

marketer

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Build Business:
A Conference Preview

Developing Your Brand

BY SCOTT D. BUTCHER, CPSM

“Regardless of age, regardless of position, regardless of the business we happen to be in, all of us need to understand the importance of branding. We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You.”

With those words from his landmark 1997 *Fast Company* article, “The Brand Called You,” Tom Peters ushered in the era of personal branding. The concept was not new; in fact, it was introduced in the 1980 book *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*, by branding gurus Jack Trout and Al Ries. But the Peters article, which challenged readers to think beyond their job description, brought the concept to the mainstream.

Branding was originally a task performed by livestock owners, who used a hot iron stamp to mark their animals with a unique symbol. This practice, which dates back to ancient Egypt, allowed the owners to know which sheep and cattle were theirs. The dawn of the Industrial Revolution shepherded in an era of mass-marketing, and the concept of branding was applied to trademarks. The red triangle that identifies Bass beer is believed to be one of the world’s first trademarks, and thus one of the world’s oldest brands.

Today, brands are everywhere. Companies are branded; products are branded; people are branded. Your car, your suit, your refrigerator: all brands. Your television is the ultimate branding machine—not only does it have a brand identity (logo) on the front, but it relentlessly displays brands, brands, and more brands through an incessant parade of commercials and product placement.

At its essence, branding is about differentiation. According to Al and Laura Ries, “A branding program should be designed to differentiate your cow from all the other cattle on the range. Even if all the cattle on the range look pretty much alike.” Author Seth Godin refers to this as the “Purple Cow”—that is, being something remarkable.

But can this concept really apply to people? Can you really be a brand? Ultimately, brands are about perceptions. It’s not what a company thinks about its product, it is what the consumers think about the product. From that perspective, personal branding is somewhat oxymoronic.

Students of branding know that the most powerful brands are singular, yet people have many facets. Brands are narrow; people are well-rounded.

Even if we can get by this apparent contradiction, there is another, more important question: Why should anyone care about personal branding? There are countless reasons. Here are a few: landing a job, getting a promotion, surviving a downsizing, bringing in new business, marketing your firm, finding a spouse, getting known in your community; the list is lengthy.

“Personal branding is about unearthing what is true and unique about you and letting everyone know about it.”

—Dan Schawbel, *Me 2.0*

On top of that, the changing workplace necessitates that we embrace personal branding—in concept, at least, if not in name.

You are probably already doing it. If you’ve been marketing A/E/C companies for several years, you’ve witnessed a transition in the way we market. Once upon a time—last millennium—we could rely on the brand of our company and our portfolio of past projects, even if these projects were designed or constructed by people who were no longer with our firm. Today, however, the clients are more sophisticated. They see through the smoke and ignore the mirrors.



Many books on the topic of personal branding have been published in recent years, each with its own spin on the concept. Authors tend to focus on a specific aspect like personal branding through social media, personal branding for job seekers, or personal branding for executives.

You are a personal brand builder. You highlight the education and experience of key staff members in press releases, newsletters, cover letters, proposals, resumes, e-marketing, and more. You position them as experts at designing certain types of building or structures, or at performing certain functions. In doing so, you are building their personal brand.

Futurists have been envisioning a world of smaller offices and teams of independent contractors brought together on a project-by-project basis. It's already happening: the small architect who uses engineers who work out of their homes. The SMPS member who is self-employed and provides marketing or business development services to several non-competing A/E/C firms. Technological advances coupled with the changing culture of the workforce (driven by Millennials) will only reinforce this trend.

You need to become the “purple cow,” and you need to do it now.

Of course, you are already remarkable within your firm; unfortunately, your co-workers don't necessarily realize it. An architect goes to school for architecture, graduates, and then practices architecture. Same for a structural engineer. But what about a marketer of professional service?

By the very nature of our job descriptions, we must be like the Renaissance Man of yesteryear—a master of all trades. SMPS members are managers and proposal writers, communications specialists and public speakers, graphic designers and journalists, Web site developers and researchers. Many of us not only multi-task, we are like the architect and structural engineer, civil engineer and mechanical engineer, electrical engineer and construction manager—but all rolled into one.

Yet this is a *requirement* of our position: It is written into our job description. So how can we apply the concept of personal branding and go beyond the position description? How can we make ourselves remarkable and indispensable?

Internal Opportunities

Tom Peters recommends that you “moonlight” in your own firm; that is, volunteer within a different department or try a different function that is outside of your department and job description. One of the easiest ways to do this relates to the human resources functions of your company. Your HR manager, who also maybe your office manager and financial manager, already has a full plate. How can you help? If you've been reading SMPS publications, you're probably aware of the recent trend toward

marketers becoming involved with recruiting. Can you develop new recruiting brochures? Maybe you can attend recruiting fairs or expand your company's social networking efforts to generate interest in your company?

The Great Recession may have delayed the mass exodus from the A/E/C industry—driven by Baby Boomer retirements—but in a few years, companies will be desperate for technical people. Because marketing is increasingly people driven, the success of your marketing program will largely be contingent upon your company's ability to hire talented staff.

There are other internal opportunities with professional development, too. What training can you provide? Can you coordinate the training of technical staff? Most professional licenses and certifications have a requirement that the holders obtain continuing education, yet technical staff are notoriously bad at being proactive at doing this. Usually, at license/certification renewal time, they fly into a panic upon realization that they still need 20 hours of training within a limited window of time. Perhaps there is a role for you to help coordinate and track professional development within your firm; again, there is a marketing angle with this. If your staff members lose key licenses or certifications, your marketing efforts will be impacted negatively.

“Branding yourself means that you create the right kind of emotional response you want people to have when they hear your name, see you online, or meet you in person.”

—Erik Deckers & Kyle Lacy, *Branding Yourself*

Additional opportunities can be found with the strategic planning and financial management aspects of your company. Our industry is still playing catch-up when it comes to strategic planning. Your marketing planning skills and knowledge of industry trends and competitors make you well-suited for strategic planning. The key is to convince executives either that you deserve a seat at the table or that your firm finally should embrace the strategic planning process.

Another avenue toward building your brand internally relates to billable work. This is an age-old issue for those of us non-technical folks. To our co-workers, we are a dirty word: overhead. But what if we could be billable part of the time? This of course comes with the opportunity cost of having less time available for our primary job responsibilities.

I once had 160 billable hours conducting a market analysis for a client looking to construct a new facility but not sure where it should be located. It was a major market research project that delved into demographics, land costs, tax incentives, and labor—a project that I was equipped to perform but not the engineers with whom I worked. What unique skills can you bring to your company's clients?

External Opportunities

There are countless ways to create or expand your reputation outside of your company. Probably the most common approach is through involvement in professional, community, and even client organizations. But the key to success here is to not just belong but to be active. Become a committee or board member and then an officer. Bring your unique skills to an organization and become a vital resource to them. Create new collateral materials, or redesign the Web site, or write newsletter articles, or become a spokesperson. Volunteer for a community nonprofit, join an SMPS committee, and make yourself visible at chamber of commerce events.

You are most likely a talented writer; after all, that is what a lot of us spend much of our time doing at our day jobs. But how else could you be using these skills? Write an article for a client's newsletter or a letter to the editor at your local paper or business journal. Share some unique knowledge in an article for SMPS or for another organization to which you belong.

We've all read in numerous books and articles about how people fear public speaking more than they fear death. Guess what? That means that there are many organizations, meetings, and conferences in need of speakers. Again, think universally about your topic—it doesn't have to be about your job. Develop a presentation, then speak to a college class or community organization.

Another way to develop your brand is through social networking and blogging. Are you on LinkedIn? If so, do you just connect with people or do you belong to groups and participate in discussions? Providing content of value—through LinkedIn Answers or group discussions—is an excellent way to expand your contact base and begin to make a name for yourself. Joining and participating in an SMPS group (national, CPSM, chapter) is the low-hanging fruit, but you should think beyond just communicating with your peers.

Blogs and micro-blogs (e.g., Twitter) offer excellent platforms to become known. You can blog for your company but also for yourself. Set up a free account at Wordpress.com or Blogger.com. Or join another blogging site, perhaps something relating to an area of interest. There's a blogging opportunity awaiting you at MySMPS.org—what are you waiting for?

Education and certification are also components of your personal brand. Some marketers have earned graduate degrees like MBAs.

SMPS members regularly utilize the society for professional development—chapter meetings, conferences, webinars, newsletters, and white papers. Becoming a voracious reader of books, periodicals, and blogs adds to your knowledge base, in turn helping to define who you are. For many people, particularly in the A/E/C industry, certifications are an important personal branding component. We're surrounded on a daily basis by registered architects, licensed engineers, LEED accredited professionals, and literally dozens of certifications obtained by industry professionals.

The Certified Professional Services Marketer (CPSM) designation can enhance your credibility with technical professionals and within your company. You might also consider the LEED Green Associate certification, Accredited in Public Relations (APR), or Accredited Business Communicator (ABC) programs.

Your personal success—within your firm, within your community, within your industry—is directly related to the perception others have of you. Whether you call it personality, personal branding, or reputation management, the process of becoming remarkable and remaining indispensable is a vital part of where you go from here. The process happens to also be a lot of fun, too! What have you done to develop your brand and become better known?

I'd love to hear from you. Email me at sbutcher@jdbengineering.com with your story. 

About the Author



Scott D. Butcher, CPSM, is vice president of JDB Engineering, Inc. (www.jdbengineering.com). In addition to serving on the SMPS National Certification Committee and as an SMPS Foundation White Paper Liaison, Scott is the author and photographer of more than 10 books, is a regular speaker to business and community groups, and has served as a director and officer for several nonprofit organizations. Connect with Scott ([scottbutcher](https://www.linkedin.com/in/scottbutcher)) on LinkedIn, Twitter, or Facebook. This is his fourth contribution to *Marketer*.

BUILD BUSINESS™

THE BOTTOM LINE

AT BUILD BUSINESS

Scott Butcher will present “Beyond Marketing: Developing Your Brand as a Leader in Your Firm and Community” in the Leadership Track on August 26 at 3:15 pm. To learn more about this session, visit the Build Business Learning Center at www.buildbusiness.org.

HOW STRONG ARE YOUR SALES AND MARKETING SKILLS?



Expediting Profitable Connections*

Joe Takash, President, Victory Consulting
August 24, 1 – 5 pm,
Sheraton Chicago Hotel & Towers
www.buildbusiness.org/sales.htm

The higher you go, the less honest feedback (if any) you are likely to receive about your specific strengths and weaknesses in sales and marketing. Consequently, sales seldom maximize profitable opportunities—many of which are right in front of you.

This workshop will provide you with very candid insight into the sales process and three tangible takeaways. If you are truly interested in making a greater positive impact on your company's bottom line, this is a training session that you cannot miss.

* Preconference Workshop for Build Business: The Bottom Line, the SMPS National Conference. Registration for this program is separate and not included with conference registration. You do not need to register for conference to participate in this workshop.

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August 24 – 26, 2011
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