

Personal Branding: Turning One's Self Into a Commodity

Posted on [October 13, 2013](#)

[Personal Branding: Turning One's Self Into a Commodity](#)

by DAVID ROSEN

[CounterPunch](#)

October 4-6, 2013

Are you a brand? Do you have a blog?, a Facebook page?, a Twitter account? Are you a 21st century individual, a postmodern digital self? Do you know how to sell yourself? Are you fully integrated into the market economy?

Personal branding represents the full transformation of the self into a thing, a commodity. It is the new ideology of success, one perfectly suited for the 21st century global capitalist marketplace. Mark Suster, writing at [Inc.](#) insists: "If you don't control your messaging — someone else will. That goes for both your business, and your personal brand."

Writing in [Forbes](#), Lisa Quast celebrates the new capitalist order: "Developing a *personal* brand is similar to product branding. The overall goal with branding is to differentiate yourself (the product) in the market so you can attain your objectives, be those landing your dream job or becoming a famous singer. The process includes defining your brand and brand attributes, positioning your brand in a different way than your competitors and then managing all aspects of your personal brand."

Entrepreneur's [Dan Schawbel](#) extols the virtues of branding: "Entrepreneurs have always been focused on building the brand names of their companies, and for good reason. ... It's not just about what your company does, but why you started it, its purpose and your vision. ... As an entrepreneur, you need to become the brand."

Hubert Rampersad, a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering, champions what he calls "[Authentic Personal Branding](#)": "Branding isn't just for companies anymore. There is a new trend called Personal Branding. Successful Personal Branding entails managing the perceptions effectively and controlling and influencing how others perceive you and think of you. ... It is the positioning strategy behind the world's most successful people, like Oprah Winfrey, Tiger Woods, Michael Jordan, Donald Trump, Richard Branson and Bill Gates. It's therefore important to be your own brand and to become the CEO of your life."

These quotes are but a tiny sampling of the advice spewed forth by innumerable hucksters proclaiming the glory of personal branding. Ever entrepreneurial, their individual programs — offered at a high price! — can transform you into a social commodity. (Google identifies 36 million related sites under "personal branding.")

These sideshow barkers follow in the well-trod path first laid down by Horatio Alger a century-and-a-half ago. In 100 or so dime novels for teen boys, he fashioned the post-Civil War "American dream," the rags-to-riches myth that anyone can make it. (Alger's first novel, [Ragged Dick](#), was published in 1867 — the same year Marx released *Das Kapital*.)

In 1936, amidst the Great Depression, Dale Carnegie followed with *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. This preacher of success fashioned the self-improvement movement that's culminates in today's personal branding. The book has sold an estimated 90 million copies, only proving a sucker is born everyday. (Ironically, 1936 was the same year that John Maynard Keynes published *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, establishing modern corporate-state capitalism.)



The Global Realm

The Global Realm

October 13, 2013

To be successful today, let alone a celebrity or merely a popular, ordinary person, postmodern capitalism demands that each one transform her/him "self" from an old-fashioned "thing" into a 21st century "brand." Once upon a time, people preserved a separate, private, non-commodity space in which they were existentially "free," themselves. That space is shrinking. Like the natural world, the capitalist market is increasingly colonizing private life. What aspects of daily life are outside the grip of the marketplace?

This transformation of marketplace exchange and political consciousness might, ironically, turn everyone into Marxists. From the Goldman-Sachs power player to the Wal-Mart greeter, everyone shares a common, intuitive understanding about the modern capitalist world: the game is rigged! Everyone is but an exchangeable commodity.



Career Woman, Inc.