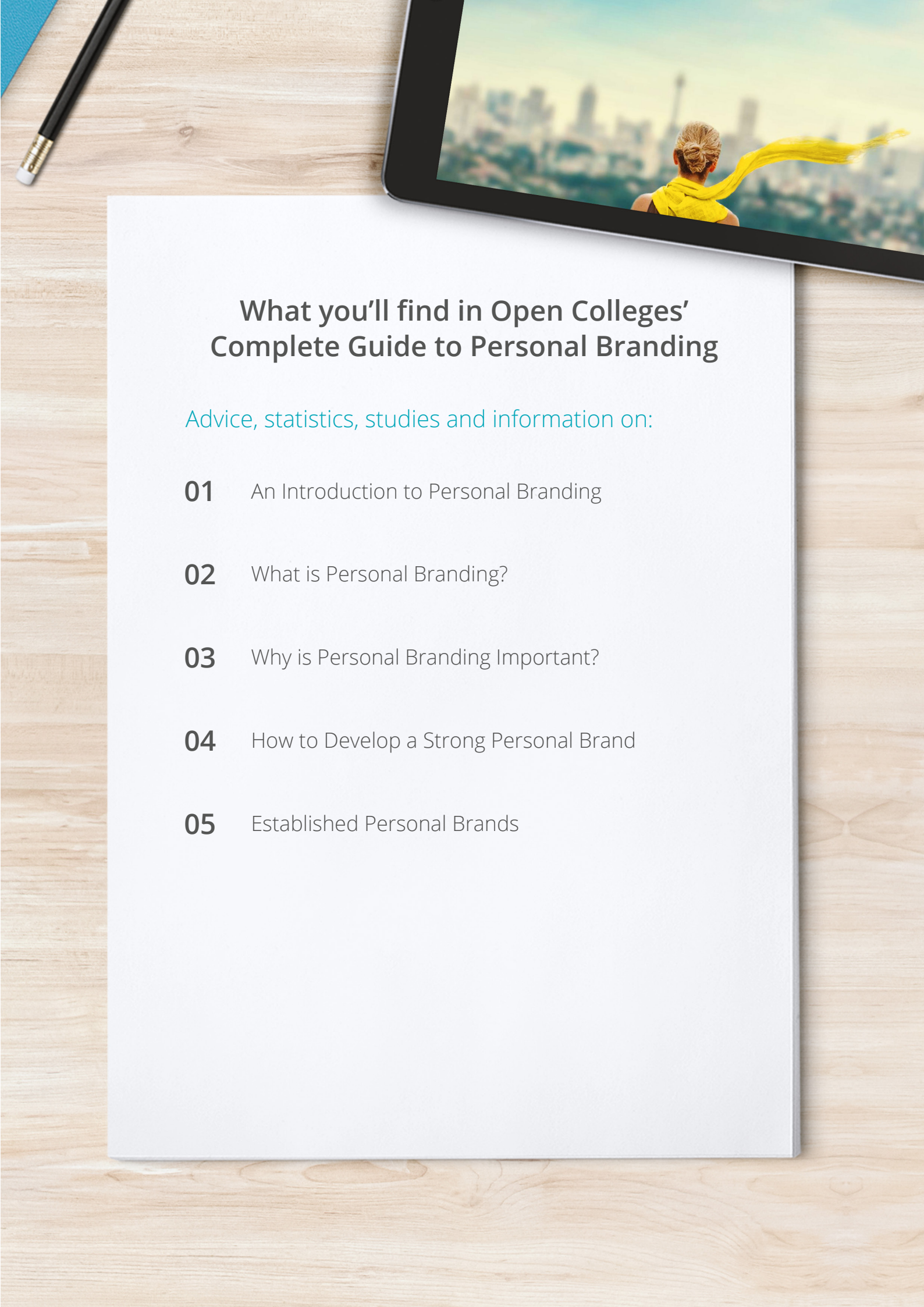


THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO **PERSONAL BRANDING**

Do you have a defined personal brand?
Open Colleges has spoken to personal branding experts to offer
you the best advice on how to develop and strengthen your
personal brand in order to stand out from the crowd.



Open Colleges



What you'll find in Open Colleges' Complete Guide to Personal Branding

Advice, statistics, studies and information on:

- 01** An Introduction to Personal Branding
- 02** What is Personal Branding?
- 03** Why is Personal Branding Important?
- 04** How to Develop a Strong Personal Brand
- 05** Established Personal Brands

01

► An Introduction to Personal Branding

Personal branding. It's an often referenced term that promises to open doors and position you for success and glory. But as more experts enter our field telling us what exactly it takes to be an expert, it's easy to lose focus as to why you're doing it, and what exactly you need to do to make your brand stand out.

Should you dress differently? Is it about how you speak? Is it what you post on LinkedIn or social media?

Today almost every individual has a 'personal brand' – whether you've consciously cultivated it or not. Beyond your industry reputation and the general impression you make on people, it's now a digital footprint across time and space, unconsciously crowd-sourced by friends, colleagues and employers. According to an [AVG study](#), even 92% of children under the age of two already have a digital footprint!

Regardless of age, position, the business we're in or the stage of our career, all of us need to understand the importance of personal branding. Whether you like it or not, you're CEO of your own company, aptly titled Me Inc. It's inescapable and to achieve authority today, your most important job is to be head marketer for the company called You.

According to personal branding expert and CEO of [Social Star](#), Andrew Ford, a personal brand comprises of your unique skills, relevant qualifications and personality, as well as the entire journey from discovering your existence to selecting you ahead of other applicants for opportunities.



Andrew Ford
*CEO of Social Star and
personal branding expert.*

Despite the importance in our personal branding being able to accurately represent who we are, a survey by [Glenn Llopis Group](#) revealed that less than 15% of people have truly defined their personal brand and less than 5% are living it consistently at work. The truth is, good personal branding is hard and requires a tremendous amount of self-awareness, action and accountability to present yourself to the world adequately and properly.

70% of professionals believe they have defined their personal brand and 50% believe they are living it – so how can you know if you're effective in presenting the right message about yourself to the world?

The question is no longer if you have a personal brand, but whether you choose to guide and cultivate the brand yourself or to let it be defined on your behalf.

“ The truth is, good personal branding is hard and requires a tremendous amount of self-awareness, action & accountability to present yourself to the world adequately and properly.

02

► What is a Personal Brand?

Introduction

Personal branding is the ongoing process of establishing a prescribed image or impression in the mind of others about an individual.

It's the association people have to your name. Every tweet you send, every status update you make, every picture you share and even every word you say in social company contributes to your personal brand. It is an amalgamation of multiple daily actions, as well as your connection to other people and organisations.

Because of social media and our subsequent levels of visibility, personal branding is one of today's leading career strategy topics and an essential tool for thriving in today's work environment. It helps you attract business opportunities through playing to your strengths and communicating expertise to your chosen target audience through your online, verbal and networking channels.

The end outcome is about getting so known for one important thing that key clients, employers or recruiters come to you. A personal brand is there to build trust and dependability, resulting in peace of mind and referrals that result from your high gradient dealings with others.

"Getting discovered and differentiating yourself uniquely is where personal branding comes in."

Andrew Ford, CEO of Social Star and personal branding expert

It appears that the privilege of building a "personal brand" is achieved through an actual execution of what makes you different and brilliant. However, you don't have to reinvent the wheel. Here is how to use what you already have to make yourself memorable.

What makes up a Personal Brand?

The following 10 elements are familiar to you as your thoughts and attitudes, outside interactions and life experience. Here is what they mean – and how they will form the foundations of your personal branding story.

1. Personality

Think of your characteristics in terms of how they affect the experience someone will have with you. Are you organised? Funny? Intense? Make a list of words that best describe these features of your personality. Ask yourself how you make people feel; what would be the benefit of being around you and what words do others use to describe who you are.

2. Values

Your values are your operating principles. They impact how you feel, behave and react. When you're living in alignment with your most important values, you are energised, confident and available to others.

3. Passions and Interests

Your interests and passions are things that motivate you to devote energy to them – that's why you should use them when defining your personal brand. Your passions motivate you and make you attractive to others. When you are clear about what moves you, you can seek out ways to link your passions with what you do and how you do it.

4. Strengths

It's important to identify the strengths and qualities that will power your presentation and messaging. Assess everything from your style, body language and tone of voice, to how you communicate on email or by phone. Build on these strengths and seek out opportunities to demonstrate your skills in these areas to others.

5. Education and Work Experience

Everything can be useful – even if you didn't study directly in your industry of current interest. A module from a past course could be perfect for a component of your ideal career, while skills gained at a summer job could be transferred into a more corporate marketplace.

6. Influencers and Inspirations

Who is someone you admire and aspire to emulate in your field – or even on the global? If a well known leader's inspirational mottos are peppered throughout your iPhone, it's a good idea to jot down the achievements or qualities to act as a bench mark for your own achievements.

7. Your Look and Style

Think of your clothing, hair/makeup and accessories as your 'packaging'. No matter your occupation or personality, you should have your own personal "dress code" that follows your unique look, tied to your personal brand and goals.

8. Goals

Now that you have an understanding of who you are, you can move into the stage of figuring out where you want to be. What would you like to be doing in 3–5 years' time? Where do you see yourself? The most exciting part about setting goals is the ability to work backwards.

9. Target Market

If you are looking for opportunities, who is most likely to grant these to you? Who's attention do you need to gain in order to open your professional doors? This is your target audience, the people and organisations you will be tailoring your messages to. It could be company owners, managers, business partners and other employers and stakeholders.

10. Associations

Being connected to important people can build your brand. It's an incredibly powerful and effective way to become more successful. Through powerful associations with bigger brands, your book can land on best seller lists and your name can get out in the world with more voracity and speed. Pay attention to the people that will actually support you and those you can deliver value to.

03

► Why is Personal Branding Important?

Introduction

Consider why you visit some websites or blogs more than others. Or why you feel compelled to reach out to some experts when conducting research.

Our perceptions of others and what they stand for have always been important – it's just that now, we have a name for it.

Building your own personal brand correctly is important because you have to know and articulate what value you bring to the marketplace to stand out in a sea of other contenders.

Wouldn't you want a potential employer to say upon meeting you "wow, they understand our industry and have the insight and experience that's perfect for this role?"

As Tom Peters says in his 1997 [breakout article](#) about personal branding, "if your answer wouldn't light up the eyes of a prospective client or command a vote of confidence from a satisfied past client, or – worst of all – if it doesn't grab *you*, then you've got a big problem."



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Tom Peters

Seven Reasons Why You Should Build a Personal Brand

1. Creating a strong personal brand can benefit your career

A 2012 [study](#) by California Polytechnic State University found that a personal brand gives employers the recognition needed to make a valid distinction between qualities of various employment candidates.

With the current state of today's job market, it is becoming increasingly difficult for individuals to differentiate themselves from competitors. Thus, personal branding is seen as an increasingly important tool for job seekers to define their strongest attributes and sell themselves to companies. And with a limited number of positions available in today's job market, having a strong personal brand is what can open many doors for a variety of job opportunities.

2. Developing a strong personal brand will give you better sense of self

The search to develop an identity and a "self" has existed in humans for a long time, but the need for it has increased dramatically during the last century due to the competition we face regarding most of our life choices.

Research by [Stockholm University](#) found that people today are expected to 'self-style' their life projects in a way that builds a certain 'individual capital'. This capital can be tangible, such as financial assets and memberships, and intangible in the form of attitudes, knowledge or taste. The point is, by bringing awareness to what you choose to share with others, who you are and what you stand for becomes apparent.

The study found that by creating an alter-identity through photos, we are able to express our identity for recognition and social interaction. An online branding platform gives us a way to develop a unique point of view to assist both professional and personal goals.

3. Cultivating a personal brand will help you think strategically

A lack of adequate research and strategising can provide a big issue when it comes to articulating our branding - so getting good at personal branding can help develop some thoughtful skills.

The founding father of 'personal branding' as we know it today, Tom Peters, wrote in [Fast Company](#), that we are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You. While everyone has a chance to stand out, everyone also has a commitment to learn, improve and build up their skill collateral. As Peters stated, we all have a 'chance to be a brand worthy of remark'.

Meanwhile, [CIO Magazine](#) caution against using generic term to describe yourself, such as 'industry leader'. When asked why you're an industry leader, you need to back it up with a strong explanation – or choose a more accurate term. That said, if you know what your capabilities are, you can create a personal brand statement with the very specific attributes and qualities you bring.

What most studies and prominent articles in the field point out is that it's important to take the time and consideration to build your brand strategically but also authentically, so you can back your messages up.

4. Building your brand will help you to deliver more value

Prominent leadership teacher [Teresa Page](#) doesn't have a website – and yet she's coached Australia's top senior leaders, high profile actors and even Princess Mary of Denmark on how to articulate and express their uniqueness. She argues that technically, when you have a strong personal brand, your reputation on over-delivering and quality service will let you be known in the marketplace.

“You have to bring a unique synthesis and value to the market place. Credibility is based on results and customer orientation, and this is the only criteria by which people will come back. Otherwise you're struggling to get traction based purely on an image.”

Teresa Page, Leadership Teacher

5. Personal branding will help you define your specialisation

Dan Schawbel, author of the upcoming book, *Promote Yourself: The New Rules for Career Success* says that “people are looking for specialists not generalists when recruiting and promoting now. If you can become the best at what you do you will become sought after.”

Once again, you need to be honest with yourself about what your strengths are. What it really comes down to is discovering your brand, this is the most critical step. Schwabel says that everything else already exists – all the job boards, all the people around the world connected by technology. “The one thing that doesn’t exist that you need to solidify is how you want to position yourself.”

6. A personal brand will help you build self confidence

Career coach Kylie Butler from [Inspired Careers](#) says that people hire you, work with you and even fall in love with you because of the way you represent yourself to the world. “Your brand is not a logo or a name, it is about expressing meaning. Your brand is about how you choose to take your ‘why’ to the world.”

Butler says a personal brand is important because it forces you to define what drives you, your mission and purpose – which can be wildly empowering. “Be as ‘you’ as you can and don’t dumb or simplify you for anyone else,” she says. “Be true to who you are in how your dress, walk, talk and write. And actually work on a little elevator pitch, not a sales one, but your story.”

7. With a personal brand, you shape your own story

Online tools have allowed us to be our own marketer. With the current rise of social media, management of a personal brand has gotten easier. We can choose to utilise Facebook, Twitter, personal blogs and LinkedIn to develop and maintain own brand.

Most companies are using search engines and social media tools to seek out future employees, so a personal brand will ensure you’re not left behind. Another obvious advantage is that you can perform a personal brand audit by typing your name into a search engine and seeing what comes back. If any of the content is unprofessional (like a Facebook image of yourself acting less than stellar at a party), simply remove it or tighten up your privacy settings.

A study by the [South East University in Bangladesh](#) confirms that online environment offers ‘a wide range of platforms for formation of identities’. Online personal branding consists mostly of self-marketing that blends core identity with the ‘extended identity’ – that is, communicating a positive image with the aim of getting recognition from others. In order to make authentic disclosure in new online platforms, we should engage in self-assessment and strive to highlight significant aspects of our goals and skills.

However, a study by [Stockholm University](#) discovered that the most widespread social media only focused on photos. There is a frustration among many users of Instagram and other social media that users convey a fake and nuanced perfected image – which could have a negative impact on a personal brand if not managed correctly. So, a personal brand encourages you to be more thoughtful and real with what you’re putting out if you want to make a positive impact.

In short, a personal brand helps us develop a sense of self, discover what we stand for and even consolidate our path in life. By broadcasting this message clearly, we make it easy for like-minded collaborators to seek us out for the purpose of growth, employment and other prosperous learning and exchange.

“ Most companies are using search engines and social media tools to seek out future employees, so a personal brand will ensure you’re not left behind.

04

► How to Develop a Strong Personal Brand

Introduction

Earlier, we clarified that building a personal brand is achieved through an execution of what makes you different and brilliant, using what you already have to make yourself memorable.

Your personal brand is the conscious association people have to your name, resulting from a fusion of daily actions, your presentation and appearance and your connection to other people and organisations.

In this section, we will now highlight some practical ways to communicate those unseen foundations of your personal excellence in a compelling and effective way. Whether it's on social media, the workplace or everyday social interactions, the end outcome is about getting known and trusted for one key thing that clients, employers or recruiters come to depend for you upon.

The 12 Elements You Need to Communicate Your Personal Brand

The following 12 insights will help you communicate your message to the world through practical criteria that is aligned to your target market's needs and values. Sending the right positive cues will help your prospects recognise you as 'the one' to fill their opportunity gaps and take action. These actions are about being true to who you are, highlighting your strengths and making a genuine connection. So, let's get started!

1. Theme

Experts like [Teresa Page](#) from Starmaker Studios encourage us to bring our goals back to the final outcome, or the 'dream'. "Our wishes always have correlations, so really let the vision of what you want and how it will look build in your imagination" she says. From there, pick a word or phrase that will define your theme. Pick in mind that this is an overarching concept, with discerningly expressed details.

Let's say one person picks being a philanthropic leader as their theme, and another wants to be known for great interior design. Every platform from which they use to showcase their skills, expertise and knowledge will be a thread leading from their theme to be effective.

So if being a player in the philanthropic space is what you want to be known for, your collateral will reflect that through posting relevant statistics and case studies of effective social initiatives, as well as images and photos that prove your involvement in various causes.

If design is your thing, yours would be sharing a visual diary of your projects, other art and design that inspires you, as well as testimonials from happy customers you smile.

2. Point of Difference

After getting clear on your theme, you must define your strongest selling points. If you're unclear about what you stand for, you're letting the marketplace define you – which may not always play in your favour. Your point of difference or USP (unique selling proposition) is about considering what impact you want to have on people – and what is a special or unique quality about you that will make you stand out above all others.

Perhaps you're a graphic designer – sure there are lots of people out there who may perform a similar function, but what makes you just that little touch different? Everyone has a point of difference, so ask yourself: what do I offer in my service that is a bit quirky or unusual? Who is outside of my target market? What kind of work is outside my scope? What do I specialise in? Who is my dream client and why? What type of work do I love doing most?

As you can see, there's some contrarian questions in there. Don't be afraid to say no to work and specialise in a niche skill or market, as that's how you build a brand for yourself and become known for that 'one' thing.

3. Personal Branding Statement

Have your theme? Know what makes you special? Now, your personal brand statement summarises everything you want to convey into a few sentences, like a mantra which you live by both professionally and personally.

A personal branding statement sums up the vision of what you're hoping to achieve and marries that up with your talents and mission. You should feel happy and excited stating it, as this stanza really sums you up and broadcasts your gifts and contributions to others. You'll have a chance to develop your very own statement in a moment, so stay tuned...

4. Appearance

What is the first thing others notice about you before you even talk? That's right – it's your appearance.

When considering first impressions (both on and offline), nothing communicates who you are more than how you're presenting yourself. Our look is like a walking brand identity.

As Page says, "if your website were to walk off the page, would it look like you?". If your design is minimalist online, it would therefore seem strange if your outfits were always eclectic and busy. Page recommends working from the inside out by choosing three key words that define the unseen dimension of your brand. It could be "assertive, professional, inspiring". Therefore, accents like sharp heels, blazers and blouses with a pop of colour would go much farther in communicating that message than say, trainers and a baseball cap. The opposite would apply however, if your brand stands for fitness, youth or a casual start-up culture.



**If your website were
to walk off the page,
would it look like you?**



Teresa Page

5. The way you speak, the words and tone you use

Look the part? Now it's time to sound the part. Whether written or spoken, make sure that your language is 'audience-appropriate' to make maximum impact.

For instance, if you are wanting to get into fashion, then any blog posts you create or conversations you have with thought leaders in your industry need to incorporate relevant dialogue about designers, trends and technical terms that shows you're 'in the know' and have something to bring to their conversation.

Andrew Ford from [Social Star](#) also recommends mastering your 'elevator pitch', as sometimes you may only have 5 minutes with someone to make an impression and let them know clearly how they can help you and vice versa.

As well as clearly stating who you work with, how you help and why, Page recommends taking it up a level with an 'emotionally compelling narrative' which speaks from the heart about what you love. "When people hear that you have a heart-centred purpose and you are authentic, people are going to be mesmerised when you speak – and by your potential impact."

Finally, keep tone to be audience appropriate – if your goal is to enter politics, you don't want to sound very chirpy and chatty. Fashion folk will have a certain pitch and tempo that differs from say, the finance industry – so pay attention to how people speak.

6. Social interactions

Similar to looking and sounding the part, a big element of making the right impression is coming across socially congruent. If your brand is stately and professional, then behave around those you want to influence (or anyone outside immediate friends and family) in a similar way.

And, if you are a lot more casual in nature, don't make your brand overly formal – even if you're in a traditional industry that calls for that. Your personality is what makes you stand out, so be true to yourself, even if that means being a bit different. When out with others in your field, be polite and ask others questions about their work. And as Ford says, "if you talk about what lights you up as a person, you can't go wrong".

7. Your peer circle and associations

Your peers are the people who help you define yourself and where you're coming from. These could be mentors, friends within the industry and anyone else who helps you define who you are and what you do.

Brazel reminds us that traditional networking is not for everyone – so breathe a sigh of relief. To meet the right people in your peer-group, follow your hobbies. Is it golf? Cooking? Riding? That way you'll always meet someone like-minded and start a conversation from there. So, expand your social network with people who lift you up, give you honest feedback and help you grow in compelling ways. Ask yourself, am I a better person after that interaction?

8. Social media, blogs and websites

As you are likely gauging by now, your digital presence needs to be an extension of your offline self. This may include your social media accounts, as well as any blogs or websites you have created and maintain online.

Curiously, Ford states that while your website is about you, it's not 'for you.' After all, your website exists so that your target audience can find useful information about what you do and how they can work with you. And better than just having a static website is a content rich, thriving mechanism that keeps getting updated with fresh and fabulous content!

Online platforms are a great way to stay top of mind and build value in the eyes of your audience – so share opinion pieces, projects you're working on and ultimately, what you have to offer than can help others. Creating content – whether it's video, visual or written is still the best way to showcase what you do, so if appropriate aim to produce a quality post at least once a week.

9. Imagery

According to brand expert Susan Gunelius, "brand imagery are the tangible or intangible elements that consumers associate with a brand."

Images work well online because they're attention grabbing pieces of bite-sized content that evoke immediate emotional reactions. It's important that the images you choose capture the essence of your personal brand. Whether you use stock photos or take the images yourself depends on your cinematic aptitude, but the end result must convey your theme.

Do you want to convey a mood that is sophisticated, playful, wholesome or arty? Be inspired for visual content by people who are successful in your field and look at what they post, then put your own special twist on it. Get creative!

On another note, Ford recommends getting professional photos done for your website, LinkedIn and any other platform you use professionally. Ensure these convey your personality as well: you don't have to look overly stuffy just because they're 'work' photos.

10. Colours

Personal branding expert Chris Brazel says that colours create a subconscious link to value systems your 'tribe' identifies with. Every industry has a different colour association and to help you define your colour, Brazel recommends the following associative game:

"Think of someone who personifies the ultimate success in your industry. What is the first colour scheme that comes to mind? That is what you could use."

Research what different colours mean and check out websites of other people who are doing well. Is there a tonal mood that is emerging?

11. Logo

Similar to the colours, your logo needs to be a shape or symbol with meaning or significance to who you are. It's important to understand what different shapes mean – a rectangle for stability, a circle as harmony for instance.

Brazel recommends that a logo must also incorporate your passion, so whether you're into horse racing, writing or photography, it can be fortuitous to include a nod to that into your logo. "You'll be surprised how such a subtle reference can attract like-minded people to you. It's like their brain recognises the symbol."



You'll be surprised how such a subtle reference can attract like-minded people to you. It's like their brain recognises the symbol.

Chris Brazel

12. Reputation

Your reputation and what others say about you is certainly important to your personal brand. And so, a sure-fire way to keep your reputation strong is to build it upon genuine and heartfelt service.

"Turn your desire for building wealth into your desire to helping more people by asking 'how can I serve more people today?'" recommends Page. From that place, you 'keep the brand resonance high', which means producing regular content with your audience in mind.

Think about what is interesting to your audience and what problem you can solve, then do so with regular interesting and useful tips on your social platforms. Take the connection offline through involvement in community events, mentoring people, volunteering, sharing and celebrating in the successes of others and of course noting any testimonials that come your way.

05

► Established Personal Brands

Now let's put this to the test. Do we have the same associations when we think of these public identities?

Mark Zuckerberg

Sheryl Sanders

Elizabeth Gilbert

What colours, images and word associations come to mind? Where do you imagine these identities would spend time on the weekend? What kind of things or statements would they say? If you were to hire this person for a talk, what would they speak about?

Likely, when you thought of Mark Zuckerberg words like entrepreneurial disrupter, recluse, hoodie, billionaire, may have flashed through your mind. We seldom see Zuckerberg in a suit or splashed across the social pages at the awards parties. His inspirational mantras like "I'm here to build something for the long-term. Anything else is a distraction." only serve to gain his cause.

What about Sheryl Sandberg, another Facebook employee – yet one with vastly different attributes? Sanders is seen as wise, strong, compassionate, a leader empowering women and encouraging 'leaning in'. Known for quotes such as "Done is better than perfect" and "What would you do if you weren't afraid?", Sheryl's brand is uplifting and full of promise for professional and entrepreneurial women.

Now, what happens when you think of Elizabeth Gilbert? Instantly it could be the word 'creativity'. Or maybe Bali. Or 'eat pray love.' The point is, she creates an association, from her soft pastel outfits to her casual style.

Imagine you can have a similar impact?

As you can see, a personal brand is a fusion of your experience, gifts and talents with your unique characteristics, such as your personality, value systems and goals. Using visual cues, words and actions to broadcast that to the world through various platforms, you can attract the prospects, parties and constituents to work on your next projects, dreams and career opportunities. Anything is possible with a strong personal brand, giving you a newfound clarity, confidence and context you may not have had before.

We believe that taking the right steps to articulate your personal brand will elevate practical touchpoints such as your CV, LinkedIn profile and personal bio to help you really shine in the market place.

Ready to develop your own personal brand?

Simply enter your information into our handy tool [here](#). You will have a clearer picture of what your compelling messages are on the other side, as well as a one-page document you can use to strengthen your employability and show to prospective employers to stand out from the crowd.