

Branded for Success

Transcript

Slide 1: Welcome alumni. In this webinar, we'll discuss the importance of branding yourself for job search and career success.

Slide 2: We'll talk about what a brand is, as it relates to people, why it's important to have a brand as you think about your career and job search, the steps involved in the process of developing a brand, and how and where to use your brand once you have it developed.

Slide 3: A lot has been written about personal branding over the past few years, and it may seem like the latest fad, or just a buzzword or simply fluff. But branding has existed all along, though you may not have thought about it in terms of yourself and your career. Let's start with a definition of a brand.

Simply put, a brand is the image a person or product puts out to the world, or how it or they are perceived. For you, your career brand is your image, your reputation. It's your promise of excellence, your distinctive characteristics that set you apart from other workers and job-seekers. Your career brand is the essence of who you are, what you can do for an employer, and your potential for the future. It includes your education, technical expertise, key accomplishments, skills, strengths, and values, all the elements that set you apart from your co-workers, colleagues, and competing job-seekers. While your career brand is just a collection of words that describe you, keep in mind that your actions MUST match those words. Otherwise, your career brand is just an empty promise that will have devastating effects on your career.

Your career brand is a combination of what you say about yourself and what others say about you. The good news is that you have complete control over the first and a fair amount of control over the second. The bad news is that a significant amount of information may be floating out there about you (true or not) that was in people's minds or online before you started caring about your brand.

So ultimately, your personal or career brand is the intersection of who you aspire to be, how you are perceived by others, and who you really are as a person. It exists, and if you don't take control over and manage it, others will do that for you.

Slide 4: Let's look at a few examples of branding. Here are some successful product brands; you have a positive association when you see the brand as it relates to the product. You believe them, and the brand helps to sell the product, which is the goal.

Slide 5: On the other hand, here are some examples of poor product branding; these products are not in line with what the company is known for, or their brand, and so were not successful. No one was able to think of Harley Davidson having a soft side, focused to children and birthday cakes, nor did people feel comfortable flying on Hooters airline, when the company's strength was making chicken wings served by scantily clad women. Coors, of course, known for beer not water, and Bic's forte is office supplies not underwear. And who wants to use a ketchup company for their cleaning needs? If there's a discord between the brand and the product, the product won't sell and the brand becomes muddled.

Slide 6: Finally, you get an instant reaction to this brand, and chances are, if you're a hiring employer, it's not a positive one. Right or wrong, most employers would not be able to get past this person's brand, or how he portrays himself to the world, to see any of his more positive brand attributes. Remember, you always have to watch how you're perceived by the world.

Slide 7: So everyone has a brand already, but why is it important to make an effort to brand yourself? If you're a job seeker, you may have noticed that there is increased competition in the job market today. It's no longer possible, in most cases, to simply apply for posted positions and slide into a job. Companies know that they can be selective, and wait for the right person with the right set of qualifications to make the right approach to the right people, and your competition is doing just that. This has really established the need for differentiation, for you to set yourself apart from the competition, and to demonstrate your promise of value, or what an employer can expect from you. If you have a clear idea of who you are and what you want to be known for, and are able to show this through all your marketing materials, and make a match to the company's needs, they will readily be able to see you in their position, as a member of their team. Going through the process of branding yourself also builds your confidence in your strengths and abilities, which then allows you to move forward with selling yourself to others, which is essentially what you're doing when you're in a job search. When your brand is clear, your message, your look and what you have to offer are more consistent, which naturally rolls into a good self marketing program. Most importantly, remember that you have a brand – that other people have an opinion of you and your work, regardless of whether you agree with it or not. If you don't develop and manage the brand you want to portray, others will do it for you, and it may not be what you want. We'll talk more about others' perceptions of you in a minute. You can choose to build upon your perceived brand, or change it.

For example, I was working with an alum who was about 3 years into his career, and wanted to advance inside a large corporation. He found out that, although not intentionally, he was branding himself as a reserved, thoughtful, hardworking and quiet leader. He wanted his brand to bring up thoughts of a charismatic, dynamic leader who was also hardworking and thoughtful, so he needed to change the current perception. He needed to build and portray his brand as a charismatic, dynamic, thoughtful and hardworking leader. The best way to make such a change is to embody your brand. This person had built his brand by default; he had not managed it actively. He was not conscious of it nor was he trying to come across in any particular way; however, there was still a brand attached to his name and it was based on how he was behaving and how he was perceived by others in his company. Once he was aware of this perception, he could work on changing it, and changing his brand to be what he wanted. That's the good thing about a personal brand – it's yours to create.

Slide 8: We've established that you already have a brand, whether you've formally defined it or not. Let's look first at what you think of yourself, in terms of who you are and what you have to offer.

Slide 9: What 3 adjectives would you use to describe yourself? Take a minute to think about that, and write them down. Does anyone want to say what they've come up with?

Slide 10: Now how do you think others would describe you? Think about your relationships with people in different situations; at work, in social situations, at volunteer events. Take a minute to write what you think. Anyone have any initial thoughts they'd like to share? Seeking feedback from people you trust about how you're perceived is a good way to find out about your current brand. So take some time to ask friends, family, coworkers (current or former), and colleagues. It's also helpful to review

performance appraisals, review customer testimonials or letters of thanks, and recommendations, like reference letters and LinkedIn recommendations. This feedback will either give you validation for your thoughts, or may be an eye opening surprise. Either way, it's important to see what your reputation is for others.

Slide 11: Your goal now is to determine how you want people to see you – what you want to be known for, how you want to be perceived, what image are you trying to create, what problems do you solve, how you make other people feel. You may have some ideas about that; if so, go ahead and jot them down. This could be a description, like strategic thinker or creative idealist, or a job title, like Event Planner or Project Manager. If you have some ideas, great. If not, don't worry; we're now going to look at the components that go into developing your personal brand.

Slide 12: It's time to do some self assessment, to examine these key elements as they relate to you. As we go through them in detail, take a little time to write ideas and words as they come to you. These will help you create powerful and compelling brand, and the marketing materials that you will use your brand in. So record words that inspire you, that communicate who you are, and what you do.

Slide 13: The first element is vision, or your overall outlook on the world and life. It may be hard at first to look externally at the bigger picture, but it's your outlook that has guided you in your profession and has helped you develop your talents, so it's important. Think about what it is that can help you create the broad umbrella encompassing all of the specific goals your branding will incorporate.

Slide 14: The next element is purpose. Your purpose is the internal vision of what you would like to achieve, and how you want to make a difference. You may have given some thought to your purpose, to why you're here, or this may still be a work in progress for you. It may be helpful to think about your past, and to the types of situations you were drawn and the problems you solved. If you're unsure about the precise direction you'd like to take but know you want to change careers, you can do some strategic brainstorming, in which you identify a problem that matters to you and then find a job that will allow you to become a part of the solution to it.

Slide 15: Your values help define you and make up the core of who you are. You have to know yourself and what you want and need before you can move forward. Your belief system and operating principles determine whether an opportunity in front of you will be a good fit. If you haven't defined your core values, you could be wasting time and energy pursuing opportunities that aren't a good match for you and will ultimately leave you feeling dissatisfied and unhappy. Dissatisfaction can be your subconscious telling you that you are not paying enough attention to who you really are. Sometimes values can be hard to define. If you need help to clarify your values, think about conflicts you've had in the past; chances are you remember them because they touched on a value that is key for you.

Slide 16: Take time to determine what's really important to you, what is at the core of who you are and what you believe strongly in. Here are a few examples of values; and you can find more online. It's important to be clear about the meaning of the values you choose; people may have different interpretations of the same value. For example, to one person, flexibility means being agile in your work style on a day-to-day basis; to another, flexibility means being interested in working on a variety of different projects that are thrown your way. Once you pick your top values, determine what they mean to you.

Slide 17: Passions are a key element, because if they're not being met, you probably won't be happy. Start by looking at the bullets here, and jot your thoughts down. Once you have ideas about your passions, you can drill deeper to find the meaning behind the passion, or what about it really excites you. This meaning is what you want to carry forward into your next job or career, and it's what needs to show through in your brand. Employers who recruit with us tell us that they look to see evidence of passion in the students they interview, and that this is what sets them apart from the competition.

Slide 18: Goals demonstrate that you have clarified where you are going in the future. You should have short and long term goals, and they should be SMART – in other words Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-based. Goals will help you create a strategic plan, and the specific actions needed to carry out in order to fulfill your purpose.

Slide 19: Remember when I asked you to describe yourself? These adjectives now become your brand attributes, or what best describes the value you have to offer. Take another minute to look back at what you said and see if you'd like to revise your attributes.

Slide 20: Your strengths are those areas in which you excel, those specific things you succeed in. To determine your strengths, think about these questions.

- What are my past accomplishments
- How do I influence others to work together to accomplish a common goal
- How do I help others bring out their strengths
- When did I put my colleagues or employers needs above my own
- When did I help an employer identify and solve a problem that saved him money, or helped avoid a loss of valuable resources
- How did I react when I experienced failures? How do I learn from mistakes and grow from the experience

Slide 21: Again, going back to our exercise at the beginning, it's important to know how you come across to other people. Remember that the true measure of your brand is the reputation you have for others. It's important to get that feedback, to make sure it aligns with your own sense of your brand attributes and if not, determine how you'll change your brand.

Slide 22: Most people don't like to focus on their weaknesses. If you're going to do an honest self assessment and have clarity in your brand, however, it's important to determine where you're not as strong. You don't want to overly focus on your weak areas, but it's helpful to be aware of them, so you can target your job search to your areas of strength. Many people feel you should push yourself to overcome your weaknesses, but I tend to agree with research that shows you'll be more successful, and happier, if you play to your strengths in your career. I recommend the book *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, by Tom Rath, and *Now Discover Your Strengths and Go Put Your Strengths to Work*, by Marcus Buckingham.

Slide 23: It's important to determine your target audience, or your niche. In other words, be strategic and target those companies that best match your goals, skills and qualifications. Doing industry research will help you find that area, and then develop a list of companies that you will target. Once you

have your list of targeted companies, you'll want to do intensive research before you apply. You want to find out everything you can about the company – their products and services, the company culture and environment, recent news items, their outlook and future plans, and what type of employee they typically hire. This will enable you to determine where and how you will best fit in, and how you'll be able to help contribute to the company's success.

Use every available resource to conduct your research; it's best of course to begin with the company website. Dig deep to find out all you can, including reviewing all posted positions, as this will give you the best idea of their preferred type of employee. Also use industry reports, to gain a sense of how the company fits into their industry. Professional associations will give you information on the company and employees that are part of the association. Research sites like GlassDoor and Hoovers have great information, and don't forget the RIT library, at library.rit.edu. They have a wealth of company research resources available for alumni, many that you can access remotely. LinkedIn is another great resource for research; companies have pages, and you can search for RIT alumni at the company, with whom you can do informational interviews. Once you are confident that a company fits your overall goals, you can add it to your marketing plan, and strategize about how you will connections that will lead to a job.

Some ideas for that include associating with leading organizations, industry experts/consultants and influencers in your field, finding them on LinkedIn, following group discussions, finding people in companies whose career path you admire and seeing what groups they're in.

Slide 24: Finally, what differentiates you from the competition? This is the crux of your brand, and really pulls together all the other elements. It's the essence of who you are and what you have to offer. So take some time to think about this, and use the questions here to help you determine what differentiates you.

Slide 25: Now let's put all the elements together now, and create your personal brand statement. This will be a brief summary of who you are and the value you can provide – your benefits over other people with your skills. You want to focus your statement on the benefits you provide, not a specific job title. Though if you're targeting a specific job or specific company and it's appropriate, you can revise your statement accordingly. In the sample here you see all of the elements of a brand have been incorporated.

Slide 26: Remember to be clear, specific, and use keywords for your targeted industry. Here are some additional samples.

Slide 27: Now that you have a cohesive brand and branding statement, you can begin promoting it, and yourself, to your targeted market. Again, think of yourself as a product you are trying to sell to a specific audience, prospective employers. These are the keys to successfully promoting your brand. Your brand message must be clearly defined to represent your unique value and benefits you provide, the message must be consistent through all of your marketing tools including social media, and you must continually make efforts to keep your brand in the top of mind with your target audience.

Slide 28: Here's a quick summary for your strategy in promoting your brand. We have talked about defining your audience and researching your targeted industry.

Slide 29: In terms of your promotion materials, we won't spend a lot of time on these now, as we'll focus on your marketing tools next week. But I want to briefly mention your branding materials.

Take advantage of every opportunity to communicate a high level of quality and personal excellence. Offer a consistent message of your brand in all your materials.

William Arruda, a branding expert, says, “The more you work towards credibility and visibility in your profession, the quicker you enter that inner circle – within your company, in your department, and ultimately in your industry.”

Slide 30: Here are some key areas of your resume where you can promote your brand.

Job target/title at top of resume – change on each resume so reflects the specific position you’re applying to.

Branded career summary – shift information around and place most relevant skills, experience and accomplishments first

Key skills/core strengths – key words are important in ATS, and also draw managers’ attention. Put more relevant first

Most critical and relevant info is at beginning of bullet

Bullet points – reorder bullet points for each position so most relevant for position come first

Slide 31: Cover letters should be specifically targeted to each company and each job to which you apply, and are a good place to highlight elements of your brand that are particularly relevant to the job and company. Focus on your relevant problem solving and accomplishments, and again, your goal is to differentiate yourself from your competition.

Slide 32: Portfolios are a great tool for expressing your brand, as they offer the opportunity to “show” instead of just “tell”. Be sure that you use the appropriate medium for your field and industry, and there are opportunities for most fields. The creative fields come easily to mind, of course, and Behance is a good online portfolio option. But anyone can develop an online portfolio, in personal website that showcases your skills and accomplishments, and software engineers can even demonstrate their programming prowess with sites like GitHub.

Slide 33: Everyone should have professionally printed business cards that showcase your brand, not just your contact information. Some people use a title that is a good representation of their targeted job; otherwise you can use bullet points to highlight your brand attributes, or just a simple personal branding statement. Carry these with you at all times, and bring to all networking functions and informational interviews. Sometimes they can take the place of resumes. A new trend is to have an electronic business card that’s kept on your phone. Sites where you can develop these cards include: mycard, inigo careds, camcard, I-card pro, and Haystack.

Slide 34: Again, a personal website is a great place to showcase your strengths, skills, accomplishments. You can include your resume, recommendations, papers you’ve written, summaries of projects you managed, design samples, coding samples – anything that reinforces your differentiated brand as it relates to your specific field. Another way to distribute your branded message is through a blog, or online log. Publishing is a good way to demonstrate your expertise in your field, and to demonstrate your tech savviness.

Slide 35: Develop a powerful elevator speech that introduces you and your brand, tells where you've been, why you've been successful, and where you want to go. You'll use a form of this in networking situations and sometimes during an interview, when the recruiter asks you to "tell me about yourself."

Your elevator speech should be a summary of your experiences, skills and future goals. So include where you've been – experience, background, what you have to offer and why you are the most qualified for this job/field/industry, and where you want to go – how you will use your experience and skills to succeed at the job or in the field.

When drafting your elevator speech, include your years of experience, areas of specialization or industry focus, relevant technical and transferable skills, accomplishments in previous jobs, activities or accomplishments during your time of unemployment – include any skills building or training, and desire position, or tailor to specific position you're applying to. Prepare at least 2-3 versions – a base one that's about 60 seconds, one for the telephone that's about 30 seconds, and one for job fairs that's about 15 seconds. Remember to emphasize the benefits and value you offer, tailor your speech to specific situations, and always end with a sentence that tells what you want to do now.

Slide 36: The key is for the interviewer to be able to see you in the position, so have examples ready to demonstrate your achievements and give them a full picture of what you have to offer. Be prepared to discuss every aspect of your resume, elaborating on the information with stories that emphasize your accomplishments. You can supplement your resume and your stories with samples; a portfolio, writing samples, coding samples, or other applicable materials that highlight your abilities.

Many people are uncomfortable with the thought of actively selling themselves to prospective employers, believing that their qualifications, based on their resume, should speak for themselves. In today's competitive marketplace, however, it's essential to be very proactive in determining just what sets you apart from the competition, and emphasizing your brand to employers. So you're not just an engineer, you're an engineer with a strong focus in this area, and interests in this area, and strong communication skills that allow you to do this. You're now differentiated from your competition who won't have your unique mix of qualifications.

Now you have to match your qualifications to the company's needs, convincing them that your skills and qualifications will enable you to solve the problems and challenges they're faced with. This is more than just sharing your past experiences, even your past successes – this is clearly and confidently demonstrating how these experiences, achievements, and skills will be relevant and valuable to this company. Always think from the employer's perspective – what can this person do to help me - and focus your answers to convincing them that you're exactly the right person to do just that.

You'll also sell your value during informational interviews, as part of your networking process. The goal of networking is to connect and develop relationships with people to ultimately help you gain contacts in your targeted field and companies. When you meet with people, you need to be clear on your brand and the value you have to offer, so you can convey this to your networking contacts. They have to see your particular assets so that they can help connect you with the right people, and feel comfortable making referrals on your behalf.

Slide 37: Here are a few other ways to demonstrate your brand. Your appearance should always be polished and professional, reflecting your confidence. Be sure your email and voice mail reflect your

brand; have a targeted signature line in your email, and a professional voice mail message. There may be other ways to reflect and strengthen your brand, appropriate for your targeted field or industry; do some research and find out what those are and make sure you're doing everything possible to present a cohesive, consistent brand.

Slide 38: Networking gives you some of the best opportunities to showcase your brand. Here are some tips.

Plan a strategy to show up in places where your target audience is or where people who know them will be

You want to connect with the key influencers, and associate with leading organizations, industry experts/consultants and influencers in your field. Do this by finding influencers in LinkedIn, both from your targeted industry, companies and also in Groups. You should also be part of professional associations for your field. You need to be seen with people that are in the same niche, people that have a higher authority. This works both in person and with your online presence. Being connected with authority figures in your field helps you get credibility

Use your brand statement when people ask what you do

When networking – listen & build trust – build mutually beneficial relationships

Follow up, send thank you's, and maintain the relationships you've started

Slide 39: Information found online is used by others to assess your credibility, knowledge and experience

Promoting yourself online is the best, easiest, fastest way to build your personal brand

Be diligent about your online presence

First, see what's already out there about you – Google yourself. Is the information you find positive, and what you want to be known for? Does it support your brand, or work against you?

Make your social media presence as strong as possible.

There are a lot of social media sites, and you can use as many as are appropriate, as long as you remember to keep your brand message consistent and be active if you participate – keep yourself top of mind. I'm going to talk about a few of the most common sites that can be helpful in promoting your brand.

Slide 40: Twitter is becoming more popular, and can be a good way to help you build credibility in your field, and also connect with the key influencers in your field and at your targeted companies. Here's a good website to help you build your Twitter profile, and some tips. Again, you'll see that you should incorporate your brand statement as part of your profile, so that when people find you they will see what you want them to see.

And here are some ways to gain followers, which increases your online presence, and spreads your brand even further.

Slide 41: Most people think of Facebook for purely social purposes, but it can be a powerful tool to disseminate your brand and further your networking. Here are some tips for using Facebook with a more professional focus, again emphasizing ways to incorporate your brand.

Slide 42: LinkedIn, of course, is one of the most powerful social media tools for networking and developing contacts for your job search. It also offers multiple ways to showcase your brand, and the more of these you take advantage of, the more widely your brand will be distributed and the more targeted contacts you'll make. The first step is to have a fully branded profile, and here are some tips to keep in mind.

Slide 43: LinkedIn makes you visible to decision-makers who are looking for exactly the services you provide.

Each section of the LinkedIn profile allows you to upload content or link to content on the Internet. This is a great way to demonstrate what you know. This could include:

YouTube videos

Articles you've written

Work product

Product descriptions for items you've sold or serviced

Spreadsheets

PowerPoint presentations

LinkedIn Publisher posts

Links to personal websites

Be sure to get recommendations that support your brand, and arrange your endorsements so that the skills and strengths you want to highlight are at the top. Don't hesitate to ask for endorsements and recommendations from your contacts.

You also want to join groups for your targeted field and company, and be sure to be active, providing relevant information to those you want to target.

Slide 44: Here are some last branding success tips that summarize what we've discussed.

Authentic – not making things up, emphasize your true skills, traits, and what kind of results you get

Most importantly, never stop managing your brand – it is living and changing and growing with you – you must invest time and effort. Ultimately it's worth it because you will become more discerning about work you take on and opportunities you are attracted to because you know specifically what you want out of your career, and you only want things that will advance your personal brand.

Slide 45: Here are some additional resources on branding. I'll also be posting some worksheets to help in your brand development efforts.

Slide 46: And remember we're here to assist in any aspect of your job search, including brand development. If you would like to know who your career services advisor is, just contact me and I'll connect you. If you have any questions on any of this material, please contact me.