

# Professional Branding Guide for Career Builders



**Social  
Selling  
Labs**

By: Koka Sexton



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Loading yourself up on AP classes, solid grades, varsity sports, and or a resume of extracurriculars may have been enough to land you a spot at your top choice college, but you probably realized that all of your fellow classmates were just like you in that realm once you stepped onto campus. In order to stand out, it took more than fine academics and involvement, didn't it?

Today's marketplace functions similarly and the competition fiercer with a world of people 'just like yourself' as competition. All things considered, how can you manage to distinguish yourself from the crowd in a global, interconnected marketplace?



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## **Build your brand.**

Now more than ever, building a professional brand is important for your career. In the words of LinkedIn expert Melonie Dodaro, having a strong personal brand will help you to establish yourself as an authority, create more demand for your services, and allow you to command higher fees. By determining your personal brand, you are making a worthy investment in your future.

The idea is that you want be unique in your field. The more you can stand out in your industry, the better.

— Koka Sexton

# Professional Branding Guide for Career Builders

## What makes a brand



Before we delve in any further, let's examine a few definitions of the word *brand*.

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### From Merriam-Webster's dictionary:

A class of goods identified by name as the product of a single firm or manufacturer; a characteristic or distinctive kind

### From [businessdictionary.com](http://businessdictionary.com):

Brands help harried consumers in a crowded and complex marketplace by standing for benefits and value. Legal name for a brand is trademark and, when it identifies or represents a firm, it is called a brand name.

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**From Forbes magazine writer Jerry McLaughlin:**

[the word brand] refers to the perception customers have about that product or service.

**From The Tronvig Group's writer James Heaton:**

A brand is the expression of the essential truth or value of an organization, product, or service. It is communication of characteristics, values, and attributes that clarify what this particular brand is and is not. A brand will help encourage someone to buy a product, and it directly supports whatever sales or marketing activities are in play, but the brand does not explicitly say, "Buy me." Instead, it says, *"This is what I am. This is why I exist. If you agree, if you like me, you can buy me, support me, and recommend me to your friends."*

Q. What do all of these definitions have in common?

A. They share the same core concepts of *distinction* and *value*.

Everything about your personal brand should be authentic and genuine.

— Koka Sexton

# Professional Branding Guide for Career Builders

When you shop something “brand name,” you are seeking to purchase an item that has a reputation for quality and excellence. When you become your own brand, you are responsible for your reputation, and hopefully, that reputation is one that puts forth notions of quality and excellence with real-life experience and skills to back it up.

So what makes a *personal brand* different from just a brand? Not much: the only difference is that you are the head honcho of You, Inc.

The personal brand workbook provided by [pwc.com](http://pwc.com) offers a good working definition for the concept of a personal brand: it’s “your reputation, your calling card; it’s what you’re known for and how people experience you. It’s about bringing who you are to what you do and how you do it—in person, on paper, and online.”

For our purposes, let’s define personal brand as attaching your personal character, personality, and experiences to your professional reputation. When it comes to building your brand, you must first understand that, as John Williams puts it, “everything about you, from the type of cell phone you carry and the vocabulary you use to the brand of coffee that you drink says something about who you are and what you can do for the rest of us.”

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It is crucial to clear up a common misconception right away: image management and personal branding are two completely separate and different ideas. Personal branding dictates that you stay true to your authentic self.

Everything about your personal brand should be authentic and genuine. When it comes to developing your personal brand, you should be sincere. On the other hand, image management is “a product of conscious manipulation,” and involves changing who you are in order to fit others’ expectations. If you want another way to look at it, consider the Dr. Seuss approach to personal branding: *Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don’t matter and those who matter don’t mind.*



# Professional Branding Guide for Career Builders

## How to Build Your Brand

Now, you don't have to attract the attention of everyone on earth (unless your personal goal is to become a household name). The idea is that you want to be unique in your field. The more you can stand out in your industry, the better. You need to determine—if you haven't done so already—how you and everything that you do and everything that you're about can bring value to your field. This is how you establish an advantage over the competition. Start with a basic self-assessment, and consider the following:

- Your unique professional skills—what makes you different from others in your field?
- Your life experiences—what makes you unique?
- Your character strengths—both in and out of your field, what does your personal character contribute to the greater good?
- Your personality traits—what are your strong points? How do you strike others?
- What makes you distinct?
- If someone were going to take notes on your persona and your abilities, what would they say are the highlights?

After you have spent some time reflecting, try your hand at writing a mission statement that includes three or four of your top brand attributes. Include attributes that you feel you already possess as well as those that are still in-progress.



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Williams' advice: your personal brand is not limited to your current title, your current role, or your current company; on the contrary, the only organization you belong to for life is yours. Create a mission statement that promotes who you are and who you are becoming.

**Building your social profiles** Like it or not, your social profile is the first glimpse into you and your brand that anyone will see, prospective employers and clients included. This is quite similar to preparing for a first date, a time when you want to make your best impression. If you like your date, you'll hope that the feeling is mutual so that your date will want to find out more about you and proceed to happily ever after...or at least date number two. In the professional world, your social profile is the equivalent of your first date: you need to put your best, most genuine self forward in the hopes that you might receive an email inquiry, follow-up phone call, or possible interview.

## Using your photo to your advantage

You may be tempted to leave the frame for your photo empty or perhaps fill it with a pleasant nature image, company logo, or other form of graphic design. Avoid that temptation! Experts advise that a picture of your shining face will work wonders for your profile compared to those profiles with empty or logo-filled frames. According to a study at Duke University, people trust smiling faces more that they have seen multiple times, which is why a photo of your smiling face works best compared to an image of a logo or other graphic design. The same study found that behavioral results showed more accurate and quick retrieval of face-name associations for smiling than neutral faces.

If you're on a platform that allows you to display more than one image on your profile page (such as Facebook or Twitter), you can use an image or photo that reflects your brand and your style—just remember to have a photo of your face

# Professional Branding Guide for Career Builders

With all of this in mind, refrain from posting a selfie. Even if you took a great shot with a selfie stick, it will not come across as polished and professional. Instead, make the investment in professional headshots, which generate more profile views and drive higher overall engagement.

## About You: Your Bio and Summary

*Short, sweet, and to the point*—this is what you need to keep in mind when it comes time to create your bio, with the key word being *short*. A bio for Twitter, for example, can be a total 160 characters—“little more than a tweet.” If you have never described yourself in one short sentence, here is your chance. Put your imagination to use and introduce people to who you are and what you’re all about, which will inform them about and why they should follow you on Twitter.”

Some of what you ought to mention in your own, creative way (that exudes your brand):

- Your position, role, or title
- Where you work
- Your interests

Stay true to your voice, your persona—that’s who people will be engaging with, after all. Humor is ok and even encouraged—just keep it professional. If your place of business has a Twitter profile, include that as well.

- Create a punchy one-line headline to capture people’s attention
- Showcase your work: upload or link to your previous work, such as blog posts, presentations, images, and websites, and give people a reason to engage with you
- Follow relevant channels and Influencers
- Stay informed and challenge your current thinking by following channels and Influencers relevant to your industry or specialization

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## Building your network

Now that you have a profile, it's time to invite others to connect with you so they can actually see your profile and begin to engage with you. Whether you are starting from scratch or are looking to build your network, consider reaching out to:

- Colleagues (past and present)
- Clients
- Friends
- Family
- College alumni

If you have a profile on LinkedIn, follow companies that you admire, wish to work for, or have the top billing in your industry. When you follow companies on LinkedIn, their posts, status updates, and shared media will appear directly in your feed.

It is also wise to join different groups. Think of these as online clubs or organizations within the larger realm of social media platforms. Simply search for groups that pertain to your industry or career and align with the core tenets of your personal brand, and then join those that pique your interests in order to keep up with news and topics that are trending.

Once you set up and continue to build your network, it's time to share content. When you share content, view it as an opportunity to connect and engage with your network (not to sell something). You can—and should—use content sharing as a chance to establish your expertise and authority, but whatever you do, remain genuine to yourself and authentic to your brand.

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Use your status updates to engage your networks, and share content and media through your updates and posts. And why share media-rich content? Basically, this kind of content is the kind with the most potential for sharing (for others in your network to share with those in *their* networks, that is). It has the biggest chance to be re-posted, commented on, liked, tweeted, re-tweeted—essentially spread to a much larger group of people than you would typically have access to.

There are scores of social networks out there these days, with some of the biggest and most popular platforms being LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, and Pinterest, and don't forget about Periscope, Blab—the list goes on. The more you plug in and connect on these platforms, the more you will need to manage your posts, updates, and overall accounts. This is where tools like Hootsuite, Buffer, and Ifttt come in.

All of these are different social media management tools that helps you manage, post, and delegate tasks on Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare, LinkedIn, WordPress, Google+, and others all from one place. To save time, it will really help you to streamline all of your social media profiles into one system. You could also try Ifttt, which stands for If This Then That (pronounced like “gift” without the g), which automates all of your social media together in a unique way: you create “recipes” that give search commands, correlate information, and even file photos and documents for you in DropBox.



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However you choose to connect with your network, remember that the idea is not to sell yourself, your product, or your company. If that happens, consider it an added bonus, but always keep in mind that the idea is that you share great things and then use the engagement to expand your network. Push the barriers of your second-degree network and then connect with a larger group of professionals that can either add value to you or to whom you can bring value.



Whether you are in sales or marketing, and whether you are a free agent or not, you are the only one out there responsible for yourself, your reputation, and your values. Own yourself and your brand—you're the only one who can. In the words of Dan Schwabel, “by focusing on delivering results, being remarkable, and learning new skills to adapt to our ever-changing world, you can make your brand memorable, and opportunities for success will follow.” Be memorable—be the real you—and by doing so, you will welcome chances for greater success.

# Professional Branding Guide for Career Builders

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