

Your Online Brand Is YOU

By Angela Booth

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Your Online Brand Is YOU <http://www.digital-e.biz/>

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Summary: You're a small business, or a microbiz. Do you need a brand? Yes you do, and it's easy to create, because your brand is YOU.

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You've decided to make the leap. You're going to start selling your products and services online. You're excited. Wow! Millions of people will be able to buy from you.

Let's see --- what will you need to do first? Yep. You'll need to create your own Web site.

Two or three months later, your Web site is complete. You're

thrilled. It's exactly what you wanted, your own storefront online. You get to work and do everything you're advised to do: you send out news releases and submit your site to all the search engines. You promote your URL on everything from your business stationery to the side of your car.

Six months after that, you're starting to see a trickle of traffic, but it's hardly the flood you imagined it would be, and you lose heart and interest. The Internet, you decide, is a sham, a haven for sp*mmers and assorted lunatics. You vow that you're staying with the safe and comfy offline world, and you vow never to be taken in again.

What did you do wrong?

Oddly enough, you did nothing wrong. You did everything right --- BUT what about branding?

In the real world you create your brand without too much effort. People judge you by your physical presence: by your office, your clothes, your stationery, your advertising and your voice on the phone. In the virtual world, you lose all those valuable cues which tell people how to pigeonhole you. You must replace them with something.

Offline, your brand is you. It's you online, too. However, it takes more effort to create. You need to create an online persona and a Unique Selling Point. A tagline, or motto, is also helpful.

Important: There is no way you can do this stuff wrong. You just need to do it. If your goals change at some time in the future, not a problem -- just change your online persona, your USP and your tagline. Then hey presto chango, a whole new you/ brand.

Also important: don't be afraid to be bold. Share your passion. If you're enthusiastic about what you do, others will be too. You must be enthusiastic to create a memorable brand.

=Your online persona

In the online world, you can be whatever you aspire to be, by creating an online persona. Take a look at these three sites:

1. Judy Cullins's online persona is "The Book Coach".

<http://www.bookcoaching.com>

2. Tara Calishain's online persona is that of an online research expert, with "ResearchBuzz".

<http://www.researchbuzz.com/>

3. Jane Teresa Anderson's online persona is that of a dream

expert with "Jane's Dream Network".

<http://www.dream.net.au>

Judy, Tara and Jane have all created an online persona which is easy to remember. You can do the same.

Start by thinking about what you're passionate about, and what you hope to achieve.

= Your USP (Unique Selling Point)

Your USP (although you probably won't spell it out for people directly on your site or anywhere else) needs to be evident in everything on your site during the first year or so. It's your mission statement if you like, or your compass.

Your USP tells people what to expect from you. This, combined with your online persona, is your brand. Your USP must relate directly to your audience.

Write down this question: "In one sentence of 25 words or less, what matters most to me?" Answer the question.

Your answer won't appear on your site, it's strictly for you. Another way of putting it would be: "Where's my passion here?"

Your answer is your USP. You don't need to share your answer. However, keep it in mind. Look on the answer as your road map for the site. If everything you write/ create for the site harks back to those 25 words, there's no way you can go wrong in creating a coherent online persona. And your own brand.

= Your tagline

From your 25 words, create a tagline/ slogan. You don't need to use the exact words, just the general idea behind them. For example:

My tagline for Creative Small Biz is:
Turn your talent into a flourishing business.

For Digital-e it's:
Info To Go.

Your tagline keeps you focused, it's a reminder to yourself.

There you have it. It's easy to create your own online brand. How much does it cost? Not a cent, just some thinking time. It's value to you however, is immense. With your own brand, you will stand out online. (And you'll have a lot of fun, too.)

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