

Personal Branding & What It Means in 2016



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What is a personal brand? Building a personal brand will earn you more money, give you better career options and make you virtually immune from unemployment. When I think about my personal brand in 2016, it has occurred to me that it is similar to when I first heard the term in 2005. I had always thought of the term “brand” as pertaining to companies and brands like Tide (P&G’s flagship reliable laundry detergent for cleanest clothes), McDonald’s (trusted hamburger fast food chain) and Avis Rental Cars (“We Try Harder” to be your best rental car experience). I rarely ever thought of Jeff Willinger as a brand. And then something changed — I had sold my company of 15 years, Graphic Packaging, which had defined my being for most of my business life, and knew I had to figure out what this Jeff 2.0 was going to look like.

This was when social media was just coming into its own, and companies like Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn were coming to the forefront of people communicating a whole new way. Working out loud and collaboratively, I had the good fortune of being one of the early adopters on many social channels and was able to “put it out there” what I wanted to be and then build my brand from that point forward.

I was able to use social media to build a great personal brand and learned how to present myself as the best solution to customers’ and employers’ worst problems. By living my brand, I was able to learn the right ways to sell my knowledge capital and demonstrate my value to prospects and potential employers, while also rebranding myself. I was able to connect my online and offline networking together to successfully navigate my next career change — and the one after that. In today’s turbulent business environment, millions of people are seeking to strengthen their personal brands and demonstrate far greater value to potential customers and employers. Many of them are seeking to rebrand themselves as they move towards entirely new jobs and careers. Fortunately, social media offers powerful new tools for building personal brands, strengthening business and personal relationships, and

showing how you can solve the tough problems that keep customers and potential employers awake at night. Knowing how to use the social media tools to assist in building a personal brand that connects you to unprecedented new opportunities and makes you invaluable to your employer and your clients.

One of the keys to a successful personal brand is building your own storyline and online identity — beginning to “live” your brand and connecting your online brand and “in-real-life” brand. The key for me was choosing the social media tool that “put me on the map.” Twitter helped me by letting me add a biography that was 140 characters, so I was able to put myself out there, live my brand and meet my goals by supercharging my social media channels on a regular basis.

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I then added a blog as the hub of my social media wheel and used it to tell my story far more effectively. I decided to commit to a monthly post on a topic relevant to my personal brand. In my case, it was SharePoint, internal communications and ways to drive adoption and engagement around intranets. I was able to find content from such sources as Mashable, Tech Crunch, Harvard Business Review and Sloan Management Review to complement my personal ideas.

I have been able to avoid the killer mistakes too many business social networkers make by not oversharing, rather being a constant resource to my colleagues and connections in both real life and online. Given my experience, here are things you will need to keep top of

mind to positively shape your personal brand:

- Build a powerful social network that feeds opportunities to you.
- Connect with influential people that will help build your brand.
- Use the best tools and solutions for brand building.
- Create a great personal profile that sells.
- Build a personal brand that will get you promoted.

By building a recognizable personal brand, you’ll find that opportunities find you effortlessly. Whether it’s at work or at play, you will become a magnet for the opportunities you’re most interested in.



Jeff Willinger is the VP of digital inspiration at Rightpoint. He is an internationally recognized online influencer, analyst and expert on all things web collaboration, enterprise social networking and enterprise IT strategy. With experience spanning more than two decades, he is a global speaker and expert in all CMS solutions and is a technology and business evangelist with deep expertise in user experience, information architecture, enterprise content management and web 2.0 technology strategy. He is the president and founder of the Social Media Club of Chicago and serves as EVP for Business Marketing Association.

