

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE

TO GROWING YOUR
PERSONAL BRAND

Secrets We've Used to Grow The Brands
of New York Times Bestsellers



1997.

That's the last year that anyone in our industry seriously questioned whether personal branding was a worthwhile pursuit. Tom Peters' seminal piece on the topic in Fast Company puts it like this:

“

“We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You.”

So, over the last two decades, companies have invested in CEOs and leaders building their personal brands — carefully crafted images of who they hoped their best selves to be. Universities have built curricula around the concept ([University of Virginia](#) and [State University of New York](#), for two examples). Hundreds of personal brand experts have cropped up telling you the best way to build the brand of YOU.

While Tom Peters ([who ironically has no mention of personal branding on his own Wikipedia page](#)) coined the term personal branding in 1997, a couple of things have changed since then. (No, I am not talking about the rise and fall of Nic Cage.)

In 1997, the web was a conglomeration of billboards for American industry. [Check out this stellar web-billboard for Home Depot, for example.](#)

Now, the web is a place where social networks allow people all over the world to connect with each other — instantly. Politicians, celebrities, athletes, and other entertainers who once leveraged personal brands for personal gain now see the facade of their carefully polished image shattered by the reality of today's interactive society.

Is it time for personal branding to die? Probably not. But maybe we should re-examine what personal branding means in a post-Facebook world.

WHAT IS PERSONAL BRANDING?

Tom Peters' synopsis is apt. It's the idea that each individual, regardless of industry or title is the CEO of his/her own company — Me, Inc.

Although Mr. Peters gave us the term, we can hardly credit him with the concept.

It's old. Really old.

Remember King Solomon (the wise king from the Golden Age of Ancient Israel)? He stated the value on a personal brand this way in Proverbs 22:

“A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.”

That's the allure, right?

That's why we pursue establishing a favorable personal brand — because we know the value of respect. We know the value of being liked. It can influence each aspect of our lives, from whom we marry to what our potential job title will be.

So, like the personal branding experts at XYZ, Inc., we carefully craft a person we think will attract the most opportunity, the greatest accumulation of wealth, and the highest prestige.

Unfortunately, that method of personal branding doesn't work anymore.

Personal branding is who you are when you're talking with friends, eating dinner at a restaurant in an unfamiliar town, and watching National Treasure while you're working remotely.

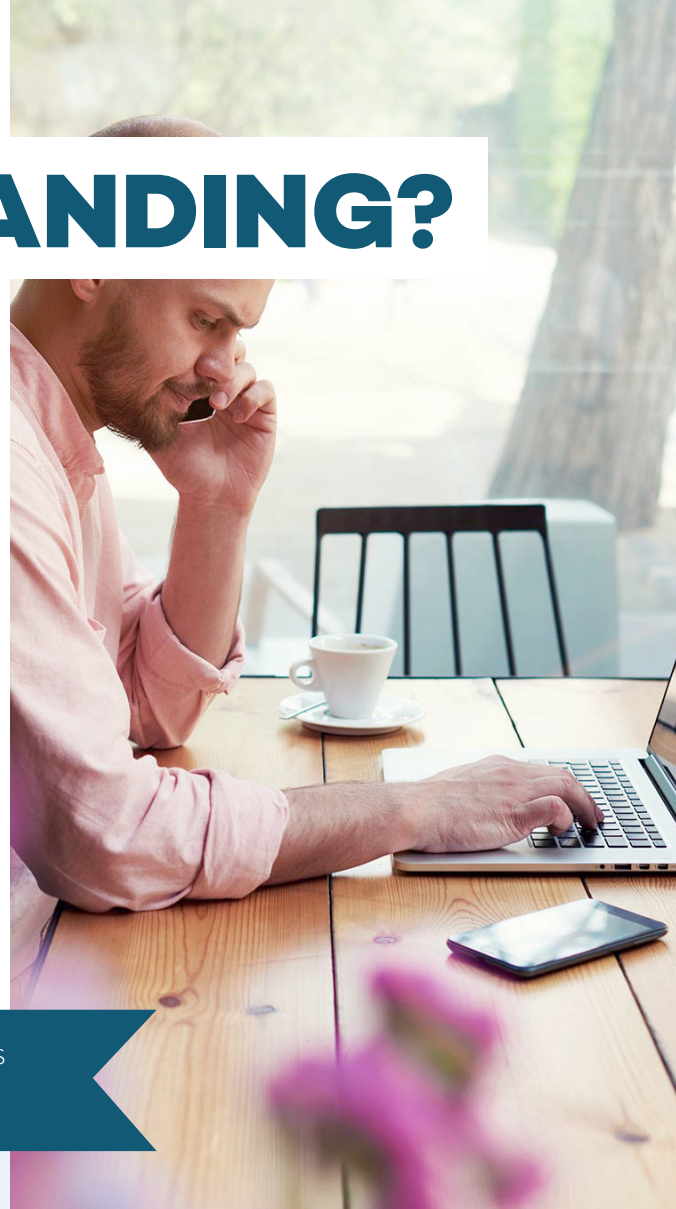
You are you — not only the best parts, but also the worst.

And in this economy of instant news and ideas, that's truer than ever.. Authenticity is crucial, because when you're insincere, your audience will find out — sometimes sooner, sometimes later, but they will always find out.

That's why Neil Patel (Yeah, I know we're trying to rank for the same keyword, Neil. Please stop writing such good posts, so I can beat you :-)), put it best in the second point here: [Inject Personality into Your Brand](#).

Although, I would alter by one word:

Inject your personality into your brand.



WHY IS PERSONAL BRANDING IMPORTANT

So, CEO of Me, Inc., now that you know what a personal brand is, why should it be important to you?

You're likely here for one of two reasons:-

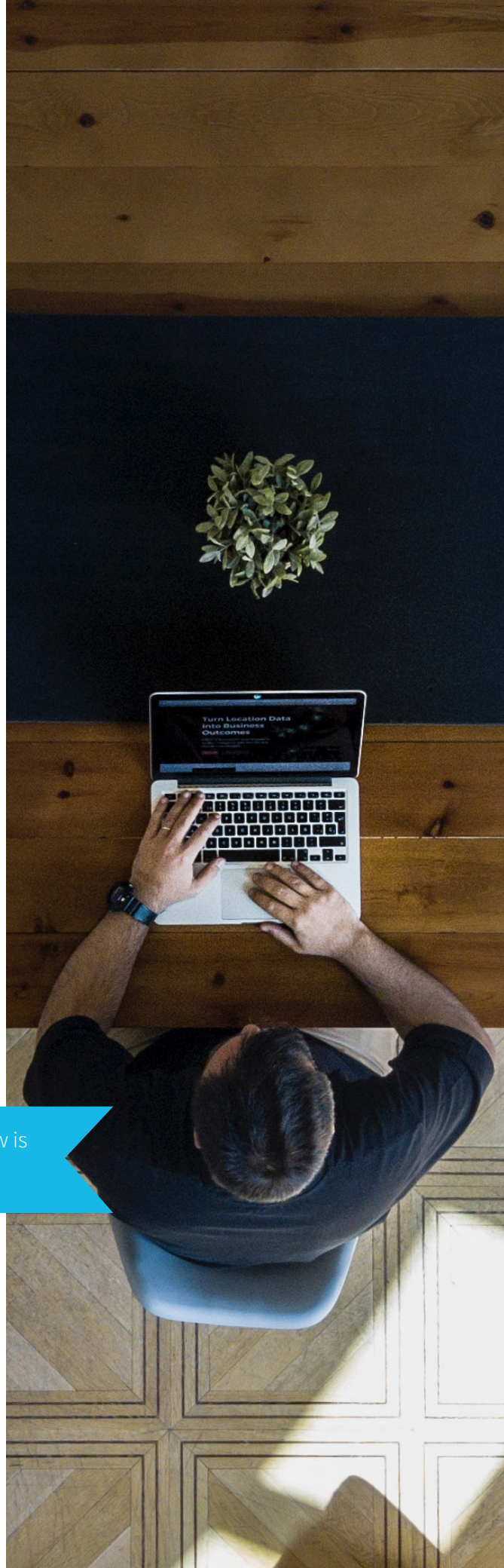
- 1 You already have a personal brand that's doing well, and you want to grow it.
- 2 Your personal brand has stalled out, and you need help getting going again.

Regardless of where you are, you know the brand is important. But let's get really honest about why that's true by seeking some wisdom from the words of Honest Abe (Abraham Lincoln — for those of you who didn't take elementary school History :-)):

“Character is like a tree and reputation like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing.”

If your brand is incongruous with who you are as a person, it won't last. Personal branding is important because it can make the difference as to whether your fans stick around or not.

Base the brand (the shadow), on who you are (the tree), and people will stick around for the real thing.



THE 4 KEY FEATURES *of* A STRONG PERSONAL BRAND

There are 4 key features of any strong personal brand. Get these right, and you'll be well on your way to building a brand that inspires, educates, and helps people reach their goals.

1

SPECIALTY

The best personal brands know who they are.

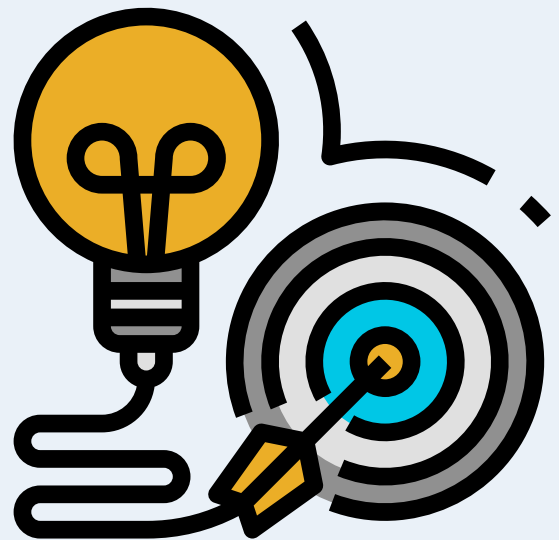
You're unlikely to find a strong personal brand that teaches writing, painting, basketball, and chess.

Why?

Because, if you specialize in all of those things, you really specialize in none of them.

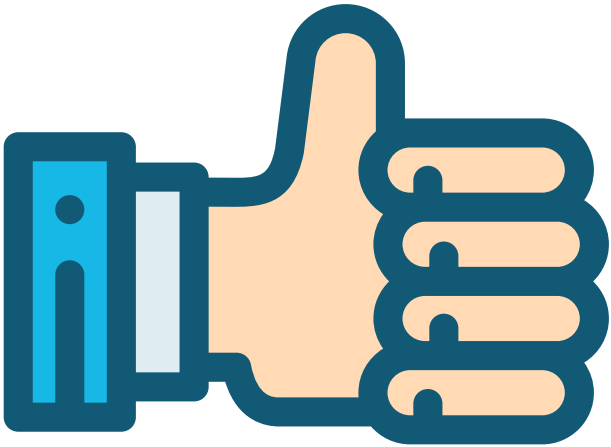
If you want to build a personal brand, your name must be associated with a specific topic, so that, when people think of that topic, they think of you.

That means you have to pick a specialty. Maybe it doesn't have to be exactly one, but you should not advertise yourself as "The #1 Expert in Writing, Painting, Basketball, and Chess!"



2

EXPERIENCE



The internet is crowded, and audiences realize it. They’re no longer taking marketing material at face value.

They want to see that you’ve generated tangible results. They want to see evidence you know what you’re talking about.

If you’re a business coach, that means you’ll want to highlight results you’ve gotten for your clients.

If you’re a motivational speaker, you’ll want to show clips from some of your speeches.

But, what if you’re just starting out and don’t have much experience yet?

Then you want to build experience as quickly as possible—and that might mean doing some work for free.

Reach out to your current network and ask if anyone is interested in receiving your services for free.

If you’re a speaker, offer to speak at local or community events for free.

If you’re a writer, offer to write blog posts for people who have bigger audiences than you. (This is called “guest posting,” and we discuss it more in our [guide to increasing blog traffic](#).)

The goal here is two-fold.

First, you want tangible evidence of your experience. That’s simple, and you get it easily by performing your speech or sharing your writing.

Second, you want to get testimonials. A few days after you’ve performed the speech or written the blog post, reach out to the person you helped and ask for a testimonial. Don’t be shy! Odds are, they’ll be grateful for your service and will gladly say some nice things about you.

If you do this, then you’ve generated tangible evidence of your experience quickly.

NOTE

You don’t have to be world-class to get started. You just have to be 1-step ahead of your audience. So, if you have a serious passion for fitness, you don’t have to be a professional bodybuilder to build a personal brand. But you do have to be consistently learning and providing value to your audience.

3 DEFINED TARGET AUDIENCE

Think about it:

The way you talk to your mother is not the same way you talk to your friends.

Building your personal brand is similar. You have to know who you're talking to, so you can present your message effectively.

The simple fact is—you can't reach everyone. There are too many people in the world, and not all of them need what you have. So, focus on the subsection that you can have the most impact with.



Based on your specialty—what group of people most needs what you have to offer?

If you're a motivational speaker, maybe your target audience is businesses or schools. Those organizations are often looking for someone to come in and add some enthusiasm and passion to their environment.

And if you're a business coach, then your target audience could be anyone from aspiring entrepreneurs to current CEOs depending your level of experience.

The market is a puzzle and you are one piece of it. Where do you best fit?

4 ABILITY TO TEACH

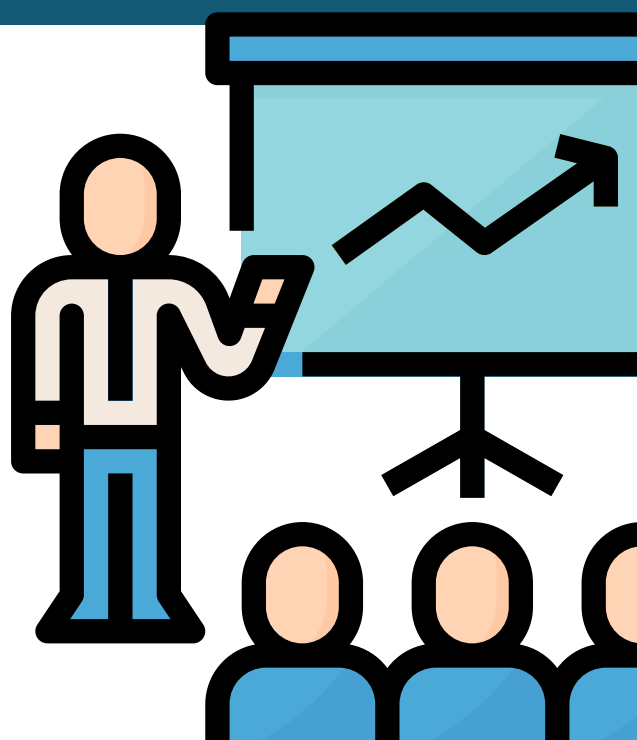
People care about personal brands because those brands help them improve their lives in some way.

It's not enough to simply talk about yourself, what you've done, and how great you are.

One critical element that separates the best personal brands from the ones no one hears about are the ability of successful personal brands to turn their life experiences into teachable moments for their audience.

This is hard, because it not only requires you to be able to clearly communicate your experience to your target audience, but also requires the completion of some difficult inner-work.

If you want to build a strong personal brand, you'll have to take a look at your own life to determine what lessons you've learned through your experiences and how those lessons can help others improve their own lives.



WHAT SEPARATES PERSONAL BRANDS THAT STAND OUT FROM THOSE THAT DON'T?

Truthfully, there are many things separating successful personal brands from unsuccessful ones.

But there's one in particular that, if you don't get it right, your personal brand is doomed.

Stand-out personal brands clearly communicate exactly who they are and what their brand is all about.

It's clear what they stand for. It's clear what they're trying to accomplish. Those core values are fairly simple for their followers to understand.

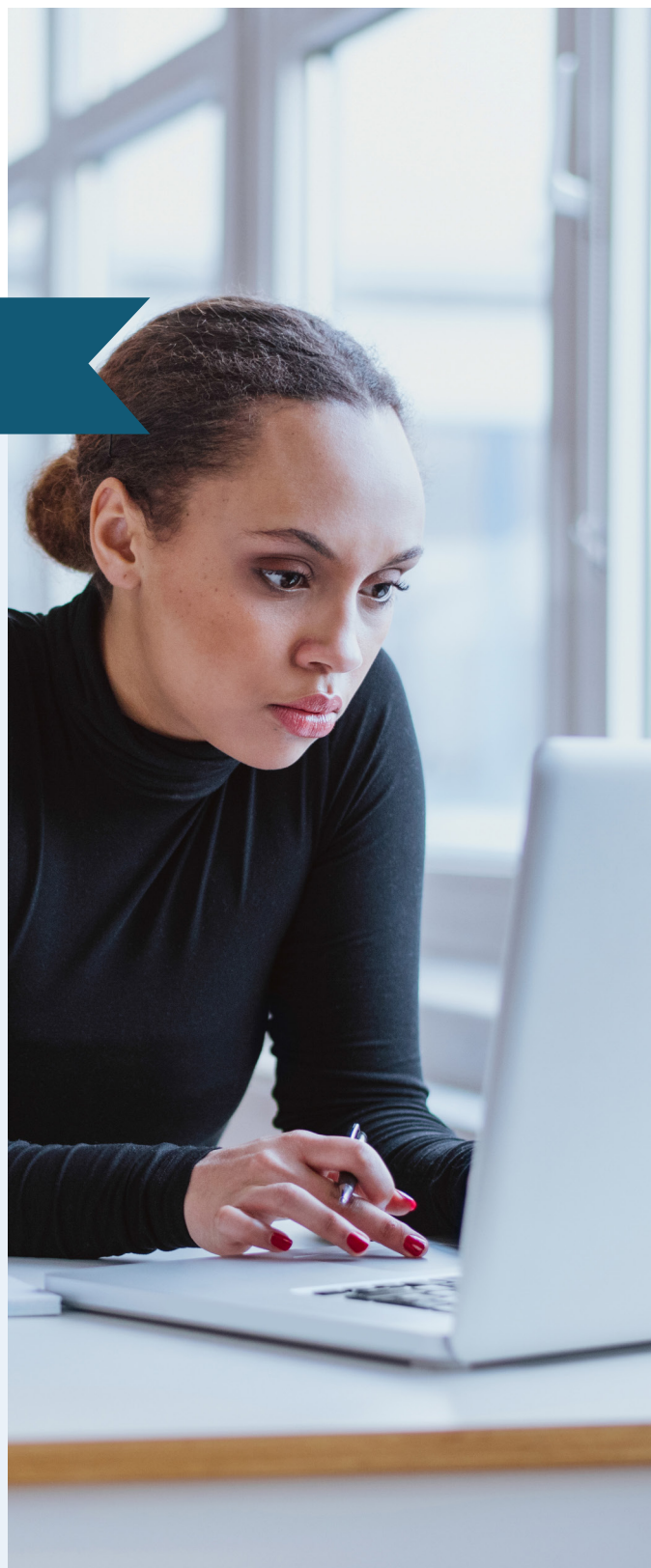
They've taken great time and effort to be very clear in communicating who they are and what their brand is trying to do, which makes it very simple for their audience to latch on and to become a part of what's going on.

In short, they've done the hard work to define themselves and the value they provide.

Forgettable personal brands haven't figured out their niche or haven't figured out exactly what they're offering. Instead, they're trying to offer everything to everybody.

People get lost when the communication is not clear and when the call to action is not clear.

If people aren't able to say, «That's the expert in writing,» or, «That's the leadership expert,» you'll struggle to stand out as a personal brand.



HOW STRONG PERSONAL BRANDS CONSISTENTLY COMMUNICATE WHO THEY ARE

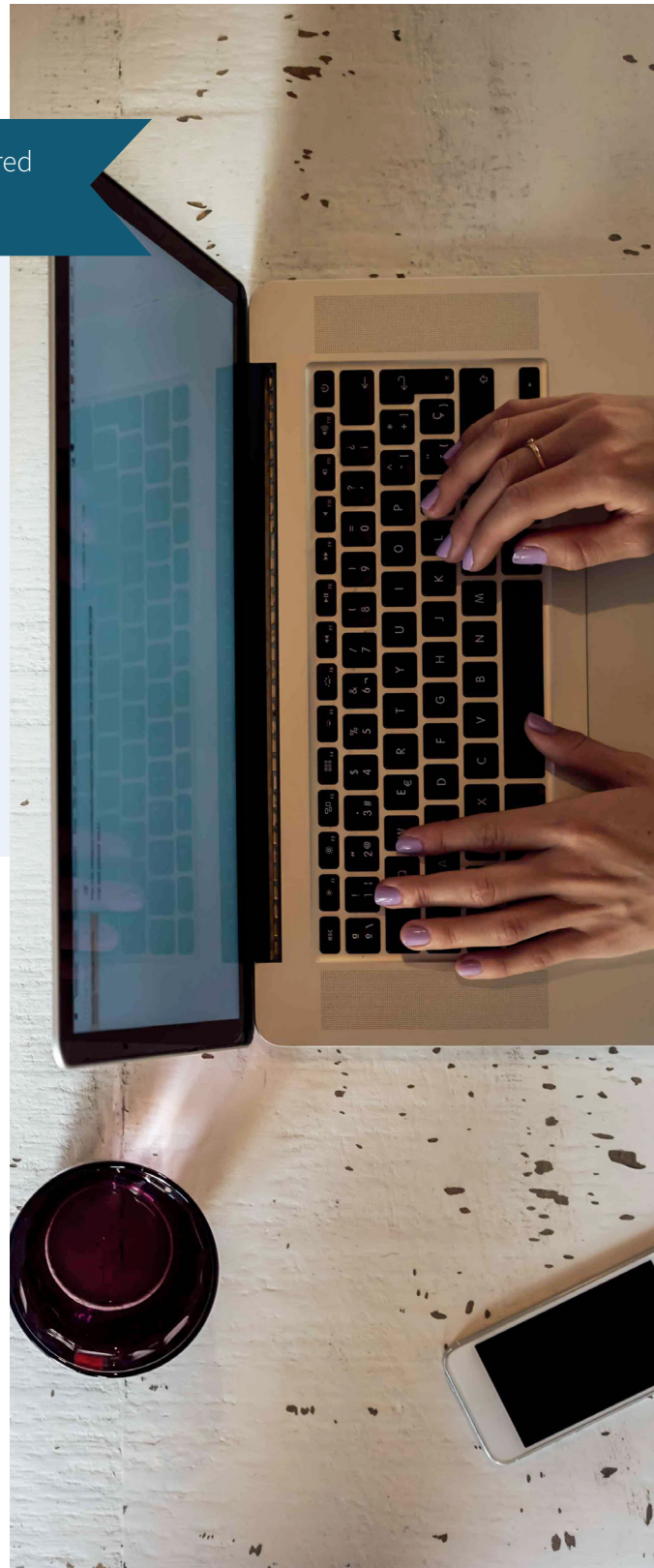
Put simply:

They have decided exactly what they're doing and have not wavered from it.

Not every opportunity and not every topic is in their wheelhouse. They're okay with that. They are specialists, and they stick to what their plan. They stay in their lane.

This lets their audiences know exactly what they're getting and gives great credibility to the brand itself.

They're effectively and consistently communicating who they are, what their vision is, and the value they can bring to the lives of the people in their audience.



HOW TO *Build* A PERSONAL BRAND

if you're just starting out

If you're just starting to build a personal brand, here are the foundational elements you must figure out if you want to increase your chance of success.



1 FIGURE OUT YOUR STORY

- » What is your passion? » What's keeping you awake at night?
- » What are you thinking about constantly that you want to share with others?

Identify your expertise based on your life experience.

- » What is the story of your life? » How have your life events molded you?
- » What have you learned from those events?

Build your story around your life experience, then target your audience based on what that story is.

People always learn better from a story. Determine the most compelling way to tell your story and clarify why you are someone worth listening to in this area of expertise.

2 DEFINE YOUR AUDIENCE

If you don't have an audience, you don't have a personal brand.

It's important not just that you're putting out content, but that you have an audience for that content—that people care about what you're saying.

The fact is—you have knowledge about something that other people want to learn about. Who are those people? What are they interested in? How can you help them?

It's okay if this is vague at first, but you must have at least a general idea of who you're talking to. Often, this gets more specific as your audience grows.



3 DETERMINE YOUR GOAL

Building a personal brand is hard. You need a way to measure your progress, so you don't get discouraged.

In the beginning, your goals might focus on getting social media followers, growing your email list, or posting content on a regular basis.

But you should set long-term goals too. Allow yourself to dream. What's your ultimate vision for your personal brand?

Most importantly, WHY are you doing this?

Personal brands that last are built on a strong foundation. Your WHY is your northern star.



4 DECIDE WHICH AREA YOU'LL FOCUS ON FIRST

A lot of people write. A lot of people speak in front of others.
A lot of people teach. You can do a variety of different things.

But the most important thing to remember is that you can't do all of those at a high level at once.

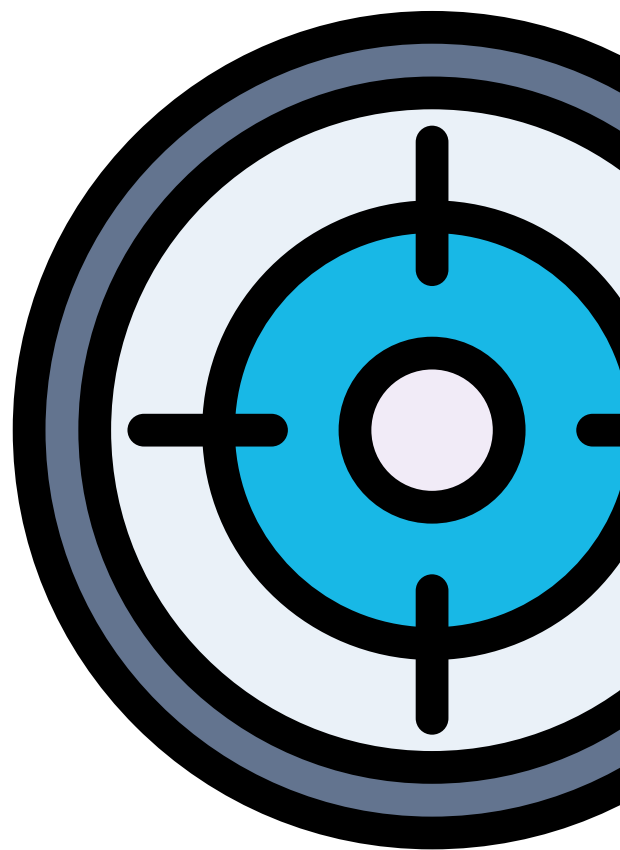
So, ask yourself:

Which one of those sounds best to me? Which one fits my personality or my skillset the best?

Start there and focus on it.

If you're an amazing public speaker, then start figuring out a way to get in front of as many audiences as possible to share your message, to hone your skill as a speaker, to get people to start to attach themselves to who you are and what your brand is doing.

Start there and then grow into the other areas from there.



5 PRODUCE CONTENT REGULARLY

Producing regular content is essential to stay in contact with your audience and position yourself as the expert in your field.

This doesn't mean you have to write a new blog post every day or send out a new email every day. It doesn't mean you have to post on Facebook or that you have to tweet ten times every day.

What it does mean is that you have to have a plan.

You have to pick your lane and decide what your schedule is going to be. Create a content release schedule, and then actually stick to it.

Just as important:

Know where your audience is, and meet them there.

If you're speaking to an older audience, it's unlikely they'll be highly active on Twitter or Instagram. Do the research to find out where your audience spends their time online, and post your content there.

WHEN YOU SHOULD START MONETIZING YOUR PERSONAL BRAND

Is your goal to turn your personal brand into your primary revenue source?

Are you looking to quit your day job so to speak and make this your new vocation?

If so, then there might be a little bit more of a sense of urgency to attempt to monetize things.

First, understand this:

If you rush into monetizing by creating a product or a service, some type of offering, and you're offering it to the wrong people, then it's not going to work.

It's very important to make sure you have figured out who your target audience is, you have figured out where they are, you've been consistent in communicating with them, and you've provided a tremendous amount of free value to them up to this point.

If you've done those four things, then you're ready to start asking «How can I make money from this?»

Here are a few ways you can start making money from your personal brand:



1 FIGURE OUT YOUR STORY

This is where a lot of people start. If you have the desire to write a book, and if you feel like people would gain value from it, then consider it as an option.

But there's a downside:

Writing a book can take a long time, and the profit margin on a book is not massive.

You'll have to sell a lot of books in order to make that a notable revenue source.

2 CREATE A COURSE



A course you create would walk people through your expertise.

So, if you've positioned yourself as an expert in business. Your course might walk people through the process of creating and monetizing a business from their entrepreneurial idea.

Courses are generally at a higher profit margin than books and have been proven to be a successful strategy for a lot of personal online brands.

3 OFFER SERVICES, LIKE COACHING OR CONSULTING

If your audience wants more 1-on-1 interaction with you or a higher level of guidance, then offering your services to help them achieve their goals is a great way to monetize your personal brand once you've built up credibility.

4 SET UP AFFILIATE PARTNERSHIPS



Most personal brands offer some sort of product to their audience.

A great way for you to begin monetizing your brand is to offer to sell another personal brand's product to your audience for an affiliate commission.

Partnerships are very valuable in the personal branding world, and showing that you're willing to help another person out can not only help you out financially, but that person will be more likely to help you out in the future as well.

As you build your brand, you're building not only relationships with your audience, but you're continuing to build relationships with other influencers to increase your network, increase the value that you're offering, and give yourself the opportunity to add a new revenue channel through affiliate sales.

WHEN TO CONSIDER A PIVOT

In general, pivots should happen organically.

If you've been working on your personal brand for 3 months and are struggling to build an audience, that's likely NOT the time to pivot.

A large part of success in personal branding comes from building up a significant amount of content—and that takes time.

Consistency is often what separates wannabes from successful personal brands.

Here's the story of a successful, organic pivot, so you can get an idea of what that might look like for your brand:



[John Gordon](#) has been around for quite a while. He went to Cornell University. He has his master's from Emory University in teaching.

When he became a personal brand, he was one of the many people that was just focused on speaking and helping teachers. He would travel around to education markets all over the country. School districts would bring him in to teach their teachers how to continue to improve their classrooms. How they can improve not only in the classroom, but also how they can improve their personal lives, so that they're better teachers during the school year.

He rose to the top of that specific industry, but he started as an education speaker. He then branched out. He became very popular and started to get asked to speak to different types of audiences. A lot of the principles that he was talking about became applicable to other industries as well.

The time came for him to branch out of just being an educational speaker and author. He started getting asked by corporations and teams. Coaches have started bringing him in. Now the books that he writes have a much wider audience base. They're not just for teachers anymore.

ACHIEVING PERSONAL BRANDING SUCCESS

Developing a successful personal brand isn't a complex process. The roadmap is simple. But it requires hard work, dedication, and even a bit of luck.

Give yourself the best chance at success by honing in on the most important elements of your business and focusing on them with a serious amount of determination.

How has your personal branding journey been?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Chase Neely is the Co-Founder and President of Leverage Creative Group, Inc., and a personal brand consultant for artists, songwriters, authors, and entertainment industry leaders.

Interested in working with us to grow your personal brand?



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