

The Personal Branding Phenomenon

By Peter Montoya (2002)

Published by *Personal Branding Press* / ISBN: [0967450616](https://www.isbn-international.org/product/9780967450616)

Summary by Graham Wilson

The Personal Branding Phenomenon	1
A quick overview – why I have summarised this book	1
Seeing yourself as a business	2
What is personal branding?	2
The principle of the ‘domain’	3
Eight ‘laws’ of personal branding	4
Specialisation	4
Leadership	4
Personality	4
Distinctiveness	5
Visibility	5
Unity	5
Persistence	5
Goodwill	5
How to build your personal brand	5
Before you begin you need to be brutally honest with yourself	5
Then create your new brand	6
Propagate your message	6
Live your brand	6
And finally, plan and plan again	6
For further information please contact:	6

A quick overview – why I have summarised this book

As some of you know, I’m in the process of ‘re-inventing’ what I do myself at the moment. (To learn more see my website!) Someone had recommended this book a while ago and so I figured it was time to look at it. To be blunt, it is not a book that I would naturally reach for. It is also of the kind that irritates me! The author is heavily self-promoting. The book is self-published (a sign that no-one with editorial clout has been through it). The thing is SO structured that it is obvious that he wrote it by dictating notes to accompany some Powerpoint presentations. While there are lots of examples (which is great) they too are so structured that they repeat themselves and feel as though reality is being squeezed into a rigid model to prove a point. And several of the people he has endorsing him are from the school of psychology that believes in plastering over cracks (or even denying them completely) and forging ahead regardless, rather than trying to resolve past history and move forward in an integrated fashion.

So why bother summarising it? I think it was Tom Peters in the 1980s who suggested that it was time for people to begin to see themselves as businesses. He argued that for most people today there is no such thing as job security. Few employers take responsibility for the longer-term development of their workforce. And most people are now self-employed anyway. So seeing yourself as a business is about taking responsibility for your own future. What's more, people who take responsibility for their life feel better about themselves, and their day-to-day work, because it fits into a bigger picture that is real to them. When we feel that way, we tend to be more creative, to do more inspiring things and relate better to the world around us.

But how do you see yourself as a business? There's not many books around on that theme, so this one looked interesting. Though I won't be adding it to my 'revisiting' list, I'm glad I read it, and I hope that you'll be glad you read this summary. It does focus your thoughts on certain things, and while you might not take it any further, that is a useful process.

Seeing yourself as a business

Although it isn't in the book this kind of mindset is important to the theme of personal branding so I thought I'd add a few words of explanation, especially as quite a few of my friends are not from the corporate sector and might find the jargon VERY off-putting!

To begin with let's drop the word 'business' and instead use the term 'workplace'. The idea is to think of you and what you do like any workplace. But rather than seeing yourself as working for an organisation, being managed by other people, and depending on peers to take the output from your own efforts and do something with them etc etc, the idea is to think of yourself managing what you do, and responding to your managers and peers as if they were 'customers'.

Silly example 1: You are an HR Director in a large business. You might begin to think more about the services that your team provide as if the company was going outside to buy them. You would be wondering about how to cost them and how to reduce those costs while increasing the quality and offering more services. You might be considering how to market these services to colleagues who previously have thought of them as 'bolt-ons' to what they do, or perhaps as necessary evils. You would be wondering about the future and how to keep in the forefront of your potential competitors and whether there are new customers that you could promote your services to. At the same time as you do this for your team, you will be doing it for yourself. "What is it that I provide to my colleagues? How do I encourage them to come to me? How do I keep in the leading edge (from their perspective rather than just my own)?"

Silly example 2: You are a parish priest! You might begin by defining what you see as your purpose and comparing it with what your parishioners might expect. You could look at the things you do (and how you mobilise your volunteers) so that these activities most closely meet the needs of the parishioners and serve your own purpose too. You would be looking at how the parish is changing and so predicting how those parishioner's needs are going to change and be building plans to provide for these new needs in the future. You would be concerned with drawing in more parishioners to secure the parish (and its assets) for the years ahead.

Once you begin to see yourself as a business, you start taking responsibility for many things that you haven't done in the past or that you have delegated to others. If this is new to you, you might want to stop and reflect on the idea for a few minutes before continuing with the summary.

What is personal branding?

Personal branding is about creating the externally facing identity that you as a business project.

This needn't be about overt self-promotion, or about embellishing your ego. It isn't about faking, or about being inauthentic. It isn't manipulative and it isn't new!

We are surrounded by people who we don't know, but who we know something about. This may be assumed or it may gathered from accurate information, but the key is that although we don't personally know them, they are not entirely strangers. That difference – the bit we know about – is their 'brand'. Of course, there will be some qualities that they genuinely have, there will be some that they would like us to believe they have, and there will be some that WE would like them to have.

Take an inanimate object, such as a bottle of Pepsi. It has a certain taste – and, yes, you CAN tell the difference between Pepsi, Coke and other cola drinks. Then it has a distinctive packaging, which evolves slowly but essentially remains pretty constant. And then, through the efforts of the marketing department, it becomes associated with certain people, certain lifestyles and certain activities. These ingredients of the brand have nothing to do with the taste, but they have a lot to do with how people perceive the product and whether they will buy it or not.

Branding is very important. No matter what we might like to believe, people do not 'buy' things for rational reasons. They do so for emotional ones. Even if they go out and do an elaborate comparison between the different features, prices, options, specifications, guarantees and perceptions of different products. They will still refine this down to a few possibilities and make their decision emotionally. That is why the brand is so important – it creates the emotional connection with the buyer. People know that nothing in life is really certain, but they still want reassurance that, as far as possible, they are safe. The brand provides this security.

Personal branding does the same for people as the marketers do for products. You, as an individual do something – let's suppose you are a journalist – you could write anything and be very good at it, but if you do you'll have lots of competitors. Instead, you develop a personal brand – perhaps as someone who makes seemingly wacky ideas understandable to serious readers. To reinforce this 'brand' you add a strap-line to your letterhead – "The Thinking Person's Guide to the New Age". You choose to dress conservatively but trendily. You target ideas to the editors of magazines that are obviously trying to straddle the fence between the traditional and the contemporary worlds of business. And so on. These are all efforts to create your personal brand and to get people to call on you to write for them – not because you are necessarily any better than another journalist but because they feel more comfortable that you'll do a good job.

Personal branding is a strategic process – it is about intentionally taking control of how others perceive you and managing those perceptions strategically to help you achieve your goals. We all have a personal brand to a certain extent though most people don't realise it and do nothing to manage it – yet it has a big impact on us all. Your personal brand influences whether you are considered for jobs and other opportunities, it determines how credible your opinions and ideas are, it determines how much help other people will give you, how seriously your competitors take you, the tolerance people allow in their dealings with you, and how much people are prepared to pay you for what you do!

Finally, just about every 'celebrity' has a personal brand. That doesn't mean that they manage them well, nor does it mean that to manage your personal brand you have to become a celebrity.

The principle of the 'domain'

Peter Montoya uses the term 'domain' to define the sphere of influence that someone is trying to reach with their personal brand. To take the journalist example, their 'domain' consists of the editors of certain periodicals, together with the readers of their work, and the sources of new material. In the case of the parish priest, they have their parishioners, and especially the subset that are active volunteers, and then there's the church hierarchy on whom they also depend.

There are three levels of influence that an individual might try to achieve;

- **Advocate** – associating themselves with a trend although this might be short-lived.
- **Trendsetter** – where they influence thinking but retain a presence in a larger sphere throughout – so that their personal brand remains even when they trend is over.
- **Icon** – not something that's easy to achieve but which tends to grow organically.

Eight 'laws' of personal branding

A personal brand, then, is “the public projection of certain aspects of a person’s personality, skills or values that stimulate precise, meaningful perceptions in its audience about the values and qualities that person stands for.”

Montoya looks at all his examples through these eight ‘laws’. Perhaps the best way of seeing these is less as being ‘unbreakable’ as he insists, but more as a checklist of the qualities that you could be building into your brand.

Specialisation

Brands are generally built on one area of specialisation. There are obvious examples of people stretching these, like Richard Branson, but the majority are based on just one. It is important to keep the brand simple, and to avoid diversification in favour of becoming even better at the core activity. You can specialise in a number of ways;

1. **By ability** – strategic vision, grasp of first principles, communicating complexity
2. **By behaviour** – such as leadership skills, passionate energy or ability to listen
3. **By lifestyle** – living on a boat, wearing turtlenecks not ties, travelling by motorbike
4. **By mission** – seeing people exceed their own expectations, for instance
5. **By product** – the futurist who creates amazing places to work
6. **By profession** – niche within a niche – the leadership coach who’s a psychotherapist
7. **By service** – the ‘consultant’ who works as a non-executive director or interim

Leadership

Psychologists have known for a long time that people want to be influenced – they want someone to cut through uncertainty and offer them a clear path to whatever they need. They convey authority on others for a host of reasons but especially by virtue of someone’s excellence, their use of position or popular recognition that they receive. Narrowing it down to something tangible, under-promising and hence over-delivering, and then promoting the result can build each.

Personality

People don’t like individuals who try to project themselves as ‘squeaky’ clean. They like people who are ‘real’. People who are able to risk being human in front of their domain are liked more for it. According to Montoya there are four characteristics to being human (!); being related to, being fallible, being positive, and being authentic.

Distinctiveness

To create a strong impression, you need to express yourself in ways that are different from others in the same domain. Remember that strong impressions are BOUND to put some people off – that is, ironically, a sign that you've got it right! What was one of the first things the media said of the new Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, as his name was put forward for the role? They talked of his strong opinions, outspoken views and unruly appearance. Think of Ronnie Corbett's cardigans, and Gary Rhodes' hair.

Visibility

Personal brands have to be seen – consistently and repeatedly. Until your personal brand is known, visibility is more important than your ability. The tough task is getting it known. To become visible, you need to promote yourself, market yourself, leverage any opportunities and have some good luck.

Unity

While authenticity is about living your life as you want to do and not being led to do so in other ways, unity is about leading your private life in accord with your public persona. While a few comedians have got away with projecting a bad-guy personality while being a loving, devoted family person, the reverse doesn't work! Whatever your gender, it's no good projecting the image of being a tough-guy at work and a loving parent at home – one or the other isn't authentic and the two aren't in unity.

Persistence

There are no short-cuts to achieving a personal brand – those that 'appear' overnight are actually the products of many years of persistence. Throughout that time it's important to recognise fads and trends and be prepared to reject those that detract from the brand.

Goodwill

Personal brands may bring 'success' to their owner, but this needs to be a by-product. True personal brands give a great deal to their domain. Provided that there's a modicum of goodwill, most people will forgive failings, tolerate under-delivery and open their doors to the owner of the brand.

How to build your personal brand

Montana gives some detailed, and a little mechanistic, exercises to help people understand and develop their personal brand. These didn't do much for me, but here's the essence of what he is suggesting.

Before you begin you need to be brutally honest with yourself

It's time to decide, and if possible test out with friends and associates, just what your present personal brand is. You need to understand what you believe you project, what other people say you project, and what happens as a result.

Start by asking yourself, what aspects of your personality you project. What moral values do you associate with yourself, and what skills and talents do you have? How do you describe yourself and your personal style?

Then ask similar questions of a number of friends or acquaintances.

Finally, revisit in your mind the last few times that you have met a complete stranger and been talking to them. How did they react? What did they focus the conversation on? What contact have you had subsequently?

Then create your new brand

Personal brands are strategic, so you need to have in mind what you expect it to achieve for you. Think of this in terms of short-, medium- and long-term goals, and break down your goals into material, positional and personal ones.

If you have competitors in your domain, think through their positioning – how do they project themselves? What do they project? What is their niche and how does it differ from yours?

Sum up what your strengths and brand are and then compare this to the needs you've found in the domain.

Then, write a personal branding statement.- a kind of mission statement – that sums up who you are, what you do, who you do it for, and what your leading personality strength is. Aim for it to be succinct.

Propagate your message

Using whatever means you have, and as consistently as possible, you need to get your message out there. You will probably use a portfolio of different approaches, including advertising, publicity, publishing, networking, the internet, and word of mouth. Whatever you do, plan it, manage it and repeat it.

Live your brand

Now that you have defined it and begun to propagate it you need to live the brand. Now is the time to make sure that your life matches the brand you have created for yourself. You'll work through your personality, the way you live, your clothing choices, habits, and lifestyle to make sure that there is consistency there.

And finally, plan and plan again

If you are really serious about this, and work the same way Montoya does, you'll develop a master plan for the promotion of your personal brand. Everything from designing business cards, producing seminars or writing for magazines, anything and everything will be included in the promotional plan.

For further information please contact:

Graham Wilson
49 Freehold Street, Lower Heyford, Oxfordshire, OX25 5NT

† 07785 222380

f 0870 122 5909

e summary@grahamwilson.org

w www.grahamwilson.org

NOTE You are welcome to copy this summary (in its entirety) to your colleagues and friends. If they would like to have future items sent directly to them, ask them to email me.