Why your personal brand is so important now – and how to build it

Brand might sound like something that belongs in the world of companies – or influencers – but it can apply to your working life, too.

Building your own brand can give you something to use to your advantage whether you're looking for a new role, wanting to take on more projects as a freelancer or independent contractor, or wanting to take a step forward in your career.

It doesn't have to be flashy or complicated, either. Your personal brand basically comes down to who you are and what value or skills you have to offer. And with the tougher conditions and more competitive job market brought on by COVID-19, branding could be an important way to set yourself apart.

Here, Adrian Kelly, National Manager at Outplacement Australia, shares his tips on building your personal brand.

How a brand can help you

Now that many of us have a digital presence through social media and other online platforms, the idea of a personal brand is becoming clearer than ever and easy for others to look out for.

"Everybody has a brand, and in the increasingly transparent online world we live in, your brand has more reach, and impact on your career opportunities, than ever before," Kelly says.

In job markets like this, he says those with a clear voice as someone that knows their field, a visible online presence and well-defined brand have an advantage when it comes to finding and applying for work.

"At times like these, where there are high volumes of applicants, hirers are turning to people with strong brands when looking for suitable talent. A strong online presence and referrals from trusted sources means those with a strong brand are more likely to be found for the right opportunities."

Having a clear brand will also help beyond the early recruitment phases. Kelly says people who've spent time defining their brands are also better prepared to confidently put forward their brand during meetings, interviews and salary negotiations.

How to build and describe your brand

If you want to create a professional brand for yourself or you're looking to refine yours, Kelly says there are a series of steps that will help you lock one in.

Your brand should come from what you can offer to the people you work with. Not sure where start? To create a strong brand, Kelly says you should consider:

- Your goals – now and moving forward
- Your market – the industry or people you choose to work with
- Your value – what you bring to these people or organisations
- Your message– what you need them to know about you

"These aren't easy questions. You will need to take time to reflect on your goals, strengths and what's important to you, and consider how these fit with opportunities, current and emerging, in the market," he says.

So, what could this look like? Say you're a graphic designer. Your goals might be to gain more clients, and eventually start up your own design business. Your market could be small to medium businesses needing graphics and branding. Your value could be that you can deliver high-quality, unique and distinctive designs on time and within budget. And your message might be that you need small and medium businesses in your area to know what you can offer them, and the medium for this could be through social media ads, for example. Whatever your line of work or situation, see how you would answer these questions.

Then from here you could use these points to create your brand statement, or 'pitch' to the market – which is how you'll describe your brand to others.

When and how to use your branding

"If your personal brand is genuine and authentic, it should support your career development and evolve with you as your life and career move forward," Kelly says.

Bring your brand into what you write in your online profiles, online bios, your resume, your application letters, and your social media profiles. It's also something you can weave into your introductions for events or in other professional situations, in your responses in job interviews, or when you're pitching yourself or your ideas.

If you're not sure your personal brand is coming across as well as you'd like, consider asking friends, family or trusted contacts in your professional network for some feedback and any suggestions of what to add or change.

Ultimately, your personal brand is about showing who you are, what you stand for and what you can offer to the people or businesses you can serve or work for. And by breaking down what this means for you and then communicating it clearly, you'll be better placed to stand out, be recognised and ready to take hold of opportunities.