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# How to Create a Strong Personal Brand in the New Economy

By Dr. Woody

Published July 26, 2010 | FOXBusiness

"Who are you?"

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It's a simple, yet powerful question, that is as important today as it was when The Who's Roger Daltrey first belted it out in 1979. Knowing who you are and what you project is now more critical than ever to your career success. The fact is, you are a little-known brand name sitting on the crowded store shelf of the "New Economy." If you have any aspiration of thriving in the days ahead, you are going to have to put yourself out there as a brand.

Learning to portray yourself as a brand can be an uncomfortable exercise and even feel a bit shameless. But regardless of your circumstances, you must do it.

Think of your brand as the promise you make to potential employers or customers. Here's the challenge: there are a lot of other brands out there making the same promise as you, you have to figure out how to separate yourself. To accomplish this, you will need to start thinking like a marketer.

## Think Like a Marketer: Stand Out from the Crowd

Legendary advertising executive Rosser Reeves coined the phrase "unique selling proposition" or USP for short and this is what sets you apart. With the unemployment rate sitting close to 10% the competition for jobs is incredibly fierce. To stand out from the herd, think about how you can show what you bring to the table as a prospective employee or service provider.

Remember, your brand is a promise. You not only have to bring value, you also have to make sure the right people notice that value. To accomplish this, you must audit your brand and deliberately craft a message.

**Audit your brand:** Before you can decide on the promise you want to make, you need to know the promise you can deliver. Developing your brand starts with introspection; know yourself, before you can know what to project out to the marketplace. So, before you get started on creating your new brand, assess your brand's current state. Take a hard look at where you are currently and identify what's working and what's not. Consider how you dress, who you are around and the affiliations you have. Proactively seek out feedback from friends, family, people who know you well.

**Craft a message:** We live in a world of fleeting contact. Getting your message across requires quick hits and sound bites-it must be simple and make an impact. When crafting your message, be positive, focused, relevant and unique. Create a set of talking points. High-impact talking points should always:

- establish your credibility;
- demonstrate your value;
- show that you stand out.

## Keep the Promise

Although Tiger Woods' case has been analyzed to death, his meltdown is a fantastic example of how not to self brand. That was a fabricated brand. His handlers (agent, Nike, management) created and marketed an image that was inconsistent with the actual man. Instead of looking at Woods as a whole person and understanding how to leverage what he brought to the table as an individual, they looked at their desired demographic and tried to force an image upon him that appealed to their pre-selected target audience.

Brands come with expectations, and Woods failed to meet those expectations. He broke the promise and has paid dearly for it. The mistake his handlers made was focusing on the promise they wanted to make as opposed to the promise they could make.

At the end of the day, your ability to differentiate from the herd and get noticed doing so will set you apart. You have to find a way to get yourself out into the market in a meaningful way. You can't be considered an option if an employer or customer doesn't know you exist or what you are about. Remember, every day that goes by, that herd gets bigger. Standing out and getting noticed will require thoughtful preparation and deliberate action. It will require a YOU Plan designed to sell the YOU Brand!

*Michael "Dr. Woody" Woodward, PhD is an executive coach and author of The YOU Plan: A 5-step Guide to Taking Charge of Your Career in the New Economy. Dr. Woody is president of the consulting firm HCI, sits on the Academic Advisory Board of the FIU Center for Leadership, and holds a PhD in organizational psychology.*

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