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enLIGHTenment  
MAGAZINE  
SEPTEMBER 2015

# HOW TO BRAND YOURSELF

One of the newest ways for salespeople to remain memorable to customers in this high-tech world involves branding themselves to be remembered by customers as “their friend in the lighting business,” encouraging repeat sales.

BY MARK OKUN

Like no time before, the sales profession has changed. There have been predictions that the salesperson would no longer be necessary and would disappear thanks to the onslaught of e-sellers and the access to information at the touch of a smartphone.

While Google makes sure there's an e-store that matches every consumer's query with its “click here to buy now” buttons that obstruct their view, the role of the salesperson is actually *more* important than ever. Knowledge coupled with honesty is the new baseline for performance. The problem is, you as a salesperson need to let people know about you long before they walk through your front door.

Today, potential customers are bombarded with advertising of all kinds — and much of that advertising comes from impersonal e-mails, banner ads, pop-ups, and even phantom text messages. Furthermore, consumers themselves will visit numerous Web sites in search of product information and to investigate the social exposure of the company and the people they may want to work with, all while scanning thousands of images in search of the “right look.”

In order for you, as a salesperson, to stand out from this never-ending barrage of non-permission marketing and self-guided searching, you need to begin building a following and start promoting your skills, your knowledge, and your great reputation. You must start building what brand expert Tom Peters calls, **Brand You**.

Building a brand is no longer relegated to the marketing team or corporate boardroom. Branding is now an individual act — one that impacts your sales performance and customer acquisition.

Retail salespeople don't have a personal marketing budget, but they *do* have unlimited resources to accomplish brand-building. They have

their projects, experiences, and daily customer interactions. When shared, these can be used as the basis for building your brand.

One of the facets of brand-building that the salesperson must embrace are the popular social platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest. Be on the lookout for Periscope & Meerkat, smartphone apps that feature live peer-to-peer video broadcasting. To reap the benefits of these social platforms, you must take the time to invest in educating yourself in how each of the platforms work.

Please make a personal commitment to these ideas. Social branding will not take the place of having good sales skills, but it will help bring potential customers to you so you can use your skills. The results of building a brand will take time to quantify. It will take time to build up a following until one day it will hit you, “Wow, it works!”

Your goal is to spread the word of what you do, who you do it for, and how you do it. Simply put, it is sharing the results of great customer interactions, plus cool products and ideas — including posting images of in-process and completed projects you're working on. While building your brand, do not lose your individuality. This is about *your* experiences, *your* projects, and *your* customers. When you re-post articles from others, you are actually building *their* brand and saying to your followers, “I believe in this.” When you use the phrase, “I believe in this 100%” as a benchmark, your posts will be yours and the ones you share will reflect you exactly. Your posts must promote that you are different than the run-of-the-mill lighting salesperson/designer. Being *different* stands out over being better when building your brand.

To be successful in building your personal brand using social media, you need to be disciplined and have determination. Schedule time to post

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on the various platforms to create the habit and to strengthen your skills. As you become comfortable with the process, you can start “freestyle posting,” which is just what the name implies: you post as close to real time as possible. When you see a great design or application, shoot a picture, and post. Did you just get in the latest and greatest chandelier? Snap a picture and post it!

#### HOW TO START

Learn how to use your smartphone to get the images you need for your social platforms. I think Instagram is a great place to begin; you can post pictures of your store, products, and project quickly and easily from your phone. These posts can link directly to your Facebook and Twitter accounts. One post to Instagram lets you cover three platforms simultaneously! Snap a picture, write 10-25 words about it, and you're on your way to building your brand.

are not on there yet, do so and complete all the steps in creating your profile. It may take more than one session to finish. In my opinion, if your career is in sales then LinkedIn is the living portfolio of your business life accomplishments. It is a way for you to have a personal Web page without the cost or hassle of maintaining a site. And unlike some other blogging sites, you share this stage only with business professionals. There is a section called PULSE that lets you post content to it like a blog, and you can also connect with other social platforms to get the most from your PULSE posts.

Blogging about your work or ideas lets you express your passion of purpose. The ability to share that passion with your customers is invaluable; this skill alone will separate you from the crowd. There is no time to be timid about sharing what you know and what you can do for your customers. Be a persistent self-promoter of the skills and knowledge you possess and how that passion, skill, and knowledge will benefit them. Keep in mind, however, that there is a fine line between exuding confidence combined with passion and a boastful ego. Your posts should be more about the project, product, or customer than it is about you! Sharing passionately is more than supplying requested information, it is about the giving of your knowledge freely. This sharing is what helps build the memory of “brand you.”

The more active you are in building your brand, the quicker you will build your reputation as being a respected resource for your clients. When you share your knowledge and your time, you will build a reputation as a resource that is reliable and precise. Your trusted customers will come to count on your support, input, and recommendations. As your customers' confidence builds, you will find that you will become their go-to person when help is needed. As the relationship bond with your customer strengthens, you will be able to introduce new ideas that will be welcomed. In turn, they will refer you to their friends and colleagues.

Do not buy into “auto posting,” as it is easily seen through. Your brand should be about you, your customers, and the experiences you share. Building your brand is also a face-to-face endeavor. It's more than posting gigs of data to a Web site, it is about the human-to-human contact. Without that human connection, the e-tailers would dominate the selling space and it would so easy to “click to buy now.”

You may feel uncomfortable that posting on Facebook and Twitter will blend work life with your personal life. It does and it should! People want to deal with people like them and those they hold in high esteem. These two platforms give the world a human view of who you are in your personal life and what you represent.

Every professional should be on LinkedIn. If you

“Regardless of age, regardless of position, regardless of the business we happen to be in, all of us need to understand the importance of branding. 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.”

—Tom Peters, brand expert and co-author of the best-selling book *In Search of Excellence*



#### WHY IT WORKS

This type of sharing of knowledge goes beyond the “Thank You” card or cheerful greeting as your customers enter the store. By knowing your customers as the people they are, they will become confident that you have their backs and know their likes and dislikes, hobbies, and interests. Through your personal actions, they understand they are valued members of your circle.

When building your brand, logic has something to do with creating those relationships, but emotion plays a much bigger part. As customers become more transactional, their loyalty is decreasing. We must step up to increase the investment we make and build with our customers. The result is likely that your customers become your friends, or at the minimum a strong acquaintance. It changes how we see people as humans and as a part of our lives and moves us beyond transactional clerks and into relational sales professionals.

Does this work? You bet! Here's a real-life account I have witnessed: Mike was new to selling and that may have been his greatest asset. He applied all the aspects of building his brand, staying connected to his small following with cards and notes. Email and

social media sites were not in his bag of tricks; however, his desire to succeed in his new career of sales overpowered his lack of knowledge of the social media. Mike posted simply at first — pictures of new items for sale and public recognition of his customer interactions. His customer relationships increased, and his customers were loyal. The importance of building a personal brand came to me when friends of previous customers would contact Mike directly, some even texted him, and others traveled over 250 miles just to work with him. One year after his start in sales, Mike learned that people buy from people they like and those they connect with.

This article is an introduction to some of the actions it takes to build your brand. There are many other nuances to learn and fine-tuning that can occur on an individual or company-wide level. This final thought bears repeating: *This is work. It is work you must commit to, and work that is beyond what is in your job description. It will require the development of skills you may not have yet.* The good news is that instead of wasting time learning some manipulative sales techniques, educate yourself on reaching out and touching current and future clients in a human way. ♦



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