

Get Branded

By Michelle L. Casto

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Michelle L. Casto
coach@getsmartservices.com

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La Fontaine once said, "By the work, one knows the workman." He must have known long ago about the importance of branding. In today's competitive marketplace, establishing and maintaining a brand name is essential to your career success. A service or trademark tells people immediately what you do. People will return to those companies or individuals who have an established brand that provides value and on whom they can trust.

In addition to having a brand name, you must develop a strategy to promote it to a targeted audience. The most important element to branding is having a strong sense of self and a clear vision. Your brand is your reputation and also what you are "known for." A brand is both an intellectual and emotional shorthand that communicates an indelible impression. Think of the more successful brand names and how easily their messages come to mind: Coca Cola: "The Real Thing." Chevrolet Trucks: "Like a Rock."

Obviously, you may not reach the audience that these major corporations have, but when your name or company is mentioned, it should create an immediate positive impression for those people who are your customers or coworkers.

That is the power you are going for: instant name recognition from your customers/clients. You do not want them to have to figure out who you are and what you do---you want them to know it instantly by your "branding." The amazing thing is once you build a brand name, you will no longer need to struggle to find work; in fact, your work will find you.

How do you create a brand? First, you must know who you really are (at the soul level). Second, you must know what you want to become. Experts agree that it takes time---sometimes several years, to develop a brand. It also takes time and energy. To get the process started, you first need to determine what your present message is. You can ask people, "What five words come to mind when you think of me? What do I do best? What do you think I stand for personally/professionally?"

Gather your information and see if it fits with what you are trying to communicate to your customers. If not, make some strategic plans to change your message. Think about what you would like to be known for, if you are not known for it already.

You should also develop an "elevator statement," which is a simple two-minute response to the question that many people ask: "What do you do?"

I am a _____

Who does _____

For _____

They choose me because of _____.

Once you have an idea of your message, ask yourself:

Is it simple?

Does it come naturally and easily?

Is the statement believable?

Does it matter if someone believes you?

In addition to the development of your message, you need to become an expert and have a personal style that stands out from others in your field. What if you are an independent contractor or consultant? How can you develop an effective Brand Me? To do that you have to be extremely focused on what you do that adds value (you cannot be all things to all people), and find ways to actively promote yourself. Think of people like Oprah, Martha Stewart, and Madonna. You know what they are about because of the way they have positioned and marketed themselves to the public.

Remember that everything you do, from giving a formal presentation to answering the telephone, sends a message. How you conduct your business will either reinforce your brand or diffuse it. You want to be sure that what you are offering has substance, but that you also put your personal stamp on it. The best three ways to build your name brand are: 1) Know yourself, 2) Choose work that allows you to do your personal best, and 3) Market, market, market yourself.

Know your strengths

What are you good at? Why do other people like your work? What areas can you improve upon? If you are not sure what you are good at, how can you expect other people to take you seriously?

Know your niche

What makes you unique? How can you position yourself in your niche market? What value do you provide that makes you stand out? Become focused, do what you do well.

Register your name

Register your trademark or servicemark at www.uspto.gov . Get a business license. Register your website and domain registration at www.networksolutions.com . Having all of your "names" officially registered is very important to protect yourself against copyright infringement, and plagiarism---in short; the stealing of your identity.

Gain credibility

What can you do to make yourself an authority in your chosen field? Write a book? Give a speech? Join an association? Putting yourself out there in front of the public is essential.

Develop and maintain your network

Who do you need to stay in contact with? Who can you connect with in the future? What relationships can you nurture that can be mutually beneficial? Word-of-mouth advertising is the most powerful and influential advertising there is.

The second way to build your brand is by the projects that you take on. When you work for yourself, you have the freedom to choose the work you do, so it is very important that you take on projects that reflect the kind of brand you are building. Make your work the difference between ordinary and extraordinary. Do the little "extras" that make you stand out. By choosing work that is important to you and making your projects extraordinary, you make (and leave) your mark. Keep your eyes and ears open. Always be on the lookout for projects, companies, and people that you can bring your special qualities or brand to. Great work does not magically appear. In fact, some projects may, at first, seem dull and boring, but when you perform your magic, those projects become exciting. And soon, by word of mouth (and because of your reputation), people will come

looking for you.

The third way to build your brand is to actively promote yourself through print and Web-based marketing materials. You can develop professional marketing materials within an economical budget. Make sure your materials are up-to-date, of high quality, contain excellent content, and are readily available to potential clients. It is also important to keep a current read on the marketplace. Is your brand making the impact you want? Do you need to make some adjustments? Do you need to reinvent yourself? Being the CEO of You, Inc. is a tough job, but the rewards certainly outweigh the drawbacks.

Develop Marketing Materials

___ Attractive business cards, letterhead, etc.

___ Your own website.

___ A personal biography.

___ Brochures and flyers.

___ Create and send out press releases.

___ Video or audio clip, if relevant.

___ Use testimonials or case studies of those who have benefited from you or your work.

___ Develop interesting story ideas that can be picked up from the media.

___ Become well known in your career field by writing or presenting your work to professional associations.

___ Have an effective communication program, so that people can find out about you (word of mouth, voicemail/information line, email, etc.)

___ Use similar colors, logos, and messages in your marketing materials, so people can easily make a connection between you and your work.

___ Develop a logo and tag line (For example: Get Smart!'s logo is the knowledge tree with a man and woman reading under it, and has the tag line: "Educate and Empower Yourself")

Building a brand is about building recognition, and above all, trust. Make sure your clients and customers can trust you to do the job and do it well.

Michelle L. Casto is a whole life coach, speaker, and author of Get Smart! About Modern Romantic Relationships, Get Smart! About Modern Career Development, and Get Smart! About Modern Stress Management. Her coaching practice is Brightlight Coaching, she helps people come up with bright ideas for their life and empowers them to freely shine their bright light to the world. Contact her for a free 30 minute coaching session:

www.getsmartseries.com and www.brightlightcoach.com

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