

Personal Branding Sells

It is far easier to sell a branded product. When you are the underdog, you have to compete that much harder to win against a strong brand. The typical sales tactics are to discount and to pile on value-add services. Either way, the cost of the sale is higher for an unbranded product. The same is true for people. Sales people that are well known in their industry with a strong reputation and referral network are a force to be reckoned with. Why? They have a brand.

Personal branding is a must for any professional sales person. Without one, you severely reduce the long-term value of your career. It won't matter if you have been in sales for two, ten or thirty years. Without a brand, the value you bring to business is largely based on how hard you work and what you produced in the last sixty days.

Sales people have a real competitive advantage in personal branding. One, we are trained how to position and package our solutions to best fit the needs of a market. Two, we are experts in presenting the core values of our products and services to get people excited about them. And three, we are promoters. We build awareness for our products and services, and help our clients choose our solutions. Essentially, we sell.

Use your sales toolkit to build your brand. The first step is to package yourself. Try your brand on for size. Say to yourself, "I am not just a sales person for a company. I am [insert statement here]." Did you pause to define yourself? Does your definition excite you? Do you stand out? If you are not happy with your answers then it is time to go to the drawing board. Michael Goldhaber wrote in Wired Magazine, "If there is nothing very special about your work, no matter how hard you apply yourself, you won't get noticed and that increasingly means you won't get paid as much, either."

Packaging yourself is the most difficult part of personal branding. Why? Because you have to say, "No." You can't be all things to all people, which means you are going to have to make choices and some of them will be hard. Go back to the core questions. What do you want to be known for? What is unique about you? What value do you bring to your customers? Use these questions to stimulate ideas and come up with a brand statement that describes who you are and how you will contribute value in business. When you can define your value proposition you can also define how you will get paid.

Once you know how you create value, you can move onto the fun stuff: promotion. Getting known is the reason to brand yourself. Wouldn't you love your prospects to call you, because they heard you were great? That sure beats cold calling. Since personal branding plays on your strengths, use your natural talents to promote yourself. If you are a great networker – network. If you are a great writer – write. If you are a great presenter – get speaking gigs.

Marketers like Seth Godin and Guy Kawasaki have propelled their brands to great heights through their blogs. They have combined their writing skills with the ease of publishing a blog to build huge audiences. Beyond blogs, the web is full of great promotion tools. You can take your networking skills to LinkedIn or Facebook. You could even take your presentation skills and create a podcast or series of YouTube clips. If you aren't into the internet, get belly-to-belly with your audience. Attend networking events and other social events to let people know you are out there. It is really exciting to think of all of the

options you have to promote your brand.

It doesn't matter which promotion tool you use, as long as it is consistent. The value of promotion is through repeat exposures. When your prospects see your name over-and-over again you begin to gain top of mind awareness. That means when they are ready to shop for a product or service that you represent, you will be their first call. A sales rep with first call advantage is very powerful.

Personal branding is not a one shot deal. You will continue to refine and evolve your brand over time. Yet if you take the time to build your brand conscientiously it will be a powerful asset in your career. It will draw customers to you, making prospecting easier. It will draw employers to you, making job searches easier. It will draw internal advocates to you, helping you get the big promotions. The ultimate benefit of personal branding is income. When your career begins to move more freely you will have that many more opportunities to earn a substantial income.

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