

PERSONAL BRANDING THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract

It seems that nowadays most of us have a networking role and/ or place, therefore it is important to understand how to have an active participation in this networked society. Since the personal brand concept became an attribute to more and more professionals, being able to create, promote and grow it through social media can be a very easy and handy way. The paper shows how social media helps and opens doors for personal branding and those who find out how to use it will enrich their success through new career opportunities, partnerships and audience for their online work. The paper also shows how social media can be used in building and maintaining a strong personal brand.

Keywords: *personal branding, social media, identity, reputation.*

What is a personal brand

If the word *branding* has been for a long time related to companies, today almost each person can say that he/ she has a personal brand, even if just few of us have consciously cultivated it. The question now is no longer if we have a personal brand, but if we cultivate it to work in our interest. In his book, *The Personal Experience Effect: Big Brand Theory Applied to Personal Life*, Jim Joseph goes even further, arguing that our personal brands begin at birth; when the parents give a name to the child, they unconsciously launch a new brand, and from that day forward, the person keeps building it.

Approximately 2400 years ago Socrates said "The way to gain a good reputation is to endeavor to be what you desire to appear", words that describe the importance of the today name of *personal brand*. Personal branding should not be perceived a luxury reserved only for celebrities or entrepreneurs, but as a must for anyone who wants others to know him for what he does best. Therefore, when building a personal brand, the first question to answer is "what do you want to be known for?" (Dalla-Camina, 2016).

In his book, *Ditch. Dare. Do! 3D Branding for Executive Success*, William Arruda insists about the fact that the personal brand is not at all the job title. If we rely on our job title to position us to others, we'll just end blending into the multitude of people who do the exact same thing. The personal brand does not consist in only what we do, but more in how, for whom and why we do it (Dalla-Camina, 2016).

One can do a very good job, but if he does not know how to create a personal brand, he will benefit much less from what he does than his brand aware fellow (Jim, 2013). We can differentiate the two from the moment we ask them what they do for living. The most probable the first would just answer with his job title, for example *I am a confectioner*, while the second will answer bringing up the uniqueness of what he does, for example: *I create unique cakes for special occasions*. The personal brand is all about the difference that one can bring in the industry through the unique quality, experience and way of presenting them. "People with strong personal brands get noticed because they share their passion for what they do in a way that is relevant to the people they want to serve." (Dalla-Camina, 2016).

There are some important aspects that must be accomplished when working to the personal brand:

- Being aware of the fact that the others identify us according to our brand; once we determine how we want our brand to be perceived, we decide the strategy of building it up. This is why we have to be very clear about the image we intend to project. Also, if we project more images about ourselves, we may confuse people regarding what is our brand about;

- Being always aware about our online presence, because today most of the branding action happens there;
- Everything we share both online and offline must have a purpose, because every shared information, status and picture contributes to the personal brand;
- Associate with other strong brands, as this strengthens our identity (Hyder, 2014).

It is difficult to establish what is the relation between the personal brand and reputation: if the personal brand is being created by the reputation or vice versa or if they are one and the same thing. But, if we would have to define in a very briefly way the personal brand, we could say that it is what a person is known for (Harris & Rae, 2011).

What is social media

Social media is a sum of online communication channels based on content-sharing for a specific community, interaction, dialogue and collaboration. Examples of today top social media platforms are: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Google+, Tumblr, Instagram. (eBizMBA Rank, 2016)

Through social media, actually any person who has Internet access can disseminate his thoughts or ideas, materials, pictures or videos to millions of people online who have the possibility to interact with him and to opine on his posts. The main purpose of interacting on social media is creating new personal or business relations. The users turn from consumers into creators of content in a context in which knowledge is being democratized (Bădău, 2011).

At origins, social media was an online tool for people to interact with friends and later it has been adopted by businesses that realized this could be a new communication method which could lead to reaching out to customers. The first social media site everybody agrees upon was the "Six Degrees" website, which lasted from 1997 to 2001 and allowed its users to create a profile and friend other users (Historycooperative, n.d.). In the first years of the 2000's, more and more people used chat rooms to meet other people worldwide to make friends or discuss on different

topics and the website MySpace was the popular place to set up a profile and make friends. LinkedIn was also at the beginning of the social media websites, focused on professionals who want to network with each other. In 2004, Mark Zuckerberg launched what nowadays is the number one social media network, Facebook, and has more than 1.6 billion monthly active users (Company Info - Facebook Newsroom, n.d.). In the 2010's websites began to list their social media addresses and many tools were being designed to include social media on websites. It's almost unusual to see on the Internet a businesses or brand without social media icons. It's a new way to promote products and services and they will do it through the social media platform that best suits their purpose.

In the present the social media comprises thousands of social media platforms, some of them more popular than others, but each of them with its audience and users, as each serves different type of people. If for instance Instagram is for those who communicate better through pictures, Twitter is for those who communicate better by the means of words (Workitdaily, 2016).

What no long time ago was possible only for companies, media or celebrities, today is so easy for any person with a phone and Internet connection to disseminate information, pictures, videos of public interest and gain audience, followers, money, notoriety, even fame. All of these are just being offered by social media to people with the needed skills to manage it. Just like any other industry, only the ones who figure out how it works will be rewarded with many and different type of benefits (Arruda & Deb, 2013).

Building and maintaining a personal brand through social media

Nowadays social media is the best and easiest way to grow a personal identity, to establish a reputation and become visible in a specific industry or niche. It is the perfect place for the personal brand to be actualized, because almost everybody is now online and there is where they are going to look for someone if they intend to find out about his person and activity.

Thus, with minimum of effort, anybody can make an account and promote his activity in order to obtain more followers and shape the way of being perceived in online (Huffingtonpost, 2016).

The business world began to give more and more importance to managing personal brands and offers strategic advice about how to create a desired personal brand identity with the help of social media.

There are some aspects to consider when building the personal brand through social media:

Having more accounts on different social media platforms is indicated, as they can reach to more people, but only with the condition to be permanently updated;

Developing a strong positioning statement is very important, as it is a brief summary of who the person is and what he/she does; when creating it, it should be taken into account that even if the statement is about the brand, it is for the people that the person wants to be connected with, so the audience should be always kept in mind;

In order to have success with the personal brand, one should use a consistent look with which to feel all the platforms. The name, color, style and tone used are branding aspects that must be used on all accounts of the different channels. This way, the personal brand is going to become memorable and people will remember it easier. It also helps if the profile picture is the same across various social profiles;

In order to be easy to find, one should post every day on the most valued social networks and make sure that the brand message is consistent across all of them. Having an active role on the social channels is important in order to gain influence and followers, so a significant aspect in growth is posting consistently. Research regarding the recommended frequency of posting to social media shows that the best sharing volume on the most known social networks is:

- Facebook - 2 times per day
- Twitter - 5 times per day
- LinkedIn - 1 time per day

- Google+ - 2 times per day
- Pinterest - 5 times per day
- Instagram - 1.5 times per day (Kevan, 2015).

By being active, the personal brand gets exposure and helps the person in getting a position as an authority in the respective niche;

When followers contact it is advisable to answer within 24 hours; the followers and their expectations must be always taken into consideration when we want our personal brand to have success, therefore their need of quick response must be accomplished;

Engaging with others by joining different communities and groups and making an impact there.

Another advantage for promoting the personal brand in the social media is that we can reach to the people we want to be in contact with without as much effort as other manners would need. Besides, if usually branding efforts require considerable financial support for promotion, social media offers the opportunity to a person to promote himself as brand in a cheap way (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Besides, now almost every employer will look on social media for the profile of a possible employee, with other words for his personal brand. Even some, depending on the job, will specially require a Facebook or other social media account. This is another reason for taking care of our image and identity on social media, as it can open new career opportunities or partnerships.

Maybe the best way to explain the importance of the social media for the personal brand is the one that Jayson Demers explains: "If content is the fuel for your personal brand, social media is the engine." (Kevan, 2015).

Conclusions

Anyone can say that has a personal brand, the question is what he/she does with it. A personal brand, just like any brand, has to be consciously managed. Only this way it can be constantly improved and visible to the audience. In order

to promote it, today social media platforms are very handy, easy to use, even cheap.

The personal brand is not about our job title, it is about the difference we bring through what we do, about the power to convince that we do it well, sustained by the received feedbacks.

Personal branding through social media is accessible to almost anyone who wants others to know him for what he does best, who has Internet access and some minimal skills. Social media can help promote it, would open career doors and bring new opportunities for growth and development.

Even if it is difficult to say how social media will look like in the future and how personal branding will benefit from it, the most probable is that, with the new technologies, both will develop and improve, offering new possibilities for any individual who cares about his online image and identity (Labreque et al., 2011).

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