

Say my name

Rachel Brushfield and Chrissie Lightfoot discuss the benefits of personal branding for lawyers and their firms

Lawyers need to create a personal brand to stand out and get noticed. A personal brand creates a clear focus in the marketplace, thereby reducing marketing budgets and enabling clients to find them. It also enables their referrers and associates to be more likely to remember them when they spot a client need.

A personal brand needs to be authentic not forced, meet clients' needs and build the reputation of the individual, practice group and firm as a whole.

Managing and balancing these three critical levels within the legal profession is vital, especially with social media resulting in a generation who are more interested in individualistic 'brand me' than 'brand us'.

Lawyers who are often resistant to marketing would love a vehicle that helps referrers to say 'I know the perfect lawyer to help with what you are looking for'. A personal brand helps this to happen.

A personal brand is manifested in many ways. These include:

- reputation;
- being remarkably different, memorable, credible and believable;
- being the extension of who someone is, who others believe them to be and what they stand for;
- the sum of the experience that a person has;
- influencing perceptions in the minds of prospects and clients;
- the ways individuals differentiate themselves by identifying and articulating their value proposition;
- someone's unique talents which are actively leveraged to earn attention; and
- the first thing people think of when they hear someone's name.

Link with thought leadership

Thought leadership is linked with personal branding and is made easier by it.

A personal brand is like a model, while thought leadership is like the clothes and the medium in which both appear on the catwalk and at the fashion show.

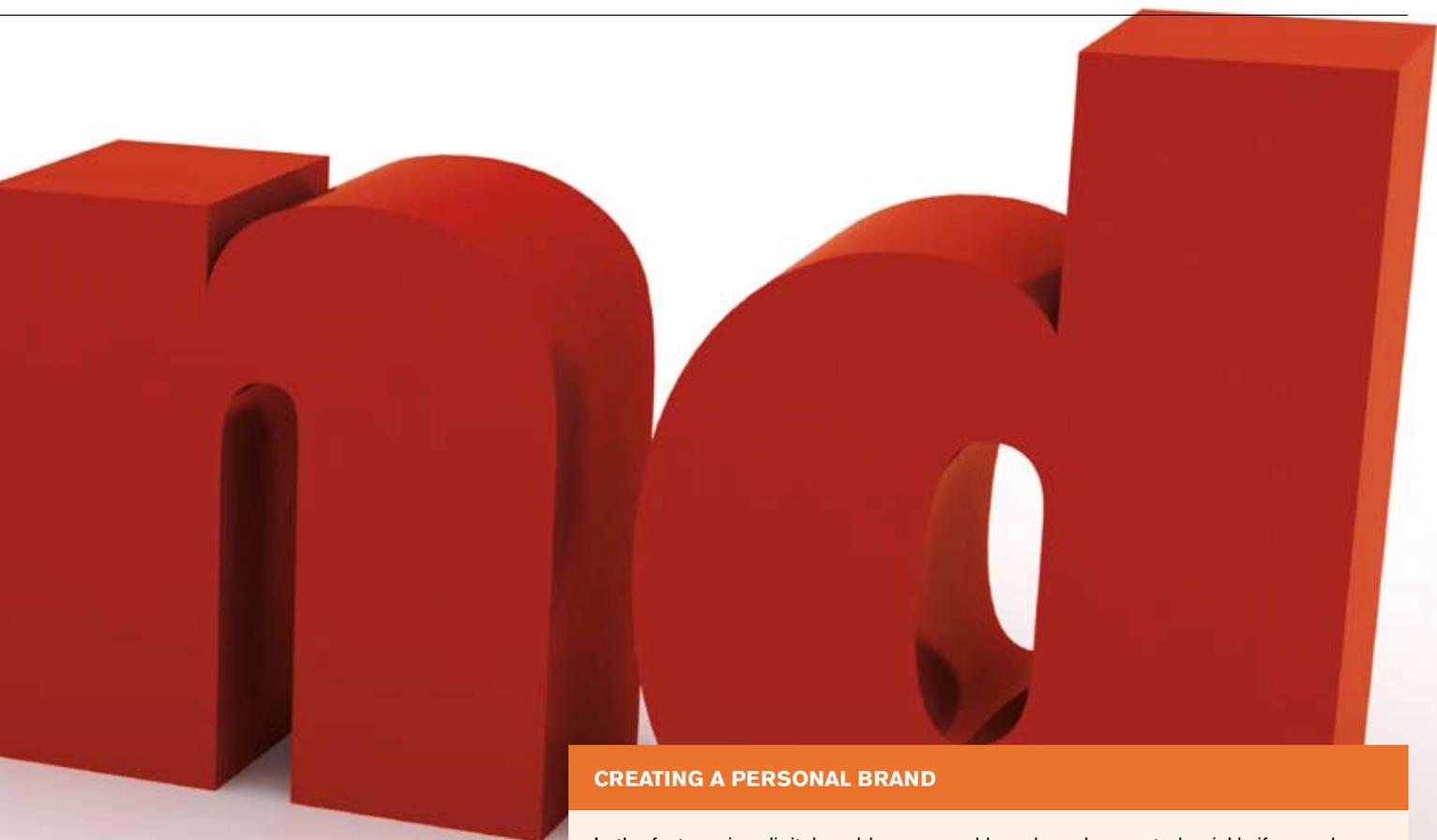
A personal brand creates a clear identity for an individual, while thought leadership brings it to life, expresses and builds it, and makes it visible.

Without thought leadership, a personal brand can be a concept and hidden away. Both help to create customer evangelists.

The two work in tandem and must be developed online (such as through LinkedIn, Twitter and blogs), and offline (such as through conference papers and articles).

Both a personal brand and thought leadership help to create business development opportunities.

They attract new prospects to lawyers and reinforce confidence in both the lawyer and firm. They also increase the likelihood of customer loyalty and repeat business.



Value proposition

For lawyers, a personal brand offers distinctive positioning that is memorable and relevant to a group of customers with specific needs.

A personal brand helps lawyers and law firms to focus their marketing efforts, attract the clients they want and filter out the clients they don't want, preventing valuable billable hours and marketing budgets from being wasted.

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It helps lawyers to achieve more from their marketing and business development efforts. Since many lawyers dislike marketing, a personal brand is an effective value proposition to encourage lawyers to attract and develop their own client bases. It will also help lawyers to tackle the issue of differentiation from competitors.

CREATING A PERSONAL BRAND

In the fast-moving digital world, a personal brand can be created quickly if enough time and effort is put into it and all communication feeds and builds it.

A personal brand needs to be created deliberately, developed consistently and maintained regularly.

Internal perspective

Step 1: Define your focus – which markets are you in? What strengths do you bring?

Step 2: Define your values – what is important to you? What do you want to be known for?

Step 3: What are your skills?

Step 4: What are your personal strengths?

Step 5: What are your unique talents?

External perspective

Step 6: Research your peers and clients' perceptions of your skills, strengths and unique talents.

Step 7: Research and analyse trends and competitors to determine the needs and problems of your target audiences.

Pulling it all together

Step 8: Consolidate internal and external perspectives – your skills, personal qualities and unique talents and how they match with the needs of specific client problems.

Step 9: Create your brand vision – what outcome do you want from having a personal brand? What difference do you make to your clients, the firm and in your career?

Step 10: You in a nutshell (your unique selling points) – what makes you different or better to other lawyers who do what you do?

Step 11: Develop an integrated communication strategy and plan, including a striking verbal business card.

Step 12: Create a one-page personal brand blueprint that sums up your personal brand.

The present and future trends of general counsel being able to choose who, where, what, why, when and how they purchase legal products and services means that law firms need to be present and attractive to the 'brand legal world' client.

Leading organisations have discovered that strong consumer brands deliver substantial benefits:

- increased revenues and market share;
- increased customer loyalty;
- increased profitability;
- increased clarity of vision; and
- decreased price sensitivity.

The real power, strength and return on investment in relation to branding lies in social capital and human capital. This means the marketing and sales relating and engagement must be done by the individual lawyer through their personal branding, not simply firm branding.

A law firm doesn't have character or personality, but the people within it do.

“Personal branding helps marketing-phobic lawyers to embrace business development by being authentic”



Reinventing marketing

Leaders and managers within the legal profession should be reinventing marketing, sales, PR and business

development approaches to embrace, involve and engage all lawyers to develop personal brands.

Firms need to turn the traditional top-down triangle 'brand firm' and marketing mantra upside down to capitalise on each and every lawyer's personal brand.

The real challenge therefore for the firm and every lawyer is to embrace the self-reliance era for business development.

Becoming ambassadors

Invariably, managing corporate ambassadorship in an established law firm may well be challenging for the individual and the firm. It's why as a brand ambassador of the firm and the individual, each must be perfectly aligned for one common purpose: the firm's success.

For lawyers to be ambassadors of their firms, the challenge is to be diligent in conveying the message that they are proud to represent their firms and align it with their own identities, both internally and externally.

When engaging in public at both online and offline venues, lawyers must be

Emma S., Paralegal

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POSITIONING A PERSONAL BRAND

Do

- ✓ Make time to do research and look at future trends and drivers.
- ✓ Put yourself forward and promote yourself.
- ✓ Remember that social media is about integrating your professional and personal lives.

Don't

- ✗ Go for the obvious need or target audience.
- ✗ Be afraid to narrow down options in the belief that it will be bad for billings – less is more.

careful to balance corporate responsibility with their individual personality.

Personal brands already exist in the legal sector – for example, Stephen Mayson and Nick Jarrett-Kerr are well known for law firm strategy. Outside the legal sector, the names Richard Branson, Donald Trump and David Beckham convey a very strong identity.

Lawyers need to ensure their names reach many people in order to create a consistent message of who they are and what value they can contribute.

Marketing opportunities

Personal branding is growing and helps marketing-phobic lawyers to embrace

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business development by being authentic. It also helps stretched marketing and business development budgets to go further by attracting target clients to them.

The branding of individual lawyers needs to work collectively with the image of each practice group, which together need to combine to create a consistent reputation of the firm as a whole.

The digital era provides the ideal opportunity for lawyers to create, establish and build a personal brand quickly and effectively to attract target clients both offline and online. ^{mp}

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