

A JOB SEEKER'S GUIDE TO PERSONAL BRANDING

Why Personal Branding?

If you're only thinking about employment in terms of "finding a job," you've missed a major aspect of the career marketplace. Landing a job at the entry, middle or senior level isn't just about searching for the right opportunity – it requires selling yourself as an ideal candidate to employers through a personal brand.

What is personal branding, you may ask? It's really no different than any other brand you see every day – Apple, Nike, Coca-Cola or Nintendo – except that you're pushing yourself as the product. Organizations are making a major investment when they hire new employees, so they want to know that they're not just buying your time from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., but subscribing to your unique business philosophy. All you need to do is find a way to package and present yourself in a way that grabs employers' attention, which is admittedly easier said than done.

To set you off on the right foot, here's a jobseeker's guide to personal branding.

Identify your brand

Before you get ahead of yourself, you'll need to figure out who you are as both a person and job candidate in order to identify your brand, according to Mashable.com. In simpler terms, the core of your personal brand should be a well-fleshed out idea of your skills, knowledge, background and professional ambitions. What type of personality are you? What interests you most about your field? What is your specialization? Where do you want your career path to take you? These are all important considerations that you'll need to spend plenty of time with before you get into the nuts and bolts of personal branding. All of these factors combined should send a clear message to employers about what they will be buying by hiring you.

Basic materials

While you'll need to get creative when packaging and marketing your brand, the core information will be relatively simple. According to Boston.com, a well-crafted resume and cover letter along with recommendations, portfolio pieces and awards should offer point-by-point information about your academic and professional history and successes. With these documents assembled, you can customize them for individual employers based on their business niche, job description keywords, desired qualifications and company tone.

Online visibility

Once you have the basic information you'll need for job applications, the next step is establishing a unified online foothold. Social media is the best place to start, so sign up for sites like Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and LinkedIn if you haven't already. For existing social media accounts, you'll want to find a middle ground between representing yourself personally and professionally.

For instance, you shouldn't stop sharing intriguing articles and internet memes with your friends – just make sure anything you post online is something you're OK with employers seeing (so take down those college party pictures). You'll also want to include information relevant to your professional ambitions, like commenting on developing industry news, joining in online debates and sharing accomplishments and completed projects. Starting and actively writing a blog is another great way to inject your voice into the online world, according to Inc.com.

Purchasing your own URL will also allow you to create a personal website to display your application details while linking to your blog and social media sites.

Spreading the message

It's not enough to have an established online presence if nobody knows about it, so the final step in personal branding is getting the word out to employers. Networking is one of the most direct and effective means of doing this, so get in contact with friends, coworkers, family members and former bosses about connecting you with influential people in your desired industry. They can pass along your website's URL so colleagues and friends of theirs can easily browse your qualifications and experiences.

LinkedIn is also a great networking resource for reaching out to classmates or former coworkers who may be able to assist you in your job search, according to Mashable.com. You can also introduce yourself to hiring managers and HR personnel at organizations where you would like to work – though you should limit these communications to gathering information about available opportunities – never ask a stranger directly for a referral or job offer.

Hitting the street

While a large portion of personal branding is conducted through the internet, hitting the street and meeting people in real life is also vital to your career success. Print up professional business cards that can direct networking contacts to your credentials and carry a handful with you at all times. Inc.com recommends attending career events and industry seminars that will give you an excuse to mingle directly with the movers and shakers in your intended field. Setting up informational meetings with executives and managers can also help you get a foot in the door at a particular company while expanding your professional network.

All in all, personal branding simply involves using the modern age's technologies and resources to raise awareness about yourself as an attractive job candidate. If you follow and commit yourself to the guidelines above, you'll be on the right track to landing your next career opportunity.