

Are You a Person or a Personal Brand?

How to become a memorable and credible authority

By: *Nancy A. Shenker*

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All of a sudden, I'm hearing the term "personal branding" on a regular basis. Social media, the rise of the entrepreneur, and the need to differentiate oneself from the competition all seem to have created the frenzy to be a "rockstar" or a "guru." I personally dislike both terms and often squirm when introduced as either.

However, I *do* believe that like Ben & Jerry, the Oreck vacuum guy, and the Millionaire Matchmaker (who herself hasn't yet found a match), a person with a great business concept AND a dazzling public persona is one step ahead of the behind-the-scenes man or woman - especially in our media-obsessed world. I spoke this past week to a group of recent grads and job-hunters. For them, personal branding was about distinguishing themselves from the competition, rather than fame, fortune, or product sales.

The name of the game is standing out and attracting customers and opportunities.

Over time, I succeeded in "rebranding" myself - making the transition from a corporate executive to an entrepreneurial consultant/speaker/writer. It was not unlike branding a product - it is about knowing your target market, focusing on attributes that are genuine and unique, and communicating not only clearly, but often.

If you aspire to becoming a "talking head" or a "quoteable and notable" person, here are some basic tips:

- **Know your stuff.** Style can only take you so far. Style AND substance are a great combination. Study up on trends and statistics in your field. Know your audience too...what do people want to learn from you?
- If you are in a field that's filled with "authorities," **work with a professional** to hone in on your unique points of difference and breakthrough messages.
- **Develop a few signature speaking topics** and become an authority on them.
- **Start a blog** or contribute regularly to other people's blogs in your area of expertise.
- **Post helpful tips and insights via social media.** And remember, it's not just about you...it's about what you know that can help others.
- **Invest in media training** if you plan to do public speaking or press interviews.
- **Web radio** is a great way to practice your message points, especially if you are camera-shy at first.
- If you are on the speaking circuit or simply a frequent networker, **develop a memorable personal style.** The clothes can make the man (or woman). If budget permits, work with a stylist.
- **Monitor your "Google cred"** on a regular basis, to make sure your online persona is consistent with your mission.
- **Be helpful and genuine.** Audiences can usually spot a fake.

And above all, remember you're not a REAL rock star. A little humility is always a good thing.

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