

Branding – In many cases, you are the product!

by Donna Messer

In the 21st century, everyone's a freelancer. Your value in the marketplace is going to be based entirely on what a prospective employer or client perceives as the value you bring to the table.

The best and most productive way to bring perceived value to the table is to brand yourself—to be as distinct and as memorable as McDonald's golden arches. If you follow the directions below, you will watch your income rise along with a demand for your services.

HAVE A GREAT WEB SITE

The first and most important way to brand yourself is to have a really fabulous Web site. It is mandatory. At the very least, you need a personal page where you post your resume and interests. Show the world you're with the program. And there are ways to make your Web site more valuable—have a message board and/or a discussion list that keeps people coming back to the Web site to discuss relevant issues and to get resources that you are willing to share. Write articles, become an “expert.” Share what you know; you will be surprised at the return you get on your invested time and effort. My Web site gets over 6,000 hits a week and it generates additional income for me.

HAVE AN EFFECTIVE NETWORK

The second must is having a strong network. It doesn't matter how distinctive you are as a person or a professional if no one knows you. Meet new people every chance you get. Become known for something that sets you apart from your competition. Visit my Web site and fill in a Mind Map—this will tell you what makes

you special and will give you a little insight into what you can add to your Web site. Do your homework—check out the types of networking events that will add value to you and your company. Find out your communication style; look for associations and organizations that have common interests. It is easier to build a profitable network when you have something in common.

KNOW WHO YOU ARE AND WHAT YOU STAND FOR

The third point is to have a “You, Inc.” attitude. Think of yourself as the CEO of your own personal services company. If you're employed, think of your employer as your biggest client (for now). Run your professional life as if it's a business you own—because it is. Become aware of what “You” stand for. With all of the mergers, acquisitions, and downsizing, chances are you will become self-employed sometime in your life. Get ready; make a list of what you stand for personally and professionally. Spend some time on this. Fill a couple of pages in a journal. Narrow down what you stand for—highlight items that you're excited about. I use my W3 as a way to find out who I am and where my value to others may be: Who am I? What do I need? What am I willing to share?

I find that my brand, like my informational, changes with my audience. We need to become valuable to the people we meet—often times we should listen first and speak later. It makes us more valuable when we can find a way to have a common interest or goal.

BE THE BEST AT WHAT YOU DO

Become an expert. Don't just be competent; the world is full of unemployed and unemployable competent people. As the white-collar revolution rages on around us, it will soon have many more to compete with. Instead of being competent, be an expert. Invent something new in your field. Do something no one else does. Create a new career field. Experts always make more money, and experts never lack work.

ENJOY WHAT YOU DO

Have work that matters. If the work you're doing now doesn't matter to you, quit. Or, change your attitude about what you do so that it does matter. Or, make dramatic, drastic changes in what you do and how you do it until it does matter. Be someone who can afford to be unbelievably picky about whom you work for. Your brand is only as innovative and exciting as your clients are. Get connected to those innovative and exciting clients and employers. A good rule for success in any business is to under promise and over deliver. You'll never stand out if you over-promise and under-deliver—everyone else is already doing that. Why not make it easy on yourself to impress others? If you always deliver twice what you promised you would, then your reputation will grow and flourish.

GET OUT OF THAT RUT!

If you cannot find out who you are—you might be in a rut—do something to get out of that rut. No one is interested in a stale, tired brand. Change your tactics, read as many magazines this month as you can, magazines that you never would have considered reading before. Go somewhere on vacation that you've never been before. Learn to dance, sing, juggle, play a musical instrument. Do anything and everything to break out of that rut. Find yourself, learn to identify your expertise, become that brand people want to identify with. Once you have done it—watch your business grow! SBCM

Donna Messer is an international speaker, trainer and coach, she is the founder of ConnectUs International, a company that designs, develops and delivers educational training programs.

ConnectUs has developed a program called “Brand Me” it's a journey of self-discovery for anyone interested in getting out of the rut! Donna is also the Managing Editor of BusinessWoman Canada magazine. For further information visit the Web site.



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