

Surviving, Succeeding, and Standing Apart by Branding Yourself

By Peter Montoya

No one wants to believe the need for their services will become obsolete - least of all independent professionals. Whether business is booming or tough times are looming, branding can position you in the hearts and minds of your clients so you stand out and are remembered longer. It's the most important form of insurance an entrepreneur can have.

By defining and promoting yourself in a way that makes you rationally and emotionally appealing to a targeted demographic by filling a specific need for them, the demand for your services will never expire.

Blending In vs. Survival

In an era of faceless corporations and online advice the only way a service-providing entrepreneur can succeed lies in his or her ability to market a strong personal brand. Individuals who market themselves as "product experts," or whose service orientation is not adequately unique or specialized, risk blending into the background or being replaced by larger competitors in their industry. The bottom line is that you need to give your consumers a reason to choose your services. You must present them with a focused message and benefit if you want to attract or maintain your clients.

You Are Your Product

In the face of grim prospects and competition, some thoughtful entrepreneurs are taking a different approach—packaging themselves as a commodity through creative, aggressive marketing. That's a radical idea to many people who work in industries where advertising and marketing is all but foreign. Marketing and the independent professional haven't usually gone hand in hand, for several reasons:

- In most industries, professionals are taught to focus only on selling and doing their jobs
- Many entrepreneurs are afraid they'll "turn off" prospects by using creative marketing tools
- We often believe that "the facts" are all a prospect wants
- Professionals aren't confident enough in the direction of their businesses to make drastic decisions on who their target audience is.

Positioning + Emotion = Clients

A growing number of independents, seeking a new direction in a changing field, are confronting these concerns head on with Personal Branding. As opposed to "product-" or "fact-based" marketing, Personal Branding uses brochures, logos, direct mail, public relations and other channels to position entrepreneurs as the brand of choice, not merely salespeople. The power of branding stems from the fact that it focuses on the one aspect of a service-oriented professional that never becomes obsolete: his or her expertise, service, and personal connection with clients.

Personal Branding promotes an identity of the individual that communicates on an entirely new level. It cleverly informs clients that the entrepreneur is a knowledgeable professional who brings more than a roster of products to the table - that he or she is a person with experiences and goals in common with the audience. This approach appeals more to emotion than to numbers, though the idea of financial security and prosperous investing is always an undercurrent. Rather than relegate the advisor to a mug shot and a bio on the back panel of a brochure, personal marketing makes the advisor the star of the show.

Attract Rather Than Chase

Personal Branding works for many reasons:

- It emphasizes "niche marketing," where professionals target certain segments of the population that fit their personality and skills
- It allows advisors to attract the clients they want instead of chasing after anyone they can find
- It's "downturn-proof" because it focuses on individual attributes that remain constant, no matter what the market does
- It's creative and memorable, unlike the generic, template-based advertising that is provided in most industries

Most important, personal marketing works because it acknowledges that service industries are about people working with people, not companies working with clients. It's a human approach that makes consumers feel comfortable about calling an advisor. And considering that at least 75% of buying decisions are based on emotion - not logic - that's a strong appeal.

A New Approach for a New Reality

Personal Branding is radical to some people. But we're working in radically changing times. In an age of free information, web service companies, and corporations who deliver rubber-stamper services, entrepreneurs who realize that they, not their products, are the real commodity will be the ones industries look to for leadership in the not-so-distant future.

Peter Montoya is president of Peter Montoya Inc., the world's only Personal Branding agency. For information on Personal Branding Magazine or his acclaimed book, *The Personal Branding Phenomenon* please visit www.petermontoya.com or call (866) 288-9300.