

LifeMap is a navigational tool to help you on your path towards personal and professional success.

Our belief is that you can achieve a more rewarding career, a more productive organization and a more satisfying life.



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Behind the Branding Buzz.

In my on-going LifeMap reading program I'm always on the lookout for ideas and concepts that overlap and so might be instructive and useful to more than one segment of the population. There are those buzzwords that occasionally pop up in content-hungry airline magazines but are little more than marketing tools. Typically they don't hold up to the test of time and real life application. There is one, not particularly new, that continues to draw my interest because of its broad applicability. I've noticed that in books and articles targeting recent graduates, job hunters, career changers, hopeful entrepreneurs, and even those preparing for retirement life that the term *branding* turns up consistently.

One marketing professor with whom I recently shared a plane ride broke it down to its primitive roots for me and it makes immediate sense if you've ever watched a cowboy movie. The term's origin refers to indelibly marking cattle with a branding iron so that it simply and accurately communicates ownership to even the illiterate. He noted the appropriation of the term "brand" by Madison Avenue to quickly, simply, and indelibly place the product in the mind of a potential purchaser. He continued saying that in our global economy the necessity still exists to use the brand to get into the minds of those who might not even read or write your language as in the days of illiterate cowboys.

These days the term is used to help those who want to quickly, simply, and indelibly communicate who they are and what they (or their enterprise) can do for the purchaser. The purchaser could be a potential employer, partner, loan officer, venture capitalist, or customer. More broadly one's personal brand can and should be easily and spontaneously

statement more readily, and a personal brand can and should be easily and spontaneously used to identify oneself to anyone with whom you might meet and network. Any Marketing 101 textbook can outline for you the multiple marketing avenues down which you can, by one means or another, propel your brand. Just make sure that it's current enough to educate you of the great benefits and ghastly pitfalls of using the ever-changing and unregulated Wild West world of social media. My purpose here is to help you to construct a personal brand that simply, accurately, and hopefully indelibly communicates to your audience (potential employer, customer, purchaser, funding source) who you are, what you do, what you stand for, and how that can be of benefit. There is much overlapping applicability in the ideas below so review them all.

Paths Forward

• Be An Event Pro.

Professional meetings, trade shows, and industry events are great places to observe and learn how others are branding themselves or their enterprises. What do their collateral materials communicate, what are catchy, current buzzwords, who really stands out – and why? Which ones are boring, “me too”, sounds like gibberish? Use contact info to check out a variety of web sites and social media. Your purpose here is to *stimulate you* to define your unique niche not to copycat. Fees for these meetings are usually tax-deductible but even if the costs are beyond your reach you can volunteer for the registration desk, VIP greeter, or facilitate a panel discussion to get yourself in for free.

• You're A Job Hunter.

Your brand has to be distinctive. What is it that makes you the best candidate for the job you are seeking? What do you do faster, better, more easily than others? Seek feedback from colleagues and former bosses. What contributed to your last promotion? Review your earlier performance evaluations for superlatives. A powerful 20-second elevator pitch is essential if you are to gain and retain their interest.

• You're A Freelancer.

Be an expert. Invest the time and energy to read deeply in your field. Have an informed opinion on the major issues in your field. Speak, write, and publish. Social media offers a plethora of outlets for you to establish your bona fides. Contrarian ideas will sell if they propose cost (or energy or time) savings to your potential clients. Controversial ideas may get you press or airtime but they don't always generate actual business.

• You're A Recent Graduate

You are a glass that is half full –remember that. Many recent grads set themselves back by focusing on what they don't have: years of experience, a weighty network, a broad reputation. Potential employers get that so stop worrying about it. Your brand is what you *do* offer: energy, enthusiasm, current knowledge, the work ethic from your summer jobs and internships. These things must be addressed in your 20-second elevator pitch. It will take a while to perfect it so invest the time upfront to get one that feels right and then refine it with practice – on anyone who'll listen.

• You're An Entrepreneur.

Focus on three things to use your brand to succeed. Your brand needs to be a fusion of your personal brand and the brand of your enterprise. You are it / it is you. Your mark is on the enterprise. The superlative, engaging elevator pitch is essential but be ready to follow it up with your story. Your story is how your enterprise came to be and why you just *had* to pursue it. Make it interesting and engaging. To convert a listener to a client or customer be able to rattle off your unique sales proposition (**USP**) in your sleep. A **USP** is that factor or those benefits that positively differentiates your product or service from your competitors. If, for example, it's not smarter, the only one of its kind, more popular, better established, faster

example, it's not smarter, the only one of its kind, more popular, better established, faster, unique, cheaper, newer, prettier, the first ever, or whatever then your brand is simply "me too".

•Be A Connector.

Once your brand is established you've got to get out there and market it. To most folks this means networking and I fully agree. But one weakness I see in most people's networking efforts is that it focuses solely on making contacts for themselves. Most entrepreneurs or freelancers are thinking, "Is this person a potential customer?" Most job hunters or recent graduates are thinking, "Is this person a potential employer?" But you can double, triple, quadruple your networking efforts if you consider how this connection might benefit *others*. Here is just a small sample of potential thoughts I'd like you to consider as you network to grow your brand.

- Who of my contacts would this person benefit from meeting?
- How could I help this person reach his or her goals?
- What book, web site, Ted Talk, article or other resource might really be useful to this person?
- Who do I know who could really use this person's expertise one way or another?
- Would this person be a great mentor for someone in my network?
- Could this person benefit from being mentored by someone in my network?
- Who do I know that has similar interests as this person?
- Am I aware of someone who could use this person (whose brand I trust and value) as an advisor, freelancer or consultant?

When you help two people connect in a way that benefits them you have created two new active proponents of your brand. This will benefit your network and your career. Any positive energy you send into another's life will come back to you one way or another. Depending on what you believe it will also benefit your karma and your soul.

LifeMap (sm) is about making the effort to define yourself for the marketplace and not being shy about sharing it with those who could benefit from knowing you and what you can do for them.

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