

# WHY MARKETING YOURSELF IS IMPORTANT



Simple Programmer  
Making the complex simple

JOHN SONMEZ

# Why Marketing Yourself Is Important

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# Introduction

You are probably reading this book because of marketing. That's right. You didn't just get this book by chance. I came up with a strategy to market this book and I executed that strategy to get you here reading this book.

Don't worry though, that doesn't mean that what I have to say or give you isn't valuable. It doesn't mean I am "scammy" or "evil." It just means that I found an efficient way to connect a product with a customer.

This is how the world works. It is fundamentally how business works. **All businesses have to figure out a way to connect a product or service with a customer who needs or wants that product or service.**

Unfortunately, spam emails which advertise mail order Viagra pills at cheap prices, and late night infomercials selling cheap products have given marketing a bad name. But, just because some people are taking advantage of people's weaknesses and preying on their insecurities while offering to sell them a magic pill, it doesn't mean all advertising and marketing is bad.

In fact, without the marketing, you probably wouldn't have been able to purchase many products and services which you thoroughly enjoy, because you would have never found out about them.

The same goes for marketing yourself and promoting yourself to advance your career. You can do it the mail order Viagra pill way, or you can do it the right way, where you are legitimately connecting a customer with a product or service.

In this book, I am going to show you how to market yourself in a way that primarily focuses on creating value for other people. By creating value instead of trying to take value, you'll create a solid reputation and brand that won't leave a customer feeling like they were cheated.

In all fields, it is those who learn to do self-promotion and marketing the right way who excel. They are able to rise out from the pack and blaze their own trails. They are able to create their own jobs and set their own terms, **because they have learned how to create value for others and to connect others with the value they create.**

The key to being able to do this is to shift your thinking from "*your career*" and "*your job*" to "*your business*." I love this quote by Jay-Z:

"I'm not a businessman, I'm a business, man!"

I think it perfectly sums up the shift in thinking you have to have to really be successful at marketing yourself and taking charge of your career.

In the software development world, we don't often hear much about marketing—certainly not in terms of the business which is ourselves. In fact, the only time the subject seems to come up is when creating a resume or going to a job interview. And, even in those situations, **most developers miss the opportunity to really show their skills and promote the product they are selling (themselves), simply because they view things in the completely wrong way.**

In this book, I'll be going over the basics of why and how to market yourself as a software developer. If you'd like to go deeper into the details of exactly how to create a personal brand and other topics like building a developer blog, check out my full [“How To Market Yourself as a Software Developer” package](#).<sup>1</sup> The goal of this book is really to help you shift your mindset from the world of being a software developer to that of being a software development business.

## Course vs Book

You may see me refer to the complete course or package in this book. This book was originally created to be part of a complete package called “How To Market Yourself as a Software Developer.” You can find the complete package at [devcareerboost.com](http://devcareerboost.com)<sup>a</sup>. The main difference between the package and the book is the level of detail. This book is designed to introduce you to the concepts of marketing yourself and give you an overall idea of the strategy involved in creating a personal brand and building a solid reputation. The package is designed to go into details about the specific suggestions and topics covered in this book.

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<sup>a</sup><http://devcareerboost.com>

It doesn't matter if you are employed with a big company, working for a startup, freelancing on your own, or somewhere in between, until you start seeing yourself and the work you do as a business, and learn how to appropriately market that business, you'll never go as far as you can and you'll always be limited by what someone is willing to pay you.

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<sup>1</sup><http://devcareerboost.com>

# Why Marketing Matters

Ever been to a night club and heard some cover-band play some famous band's cover?

Ever thought to yourself that it sounded like they played the song even better than the original band and wonder why this group of musicians is playing at this cheap night club while the other group is touring the world making millions?

Most people's first guess would be because of talent; the real rock band is more talented than the guys who play other band's covers. But that isn't quite the truth. In fact, in many cases, you'll find quite the opposite. **Sometimes, the most talented musicians are sitting on the sidelines while those with less talent are lip-syncing on stage and selling platinum albums.**

One of the biggest reasons for this disparity has to do with marketing. One band has the ability to market themselves, or hire someone who knows how to, and the other doesn't. **The best product doesn't win the competition, the one that is marketed the best does.**

The same is true of many other professions... including software development.

That doesn't mean you can get away with all style and no substance; you've got to have substance as well. It just means that substance or skill will only take you so far, and you'll need a bit of style, or marketing, to take you the rest of the way.

Many software developers advance pretty quickly early in their career. For those developers it looks like there is no end in sight, that is, until they hit that invisible glass ceiling that was hovering above them all along.

The glass ceiling that I am talking about prevents you from rising up higher. It puts a cap on your income and keeps you from advancing your career. It doesn't really take very long to hit this cap for most software developers. **I would guess you can be a senior software developer in somewhere between 8-12 years.**

The reason for this ceiling has to do with what I call the herd mentality. Many software developers have this herd mentality where they stick with the herd and value themselves based on where they fit into the herd. Being at the front of the herd is considered good, but being at the back of the herd is considered bad.

This is the wrong way to view your career, because it severely limits your potential and doesn't paint a realistic picture of your options. With this view, you can't see beyond the herd itself and your only real goal can be to get to the front of the herd, where, as we discussed before, is a glass ceiling that you can't pass through.

All the developers at the front of the herd tend to make pretty close to the same amount of money. There is distinction between the front and back of the herd, but there is little distinction between the developers that are already at the front.

Now, some developers are able to break away from the herd completely and blaze their own trails. Those developers no longer have to try and compete with other developers for positions at the front of the herd, because they have passed far in front of the herd where they are no longer grouped in and judged by the same standards as those who are still in the herd.

That is where marketing comes in; breaking away from the herd. **If you know how to properly promote yourself and build a personal brand for yourself, you can actually break away from the herd and outrun it.**

Marketing is important because it builds a name for yourself. When you have a name that people recognize, you have instant credibility and much higher perceived value.

Consider what happens when you go to your average job interview. The interviewer usually looks at your resume, asks you about your background, then asks you some technical questions to determine if you are qualified for the job.



A little secret here as well, most interviewers make the decision whether or not to hire you based on whether they like you; not on how qualified you are.

But, consider what would happen at that same job interview if the interviewer was an avid reader of your blog. Or, perhaps, you wrote a book about some technology the interviewer was interested in. Or gave a presentation at a conference the interviewer attended. Or wrote a magazine article—I think you get the point.

In the case where the interviewer already heard of you or knew of you ahead of time, you would be almost a shoe-in for the job. In fact, most of the time that situation would not even occur, because why interview someone you already know is qualified, and you know you like? Why not just hire them?

**There is a huge advantage to building up a reputation in the software development industry and it doesn't apply just to job interviews.**

Suppose you are asking for a raise. It is quite a bit easier to get one when your boss knows that your name is out there and other developers and hiring managers know who you are.

The same goes for picking up clients. If you are a freelancer or you want to become a freelancer, the last thing you want to do is beg for business. If you have to beg for business, you are going to have to offer low rates and you are just going to be moving from master to master, but if you have a bit of a reputation in the community, business will be coming to you instead; then, you can set the rate.

Don't get scared by what I am saying. It doesn't mean you have to become a programmer celebrity to take advantage of these perks of having a name. Not every software developer will, or would want to reach that high of a level of fame. But, we can all build our own audiences and communities based around the value we provide in some area of expertise.

I'm not going to lie though. **What I'm going to be asking you to do is probably going to move you at least a little bit out of your comfort zone.** Part of marketing yourself is putting yourself



out there. It can be difficult to do that if you are terrified about what other people will think about you.

But don't worry. We'll take baby steps to get there and you don't have to speak at conferences in front of hundreds of people or record yourself on video and post it to the internet, but if you want to, I'll show you how to do both of those things as well.

# Your Goal

If you are going to take on a new endeavor, you should probably define some goals. It is really hard to get anywhere if you don't know where you are going.

## Be everywhere

I like to borrow a promotion strategy from a mentor of mine, Pat Flynn. Pat runs a website and podcast at <http://smartpassiveincome><sup>2</sup> where he talks quite a bit about the topics that I'm going to be covering in this book. So, if you are interested, I'd recommend checking it out.

Pat has a marketing strategy he calls the “be everywhere” strategy. The idea behind this strategy is that you should be everywhere you can, so that in whatever field or niche you are serving, wherever someone goes in that niche, they can't help but find you.

I really like this strategy and I think it is a good goal to have when trying to market yourself and build a personal brand, because when someone sees you in more than one place, you become much more relevant to them very quickly. There is a sort of instant credibility when you see the same face or hear the same name in more than one place.

Sometimes I'll submit a blog post and it will get on the front page of the popular developer news site Hacker News, and I'll get a bunch of emails from regular readers who read my blog or listen to my podcast, because they are excited that someone they know was on Hacker News. I'll also get a drove of new followers after a good Hacker News post; most likely because, someone who had seen my brand before recognized it for a second time and now I had instant credibility in their eyes.

## Find a niche

One of the key things you want to think about in marketing yourself and building your personal brand is where is the “everywhere” that you want to be—you've got to define what everywhere means for you. It's not like you are going to expect that someone goes to CNN.com and sees your face, then they turn on their TV and there you are again smiling at them. (If you make it that far, you write a book, and I'll buy it from you.)

Instead, you want to focus on being everywhere usually inside what is called a niche. A niche is simply a segment of a market that is very specific. The more specific the niche is, the easier it is to conquer it and the easier it is to “be everywhere” within that niche.

Let me give you some examples.

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<sup>2</sup><http://smartpassiveincome.com>

A good buddy of mine, Josh Earl, is a developer who has chosen to promote himself and his products inside the niche of a specific text editor used for development called Sublime Text. Josh wrote [a book about Sublime Text](https://leanpub.com/sublime-productivity)<sup>3</sup> and he is working on an even more specific book about developing plugins for Sublime Text.

This is an example of a great niche. It isn't difficult for Josh to become an authority in this small niche market and for him to "be everywhere" when Sublime Text is mentioned. If he ever wants to get a job at a company where the developers use Sublime Text, he is going to have a very easy time doing it, because in that niche market, he's pretty famous. Go ahead and search "*sublime text book*" on Google and you should find his book either at the top or near the top of the page.

That is just one example of niching down. You can, of course, choose a niche as big or as small as you want. Just know that the bigger the niche you choose, the harder it will be to dominate that niche.

For example, suppose you decide that you are going to be the Dart language tutorial dude and you are going to produce a huge collection of Dart tutorials, blog posts, and articles about Dart; you'd probably be able to make some inroads into that market pretty quickly.

But, suppose you wanted to be the "the C++" guy. That is a bit of a tougher shell to crack—although it can be done. Instead, if you wanted to go the C++ route, it might be better to be the C++ memory management guy or the C++ pointer dude. But, don't worry about that for now. We'll talk more about that when we get to talking about branding.

The big goal you should want to have is to pick some area that gets a large amount of exposure in that area so that people start to recognize your name or brand in that area.

Smaller goals along the way might be increasing your blog traffic to a certain amount or getting a number of Twitter followers or growing an email list of people you send out updates and information to.

You could call what we are trying to do "building a following." You measure your success by how big a following you build in the area that you are after.



Big areas allow for a large number of people to build big followings in them. Smaller areas allow for a smaller number of people to build large followings in them, but they are generally less competitive. (There are only so many podcasts about JQuery I can stand listening to on my run.)

## Add (mostly) free value

The main form of currency you'll use to build your following will be value. 90% or more of this value you'll be giving away for free, and perhaps 10% of it you'll be charging for.

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<sup>3</sup><https://leanpub.com/sublime-productivity>

What does this “value” that you are giving away look like?

A large portion of it will be things like blog posts, articles you write, or tutorials you produce. Some of it will be speaking engagements or podcasts you produce. But, the smallest portion of it will be things that you produce and charge money for.

**I’ve been able to build up an audience and credibility by giving away 90% of what I produce for free.** Every week I create at least one new blog post, a YouTube video, and a podcast—all of which are completely free. If I didn’t provide this free value to software developers looking to improve their careers and lives, I wouldn’t be able to charge for consulting or other products that I do create. When you start giving someone value, they want more of it. And if you give them enough value, or the perceived value of what you are giving is high enough, they’ll be willing to pay you for it.

This doesn’t mean that you have to create your own products and sell them on the internet. Not everyone is interested in doing that. Some developers just want to get a better job, or get more freelance work, or enjoy the benefits of being invited to speak at locations around the world.

But, regardless of what your final goal is, you are going to have to learn how to create some kind of value and give that value away, if you want to be able to build any kind of a reputation and following online.

Everywhere you look, you can see examples of this. Think about popular radio talk show hosts or television talk show hosts. Sure, sponsors pay to advertise on their programs and some of them are paid by stations, but to their audience, most of what they provide is completely free. Most of them write books, and that is where they charge money—after they’ve already created value and given it away for free.

The multiple time New York Times best-selling author, [Tim Ferris<sup>4</sup>](http://www.fourhourworkweek.com/), is a master of this. Before his books came out, he posted many blog posts, wrote up editorial articles, did podcast interviews, and gave away a large amount of value for free, in order to build an audience. When he finally launched his first book, “The 4 Hour Work Week,” it jumped right up to the top of the New York Times bestseller list.

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<sup>4</sup><http://www.fourhourworkweek.com/>