

the least you need to know



PERSONAL BRANDING

by Colin Wright

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chapter 1

INTRODUCTION TO PERSONAL BRANDING

Who Am I?

Hello there!

My name is Colin Wright, and I run a multidisciplinary design studio in Los Angeles.

I've made personal branding a big part of my business, and cultivating a strong brand has helped my business grow while many others are dying. After spending hours upon hours answering the questions of friends, colleagues and strangers regarding my marketing tactics, business secrets and general recommendations on how they can increase their chances of getting new clients or locking down a new job, I decided to put together an ebook so that I could 1) get this (ostensibly valuable) information out to more people, 2) take part in the burgeoning movement toward open information on the web, and 3) increase the value of my own personal brand (if you don't understand what I mean by this, read more of this ebook and you definitely will).

If you want to find out more about me or what I do, meander to my site, colinismy.name.

What is Personal Branding?

Personal branding involves managing your reputation, style, look, attitude and skill set the same way that a marketing team would run the brand for a bag of Doritos or bottle of shampoo. The idea is that you can develop a collection of symbols and associations with yourself, granting your name, face and work the same benefits that companies with solid brand equity (like Coca-Cola or Apple) enjoys.

Colin says:

“ I decided to focus on building a strong personal brand after resigning from my last job. I knew that as a multidisciplinary designer and developer intending to work as a one-man studio, I would be marketing myself (and my image) as much as my skills and experience. This in mind, I figured out exactly what kind of experience I wanted my clients to have, how I would emphasize what I felt were my strong points and how I would market the positive aspects of working with me in particular (as opposed to someone who has the same skill set and price range). I quickly decided on a name for my studio that would unflinchingly call my personal focus to their attention: ‘Colin Is My Name.’ It's been a great conversation starter and clients have loved the name, though government offices and banks usually think I'm messing with them.

There are some major differences between personal branding and branding for a company or product. For one, there are many dangers involved in using yourself as the face of your professional endeavors that are not present with a largely faceless larger company.

Part of the reason many people shy away from making themselves the poster-child for their own work is a fear of retribution: if your work offends, breaks a law, commits libel, etc etc etc, then you, personally, are responsible (with not even a clever name to hide behind). The legalities and complications that lead many people to operate under the protection of an LLC instead of a Sole Proprietorship are the same legalities that make Joe Smith operate under the name Graphicwerkz Designz instead of Joe The Best Designer Ever.

Confidence (or the lack thereof) is another big concern with personal branding. Simply put, if you are not confident in yourself or your work, you will have a lot of trouble branding yourself (unless your alias is Joe The Inconsolable Incompetent, in which case you're on your own). There are many ways to build your self-confidence (several of which are covered later in this ebook), but what it usually comes down to is improving yourself, constantly and laboriously (I mentioned that this will take some work, right?).

But we're not talking about all that yet. What we're doing is defining personal branding, and I think we can safely say that it's making yourself known for what you want to be known for (man, I should have just said that at the beginning and saved myself a lot of time and e-ink).

Where Does Personal Branding Take Place?

Personal branding is not something that you can invest an hour or two in and then never have to think about again. It's a 24/7, full-time job that takes a lot of attention, tenacity, and *cajones* to do right. Fortunately, once you get into the habit, it's something that can fit seamlessly into your life without having to keep it at the forefront of your mind.

You will definitely need to take stock of and make changes to your personal and professional lives and likely make some changes to both. There's no one-size fits all solution, but there are many flexible tips that will be given throughout this ebook for everything from how to deal with a client face-to-face to what you should have in your professional wardrobe. Of course, your online presence is important, too, so that will also be covered in some depth.

When Should You Start Branding Yourself?

Unless you have a time machine (that can go backward...one that can go forward won't be especially useful in this case), today, right now, is the very best time to start working on your personal brand. Whether you realize it or not, you probably already have the beginnings of a personal brand that you've been building up since you began your professional career (or very likely, even before that). Whether you want to continue in this direction or strike out with a whole new brand, the sooner you get started pushing that brand the direction you want it to go (rather than letting it run loose like the family poodle), the sooner your brand will be strong enough to help you get where you want to be professionally.

Why Do You Need a Personal Brand?

There are many reasons you should want to develop a personal brand. Building a positive reputation (whatever that might mean in your field) can lead to increased word-of-mouth advertising for you and your services. When your reputation spreads and precedes you, it also makes interactions with potential clients that much easier, allowing you to spend less time convincing them to hire you, and more time negotiating the scope of services and payment (and actually working on the project).

Managing a personal brand helps you build a kind of brand equity, which will grant your name and products a certain star power. This associative celebrity can aid you in future projects you may wish to undertake, allow you to easily segue into alternate-but-related fields and will grant you expert status within your current field.

By recognizing and optimizing your personal brand, you will become part of and associated with specific ideas, movements, aesthetics, cultural attitudes and people. The more you refine your brand, the more targeted your message becomes and the more you will be doing the work you want to do, with the people you want to be working with, and at a price point that everyone can agree on.

And those are just the short-term benefits! In the long run, taking the time to filter out the rough and think through what kind of professional you want to be and how you want the rest of the world to see you can actually make you a much more skilled, fulfilled and happy person. It was Abe Lincoln who said, "I don't think much of a man who is not wiser today than he was yesterday." Don't be looked down on by Abe: improve yourself today.

chapter 2

THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW

How This eBook is Organized

I've tried to break the ideas up into digestible chunks so that 1) you won't get overwhelmed by monotonous blocks of information, 2) the book will feel right at home on the web ('blog-style' writing has definitely taken its toll on the mean attention-span of the 20- and 30-something audience), and 3) you can find the piece of information you need quickly if you find yourself stuck in a personal branding dilemma, unable to move more than your mouse-finger because of your blind panic.

A Quick Overview of Branding

One definition of branding goes something like this: "A brand is the name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one marketer's product as distinct from those of other marketers." Another identifies a brand as "everything associated with the product, including its symbolism and experiences."

This means that branding encompasses the look, feel and utility of the product or service itself, as well as the packaging, advertising, collateral and even the attitudes of the sales-people or promoters representing it. The intention of most companies is to develop their brands meticulously, guiding all of these variables in a specific direction in order to reach their target audience, sales goals and increase the overall brand equity - which is the value that the brand carries with it in the minds of consumers because of these variables.

The Self-Branding Process

In the big picture, the process of developing your own brand is a lot like developing a brand for a product or service. You want to start out by identifying the goals of the branding: what, exactly, do you want to achieve? Who is your audience? What do you want them to think about your brand? What associations would bring the best results? Who and what should you be affiliated with?

Once you have a goal established, the next step is to figure out where you are currently on the path of achieving that goal, followed by a series of steps intended to bring you closer to that goal.

The very first thing you should do, though, is figure out what your current brand is. We'll do just that in a section I like to call 'Taking Stock of Your Current Brand.'

chapter 3

TAKING STOCK OF YOUR CURRENT BRAND

Labeling Theory

There is a field of study in sociology focusing on what's called Labeling Theory. This theory is based on the premise that an individual's identity is partially (or largely, depending on who you talk to) determined by the words that are used to describe them. According to this theory, if a child is told they are bad over and over, they will end up being a bad person. On the other hand, someone who is told they are good-looking or intelligent will have a more positive self-image. This theory illustrates why it is so important to use the correct words when describing yourself, your work and everything related to your personal branding.

For example, if you are a creative writer with little experience and are not yet writing full time (and you work as a cocktail waitress to pay the bills), you would not want to introduce yourself as a cocktail waitress who wants to be a writer. You would introduce yourself as a creative writer, telling anyone who will listen about your most recent novel premise or how many hits your blog on the modern American tragedy received.

Labels are powerful and thusly you should refer to yourself, even if just in your own mind, as the title you wish to achieve. You shouldn't lie about it (introducing yourself as a Nobel Prize winner if you haven't won one yet, or a doctor if someone is injured in an accident, for example, would be a bad idea), but always make sure you are preparing yourself for where you want to be, not where you are.

Colin says:

“ I started up my first two businesses in college, and from that point on I began to see myself as a business owner. Even when I working another job full time, the things that would matter most to me would be the passion projects I was working on in my free time, on the weekends and late at night. After my first taste of business ownership, I knew I was going to be a lifelong entrepreneur. I could tell that people started to see me differently...there's a certain degree of respect and dignity that comes with owning a business in the United States, and I liked the feeling of having something bigger than my day-to-day going on. These projects were what helped me make the connections that eventually allowed me to do it full time.

In the case of personal branding, labeling theory extends to what you wear and how you present yourself, as well. Say you are working a lower-tier job in an office where more casual clothing is the norm, but middle management all wear button-down shirts and suit-pants every day. Start to dress up a bit for work. It may seem kind of silly, and come across as a lot of work for nothing, but you'd be surprised how quickly more responsibility will be pushed your way. Subconsciously, your coworkers and seniors start to reflexively recognize you as a person of integrity and a superior skill set, associating you visually with the attributes that are usually reserved for managers. This also shows the upper crust that you take your work seriously enough to put in that extra effort every day, investing your time and money to wear your ambitions on your sleeve (pun very much intended).

Some quick rules of thumb, according to John T. Malloy in his book *New Dress for Success*, are to always be clean (without being obsessively neat), never wear anything that identifies you with a personal belief, dress at least as well as the people you are meeting with, and if you have the choice, dress affluently (because according to labeling theory, this will subconsciously imply that you are doing well, and therefore your services must be top-notch).

I would add that, according to clothing color theory (which is different than traditional color theory), wearing navy blue demonstrates authority, black signifies perhaps too much authority, brown usually indicates a lack of sophistication (watch any movie with a Southern lawyer or kid from the sticks coming to the big city, and you'll see them use this color to imply their naivety), and red tends to draw attention away from the wearer's message and put it firmly on the wearer (which, if you are an actor or model, might be exactly what you want to do).

Keeping all of the above tips in mind, remember that not all styles of dress are appropriate for all trades and situations. Wearing a suit and tie to meet with an accounting agency or production studio is a good idea, whereas you may want to dress down a bit if meeting with a graffiti artist (or wear the same thing, but throw on a design-oriented t-shirt over your collared shirt for a slightly dressed-down touch that still maintains the sophistication of the suit). There will be more on how to dress for your brand in a later section.

Your Skill Set

No matter how great your branding is, at some point you will need to have a skill (or ideally, several). In fact, a big part of building your brand is dependent on your current and future skill sets, how you develop them, and how you use them once you've got them.

A skill set is a group of related skills that, when put together, add up to a marketable package. For example, a graphic designer that focuses on movie posters will generally have a skill set that includes mad Photoshop skills for photo and graphic manipulation, a solid grasp of typography, experience with a variety of printing techniques and services, and a broad range of composition, color, contrast and other various aesthetics-related proficiencies. This is one skill set.

It is important, from a self-marketing standpoint, to develop a handful of well-developed skill sets if you want to be truly successful. Even those professionals that focus on one aspect of their craft in order to become the absolute best at what they do require supplementary skill sets. In fact, I would argue that it's nearly impossible to become really great at anything without a supporting cast of skill sets to keep you moving forward and to give you a grasp of the big picture.

For example, if the aforementioned movie poster designer wanted to expand his business, he might learn how to screen print, design splash pages for web sites, and write copy. The first two skill sets are not that far removed from his primary one: learning to screen print will allow him to design for the screen process and produce his own t-shirts and posters, while learning to design for websites will increase his list of potential clients and workable industries tenfold. These two supplementary skill sets make use of a lot of what he already knows, so he has a head start each time he learns something that's related. The copy writing skill set is a bit further removed, but still makes use of his latent creativity and experience dealing with Hollywood promotional materials...he could write the copy for the posters he designs! Or design the layouts and illustrations for the books and articles he writes!

Colin says:

“**A**fter I started Colin Is My Name, I made it part of my business plan to constantly be reinvesting in my company, which meant spending a lot of money on equipment, and a lot of time learning new skills. I started out by refining the skill sets I already had; getting new experience, fleshing out some of the areas I wasn't quite as proficient with and making sure I was able to apply each and every one of them in a real world, business environment. From there, I began to expand my horizons into related fields, leap-frogging ahead due to my previous experience with my existing skill sets. I made sure that each skill supported another, and put extra effort into learning practical applications as well as theory.

So the first step in expanding your arsenal of skills is to figure out what skill sets you already possess. Whether your list is massive or miniscule, I guarantee you have at least a few well-developed skill sets (even if they are seemingly useless and far-removed skills, like stamp-collecting, Ultimate Frisbee or mix CD creating).

Once you've determined what you already CAN do, it's time to figure out what you'd like to be able to do. This doesn't have to be at all related to what you already can do: having links between what you do now and what you'd like to do helps, but is not necessary.

Now, go through and find points of overlap. Say, you'd like to run a marathon and you already play Ultimate Frisbee. Easy! You already run a lot, now it's just a matter of applying that current skill to a new skill set. Want to be a DJ? Those pacing and rhythm-syncing skills you've been working on while putting together mix CDs for your friends will certainly help.

The final step, learning, is the most difficult, not because it's inherently hard, but because most people are accustomed to setting goals and not achieving them. It's easy to lose focus: something in real life comes up that needs your immediate attention, so all of those future plans become pipe dreams and eventually fade away, leaving us where we were in the beginning. To fight this tendency, move forward with your plan to learn as soon as possible. Register for a class at a community college or barter informal classes with a friend who does something you want to learn (and who, in exchange for teaching you, wants to learn all about your mad stamp-collecting skills).

Then, to make sure you don't back out, tell absolutely EVERYONE about what you are doing. Give specifics. Tell them about the class and the book you had to buy and why you want to learn that skill set and where it will lead. The more people you tell, the more people there are holding you accountable and making sure you follow through. And so, if you drop the class or stop pursuing that path, they will be asking why and you will look bad. It's amazing how much the fear of simple, harmless shame can keep even the most non-committal person on the path to bettering themselves.

Take note, formal classes and meetings with friends are not the only ways you can improve yourself through learning. You can learn every day just by paying attention to what's going on around you. Hear a word you've never heard before? Ask the person who used it what it means, or look it up on Wikipedia. You can also find a lot of helpful, random information on websites like Lifehacker, where they are all about self-improvement, getting things done, Do It Yourself projects.

Your Evolution

Colin's Experience:

“ At first, most of the work I was doing was the kind of work I had always done: print design, web design and development, and some random photography projects here and there. As time went on, however, I began to take on projects that didn't directly relate to my core strengths. I began to consult with clients on their new media endeavors, e-commerce questions, marketing strategies and branding woes. Because of my personal interests in social media, technology and branding, I had started evolving from a graphic designer into something more complex, opening up lots of doorways and bringing in many new clients I would never have had access to otherwise.

It's important that you keep changing, not just because it makes life more interesting, but also because the people who are constantly evolving are the ones that relentlessly continue to move up in the world.

Careers are constantly being born and dying due to the non-stop changes in technology, the economy, public sentiment, social norms, international attitudes and many, many other environmental variables that none of us has any control over. Like diversifying your portfolio, diversifying your collection of skills and experiences is vital for your professional (and really, your personal) development.

The Company You Keep

There is something to be said for hanging out with the right crowd. Where personal branding is concerned, there are two main types of ‘right crowd’ that you will want to be associated with, and a whole host of other crowds you probably don’t want to be. The good crowds may already exist (so you can ease your way in, ninja-like) or they may not (in which case you’ll need to build your own, DIY-style). Either way, having the support of the right crowd (or two)(or three) is important in the development of your personal brand.

The first crowd you will want to find or build is your core support group. This crowd consists of people who you know you can trust with anything, even if their professional goals do not align with your own. They laugh at your jokes when they’re not funny, come to your dinner parties, and will enthusiastically support you with any new development in your life. It’s important to have this group to pull you back up when you fall, cheer you up when you’re feeling down, and to attend movies and concerts with when you find yourself with that most rare of treasures, free time.

The largest investment you will make in maintaining a healthy core crowd is the energy it takes to be a friend back to them. There will be birthdays to attend, Facebook pictures to tag and sad breakup stories to listen to. Hopefully this is all old hat for most people, as this is what a healthy non-professional, interpersonal relationship looks like. If you have trouble making these kinds of friendships, keep in mind that a solid relationship goes both ways. Work hard to be a good friend to others, and you will usually be rewarded in kind. If that doesn’t work, find a new group of people, because you shouldn’t be wasting your effort on deadwood.

Colin’s Experience:

“Throughout college, I surrounded myself with people whose company I enjoyed and who inspired me. I was particularly drawn to other people who loved their work and were ambitious enough to keep moving forward in life. When I moved to Los Angeles, I had to start from scratch, but I was able to put together a great group of friends and associates that have all kinds of interesting things going on. Many of them had ethical codes that were similar to mine: emphasizing quality in their work, aiming for sustainability, and looking to improve the industry rather than to make a quick buck before getting out. These were people that I could go out to networking events with, knowing that they would have my back, and they knowing that I had theirs. Networking wingmen are worth their weight in gold.

The second crowd you will want to have is your collection of professional friends and colleagues. These people are perhaps not as close on a personal level as your first crowd, but they know your business inside and out, and you know theirs. You all lean against each other, but also maintain certain barriers, keeping the relationship mostly professional in nature; if your core crowd invites you to birthday parties, this crowd invites you to lunch meetings. It’s important to have this group to back you up when you need a recommendation, new connection or advice on a tactical business decision.

The investment you make to maintain a healthy professional crowd is fairly simple: a basic level of understanding about their proficiencies and services and an open line of communication to share information, contacts and bad client stories. This is the crowd that you will be seeing at networking events and on Twitter, rather than at bachelor parties and on Facebook.

Building up a reliable pair of good crowds is important, and it can be equally important not to get sucked in to a bad crowd. A bad crowd consists of anyone who will bring you down personally or professionally. This includes business associates with bad reputations, frenemies who like to see others fail so they look better by comparison, significant others with incurable emotional issues, and anyone who has ever stabbed you in the back. Always forgive, never forget, and definitely don't let them back into your crowds.

Balancing Your Personal Life and Professional Life

As you develop your brand, certain aspects of your lifestyle may become work-related, even though they may not fall into the sphere of a 9-to-5 job. When you are working outside of normal work locations and timeframes, it can be easy to fall into the trap that many free-lancers succumb to that I like to call 'Perpetual Work,' because under its spell the workday never officially begins, and therefore it never really ends.

Colin's Experience:

“ In college, I developed what I've been told is a bad habit; namely, not sleeping very much. At times I'd stay up working until about 4 am, only to get up at 7 am, or maybe 8 if I felt like sleeping in. I felt justified in doing so because there never seemed to be enough hours in the day to get everything done. I knew in the back of my mind that I was neglecting other parts of my life in order to pursue professional goals, but never really put any effort into rounding out my priorities. After starting up Colin Is My Name, I made a conscious effort to start getting at least 6 or 7 hours of sleep per night, and to spend more (non-work-related) time with my friends.

Perpetual Work is a trap because it's not necessary to stay on the clock 24/7, but rather to segment your day in a flexible way so that you are able to keep up with professional responsibilities and personal responsibilities without losing your pace or having to establish barriers between them. The ideal situation is one where you can seamlessly flow from work-mode to non-work-mode without a single indication to those around you that any transition took place. It's not an easy habit to develop, but it's better than the alternative: always feeling the pressure of a work environment (even while out on a date), and never feeling like you can get in a productive mindspace (even when you've got a deadline).

A few pointers on going from work to non-work: make sure you know how many hours a day you need to work to make a living wage. If you need \$100 per day, earn that \$100 and then take a break. Anything you do beyond that is extra, which means you have license to chill out a bit. Watch a movie. Read a book. Down time; remember down time? It also helps to make plans. Not only do good plans give you something to look forward to (for example, a date that evening or going out for a drink with a friend or hitting up a museum exhibition), but they also allow you to manipulate the length of your workday via Parkinson's Law, which states that the amount of time it takes to complete your work expands to fill the time that is available for its completion. In other words, if you have a TPS report to complete and little else to do before 6pm, it could take you all day long to finish that TPS report. On the other hand, if you have a late lunch meeting scheduled at 2pm, you can and very likely will polish off that report quickly, knowing that you have an early deadline. Making plans is a very good way to create artificial deadlines that will keep you from falling victim to Parkinson's Law.

Another idea: do something easy first. Go wash the dishes that are sitting in your sink, or take the trash down to the dumpster. A little victory is still a victory, and even something small can give you the jolt of adrenaline that comes with a sense of accomplishment. Next, make a list of everything you have to get done. Be sure to put those dishes and taking out the trash on there, because those are victories you want visualized. Go down the list and handle the small tasks first. After tackling a handful of the smaller projects, you will usually find that only one or two large tasks are left, and you will be able to give your undivided attention to them, unworried by piles of tiny tasks that seem like tall hurdles when bunched together. They are now nothing but words on a Post-It with lines through them. Lines! They are pathetic. You are strong.

The Events You Attend

Going out, seeing and being seen is not only important in Los Angeles. Today, a photo can be uploaded to the Internet as soon as it is taken, so being at events and associated with the right organizations, groups of people and causes is a great way to develop your personal brand.

Colin's Experience:

“ I have been fortunate enough to attend many fancy gala events, but the events I've found to be the most enjoyable are art gallery openings. The crowd at a gallery opening is almost always a bit more sophisticated and interesting than the crowd you'd find at other get-togethers of similar scale. Finding a gallery with the right vibe was a bit difficult when I first moved to Los Angeles, but after running Colin Is My Name for several months, I had found a handful of different galleries to attend, each of them showing good artwork and all frequented by good people.

Consider this: every person that you meet while riding for the AIDS Lifecycle event (riding from San Francisco to LA on a bike to support AIDS research) will remember you and the shared experience you had together. That woman you met at the Variety Children's Charity fundraiser will remember you as the delightful person she met at an event supporting one of her favorite causes. This associates you in her mind with that cause, subconsciously granting you some of its prestige.

Determining where you want to be seen is based partially on your profession. If you are an event coordinator, you should be out at the large and complex events, slowly meeting the people who walk with those crowds, and becoming one with that scene. If you are a steady-cam operator who works primarily on well-funded indie films, you should be out at the NAB conference, RED camera launch party, and involved with any film production Meetup groups you can find. It's all about finding the right people to network with, finding the right situations to be a part of, and participating in events that you enjoy and believe in.

Your Worldview

Your worldview is your general philosophy on life and perception of the world because of it. The 'nature vs. nurture' argument could very easily come into play here, as a lot of what goes into your worldview comes from how you were brought up, while other aspects seem to be genetically predetermined. Whatever the science behind it may be, your worldview will partially define how successful you are at personal branding.

Consider this: you're interviewing two people for the same IT position. Both know the job inside and out, and both have similar educational backgrounds and work histories. The one thing left to determine who gets the job is the interview. You call in the first chap, and he is genuinely friendly and has a spring in his step. You ask him to tell more about himself and find out that on the weekends he donates his time to build websites for a non-profit he plays an active role in, and that he's an enthusiastic canoeist. Further, he has been to 17 countries so far and intends to visit the rest before he dies, and he aims to work his way up to middle management within a few years. The second interviewee comes in hunched over, wearing an obviously faked smile over a more legitimate-looking scowl. He has to be pressed before answering any non-technical question, and his long-term goal is to win the lottery and retire early. During the interview, he reminds you three times that he doesn't NEED the job, but that he deserves it, and that he will not under any circumstances be working overtime. Who would you rather hire: the upbeat, driven and friendly applicant, or the bent, uncomfortable, unmotivated guy, for whom the world is a series of disappointments?

Exactly!

Your Attitude

It's difficult to explain the benefits of attitude because it is largely immeasurable and more than a little subjective. I'll say it all the same though, because it's my ebook and I can say anything I want. But honestly, it's important to have an attitude that others react favorably to. This can mean very different things in different industries, but there are certain traits that can be emphasized that seem to consistently translate into an advantageous outlook that others will be able to see.

The first is to be 'good.' It's a word that means different things to different people so you can also look at it as being happy, passionate, content, helpful...all of these positive adjectives add up to being a good person. You can achieve this status by helping out your community, making changes that positively impact the world at large or an individual, and (to borrow a page from Google's playbook) by not being evil. Being good will garner encouragement and help from the most random and unpredictable places because people like to help those that they consider to be good. So take an objective look at your life and see what you can do to emphasize how 'good' you are, and then live in a way that benefits others (which will in turn benefit you).

The second is to be happy. If you are happy you will go through life with a positive outlook: bad things won't seem as bad and good things will seem great. You will have a surplus of productive energy and there will always be extra time to get something done (even if you have to work harder to find it). If you are not happy, you will likely not be successful (and even if you ARE successful, what's the point if you can't be happy?!).

The third is to be driven. If you've ever met someone that just seems to have it all together and is moving through life like a bullet toward their goals, you will understand why this is an important trait to focus on. Driven, motivated people inspire others just by existing, and they are able to find pleasure in even the simplest and most tedious tasks, so long as they bring them closer to their goals. Starting to see how these all tie together?

The fourth? Be helpful. Individuals who are willing to help other people, even if there is no guaranteed compensation or exchange for the effort, generally come out on top. You can call it karma if you want, but I just call it logical. If someone helps you, you can't help but feel grateful toward them, which usually means you'll be trying to help them out in the future. There may not always be an immediate or obvious return on investment, but regardless, helping others tends to bring with it a more positive self-image and a burst of adrenaline, so latently you can't help but benefit.

chapter 4

DEVELOPING YOUR PERSONAL BRAND

Identifying Brand ‘You’

As with many other worthy undertakings, the first steps in developing a personal brand are the most difficult, and where many people decide that it's too much for them. This is not because it's tedious or cumbersome or at all skill-intensive, but rather because it involves looking at yourself and your attributes in a brutally honest way. It takes guts to unflinchingly take stock of the details of your life, personality and achievements.

This, of course, may not be much of a chore for the rare few that have a natural self-confidence and can joyously look in the mirror, like what they see, and decide to improve it further. For the rest of us, however, it can be a very eye-opening and sometimes soul-searching activity, which forces us to take stock of our weaknesses even while celebrating our strengths, which can be a real blow to the ego.

But enough talk about it; just do it. Make two columns on a sheet of paper, and in the first column list ten things that you think people really like about you. Anything is game, from your winning smile to your cunning jokes to your honest demeanor. It can be about you as a person (you always know the latest sports scores) or it can be about you as a business-person (you always send personalized thank-you notes along with your invoices). Be honest with yourself; at this point we are looking at what is currently there, not where we want things to be. Ask friends, family or clients if you don't know, as most will be happy to help and will be able to offer a less-biased opinion on the subject.

In the second column, write down ten things that you think you could improve upon. Again, this list can consist of things about you personally (you have a bad habit of telling jokes that make people uncomfortable) or professionally (you're always at least a few minutes late to meetings). With this one it will be very important to ask others, and to unflinchingly accept their answers. Part of self-improvement is being able to accept criticism constructively, so tell them about what you're working on, tell them to be honest, and then write down what needs some work.

Take a look at the sheet of paper with the two lists; this is the foundation of your personal brand right now, at this moment. As with any brand, there are good things (the Toyota Prius is good for the environment!) and there are bad things (people who drive the Toyota Prius can be very smug!). The trick to developing and strengthening this foundation is to emphasize certain aspects from the first column, while decreasing or completely eliminating lines from the second column.

Colin's Experience:

“ I knew that I wanted to emphasize a friendly and comfortable client experience, the breadth of my knowledge of design, development, marketing and related industries, and the fact that I specialize in sustainable design practices and branding for sustainable businesses. There were also certain things I wanted to avoid doing that were common in my industry, but that I didn't believe in and wanted to take a stand against (artificially inflating hours, working with the cheapest contractors rather than the best and perpetuating environmentally-unfriendly practices, among others). I knew that there were lots of bad habits that I had picked up over the years that I would need to jettison if I was going to clearly present who I was to potential clients, including a tendency to not plan before starting a project. Working on these habits have allowed me to create more of a partnership with my client, which in turn allows me to draw on their experience in the field and opening up stronger channels of communication so that they will be more likely to listen and take my advice when it comes to aesthetics, design, marketing and functionality.

Absolutely everyone will have to utilize different approaches to strengthen their core brand, because everyone has very different pros and cons to their personal and business reputation. A good place to start is with the simple, obvious problems. If you are known as the guy who tells inappropriate jokes, stop telling those jokes (no matter how much you might think some people are enjoying them). If you have strong B.O., take an extra shower every day, or don't work out right before heading into the office. These are little things that may not seem like a big deal to you, but they become part of your reputation, and the less reputation baggage you have, the more your positive attributes will shine.

While working at negating and reducing the impact of your negative traits, begin to also increase the effectiveness and prominence of your positive traits. Make them even more memorable, something that your friends and clients will want to tell their friends and clients about. Associating yourself with these positive traits is going to be a key point of developing your brand, and though we'll be going over more specifics in a later section, it's important to begin to think about and emphasize these traits in your everyday encounters now.

Ethics in Branding

“When I do good, I feel good. When I do bad, I feel bad. That’s my religion.”

–Abraham Lincoln

“The cosmos is neither moral or immoral; only people are. He who would move the world must first move himself.” – Edward Ericson

Before moving on to the next level of personal brand building, it’s important that we tackle an often-overlooked aspect of brand development: defining your personal ethics.

This may seem like an exercise more at home in a philosophy class or book group, but defining your personal ethics is a great way to figure out exactly what it is you stand for, shine some light on many of the gray areas that might currently exist in your personal beliefs, and decide if the direction you are headed with your personal branding is really where you want to be going.

The trick here is to be very specific. If you are to ask yourself how you feel about politics, more than likely the answer will be “I’m a Democrat” or “I’m conservative” or “I don’t care,” when in reality it should be more like “Economically, I believe in fiscal conservatism combined with simple social programs to help the economically unfortunate get back on their feet, and socially I feel that everyone is absolutely equal in the eyes of the law and that a representative democracy works fairly well, but that it would be ideal if there were less cronyism and more of a meritocracy in place...” and on and on and on. Whew! Politics alone could take up an entire sheet of paper by itself, and you shouldn’t stop there! Move on to religion and society and relationships and science and corporatism and genetically modified foods and modern art and anything else that you might have an educated opinion about. If you come across something that you don’t know enough about to form an opinion, do yourself a favor and quickly look it up on Wikipedia or some other relatively reliable source of information. Even knowing a little bit about it will likely steer you away from or closer to your preconceived notions. Do keep in mind, however, that a notion without knowledge is simply ignorance (not something anyone wants to be associated with).

Colin’s Experience:

“ I thought about my determination to focus on sustainability and I had to figure out if I was going to only do green projects for green businesses and subcontract the rest out, or specialize in the green projects while continuing to take on work from anyone who had the money to pay for it. I ended up deciding that, while I enjoy doing work for sustainable businesses, I wouldn’t have as much impact preaching to the choir as I would spreading the word. I ended up deciding to take on any project that seemed interesting, but also to do my best to make that project more eco-friendly when possible.

So think about your ethics for a while. Meditate on it, talk to a friend (or handful of friends) about it over a glass of wine. Do what you have to do to explore your mind a bit and figure these things out now, because after you've established yourself as, say, the Pro-Life blog writer, it will be quite difficult to change your reputation and client base or job if you suddenly decide you're Pro-Choice (and hate writing blogs).

Owning Your Brand

It's not easy to pick your identity apart, figure out what personality traits and habits need to go, and actively work to scrap them, one by one. Even more difficult in many ways is to look in the mirror and to be okay with who you are. It sounds very 'after-school special,' but being able to deal with the fact that you didn't turn out exactly how you thought you would, or how your parents thought you would, or how your significant other wishes you would, is a very, VERY important skill to learn. Not only will it help you figure out the most natural, with-the-grain way to develop your personal brand (are you quirky? Make your copy quirky! A great big dork? Tell people about your 10th level Wizard character on your blog!), it will also help you come to terms with yourself and get some closure on all of that adolescent awkwardness (to make room for all the new, adult, professional awkwardness). It's easy to appreciate honesty in another person, because it comes across as more genuine than even the most well rehearsed, fabricated personality ever could.

Colin's Experience:

“It took me quite a while to be okay with some aspects of my personality. As a kid, I was the loner who would sit and read a book all through recess, later moving on to more social (but not socially acceptable) hobbies like Magic cards and video games. I would get A's in all my classes without having to put any effort into it, and so had lots of extra time to draw ninjas and super heroes all over the margins of any piece of paper that came within range. Though I played baseball and soccer, I hated both, preferring instead to stay inside and read, play games and eat junk food. I was quite unpopular; the last week of middle school, my mother would pick me up during my lunch period because no one would make room for me at their cafeteria table. Though I hid the story of my childhood when I first left for college, I later found that this uncomfortable past had a good deal of substance to it. My near-impulsive reading habit led me to take interest in a very wide variety of subjects, and made me a speedy enough reader to take in a lot of information in a short amount of time. The shame I felt in high school for having coasted through led to a backlash in college, where I decided to live life to the fullest, which meant in part working my butt off for anything that was worth achieving. My terrible diet led to a personal fast food and soda boycott in high school, along with a tenaciously followed workout schedule that resulted in a much fitter me. I was determined not to be the kid without a lunch table forever, so I made an extra effort to be more social and extroverted. Being willing to share my experiences has also shown me that EVERYONE has some kind of embarrassing childhood secret, and by being open about mine, I've been able to put others at ease enough to share theirs. The traits I perceived as negative actually led to very positive ones, and I have no doubt that the doozies you have in your mental arsenal will serve you just as well.

So figure out what makes you different. Even if it's not something you've ever been proud of, now is the time to start flaunting it and garnering yourself some novelty and notoriety by doing so.

Using Collateral

The marketing collateral (tangible goods – like business cards and stationery – that support a brand) that you use is vitally important because it reinforces visually and tactily whatever it is you are trying to say about yourself verbally. This reinforcement is paramount, because on average a normal person needs to be exposed to an idea three times before they retain it in their long-term memory. Leaving a good impression can be dependent on the business cards you carry, the look and feel of your website, and the texture of your stationery's paper-stock.

The primary step to developing a first-rate collateral package is to find someone to design it. Now, if you are a creative person who has experience with graphics software and web design, you may be able to save some money here and create the collateral yourself. Even if this is the case, you may still want to hire someone else to tackle your personal brand (more on this in a second).

For most people, it will be necessary to hire a designer to create your collateral and act as a kind of brand manager. This person will be responsible for finding the best way to represent you on paper (and on the web) with graphics and typography.

Colin's Experience:

“My first project under the heading of Colin Is My Name was definitely the most daunting one: developing my own business card. For a designer, the normally straightforward task of designing a business card becomes an incredibly intimidating undertaking because you know far too much about yourself. An individual's business card is meant to concisely express something about who that person is, what they do and maybe, if they're lucky, expose a bit of their personality as well. Developing a business card for someone else is easy, because what you see of them is the image that they project, the facts they want to tell you about their business and the pre-defined traits they want to express. To construct something so simple for someone so complex as yourself, however, takes a lot of tenacity and whittling skills; you have to cut off all the chaff in order to leave that core of vital information. When I was done with my business cards, I stood in a (metaphorical) pile of personality scraps, and was left with a core of minimalism, structure and an appreciation for the highest quality materials and products. My business card reflects these ideals.

You may also need a copy writer that will be able to take your information and rewrite it in a compelling way that will support your personal branding to anyone who reads it. A picture can be worth a thousand words, but sometimes the right combination of words can make all others unnecessary.

If you possess strengths in both design and writing, you may be well versed enough that you don't need outside help (or you may be broke enough that you've convinced yourself that you don't). I would urge you to consider it nonetheless, as most people have a distorted perception of how others view them and may not be able to create something that honestly reflects how they want to be seen. It's easy to think, "This color will show that I'm a fun guy" while everyone who sees it on your business card is thinking, "is this guy a professional clown?"

At the end of the day, the most important two pieces of collateral you can have are business cards and a website. Having stationery, envelopes, leave-behinds, banners, ads, fliers, pins, t-shirts and other pieces of collateral might be good to have eventually, but focusing on the site and cards first will allow you to really flesh your branding out and develop some nice work, rather than investing in everything at once. You don't want to find out - after investing significant funds and effort into developing your brand - that one of your elements doesn't work. You'll then be forced to redesign, rewrite, reprint and relaunch everything (which is pricy, time-consuming, and really quite traumatic).

chapter 5

COMMUNICATION HABITS

Email

“Diamonds are forever. E-mail comes close.” –June Kronholz

Electronic mail has been around long enough now that there are certain (extremely simple and usually boring) professional standards most people have come to expect. Even within those boundaries, however, there is room to make your mark. Many people choose to style their signature in such a way that it is clear who they are, what they do, where they do it and how they can be reached. This can be taken a step further with a small, unobtrusive HTML signature (though embedding images within emails has become a bit passé, due to spam filters, increased file size, and the lack of consistency in the treatment of HTML emails between email clients). Even better, you can use a nicely formatted chunk of text containing the information that’s on your business card for your signature. Simple and to the point, just the way I (and anyone who has other things to do than deciphering a complex signature) tend to like it.

Phone

Colin’s Experience:

“I’ve had some clients that refused to do any business through email: only in person or on the phone. As someone who’d grown up with email access for most of my life, I was at first a little put off, but in time realized that just as I prefer to do business online because that’s where I am most comfortable, these clients clung to the phone because that’s what they’d grown up with and were accustomed to. Working with them in this way has kept them my clients and probably improved my phone-answering skills.

How do you answer the phone? Just “Hello?” Or maybe a “Your-Business-Name-Here, how can I help you today?” Whatever your particular style is, make sure that it suits your image, because all it takes to shatter a meticulously constructed personal brand is one off-color joke in your voicemail message, or one drunk friend answering your phone at a party.

Something you can do to reduce the chances of a phone-related brand-casualty is to have a separate line that you use just for business. I know this sounds like taking a technological step backward...many people have ditched landlines completely, and carrying around two mobile phones would be pretty ridiculous. Fortunately there are services like Skype, which is a voice over Internet protocol provider, meaning it connects phone calls over the Internet rather than over phone lines, reducing the cost per call (especially internationally) drastically. You can set up a completely new phone number and tell it to redirect to your mobile phone when someone calls it using services like Skype. Also through Skype, you can set a completely separate voicemail box that can handle client calls. On your phone, you can set up a completely different ring tone that indicates when it’s a client calling. Easy as pie, and cheaper, too (but not half as delicious).

There are several other options for managing your phone calls, and it will be up to you to choose the method that works the best for your lifestyle, work environment, brand of phone, etc. What's important is that you DO keep a handle on those phone calls. Talking to someone on the phone is the modern, technological version of speaking to him or her in person (the new phone call is an email, while the new email is texting. The new texting? Tweeting... try to keep up), and you definitely don't want to mess up a technological face-to-face meeting with a client.

Texting

Do not text a client unless you are on very casual terms with them (usually meaning that you've worked with each other so long, the propriety of doing business has changed between you to be more practical than formal). Some clients may prefer to use texts right away, in which case you should follow suit, but as a general rule, try to use the phone or email first (you'll figure out which they prefer pretty quickly, as it will be whatever they use to contact you).

If you DO end up texting a client, use correct spelling and punctuation. Don't use acronyms (no LOLs, ROFLs or BRBs) and don't use all capital or lowercase letters. Your client (and third-grade English teacher) will appreciate it.

Letters

"I consider it a good rule for letter-writing to leave unmentioned what the recipient already knows, and instead tell him something new." –Sigmund Freud

Believe it or not, some people still send real-world, snail-mail letters. Some even receive some of these letters (a welcome break from the constant stream of flyers from local businesses and credit card companies, I would imagine) in something your parents would call a mailbox (or at least that's what the hieroglyphs seem to indicate).

But I digress. If done correctly, adding tangible mailers to your personal branding package can be a really unique and effective touch. Be sure that you keep your messages brief but topical...it helps to mention something personal, so that the recipient knows that you didn't just type or scribble out a boilerplate greeting (or have someone else do it for you). The letter or card is important, too: it should be on your personal stationery (which should match the rest of your branding). Make sure there is a purpose to the correspondence. The purpose can be something simple, like thanking them for their time or business, or to congratulate them on a recent success. If there is no obvious purpose to the letter, however, it will seem flat and sneaky, leaving them wondering what you are up to, rather than coming across as kind and thoughtful, which is the response you're aiming for.

chapter 6

BUILDING HOME BASES

Social Networks

Colin's Experience:

“I make it a point to try out every new social network I come across. You can probably imagine that this process is very time-consuming, especially considering that 90% of them end up being nicely designed wastes of my time. Fortunately, the other 10% end up justifying the ones that don't pan out. For a while, LinkedIn brought me quite a few leads and a few clients, and then Facebook pulled its weight by helping me connect with some interesting people. Lately Twitter has been at the top of my list, productivity-wise, though I'm sure something else will come along soon that will unseat the mighty tweet, as well.

The importance of social networking in building a personal brand today cannot be overstated. Being an active part of a social network gets your name (and your brand) out in the open, exposing your resume, work, reputation and ideas to a far larger audience than ever before. The way you carry yourself in these groups is just as important as how you act at any real world group. The online locales that you choose to frequent says a lot about you, as well, so choose your online home bases carefully. Find and join a few social networks that directly relate to your profession, a few that are broad and serve multiple audiences, and a few that are places you know your potential clients, potential employers or other people you want to impress spend their time. Like your skill sets and investment portfolio, you want your social network presence to be diversified.

Fill out the profiles on these networks as if they were a resume, though with a bit more personality (unless part of your personal branding is to be cold and professional, in which case you'll want to give that vibe instead). Take care in the photos you upload, the messages you write on other people's walls, and the sites you link to. Think of it like an interview: from the second you walk out your door before driving to an interview, you should be on your game, because anyone you see could be heading to that same meeting, and you don't want to be caught doing something stupid. The secretary will be asked if you were polite and how you carried yourself. The parking attendant's opinion might be asked for, as well. Did you smile and nod back to the kindly janitor? Did you shake the other applicant's hand? These are all things to consider before a real world interview, and all those little details matter just as much online (or perhaps even more...if you make a stupid mistake on the Internet, it will be there forever).

There are a lot of services available that allow you to divide up your online life into segments. For instance, you may be able to include your professional profile in one section of a social network, while your personal profile resides at a completely different address. Remember, though, that anyone who is considering you for a job/project/lunch meeting will almost certainly be looking at both. Why not? You'd be just as curious as they are about who they are dealing with, and the only way to know everything there is to know about someone is to look for those photos from college where everyone is drawing on the unlucky soul who passed out on the bathroom floor (and hopefully that soul is not you).

To prevent this, un-tag any photos of yourself you wouldn't feel comfortable having your mother (or grandmother) show her friends and don't post any pictures that you wouldn't want the entire world to see. Because really, the whole world WILL be able to see those photos, and that includes your future boss/clients. Due diligence is the key here. It's not a difficult process, but many people don't go through it, or are simply unwilling to let the past go in the pursuit of a better future.

Smart social networking also serves as an excellent SEO (search engine optimization) tool. Many of these networks have what's called a 'nofollow' piece of code attached to them, which means search engines like Google and MSN won't add them to their results. The majority do allow search engine crawling, however, so any terms and images and links you are associated with will get picked up by them and used to compute just how high up you'll be on the page when someone Googles you (which sounds dirtier than it is).

Blogs

Blogs have been a scene-stealer in the branding industry for the past ten years or so, though they hit the big time as recently as 1999 with the advent of a handful of useful (and generally free) blogging tools that were made available to the public around that time. Replacing Usenet groups (which were essentially big, cluttered forums in the early days of the Internet) as the major discussion hub for categorized topics, blogs have recently (in the past few years) become a major part of most companies' marketing plan (those that are in touch with modern marketing methods, at least). Everyone from Google to Quaker Oats to freelance writers in Mid-Missouri are blogging, and in varying degrees they are seeing positive responses from their investment of time and money.

What a blog means to an individual is similar, but also quite different on several levels. For one, a blogging team, or sometimes an individual who is hired to keep the blog updated, arbitrates most business blogs. Generally, this person is a step or two removed from the actual business that they are writing about, whereas an individual writing a blog has no middleman between them and the action. Additionally, most business blogs tend to stray more toward the 'advertisement in blog format' end of the spectrum, which takes away a great deal of its blogosphere credibility (blogocred?).

When you write a blog on your own, you decide the content, you decide how much to show, you decide if you should have an image or a movie accompanying an article (if you decide to have an article at all), and you decide how the blog looks. You can also choose who is on your blogroll (and whose blogroll you are on).

Colin's Experience:

“My first serious blog was very non-standard and wildly successful. It was called Circadian3, and the idea was for me to post a new short writing, photograph and illustration each and every day for a year. Each of the three items also had to relate to one another, so it was an excellent exercise in creative association, quick production (not overworking a concept), and tenacity. At the end of the exercise, I had hundreds of writings, photos and illustrations to draw inspiration from...each one a different concept I had ready-made. Some of the illustrations I was able to spin into t-shirt designs or editorial art, while others simply brought in clients for new work. The project itself also drew a good amount of attention, and since it linked back to my portfolio site, I was able to garner quite a bit of traffic from its popularity. I started a new blog with the launch of Colin Is My Name, this one featuring slightly longer-winded discussions of various design topics, which was created with the intention of furthering my reputation as an expert in the field.

When creating a blog for yourself, take into account the fact that the people reading it will generally have no idea who you are and what you do. What you post will be their first impression (and maybe last impression), and if your point for existing is not clear, your potential audience will likely bounce away to another page without taking in anything memorable about you. There are several things you can easily do to make sure this doesn't happen.

First, be sure to have a nicely designed page for your blog to live on. Keep in mind, nicely designed does not mean 'containing lots of images' or 'many curly and handwritten fonts' or 'uber-sophisticated navigation that they have to explore to figure out.' Nice design is, at it's core, having an intuitive interface (read: easy to use), pleasing aesthetics (read: not too minimal, not too over the top, unless those are part of your personal branding), and practical delivery of your content (read: don't make the user work too hard to get to what you want them to see/read/watch).

Second, make sure your content clearly represents your personal brand. If you are going for the responsible, clean-cut, business-like persona, do not run a blog that focuses on the latest and greatest videos of guys getting hit in the crotch or a daily-updated gallery of classic pornography from the 60's. There is something to be said for having depth, but ideally the depth that you present adds to and fleshes out your branding, rather than detracting from it.

Third, becoming part of a blogging community can be a huge boon for both the number of hits to your site and the implied quality of your content. If you run a blog highlighting the recent exploits of the non-profit organization Reporters Without Borders and are featured on the blogrolls of many prominent humanitarian, political and journalist bloggers, you are set to impress with your blog, making it an asset that you can fearlessly send to potential employers, clients and connections. Rather than your blog being a liability that you hide, it will be an asset that grows in value with each and every new post.

A blog used in tandem with a strong website can be an even more powerful tool, as a website usually contains more information about you and your work, while a blog contains information about your interests.

Websites

A website is by far the most important piece of marketing collateral (along with business cards) for any brand in almost any industry today. As an individual with a website, information about you, your work and your contact information (and a link to your blog) is available to anyone anywhere on the planet at any time, so long as they have Internet access (which is nearly everyone in the developed world, and, with the advent of the mobile phone, a steadily growing number in the developing world). Today, a business without a website seems archaic and out of touch. An individual without a website today seems just about the same in most circles (Facebook doesn't count, though it's a start).

Your website can be very simple or very complex depending on who you are, what you do, and who your audience is. A motion graphics artist will likely want to go fairly flashy (and Flash-y) with their website, opting for a lot of interactivity and a high-resolution sizzle reel of their work for potential clients and employers to immerse themselves in. A copywriter, on the other hand, can get by with something much simpler; in fact, many writers use free blogging services to create their site, since all they need is a Spartan page that will display their words elegantly and without distraction.

Colin's Experience:

“The first iteration of my website for Colin Is My Name was entirely rough HTML, followed a few weeks later by a nearly identical (but subtly animated) Flash-based version. I loved the simplicity of the site, but because of the way it was built, it was an arduous process to update my portfolio, add new networks to my social page, or update my client list. In many ways, it violated one of my cherished values, that design be practical as well as beautiful. It also murdered my SEO. I decided to rebuild my website, and at the time I was just starting to tinker around with Wordpress. I hadn't done anything more than simple modifications to existing themes, but I was determined that the next site I built for Colin Is My Name would be built from scratch, XHTML Strict, and based on Wordpress, using it as a content management system rather than a blog. After a lot of trial and error, learning a bit of PHP, and watching hours of training videos, I built the new website up to my specifications and was finally able to make my site the dynamic hub I needed it to be.

Many companies opt to hire web designers and developers to build their websites, which is the best way to know that they'll have standards-compliant code and the most intuitive and beautiful design for their site. It's not as common at this point to see individuals hiring designers and developers to build their personal sites, but it's likely that the frequency of this will go up as more people go out on their own, become less attached to jobs and decide that it's worth the investment to build up some personal brand equity in order to mature their investment.

What's especially wonderful about a well built website is the fact that it can be very modular, allowing you to add new pages and components and remove old ones as necessary. Just started knitting colorful mittens in your spare time? Set up an e-commerce page to sell your creations! Started to Tweet or post to your del.icio.us page religiously? Add a widget to your sidebar that streams your web activity to your site. The sky is the limit, so long as you are willing to invest the time and/or money to make your website a useful and interesting location for others to visit.

Real Life

Believe it or not, it is possible to have a personal branding home base in real life. In fact, ideally you'll have several. What it means to have a home base in the real world is to have a place that you can go – it can be a coffeehouse, club, art gallery, restaurant, any place really – where people know your name and will back you up in asserting your personal brand.

Consider this scenario: you are a muralist who is looking for a place to meet with a prospective client who wants the side of their building painted. You ask to meet up with this client to discuss what the project entails at your favorite coffee shop down the street. You know the place well, so you pick the table that will have the least noise pollution and foot traffic. As you sit and casually get acquainted with the potential client, the barista asks you about another project you recently completed; one that was a fantastic success (and she knows it), giving you the chance to tell her about it again in front of the prospect. As you walk out with the client, a mural on the building across the street catches their attention. "I want something like that!" they say. "Great," you say, "because that's one of mine! Care to drop in on the owner so he can tell you what it's done for business?"

This is obviously a bit of an idealized situation, but hopefully the point comes across. Having your own personal Cheers ('a place where everybody knows your name') is a very useful strategic advantage in many situations, from meetings with clients to networking. Even better, the more of these kinds of places you have in your arsenal, the better the chance that you'll end up at one when it matters. As sports enthusiasts can tell you, having home court advantage can be a fairly significant feather in your cap, so long as you take the time to develop some friendships and spend enough money not to come across as a cheap-skate (keep in mind, this is a business they're running, and it's as important to them as your career is to you...be generous when you can and they'll be generous back).

chapter 7

LONG TERM PROJECTS

Reputation in Real Life

Colin's Experience:

“ I was fortunate enough to have a really solid base of clients soon after I started Colin Is My Name. About 90% of the people I've done work for have in some way passed my name on to a colleague or friend, promoted my work within their network or pitched me to their superiors in an effort to get me more work with different departments within their organization. I've been incredibly grateful for this fact, and know that it is largely due to my work ethic and my carefully tended reputation. Having a solid reputation has helped me get my foot in the door at new businesses and entirely new industries, as word of my actions sometimes spread in very unexpected (but always very welcome) directions. At the same time, I've met people (and heard of people) who most certainly do not tend to their reputation, and it would seem that they've got a very different path ahead of them. Many of my first time design and web development clients tell me about how their last designer/developer was just terrible: they wouldn't respond to phone calls or emails, they would take 5 times longer to finish a project than expected, their work left something to be desired, and they simply didn't seem to know their business. In some cases, I imagine all of these things are true: some people are simply not very experienced, or just don't have a flair for what they do. Other times, though, I've seen the previous designer/developer's work and been fairly impressed. Unfortunately, because of their lackadaisical attitude toward their client, they now have the reputation of an unreliable, uncommunicative and generally untalented person.

Building a solid reputation is simple in theory: all you have to do is meet lots of people, do great things, and make more friends than enemies (though ideally, you'll have none of the latter). Unfortunately, this is not as easy as its brevity would imply. The truth of the matter is that you will not like everyone you meet, and everyone you meet will not like you. Meeting people is not an easy matter for most of us, and finding the time to do great things (not to mention the skill and tenacity it takes to actually achieve something great) can be difficult when you're out trying to meet lots of people.

There are a few things to keep in mind that may help with the reputation-building process. First, if you spend enough time working on improving yourself and completing your tasks, it will become a lot easier to do great things. Indeed, that initial investment of time will also help you meet new people, as you will become more interesting with each new thing you learn, each new experience you have, and each new finish line you cross. The more you take on and the more people you meet, the more likely it is that other people you don't know will hear of you ahead of time, making the process of meeting and befriending them a lot less complicated.

Keep in mind though, no matter how you develop and achieve and befriend there will be those who are determined to not like you. Perhaps they don't like your vibe, your positive attitude, or they may simply be prejudiced. It's important that you not allow these people to get under your skin, and do your best to turn them around. It's not exactly killing with kindness, because you don't want them to die, but more like pursuing a tough recruit. Just like love turned to hate can be the most intense and fiery of emotions, disdain turned to respect can produce an incredibly honest and long-lasting camaraderie.

There are times, however, when that person who has decided to hate you sticks to their guns and won't be swayed. In this case, be sure to maintain the moral high ground by continuing to treat them with respect and not making the rift difficult on your friends and colleagues by making them choose between the two of you. In most cases strong negative emotions like that will fade over time (they may even greet you as a friend in a few years), but letting it get you down will only slow your progress, and someone else's hang-ups are simply not important enough to slow down for. Continue to be civil and your reputation will stay intact, because everyone else will see that you are doing all you can, and if the other person continues to be antagonistic, theirs will be the reputation that suffers.

Reputation Online

Colin's Experience:

“Most of my online social activities revolve around maintaining a strong reputation and disseminating my work to those who would not have otherwise seen it. Fortunately, these two sets of activities go hand-in-hand, as people I connect with in any capacity with often take a look at my website and other projects that I have going on and then send it to their friends and colleagues. Before I know it, an online friend from overseas is getting me in to VIP events in Los Angeles, and a fellow Twitter-user who heard about me from an online friend of his is asking me if I also do motion graphics (I do) and whether or not I would want to take part in a project he's been working on. Online reputation is important because what happens on your social networks and in the blogosphere can easily spill over into real, tangible life.

Online reputation management is quite similar to real life reputation management with a few caveats. First, remember that everything you do online will be there forever, so make sure you don't do anything you wouldn't want a future employer or client to see. Second, meeting lots of people is incredibly easy online, but building up a strong reputation can be very difficult. Anything you do will have to be that much more intense to get noticed, and you'll have to be noticed by a lot more people before the reputation sticks.

On the upside, supporting a reputation that you've already build up in real life on the Internet is a very simple process, and so long as you know how you want to present yourself. You can upload the right pictures, comment the right way on the right blogs and Tweet the right links to impress that personal brand upon anyone you meet. Whether or not they will remember largely has to do with how consistently you keep to the standards of your brand, but eventually you can and will be known online, just as you are in real life.

Grooming & Hygiene

Colin's Experience:

“When I was in high school, it took me a lot longer than some of the other guys in my class to realize that I needed to start shaving. I walked around for a long time, completely oblivious to the fact that I had these scraggly, scattered, wispy hairs growing all over my face, and that I could and should actively do something about them. Eventually I got wise to the fact, after a kindly friend commented that I would probably benefit from a good shave. Careful not to harm my fragile ego, she phrased it as a recommendation of which brand razor I should use. If this friend hadn't said something, I likely would never have realized that I was committing a major grooming *faux pas* by allowing this facial hair to keep growing in such an uncontrolled fashion. Because I had never been brought into the loop about shaving etiquette, my perspective was widened that day. This process repeated itself many times in my life, with my figure (which led me to start working out), my B.O. (it's hard for a pubescent guy to know when it's time to start wearing deodorant!), my skin (I had terrible acne before I went on Acutane) and my hair (apparently just growing your hair *ad infinitum* is not the most elegant way to deal with it). Correcting these things one-by-one as I became aware of them have helped me immensely with my self-confidence, and social status, and it's greatly beneficial to know that if and when I discover something else that needs improving, I most certainly can make that change.

No, this isn't Health 101 class. But it is important that, as a professional, you maintain a certain level of cleanliness so that all the hard work you are putting into your brand is not negated by really bad breath or noticeably dirty fingernails. Some of these points vary from culture to culture, but in most cases it's hard to go wrong by covering the following bases, just in case.

Here are some commonly overlooked hygienic issues many people have, along with suggestions on how to fix them:

Dirty hands/fingernails: washing your hands frequently is a good idea, even if you don't work with food or small children. Not only will frequent hand washing keep you healthier (and more able to effectively build your brand!), but it will also keep your nails clean and your handshake less greasy (yes, your hands do build up oils like any other part of your body over the course of a day). Be sure to use a light, unscented lotion if your skin dries out easily, or if it's cold outside (dry, cracking skin is no fun, and can be almost as much of a *faux pas* as dirty hands).

Body odor: this is a tricky one, because generally we can't smell our own body odor the way everyone around us can. The best thing to do is simply ask someone you trust to give you an accurate assessment, and then act on what they have to say. If you're fragrance-free, congratulations! Keep doing what you're doing! If not, consider taking an additional shower each day (you should be taking at least one every day already). Make sure that you shower after even moderate workouts and hard exertions. If you are naturally predisposed to sweat more, invest in a heavy-duty anti-perspirant and consider wearing a light scent (make sure it's appropriate for your age group...you probably shouldn't be wearing Axe if you're over 30, and it would be a little strange to smell cologne on a 15-year-old). Women have it a bit easier, as females of all ages can get away with wearing just about any non-overpowering scent from the cradle to the grave. If you're uncertain as to whether others can smell you coming or not, it's best to err toward the affirmative and take care of it before it DOES become a problem.

Bad hair: this can be a touchy subject, but try to look at it from a non-biased standpoint. If your hair conflicts in any way with the personal brand image you are trying to convey, get it cut. If your hair is greasy or (unintentionally) disheveled or punctuated by split ends or awash with dandruff, you need to take better care of it and maybe try a different style. Depending on the type of hair you have, hair care tips vary greatly, but a good place to start is with the idea that you need to clean it regularly (which usually means using some kind of shampoo) and keep it conditioned so it doesn't get frizzy or brittle (which usually means using some kind of conditioner). If you want to do something with your hair other than what it does naturally, you'll also need to decide on some kind of product (which refers to hair spray, gel, pomade, etc) that works well with your hair type. If in doubt, ask the person that cuts your hair what they think you should be using. If you cut your own hair, walk into a salon and ask them about what they carry and what they would recommend for your hair type (you can then go buy that kind of product anywhere, or pay the helpful stylist back by purchasing something from them). In modern society, a person's hair is one of the first things we notice (because it frames the face, which is where we read a lot of valuable information about who the person is, how they are feeling, etc), so make sure that the pre-first-impression goes well by taking care of your hair. You don't have to try to make a statement with it, just make sure it doesn't scream from across the room "I DON'T TAKE CARE OF MYSELF!"

Bad posture: the way you stand, sit and carry yourself says a lot to onlookers about your personality, confidence level and intentions. A person with good posture (stands tall, chest up, shoulders down, head held high, back straight) generally comes across as more confident, trustworthy, able, optimistic and enthusiastic than someone with bad posture (shoulders curved forward, head pushed forward and chest caved in), who generally comes across as a victim of some sort; someone with the weight of the world on their shoulders but not enough strength to carry it. A good way to improve your posture is by getting in better shape (especially working on your core, chest and shoulder strength) and by doing things that increase your self-confidence (achieving something always works, as does improving your physical appearance and living a more active lifestyle). It also helps to take up a hobby that will increase your awareness of your body, like yoga, Pilates or surfing.

Unhealthy body: most people are unhappy about some part of their body. While in general a few extra pounds here and there won't matter too much, what can really hurt your personal brand's development is a general unhealthiness, which can take on many shapes. Obesity, extreme gauntness, or a sickly skin-tone...they all give the same vibe to onlookers: that this is a person who is barely healthy enough to stand, much less handle this project/job/firm handshake. You can tell when someone doesn't take care of their body – it reads in their complexion, their breathing, the tint in the white of their eyes and the lack of strength in their gait. Not taking care of yourself physically can lead to not only health issues, but also discrimination. A small investment of time dedicated to preventative medicine (read: physical exercise and eating right) every day, or a few times a week at the bare minimum, will pay for itself with dividends in a longer lifespan, a more positive self-image and a lot more energy to invest in your business (or all that other non-business stuff I keep hearing about).

Bad teeth: due to the spread of American culture through exported movies, TV shows and music, the United States' cultural bias toward white teeth has exploded around the globe, leading most cultures to adopt the same oral hygiene bias. Fortunately, it's easier and easier every year to come by cheap and effective teeth whiteners. Where once it would cost several hundred dollars and a dentist visit (or two, or three) to effectively whiten your teeth, now \$10-20 will get you a light version of what dentists use, which should be sufficient for most people to go from off-white to white, or from yellow to off-white. The idea is not to have sparkling, blinding, Tom Cruise teeth, but rather to make your teeth white enough so they are not picked out as a sign of lackluster oral hygiene, which could discredit any personal branding efforts you've undertaken. Why take the chance that someone who's approval you need might respond viscerally to your hygiene level? Invest the time now so that you won't have to worry about it later.

Bad skin: this can be a very difficult problem to deal with, partially because it is very important to many people that you have perfect skin, and partially because it can be a very difficult to achieve such perfection. In most cases, bad skin is not due to any lack of cleanliness, but rather due to overactive sweat or oil glands (which is genetic), leading to zits and pockmarks and a shiny layer of grease on the skin. First, try to wash your face (and anywhere else you have bad skin) more frequently and intensely, using face washes and clean towels whenever possible. Exfoliate regularly. Try some of the numerous over-the-counter options and follow the instructions closely. If none of these solutions work, visit a dermatologist and consider a stronger option. The bottom line is this: it's not the end of the world having bad skin, but it definitely has an impact on your self-image, and many people (even those who have had bad skin in the past, or still do!) will automatically assume you have bad hygiene when they meet you. There's no real logic to it, but because of America's obsession with physical perfection, that's the sandbox we're playing in. Do what you can to fix the problem, but don't stress out while you're doing it: that can make things worse. Not all skin problems can be fixed 100% by traditional means, but you'll come across a solution that works for you and your skin if you're tenacious.

Clothing

A first impression is very important to the future of any relationship, and when you are making it your business to have nothing but good relationships, that first impression is vital. What you wear plays a very important role in what people think of you when you first meet (and each meeting thereafter) because what you wear and how you wear it can speak volumes (subconsciously or consciously) to everyone you come across on a day-to-day basis.

Regardless of what 'look' you end up going for eventually, it's a good idea to have a basic understanding of what makes some clothing look good on a person, and what should be avoided (because it doesn't look good on anyone). Let's go over some basics, because this is not something that is generally taught in school (or by parents).

Arguably the most important thing to keep in mind when deciding what to wear is making sure it fits your frame nicely. The colors can be weird, the quality can be low, but if an article of clothing fits you really well, it will still look more expensive than it was and emphasize the positive aspects of your body. This means shopping only for clothing that fits you well, is fitted where it needs to be fitted and a little looser where it needs to conceal. As a general rule, baggy is not the way to go, as it conveys a sense of uncaring, unkemptness that doesn't look professional or friendly. There are, of course, situations where you may need to look antiestablishment and whatnot, but even in those situations, wearing something that has edge but still fits will help you maintain an attractive and professional aura without sacrificing the rebel look.

It should be noted that just because you can't find something 'ready-to-wear' (which is how most of us shop...just buying whatever is available on the shelves, rather than having clothing made for us from scratch) that fits you perfectly doesn't mean you are doomed to wade through a sea of over-baggy pants and suits with sleeves that are a half-inch too short (*faux pas! faux pas!*). Finding a decent tailor will immediately increase the value of your clothing by 50% at least, taking that old suit jacket from your dad and making it into your new professional/party jacket, and making that old pair of jeans into a new fashion statement. If you don't know how an article of clothing SHOULD fit, do a little research, or just ask the tailor; they should know and make recommendations on how to make the article of clothing fit perfectly (and if they don't or can't, find another tailor).

Next, you want to wear clothing with colors that compliment your natural tones. There is not a lot that can be done about your natural color: the combination of tones in your skin, hair and eyes determines your own individual coloration. You can, however, figure out what color clothing pairs well with your coloration can drastically change how certain clothes look on you. As a general rule, people with warmer coloring look better in yellow-based colors like warm reds, golden browns and rich ivories. People with cooler coloring look better in blue-based colors like blues, greens, pure whites and true reds. Go through your closet and see what colors REALLY look good and build on that. Don't be afraid to try out new colors, too, as everyone has a different ideal palette, and you won't know what yours is until you try out every option. Definitely take note of this, as it is one of those little secrets of looking really good that most people will never consider.

Third, dress for the occasion. This one can be tricky, because you won't always know what the proper garb is for a specific situation. A good rule of thumb is to always dress as if you are going in for a job interview, unless you know for sure that the meeting will be more casual and you would be distinctly out of place by dressing up more than that. The goal is to always be dressed slightly more professionally than the person you are meeting with, whether they are a potential client, a networking connection, a potential employer, or even just a new friend that you don't know very well. Building your image as a qualified and respectable professional in your field means dressing the part, and if you are underdressed or overdressed, you will not be sending the right signals (though if you have to error one way or the other, always opt for overdressed).

One problem that many people run into is that they want to start building their professional wardrobe, but don't have any idea where to start. For guys, it's a relatively simple list. You'll want:

1. Three dress shirts: an easy approach is to try on shirts until you find one that fits really well and looks professional, then buy three of them in different colors. The idea is to get something that has a crisp collar that is large enough to rest under the lapels of a suit jacket, but also get something that you would be comfortable enough wearing on its own out to drinks with friends. Simple is best, fitted is great, and look for something without breast pocket (which would limit the shirt to work environments, while also making the shirt look like it doesn't fit quite as well).

2. Three pairs of slacks: when buying professional-looking pants, you want to make sure they fit, and that they combine well with your shirts. They should be different enough that you can switch them up, but nothing so crazy that you are limited in how and where you can wear them. A good place to start is with one dark pair (charcoal grey is ideal), one pinstripe pair (go for light pinstripes...you'll know you've got the right ones when someone across the room can't tell they have stripes, but they are apparent up close), and one lighter pair (go for more of a khaki color over brown...pants that are brown imply naivety or that you are a country bumpkin). Wear pleats if you like, though more modern looks do not incorporate these as often (pleats tend to look a little better on people with a few extra pounds, whereas un-pleated pants fit better on guys with straighter lines). Ideally, at least one pair of slacks will go well with your suit jacket.

3. One suit: there are a lot of options when it comes to suits, but to start out you want something very versatile and simple. Go for a three-button jacket with dark (not metal) buttons, a fairly standard fit (slightly shorter than average is fine if you are going for a modern look, but try not to go too *Reservoir Dogs* with it) in a charcoal grey. The charcoal grey is a very flexible color because it implies the professionalism of a black suit without the TOO professional hang-ups that often come with one, but also grants some of the offbeat novelty of a navy suit (which lends itself to more interesting color combinations). Most important, be sure the suit FITS. If you don't know your measurements, go visit the closest Men's Wearhouse or Sears or Dillard's or any other place that has a suit department and they will usually be happy to give you your basic measurements. Then take those measurements (to whatever store you like) and buy a suit in your size that looks and feels good. If the suit needs a little tweaking, take that badboy into a tailor (trust me, you are not alone if you need to do this).

4. One pair of nice, black leather shoes: the world of dress shoes is a slightly scary one because of all the different styles, colors, textures, heights, etc. A good place to start is with a pair of standard Oxfords, which are essentially the most vanilla dress shoes you can get (which is what we're aiming for at this point). A good Oxford will fit well enough to wear all day long, give you a little extra height, and will not be adorned with any unnecessary frills or decorations. Go for a standard black with a slight polish to it (but not so polished that they look like they are made for a tuxedo). If possible, buy them at the same time you are buying a belt, because the two should match in color, texture and sheen.

5. One black leather belt: As mentioned above, if you can buy your belt at the same time you buy your shoes, you'll be in good shape (and won't have one of those moments where you get home and realize that they look ridiculous together). Go for a standard clasp in the front, and make sure the buckle is not a difficult color to match (a red-gold, for example, would not be a good choice here). Generally you'll probably want to look for something silver- or steel-colored, as that will be the most versatile color to work with. Also: make sure the belt fits! You'll want enough tail to be left after the belt buckle to go through the first belt loop, but not enough so it goes too far beyond that loop.

6. Three pairs of tall dress socks: the exact color of these socks can vary by your personal preference, but you'll want two pairs of either black (which will go with the shoes and belt) or dark grey (which will compliment the suit). If you are feeling adventurous, or if you are someone who likes to have an interesting detail to an otherwise very standard wardrobe, you can grab a pair of socks in bright red or some other distinctive color, but this is probably an option for further down the road, and you'll definitely want to have the black/grey socks for most professional meetings (though if you do invest in another color, make sure that it is bright or different enough that it's clear you wanted them to stand out...it would be an awkward situation if the people who see you wearing them didn't think you did it on purpose, thinking you simply don't know how to dress yourself).

For guys, that's it! After you have these few items, it gets simpler to expand because you already have the basics. Some good next steps include getting a solid messenger bag or satchel, a handful of polo shirts, some dark-washed jeans and some basic (read: not gaudy) tennis shoes. Also: you can never have too many suit jackets (though in general stay away from corduroy when it comes to professional outings, unless you're interviewing with NPR ten years ago).

Dressing professionally and simply is a bit more difficult for women than for men (because ladies have a lot more options), but is still definitely attainable on a budget. Start with the following:

1. Basic white button-down shirt: there are many different styles, lengths, weights and fabrics available, but try to steer toward one that fits well, is opaque, is 100% cotton (because it will breathe) and can be tucked in nicely. Collars will also vary in shapes and sizes, but usually a larger collar will be more versatile and has a more modern look.

2. Black pants: a basic pair of black pants should fit well (meaning that they do your body justice without hugging so tightly that they would be more at home in a club than a business meeting), be made of a durable and flexible fabric, and emphasize your vertical lines (which has been shown to increase a person's authority in the eyes of others).

3. A basic, matched three-piece suit: this includes a jacket, skirt and slacks, and can be in any neutral color (though a dark grey will be the most versatile and professional to start out with). There are many different shades of grey, so be sure that you get one that looks good with your skin tone and hair color. The suit should also fit very well, be fitted where necessary and emphasize professionalism without being so thick or unflattering so as to hide your femininity (it has been shown that the most successful female executives compete AS powerful women, not as women trying to hide the fact that they are women to compete in what has traditionally be a very male-dominated field...own it, ladies!).

4. A pair of versatile khakis: there are a lot of shades of khaki, so make sure you get one that compliments your coloration. Be sure, too, that they fit well, have nice vertical lines and are professional-looking enough to wear to a job interview (no frayed edges).

5. A pair of dark blue or black jeans: these serve as your dress pant alternative and can actually usually be worn in a professional setting, so long as they have a nice cut, no tears or frayed seams, and go well with your dress shirts and shoes. Again, be sure that they emphasize clean lines over hugging every crevice (which can be slightly difficult to find with some brands these days), and go for more conservative over too funky (the nice fit will make them look more modern, even if the style is standard).

6. One blouse: this should be light and made out of silk or cotton. The idea is to offer up a slightly more feminine alternative to the standard white shirt, while still maintaining a strong level of professionalism. Go for white or a color that compliments your complexion without being too bright (neutralized blues, greens and browns are good options here).

7. One turtleneck or mock-turtleneck: this should be fine wool or silk, and provides another professional alternative to the standard white shirt. It can be in just about any color, but the same basic rules apply: don't go for overly bright colors, as you want the cut to stand out, not the brightness (the worst-case scenario is for people to notice you because you're wearing an obnoxious shade of orange or some other eyesore that is distracting rather than supporting your natural coloration...remember, too, that red will usually garner the most attention, but it won't necessarily be the kind of attention you want in a professional setting).

8. One little black dress: if you own only one dress, this is the one to get. This kind of dress comes in myriad styles and textures, but the attributes to aim for are fit (of course), versatility (can you wear it at work and after work?) and durability (if you are only able to wear it once before it tears, shrinks or frays, it's not a good investment). In essence, get something that you could wear anywhere without worrying about being overdressed or overexposed.

9. One black leather belt: go for unobtrusive and classic in style. Look for a standard belt buckle and a width that compliments your dress pants and khakis. Best to shop for your belt at the same time as your dress shoes, so that the textures and shine match.

10. One pair of black leather pumps: for the uninitiated, a 'pump' is a heeled shoe with a low-cut, closed front and generally has no fastening. This is probably the most standard and classic heeled shoe one can have, and displays a level of professionalism while still being feminine. Match the texture and shine to your belt, and get whatever height is most comfortable for you (and easy to walk all day in).

11. One pair of black leather flats: almost any relatively conservative style of flat shoe will work, but be sure they match your belt, and go for closed-toe styles rather than exposed-toes (it's more professional).

Those are the basics, but woman have the good fortune (or bad fortune, depending on how you look at it) to have an incredibly vast amount of clothing choices available. Some good next steps are to get a classic black handbag (not too big), some black (or grey) stockings, a simple necklace and earrings and a simple cardigan or sweater.

For both men and women, remember to buy quality over quantity, and to take advantage of sales and clearances at stores that sell clothing that fit you well. If it's a choice between getting one shirt and one pair of pants that look fantastic on you and are made well versus buying three shirts and two pairs of pants that fit kind-of-okay and are shoddily constructed, go for the former every time. Not only is it good for your wallet in the long term, it's also good for your lifestyle (less clutter).

Up next, a quick summary and list of links to further information on personal branding!



FINAL WORDS

Now you know the very basics of personal branding, and are ready to do a re-launch of your own brand. This is most certainly a continuing process, however, so be sure to keep taking stock of who you are and where you want to be, changing your image when you feel the need or want to try something new.

Remember that change is empowering, and that confidence allows you to more easily accept change. Aim for both.

Some other good resources for personal branding include the following sites and books, which you should definitely check out, as all of these people are experts in the field:

Personal Branding Blog

Run by Dan Schawbel, a twenty-something expert on personal branding, this blog is an incredibly valuable resource for all of your personal branding needs. Be sure to grab a copy of his book *Me 2.0: Build a Powerful Brand to Achieve Career Success* for more in-depth information on many of the topics I covered in this ebook.

Personal Branding for the Business Professional

This quick-tip personal branding guide is notable for the great scope of information it gives in a very small space (only 15 pages! But so much information!). I think what I like the best about this guide, though is that Chris Brogan (the author) and I both use the term 'Home Base' in our ebooks (we developed our ideas separately, I swear!). Oh yeah, did I mention it's free?

Personal Branding in the Age of Google

Like most of Seth Godin's blog entries, this post is concise, to the point and accurate in its assesment of the subject at hand.

Personal Branding

This article by Steve Pavlina (operator of the site 'Personal Development for Smart People') hits on the important aspects of personal branding, and if you like his style, you should pick up his book, *Personal Development for Smart People*.

Personal Branding the Competitive Edge

This ebook by Louise Mowbray is available for a very reasonable £14.99 (for 84 pages and 16 chapters of personal branding goodness). Check out her blog [here](#).