



Personal Branding: When the Professional is the Product

By: Joe Geisman

Whether you are an attorney, doctor, financial advisor or any other provider of professional services, marketing and business development is crucial to your business. Your ability to successfully attract and retain clients depends on many factors, including substantive considerations like your skills and the quality of your services. But in today's business environment, where professionals and prospective clients are connected like never before, a professional's personal brand is often the driving force behind the selection of one professional over another.

A majority of the services provided by professionals in a given industry do not materially differ from one provider to the next. For example, a trademark lawyer typically counsels clients on the use of trademarks, prosecutes trademark applications and enforces trademark rights. An internal medicine doctor typically evaluates patients and either treats a patient's condition or refers her to a specialist. There are of course other services provided by these professionals, as well as novel or unique situations that may call for some specific expertise. But for the most part, the fact that one professional in a particular field may have some superior skills as compared to her competitor is immaterial.

So how does a provider of professional services set herself apart from her competitors? The answer is personal branding – a deliberate, systematic process by which a professional leverages her competencies, experiences and personality to develop a brand identity, position her brand in the relevant marketplace, and influence and manage how she is perceived by clients and prospects. Personal branding is the means by which a professional builds recognition, influences public perception, and markets herself and her business effectively.

Businesses that provide professional services are based on people. In essence, the professional is the business. Through personal branding, a professional creates and builds a recognizable, distinct image over time. The brand supports, communicates and synthesizes who a professional is and what she knows and does. It conveys information about the professional and her areas of expertise, conveys trust and credibility, differentiates the professional from her competitors and increases awareness.

At its core, personal branding is about perception. Clients and prospects develop opinions about a professional and what she knows and does before ever meeting her in person. Whether those opinions are based on information provided by colleagues or found on the Internet, any professional who is interested in attracting and retaining clients must take control of the process through which perceptions are formed and actively manage how she is perceived. We at Maize Marketing welcome the opportunity to work with you on the strategic development, management and communication of your personal brand in a manner that is consistent with your overall business and personal objectives.