

## Develop a Personal Brand to Minimize Job Search Woes

---

12/1/2006

By Rebecca R. Hastings

When it's time to search for a new position, HR professionals know they need to clean up their resumes, network and hone their interviewing skills. Personal branding avoids the need to tackle these chores all at once. And, once branded, individuals may find they no longer need to look for work; instead it looks for them.

Becoming well known in an industry or profession is a priority for those striving to establish a personal brand, says Susan Geary, owner of **1st Rate Rsums** in Prescott, Ariz. and vice president of public relations for **Career Directors International**, a professional association for career professionals: "Once you get to that point you don't even need a resume."

"The goal is for the candidate to do the hard work for the hiring manager," says Linda K. Rolie, principal of **Career Services**, a management consulting and counseling firm in Ashland, Ore. "Branding gives hiring managers a snapshot of what they do, what they know and how they get along with other people."

"The more times [a job seeker] can splash [their skills] across the hiring manager's desk and in their marketing and selling of themselves, the better," Rolie says.

But a resume alone may be insufficient to attract the attention of a hiring manager. "Individuals should make sure they can articulate the unique value they bring to an organization," says Abby Locke, president of **Premier Writing Solutions, LLC**, an executive resume-writing and personal branding services company located in Washington, DC.

To highlight accomplishments and skills individuals need a clear picture of what they have to offer. But Geary says many professionals fail to keep track of professional accomplishments and therefore struggle with this task. She suggests keeping a career file that includes copies of performance reviews, seminar information, emails from supervisors, and thank you notes from customers, with the same attention to detail that is given to tax files.

Geary says HR professionals should also gather information that demonstrates how they have impacted an organization's long-term results.

Once it has been established, Locke says an individual's brand should be conveyed consistently on the resume, career marketing documents, a 30-second elevator pitch, organizational affiliations and a web portfolio.

### Is Branding the Flavor of the Month?

Locke says **branding is not a new concept** though the idea of branding a person is being given greater attention now.

"Not only has Google made candidates more transparent to HR people it's also made HR people more transparent to candidates," says Kirsten Dixon, founding partner of **Brandego LLC**, a career and personal brand management consulting firm in Exeter,

N.H., and co-author of the soon-to-be-released *Career Distinction: Stand Out by Building Your Brand* (Wiley, 2007). "HR people should walk their talk," she says. "If they are Googling candidates, they should recognize that candidates are going to be Googling them."

"Personal branding has been around longer than the idea of online identity," Dixon says. "But the web has made it more important than ever to be incredibly clear about what your personal brand is and to consistently communicate that brand online."

Dixon says personal branding is the new method of career management. "It works well because it's incredibly positive," she says. "It's about who people really are and how to leverage their unique abilities."

Dixon says the branding process begins with extracting information about an individual, including what they uniquely offer. This includes surveying colleagues, clients, friends and family. "It also involves analyzing who your target audience is; who needs to know about you to help you reach your goals," she says. "We use this data to hone in on an individual's brand statement - their elevator pitch," says Dixon. "That brand statement is then applied consistently across their resume, [LinkedIn profile](#), web profile, cover letter, blog, etc."

"The next phase is expressing," Dixon says. "Once you've extracted your brand you have to come up with a plan to make sure your target audience is aware of who you are and what you offer."

Like product marketing personal brands are communicated narrowly in ways that make the individual visible to the target audience. "We don't have the budget to reach the world," Dixon says.

### **Avoid Being a Jack of All Trades**

Because there is so much information online, Dixon says part of the challenge is figuring out how to stand out. "One of the biggest problems we see when people are developing blogs is that they have 50 different categories [of information] where five or six would be better," Dixon says. "Strong brands are known for just a couple of things."

"I think blogs are one of the best ways to build your brand online," Dixon says. "It creates a two-way conversation, and anyone can create a blog with limited technical knowledge," she says, adding that blogs are either free or accessible at a very low cost.

Those concerned about the time it takes to maintain a blog should take heart. "Blogging experts will tell you to update blogs three times a week or daily," Dixon says. "But my advice is to do so at least three times a month." And although it's important to have some original content, she says it's more important to create a well-organized resource that highlights an individual's areas of expertise.

### **What Happens at Home Stays at Home**

"I strongly believe that professionals need to separate the personal from the professional," Dixon says. Those with personal websites should take advantage of the privacy features available on sites like Facebook and MySpace that allow the user to control who sees what, she says. "The tools are there; people just need to understand how to utilize them."

Professionals who want to spice up a blog with personal accomplishments, such as completion of a marathon, should do so with caution, according to Dixon. "The conservative approach is to avoid putting anything on a blog or web portfolio that you wouldn't put on a resume," she says. "The key is relevance - is the information relevant to your target audience?"

But Dixon says there are times when personal information can filter out those organizations that an individual would not want to work for anyway, such as those that conflict with political or religious beliefs. "Putting a little bit of who you are and what you think can help weed out no-win situations," she says. "That's really the benefit of branding," she adds, "It attracts the right kind of opportunities for you - the ones you will most enjoy."

### **If You Build It - and Manage It - They Will Come**

Dixon says anyone can quickly and easily establish a web presence. "One good starting point is to Google yourself to establish your baseline," she says. "If you have no presence at all, that says something. If you have very little presence, it's easy to build," she says. "But if you have negative stuff -- known as **digital dirt** -- then you really have to build and actively promote your own site so it will rank higher in search results than the dirt."

Dixon also recommends the use of profiling/online networking services like ZoomInfo, LinkedIn and Ziggs to help monitor and control an individual's online identity. ZoomInfo only looks for professional info and aggregates it into a profile, says Dixon, which may or may not be accurate. "You can check to see if you have a profile, register for free and update it," she says.

Dixon says profile sites are generally accurate: "The reason you can't get away with anything on them is because of peer pressure; your former colleagues are all looking at them too."

"There are other things HR people can do to establish their identity on the web," says Dixon, such as posting on related HR blogs, participating in online discussion forums and reviewing books about HR topics on Amazon.com.

"It's all about networking and giving -- serving as a resource," she says. "If you can get on the board of a professional association that's huge," Dixon says. "Professional associations are a great way to network, online and offline."

Whatever methods are used, the HR professional should make sure their identity is tightly related to their areas of expertise, Dixon adds.

Dixon says a solid web presence can even help an individual rebound when career challenges and economic downturns occur. "Opportunities seem to come to you rather than having to go out and get them all the time," she says. "It's like perpetual career management."

"If you manage your career on a daily basis -- like brushing your teeth -- then it doesn't become such a big job," Dixon says.

*Rebecca R. Hastings, SPHR, is online writer/editor for SHRM.*

## **Society for Human Resource Management**

1800 Duke Street  
Alexandria, Virginia  
22314 USA

Phone US Only: (800) 283-  
SHRM  
Phone International: +1 (703)  
548-3440

TTY/TDD (703) 548-  
6999  
Fax (703) 535-6490

Questions? [Contact SHRM](#)  
Careers [Careers @ SHRM](#)

©2009 SHRM. All rights reserved.