

What is Your Brand?

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Years ago, a person could be hired by a company and expect a lifetime of moving up a career ladder at that employer. Today, the more likely scenario will be multiple employers across a range of industries. What does this mean to career-oriented professionals? You need to establish a *personal brand* that encompasses a broad base of professional competency that can move you up the ladder wherever you go. The first rule to consider is that customers, or in this case employers and your network, determine your brand. You can help manage perception of your brand through your actions and by demonstrating professional competency, but ultimately, the “word-of-mouth” that promotes or hurts your brand will be based on how others perceive your brand. Think of a product you trust and the reasons it is your favorite product. For example, I’ve found a high-end paint that costs about \$10 more a gallon than the paint I used to use. One of the reasons I first bought it was based on a display in the store that showed it covering a darker color evenly in only two

coats. I do home improvements as a hobby and normally don't have a lot of spare time. I liked the idea of a paint that didn't require a lot of coats. After I used it, I found that not only did it cover any color, it also dried in about two hours so I could do two coats in one afternoon (or as more likely happens with my schedule, in the dead of night). Let's analyze this example further. Why did I initially try this product? Because the marketing display highlighted that the paint would solve an issue that was important to me. Why did I trust this product? Because when I tested it by painting a maroon ceiling white, it really did cover it in two coats. Why did I pay the higher price? Because, as I've continued to use the paint, I've found it is even better at saving me time than I had originally expected. Not surprisingly, there are many parallels between this example and the mindset of a hiring manager. The world is full of people who simply go to work to pay for their lifestyles. They like to be told what to do and don't want to do more than the minimum required to remain employed. There are far fewer people who see their jobs as careers and challenges at work as opportunities to demonstrate their professional competency. The higher one rises in an organization, the more valuable employees are who take initiative and produce results. By packaging professional competency in a results-oriented brand, professionals will ensure continuing opportunities for career success. Some suggestions to develop your brand

follow. **Build Rapport with Your Audience** We all trust the person who looks back at us in the mirror every morning. If you want to build rapport and trust with your boss, mirror his or her values. Dress appropriately, communicate clearly, track tasks, report regularly, meet project deadlines, and arrive early. These actions will set you apart.

Ask for Challenging Assignments Look for opportunities to make your boss's job easier. Completing challenging projects is the best way to demonstrate competency and establish a successful track record.

Grow Your Competencies A commitment to lifelong learning is good for four reasons. First, it broadens your competencies which can be beneficial during career changes. Second, it may lead you down unexpected career paths that are more fulfilling. Third, it may introduce you to like-minded people in a position to help your career. Finally, learning new things is good exercise for the brain and helps minimize the effects of aging. While college or career-related skills courses are one way to grow your competency, certification calls on your experience and education to validate or confirm competency in a specific field.

Promote Yourself Keep track of results achieved on challenging projects and include those on your resume. Getting in the habit of updating your resume after key projects are completed ensures your resume is always current and quantitative. If you attain a certification, use the initials after your name and include it on your resume. This opens the door to telling a story to anyone who asks about what you learned in that process.

Network with Professionals Joining professional associations, participating in industry-related activities and volunteering for projects at work will grow your professional network and increase the number of people who have perceptions about your brand. In short, establishing professional competency requires both demonstrating competency plus great word of mouth. Your best career advancement opportunities will come from people familiar with your brand.

About the Author



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Susan Mucha is president of Powell-Mucha Consulting, Inc., a consulting services firm for the electronics manufacturing services (EMS) industry. Prior to founding PMCI in 2001, she spent 20 years in the EMS industry in sales and marketing management positions, including four years as an officer of a multinational NASDAQ-traded electronics firm. She has served as adjunct faculty in both University of Phoenix's undergraduate program and Webster University's MBA program. In 2008, she authored *Find It. Book It. Grow It. A Robust Process for Account Acquisition in Electronics Manufacturing Services*.

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