



Have a Focus:

Although you may wish you had all the skills in the world, the simple truth is that you do not. Luckily for you, everyone has skills and specific areas of expertise that make them stand out as a valuable asset.

Your individual expertise is what will interest people in having a conversation with you or influence them to toss you a follow on social media. For example, if you love to cook, consider weaving your passion for cooking into your brand.

“You need to find your niche. The way you are going to rise above the pack is by finding something that you are uniquely qualified to speak on,” Zimmerman says. “When you start developing your brand, realizing what your strengths are, you are going to start thinking of your niche and how you can carve your little piece.”

When building your personal brand, it is important to recognize the value in being an expert in one thing rather than having general knowledge about many things.

Be Genuine and Authentic:

In the digital age, many people mask the real versions of themselves and put on a persona for their social media followers. The issue with this lies in how easy it can be to identify someone who is not showing their true colors.

Staying true to yourself and your values and constantly embodying your brand sets you up as an authentic person. Authenticity in your brand can lead to credibility among others, whether that be friends, coworkers or social media followers. In any successful brand, individuality and authenticity go hand and hand.

“A good personal brand is built off authenticity,” Zimmerman says. “That does not mean that you cannot keep things personal, but show a little vulnerability — maybe showing off a little bit of your weird side or if you have a hobby that you totally geek out for.”

Tell Your Story:

Storytelling is debatably one of the most important and effective ways to breathe life into your brand. Major thought leaders of the concept and countless marketing textbooks not only encourage storytelling, but claim that it is essential.

Telling your true, imperfect story is another way to show authenticity and to cultivate relationships. This is especially useful for those with a social media presence, as sharing stories can help them to relate to followers and appear more raw and human.

Be Consistent:

When it comes to your personal brand, consistency is key all across the board — from maintaining a consistent focus or “theme,” to being consistently authentic, to being consistent in the story that you tell.

However, it is not only applicable to these core aspects of personal brand development. Influencers, content creators and e-business owners need to be consistent in their online engagement. Also, as an individual, you can stay connected with people in your network online by maintaining a noticeable and memorable presence on your platforms.

Don't Be Afraid to Fail:

The thought of your personal brand “failing” can be daunting and discouraging, but it is best not to look at it that way. Just like the best brands out there, trial and error are stepping stones to future success. Those who have struggled or faced failures have the scars to show from it, the stories to tell from it, and the knowledge they have gained from it.

“The best thing you can do is to just keep trying new things. It is going to mean some vulnerability,” Zimmerman says. “It is going to mean going to a meeting of some student org that you are curious about for the first time and not knowing anyone there. Often those times where we put ourselves out there the most, those are the times that can be the most beneficial and nourishing to us.”

Failure can be an incredibly valuable tool to use to your advantage in both your personal and professional life. Additionally, keep in mind that everyone measures failure and success differently and a set-back is only a set-back if you allow it to be!

“The mind can really play some tricks on us and seem to be the enemy of productivity, but you need to fight that,” Zimmerman says. “You can always redefine what your definition of success is.” ■

ON-BRAND

By Abby Fortin

If you are an Instagram micro-influencer, a YouTube personality, a prominent local figure or just a typical college student, establishing an authentic and consistent personal brand is crucial to your success. The way that you act and the image that you project is your brand, whether you realize it or not.

Personal branding is the intersection of marketing, networking and reputation, and it is never too early (or too late) to get started. Establishing your personal brand may seem like a tedious and time-consuming task, but you actually already have all of the tools you need.

Penn State public relations professor Bill Zimmerman has decades of branding experience. Between his time with Penn State's Office of Strategic Communications and his personal branding endeavors, Zimmerman has many tips and tricks up his sleeve.

“It is OK if you do not have [your brand] figured out just yet, if it is not fully formed,” Zimmerman says. “What is important is you just keep staying active, put yourself out there, keep making stuff.”

The value in developing a strong personal brand is greater than you would think; the ability to effectively market yourself and your talents allows you to stand out amongst others. When it comes to job hunting and the perpetual corporate rat race, a distinct brand can make you a hot commodity.

The benefits are obvious, but how should you begin to craft your brand? In order to better understand yourself and pinpoint what you want to embody both personally and professionally, consider these five core aspects: