



John Egan

John Egan, editor in chief at SpareFoot

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Are You Ignoring Your Personal Brand?

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"Your brand is what people say about you when you're not in the room."
- Jeff Bezos

In the social media era, the importance of personal branding has grown enormously. A professional-sounding, well-rounded LinkedIn profile can help you land a new job. A Facebook page full of photos depicting drunken escapades can torpedo your chances for a new job. An insensitive tweet can cost you your job.

For anyone seeking to nurture a personal brand, the Internet can be full of opportunities and landmines. But no matter which tools you use to cultivate your personal brand, it has become more apparent than ever that all of us must tend to our personal brands, so as not to let someone else try to shape or damage our reputations.

'Personal Branding Isn't Easy'

On the positive end of the spectrum, your personal brand can open doors to an array of opportunities: a new job, a job promotion, a speaking engagement, a book deal, a blogging gig and so much more. Your personal brand also can spotlight any number of strengths; in my case, those strengths include brand journalism, content strategy, writing, editing, traditional journalism and PR.

"Personal branding isn't easy," according to a [Forbes.com article](#) by Lisa Quast, "but thinking through your unique strengths, your career goals and aspirations, and how you want others to perceive you can have dramatically positive results"

Given the power of Web 2.0, the options for extending a personal brand are numerous and varied. For me, those options include establishing a personal blog, which I am working on; writing blog posts for websites such as [The Huffington Post](#) and [PRDaily.com](#), both of which I started contributing to this spring; and setting up a website that promotes my personal brand, which is in the works. My personal brand goes beyond social media, as should yours.

In his book *Me 2.0: Build a Powerful Brand to Achieve Career Success*, personal branding expert [Dan Schawbel](#) points out that the relative ease in producing a website makes it simple to promote your personal brand. You can turn to places like [Wix.com](#), [Weebly.com](#), [WordPress.com](#) and [WordPress.org](#) to set up a free online presence, or you can pay a web designer to create something fancier. Furthermore, online tools such as [about.me](#), [brag.me](#) and [brandyourself.com](#) can help you build and protect your personal brand.



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No 'Cookie-Cutter Methodology'

Branding specialist JD Gershbein recently wrote on Forbes.com that he's fed up with people serving up advice about personal branding through blog posts such as the one you're reading right now. Nonetheless, he does dispense some personal-branding advice of his own, emphasizing that there's no "cookie-cutter methodology" when it comes to assembling an "extraordinary" personal brand. Gershbein makes a great point that how you communicate — by text, phone and email, for instance — is an "essential element" of your personal brand. On these counts, I wholeheartedly agree with Gershbein.

But just the mere fact that Gershbein wrote a Forbes.com piece about personal branding — regardless of his stance on the subject — underscores the importance of personal branding. Much to Gershbein's chagrin, I now join the chorus of folks sounding off on personal branding.

"As an individual," according to Schawbel, "you must acknowledge that you are a brand. And who better to market your personal brand than *you*. This means at the end of the day, the success of your personal brand lies in your hands."

The Brand Commander

Indeed, no one has more of a vested interest in a personal brand than the person who "owns" the brand. Schawbel stresses that personal branding is an amazing, versatile and necessary tool that will "allow you to achieve your long-term goals in the short term and empower you to become the *commander* of your career."

Big brands such as Walmart, Budweiser, Apple and Southwest Airlines collectively spend billions of dollars developing and maintaining their brands. Fortunately, developing and maintaining a personal brand does not require such a hefty financial investment; however, it does require a considerable investment of time and effort.

If you fail to put in the work necessary to engage in effective personal branding, you run the risk of allowing other people to define your personal brand. As has been discovered by celebrities such as Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling and the infamous O.J. Simpson, your personal brand can quickly be tarnished, it not outright destroyed, and your brand may be irreparably harmed. All of the crisis management specialists and PR professionals in the world may be called upon to "fix" your brand, but the power to keep your personal brand alive and healthy ultimately rests with the person behind the brand. That's you, the brand commander.



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