience wants most = Irresistible offer

Once you have an irresistible offer, you need to be able to articulate it clearly to your audience. Here are two questions that you need to be able to answer clearly and succinctly:

- **What do you do?** Your answer to this question is your **value proposition**. What is the value that you provide to your clients in exchange for charging them?
- **How do you do it?** Give your process, product, or service a unique name. When you give it a unique name, it immediately stands out from any competing offers that promise the same result.

6. Prepare an elevator pitch.

As you begin to conceptualize your personal brand, spend some time crafting an elevator pitch—a 30- to 60-second story about who you are. Whether you're attending a networking event or an informal party, having an elevator pitch prepared makes it easy to describe succinctly what you do and where you're going (or would like to go) in your career.

Keep your elevator pitch brief by focusing on a few key points you want to emphasize. This could include that you're looking for a new position, have strengths in a particular niche, or recently increased the value of your current department or company.

Simon Sinek does a great job of explaining how to do this in his book [Start with Why](#).

7. Embrace networking.

As you cultivate your ideal personal brand, it's important to network regularly (and effectively) to grow your professional circle. Connect with peers and industry thought leaders by going to formal and informal networking events.

The more connections you make—and the more value you can provide in your interactions—the more likely it is your personal brand will be recognized. And, considering 85 percent of all jobs are filled through networking, regularly attending these events will help you not only build your brand, but potentially advance your career, too.

At these events, don't be shy about asking fellow attendees to meet again for an informational interview or a casual coffee chat. And remember, if you don't get a chance to connect at the event, reach out via email or LinkedIn to spark a conversation. Relationships should not be one-sided. Rather, they should equally benefit each person involved. Before asking for something from a potential contact, consider how you can be of use to them. Offer your services first. Networking should be based on reciprocal relationships, not one-way ones.

Remember that there are many ways to help someone; sometimes, simply connecting someone with a like-minded individual is valuable.

8. Ask for recommendations.

Having current and former colleagues and managers endorse you is one of the easiest and most effective ways to define your personal brand, allowing others to communicate your value for you. Just as a business might cultivate customer reviews and testimonials for use in sales and marketing collateral, you too should cultivate your own reviews in the form of recommendations.

LinkedIn is a great place to ask for endorsements because these recommendations will likely catch the eye of future hiring managers. But don't forget to ask the people endorsing you to act as an actual reference during your job search, being sure they're willing to speak with a potential employer or write a bonafide letter of recommendation if needed.

Not sure who to ask? Former managers who mentored you closely are ideal, but other connections can also craft effective recommendations, including professors and leaders of organizations you belong to.

9. Grow your online presence.

One of the most important aspects of personal branding is making sure your online presence is engaging to hiring managers, co-workers, and others—even if you're not on the job hunt.

With so many different social media tools available today, your online presence will likely look different depending on the medium you choose. While your story should match across all platforms, once you know where your targeted audience is most likely to turn, you can redouble your efforts in telling your best story there.

Additionally, if you want one of your sites or profiles to be exclusively for friends and family, adjust your privacy settings to ensure that potential employers don't stumble upon any information that could potentially harm your chances of landing a job. Here are some platform-specific tips to help you effectively craft your personal brand online.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn serves as a professional social media tool and is the ultimate site for defining your brand. The best way to use this network is to participate in groups, make introductions with people who interest you, and ask for (and give) recommendations. Some other tips for effectively telling your story through LinkedIn include:

- **Focus on key industry skills:** Recruiters will often search for keywords that relate to the role they're trying to fill, so it's important to feature industry terms in your profile—whether in your headline, summary, or job description—and explicitly state your skills.

For example, if you're pursuing a communications role, zero in on your area of interest and key qualifications, such as public relations, social media, or crisis communication.

- **Quantify your accomplishments:** Saying you're "results-oriented" isn't nearly as effective as your actual results. Quantify your accomplishments when possible, whether it's the number of articles you've written, dollars you've raised, or deals you've closed.
- **Complete your profile:** While this might sound obvious, it's not uncommon for users to leave sections of their LinkedIn profile blank. Recruiters want to see what work experience you have, your educational background, and a detailed list of accomplishments, so make sure you're showing the full picture. Convince them you're the person they should hire.
- **Use a professional photo:** LinkedIn users with a professional headshot receive 14 times more profile views than those without. Upload a current photo that's closely cropped to your face. Remember, you should be the focal point, so avoid any busy backgrounds—and smile. The more welcoming you look, the more likely recruiters are to contact you

Twitter

Leverage this platform to highlight and build upon your industry expertise. Try to incorporate your personal brand into your Twitter bio by using hashtags to focus on your niche, following leaders in your field, and retweeting top industry stories. Don't forget what you tweet is still a part of your online image.

Personal website or portfolio

If you're in a marketing or design field, it's especially important to have a personal website or portfolio that provides essential information about who you are and helps visually highlight your work. You can create your own site using [Squarespace](#), [Wix](#), or [WordPress](#), among others. Small brands and business owners can also take advantage of helpful design resources like [Canva](#) and [Venngage's logo templates](#) to get started creating brand-specific content.

10. Remember that your personal brand isn't just online.

Your brand is more than just an online persona; it's how you carry yourself at home, in the office, and even on your daily commute.

Your reputation is everything. Those who frustrate or annoy others—that will come back to haunt them. The more opportunities you must work with others, volunteer for projects, and assert yourself as a leader, take them. That's part of your brand.

Leadership isn't reserved for C-suite executives. Strong leaders exist at every level of the organization.

Leadership comes from how you behave, how you act, and how you inherently interact with people.

That story you tell, combined with those everyday interactions, ultimately define your personal brand.

Reinvent Your Personal Brand as You Grow

As the digital ecosystem changes and your career evolves, so will your personal brand. Adjust your persona accordingly as you meet different people, find new networking opportunities, and grow in your career. If it reflects your professional life, don't hesitate to create a brand that lets you shine.

5 STEPS TO REINVENTING YOURSELF

1. Define your end goal

Before you begin your rebranding effort, take the time to develop a plan. The last thing you want to do is to confuse people, or even yourself. Start with research. Review industry publications conduct informational interviews and obtain a mentor. You may even want to take on internships or shadow programs, depending on what kind of shift you are trying to make. If it's a career change, for example, getting experience in your new field before you decide on a change can be beneficial.

Next, it's important to develop the skills you will need to succeed. For example, if you are a video game developer who wants to transition to a career video-game marketing, you may know the technology, but technical savvy won't be enough for a new role. You'll need to decide what new skills you'll need to cultivate and how you'll achieve them. Adding more knowledge in your desired field will provide the credibility you will need so that others take you seriously.

2. Leverage your differences

We all have a unique selling proposition—the traits about us that people will remember. When changing your brand, you can use this selling proposition to distinguish your benefits from others. Answer these questions to identify your differences:

- What value do you provide?
- How do you do it uniquely?
- Whom do you do it for?

Once you have brainstormed on the questions above and formed a picture about what you have to offer others, work to put it all together in a succinct way.

3. Develop a story

You must develop a coherent narrative that shows how your past has shaped you and illustrates the direction you are planning to take your career. The key to success is to focus on the value your prior experience brings rather than explaining your transition in terms of your own interests (such as “I was tired of my job and needed to try something different”). Remember that your story must be in alignment with your past. You’ll be called out quickly if you’re seen as discarding your roots, fudging the truth or not recognizing your history.

4. Reintroduce yourself

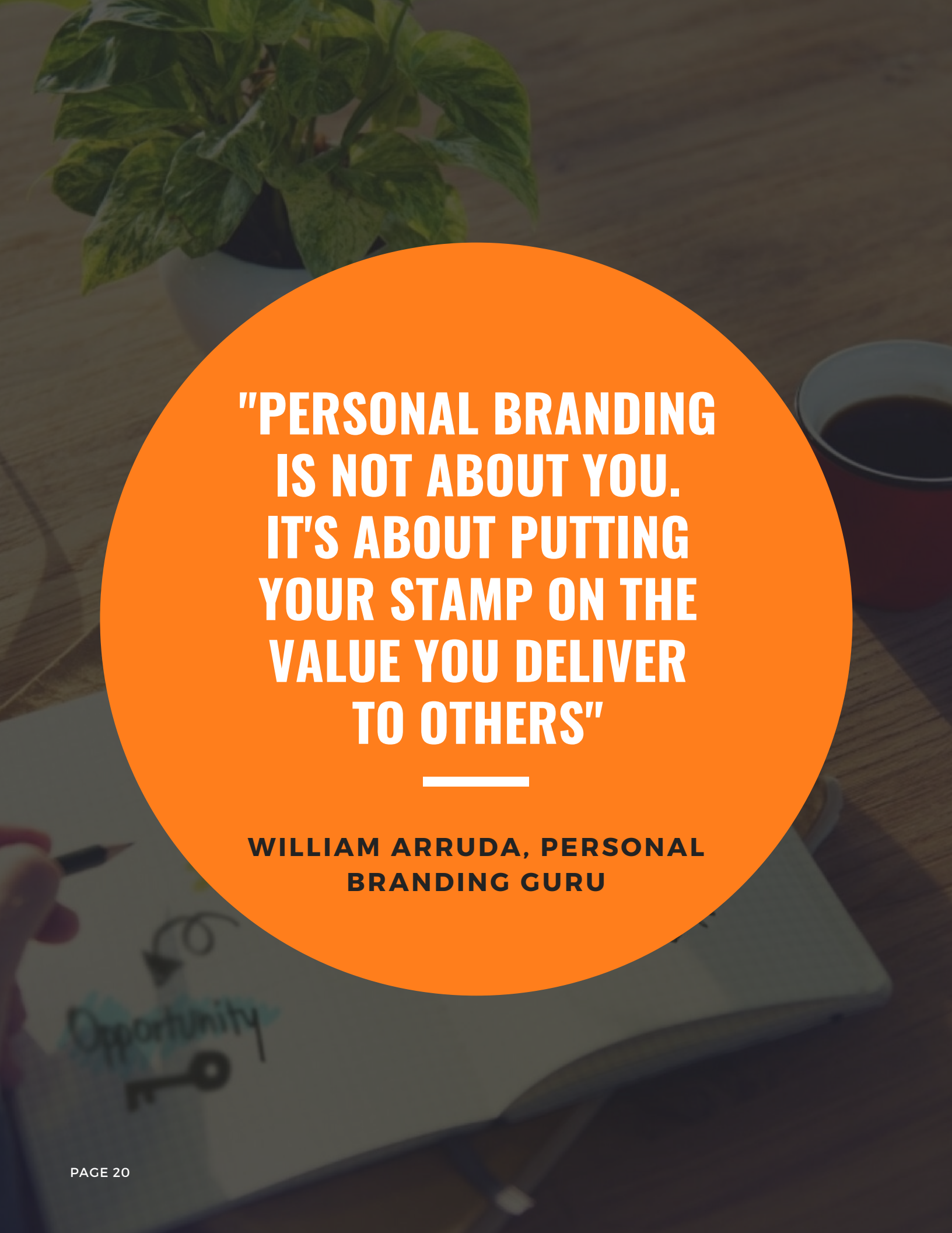
Now that you’ve completed the first three steps, it’s time to put your new personal brand out there. Make sure all of your touch points (such as your resume, cover letter, LinkedIn and Facebook profiles) are consistent with your new image. Then think about your relaunch. Can you get involved with any projects that will showcase your new interests and skills?

Reach out to people you know and ask for help in spreading the word about your change. Make meaningful contacts in your industry and ask for testimonials as you work with clients in your new role. The more connections you make, the more likely it is that your new brand will be known and recognized.

5. Provide value

Share your expertise by producing helpful content using social media, blogs, and podcasts, always ensuring that your material offers genuine value. You can quickly become a valued resource if you help people resolve a problem. Put your time and energy in publishing in respected publications, speak at industry conferences or take on a leadership role in your trade association. The resulting exposure, network connections and trustworthiness can pay major dividends.

Finally, be consistent and diligent. Rebranding takes an ongoing effort.



**"PERSONAL BRANDING
IS NOT ABOUT YOU.
IT'S ABOUT PUTTING
YOUR STAMP ON THE
VALUE YOU DELIVER
TO OTHERS"**

**WILLIAM ARRUDA, PERSONAL
BRANDING GURU**