

What do you think?

Personal branding is a painless step in working towards your goals. Regardless of your industry or professional status, your personal brand has the power to make or break all kinds of opportunities for advancement.

When building your brand starts to feel like a job, remember that it is an essential part of cultivating your career. And keep in mind that the greatest investment of resources, time and effort will likely come up front.

Building and optimizing new profiles, generating content about you and your work, identifying your goals, building a brand strategy - this can feel overwhelming. But once you've established a strong foundation, you'll have a roadmap to follow, which makes the whole process much more manageable.

Distinguish yourself from your competitors and take control of your personal brand with the following approach.

Start by doing an exhaustive self-exploration. Ask yourself, family, peers, and others in your network the following questions:

- What single words of strength best describe me?
- How would I describe my communication style?
- How would I describe my leadership style?
- What am I expert at or renowned for?
- What is the core message I want to express?
- What is your personal brand?
- What do you want to achieve by putting effort into how you look online?

When figuring out how to start your own brand online, ask yourself questions like:

- Who are you? What makes you unique?
- What is your vision for your personal brand?
- What can I promise to people that work with me?

- Who are my customers and/or clients?
- What makes me unique compared to my peers or other job applicants?
- What is the legacy I have left with each employer?
- Do I have a value proposition? Does it need to be refreshed?
- Do I have an online identity and does it clearly reflect my strengths?
- What can I say to ignite attention and promote my career expertise?
- Is there a consistent theme in my performance appraisal feedback or career testimonials?
- How can I express and optimize my personal brand?
- Do I have a career management portfolio and do all the documents match the image I want to portray? (Resume, cover letter, online profiles, networking business cards, video bio, etc...)
- What is your goal with personal branding?

•What are your professional goals?

•Who is your audience?

•Who can you help? How can you help them?

•What makes you different?

•What's your X Factor?

• What makes you reliable? Trustworthy?
How do you prove that? What's the evidence?

In addition to these kinds of questions, start thinking about your accomplishments and gather any supporting materials that can reinforce them.

•What are your short and long-term goals for your personal branding strategy?

- Is a personal brand important to you as a professional?
- Have you developed a strongly established personal brand? When did you last audit how others perceive your unique personal brand?
- How can you tie your personal brand to your product or service brand and maintain authenticity to yourself?
- What opportunities can you identify to showcase your personal brand?
- Will your personal brand evolve separately from, or in tandem with, your product or service brand?

Once you have compiled your answers to these questions, promote your personal brand in all your career management tools beginning with your resume and online profiles. Taking the time to define your unique promise of value elevates your personal brand status and career management to new levels.

Feel free to share your thoughts in the comments. We'd love to hear from you!