

The Selfie

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Micro and small business entrepreneurs who begin to market themselves early have a definite advantage over those who don't.

(4 minutes) When the decision is taken to start a business, most entrepreneurs have little more than a product or service that they believe someone will buy, a support network of friends and family, prospective buyers, and a little cash and equipment to invest in product/service development and a place to sell. What most overlook is the most powerful marketing asset of a start-up; the personal brand of the business owner/principal.

The purpose of marketing oneself is to identify, create and sustain competitive advantage. Self becomes an “engineered product,” not a commodity.

The brand value of self is an outcome of education, personal development (a well-maintained mind and body), and experience in the field of interest for career development. Ancillary is the level of compensation that can be demanded for knowledge and skills shared.

A person's brand should become an aspiration for all who interact with that person. A brand is not what the person thinks it is, it is what family, friends, colleagues and customers say it is. If a brand is trusted, it will be recommended to others. Dealing with perception is a delicate task. It soon becomes reality and may work for you (brand asset) or work against you (brand liability). When developing a brand for the person, be acutely aware of the elements of a brand and learn how to apply them as a single product and value proposition inherent in the promise.

Before a promise is made about the brand of the individual, make sure it can be delivered. If the brand of an individual promises a unique skill, network, experience, or ability to distinguish herself or himself from competition, then that ability must be communicated in written, spoken and body language that is understood by the target audience or market sector. The value proposition of the person's brand is useless until it is communicated to a receptive audience

that will react to the message in a way to cause a favourable and expected outcome. If the message is relevant, timely and delivered effectively, then the person will stake a place in the collective mind of an audience. That is the place to be – top of mind when the person's name is mentioned and that will be associated with a product or service. Consider the top of mind space held by enterprises like Nike, Lafarge, BBC, and FOX. The success of these brands owes much to a brand proposition and how it is communicated. The same can be said for the individual entrepreneur. What comes to mind when you think of names like Jobs, Branson, Gandhi and Clinton?

To round off the marketing of an individual, there should be a plan in place and set of tactics for the individual to compete. The plan would have a vision detailing where the individual wants to be. It would have a shorter-term mission and a goal to implement the mission through several realistic objectives. The traditional four Ps of the marketing mix (product, price, place, promotion) come into play to help move the individual into top of mind among customers and prospects. Strategic planning and developing tactics to support an individual's brand require a great investment of time.

The marketing of "me" is a career-building necessity. Micro and small business entrepreneurs who begin to market themselves early have a definite advantage over those who don't. A little marketing can go a long way. A lot of marketing is an investment in your future - and that of your enterprise.

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