How can personal branding help you?

Whenever two people meet for the first time they very quickly develop an impression of each other. Although people can override their initial instincts about a person, this usually involves time and significant effort. Frequently, a person’s first impression of someone else remains long after the first meeting.

In a situation where you have one chance to impress a potential employer quickly, such as an interview, presentation or networking event, it is obviously important to ensure that you create the best first impression possible.

Experts have studied first encounters and have estimated that only 7% of the impression that you make is based on what you actually say, with 38% resulting from your tone of voice and 55% being based on your physical impact.

Personal branding is a powerful tool which enables you to analyse your physical impact in depth and to make changes which will enhance the impression that you make when meeting others for the first time.

Personal branding also encourages you to pay attention to your personal attributes such as your values and ambitions. Undergoing a process of personal branding can therefore help you to understand yourself more thoroughly and to clarify your career goals.

What is personal branding?

To understand personal branding let’s consider the personal brands of two celebrities: Victoria Beckham and Russell Brand. What words would you use to describe them?

It is likely that you have used words like posh, aloof or contrived to describe Victoria Beckham, whereas you may have used words like eccentric, theatrical or controversial to describe Russell Brand.

These words sum up our understanding of what these celebrities stand for, what their values are and what they’re all about. The ideas and image that the celebrities are conveying are their personal brand.

Celebrities often think very carefully how they want to be perceived by the public and have employed teams of marketing experts to help them identify and establish their personal brand. But what do these experts do? How are personal brands formed?

Take a moment to think about Russell Brand and Victoria Beckham again. How do factors such as their clothes, body language, pose, facial expressions and grooming impact on our impressions of these celebrities?

For example we could say the following about Victoria Beckham:

- The way that she rarely engages with her audience by smiling, together with the barrier that her trademark sunglasses create, gives her an air of aloofness.
- Her immaculate grooming and tailored, perfectly matched clothes contributes to her brand as ‘posh’.

Personal brands are therefore initially built through a person’s

- choice of clothing (colour, shape)
- personal grooming
- body language
- facial expressions

As we discover more about another person through hearing them speak, by witnessing their behaviour or by learning about their interests, their personal brand may be confirmed further or contradicted.

For example, Russell Brand’s eccentricity and controversial nature is not only suggested by his individual dress sense and haphazard grooming, but also by his use of elaborately theatrical words which are mixed with slang and a cockney accent. Over time, the projects that he has been involved with have been
contentious, confirming his personal brand to be one of controversy and individualism.

Personal brands can therefore be described as the impressions, ideas and connections that we make about people built on factors such as:

- choice of clothing (colour, shape)
- personal grooming
- body language
- facial expressions
- movement
- speech
- use of language
- behaviour

**Your personal brand**

Whilst celebrities are often very aware of their personal brand and may have worked hard to change or maintain it with the help of experts, ordinary people like you and I also have a personal brand.

Have a look at the people below and ask yourself the following questions:

- What words would you use to describe each person?
- What do you think their values are?
- What job do you think they do?
- Do you like them?
- What is their personal brand?

It is likely that you were able to answer all of the questions for each person listed, simply by looking at their picture, which demonstrates how easily people make assumptions about others based on image alone.

Now look at the pictures again paying attention to factors such as: clothing, hair styles, personal grooming, facial expressions and body language. Ask yourself, how exactly do these factors build on the personal brands of the people in the photos?

For example, we could say that person 1 has a smart suit, with glasses and slicked back hair. This suggests that he works in a corporate environment where smartness and professional attire is valued. His posture is fairly casual, but he is staring very directly at the camera which makes him appear slightly confrontational. This suggests confidence, bordering on arrogance and, together with his corporate attire, implies that he wants to be perceived as successful and a high flying business man with status and prestige.

By contrast we could say that person 5’s warm smile and casual polo shirt implies that he is friendly and wishes to be welcoming. This impression is enhanced by him informally sipping from his mug and sitting on what looks like a sofa or easy chair. From this picture, we would never assume that he works in an achievement focused corporate environment.

Just as individual factors such as choice of clothing, personal grooming, body language, facial expressions, movement, speech, use of language and behaviour create a personal
brand for the celebrities previously mentioned, the same factors build a brand for people like you and me.

It is important to note that even people who pay little attention to their appearance have a personal brand. For example, person 7 is wearing a plain shirt and jeans, lacks make up, wears heavy functional glasses and has her hair pulled back. This makes her come across as plain and understated and she almost sinks into the background. Even if she has given no thought to her appearance, she still has a personal brand.

As you cannot prevent other people from making assumptions about you based on factors such as image, it seems sensible to make this work in your favour by deliberately ensuring that your personal brand presents you as you would like to be perceived.

How your brand may change

Let's look at person 7 again and imagine that you see the same woman, dressed in exactly the same way in the following locations. Ask yourself which context seems to suit her the most and which the least:

- Delivering a dynamic multi media presentation to a group of advertising executives
- Studying in silence in the university library

To successfully deliver a dynamic presentation to an audience of advertising executives who, due to the nature of their work, are likely to be highly imaginative and creative, it is important to create the impression that you have these qualities yourself. In this photo, person 7 sends an unspoken message to her audience that she lacks vibrancy and dynamism and it will be much harder for her to convince them through what she says. For this reason, it is likely you decided that person 7 would be more suited to the context of 'studying in silence in the university library' where it doesn’t matter that she is sinking into the background.

We could say that her current brand works in the context of studying in the university library, but not in the context of delivering a dynamic multi-media presentation to a group of advertising executives. It is impossible to say that her personal brand is ultimately right or wrong; what we can say is that in some contexts her brand works, whereas it doesn’t in others.

Many people adapt their image automatically according to different contexts. For example, how they present themselves when they are relaxing at home may be very different to how they appear when at work. Think about yourself; does your brand change slightly or significantly according to different environments? When working out whether you want to change your brand, it is therefore important to be aware of the context in which the brand will be used.

If you become aware that your brand really isn’t helping you to be perceived in the way that you’d like, it is possible to undergo a process of rebranding. Celebrities often do this when they want to be perceived differently by the public. For example, think about the way that Angelina Jolie used to convey a gothic look by choosing to dress head-to-toe in black, by ensuring that her skin remained very pale and by wearing her hair long and dark. More recently she is often pictured with her family wearing more casual, almost hippy clothing with much lighter hair and tanned skin. She has changed her brand from gothic rebelliousness to nurturing motherhood.

You may be able to think of other celebrities who have changed their brand over time. Good examples are Madonna, Kylie Minogue and Gwyneth Paltrow.

Make-over programmes such as *What not to Wear* and *How to Look Good Naked* also use the principles of re-branding to help their clients change their appearance so that they feel more confident and so that others perceive them differently.

Some people are uncomfortable with the process of personal branding because they feel that they are consciously manipulating aspects of themselves and therefore being false or interfering with their personal identity.

However, it is important to remember that a person’s sense of self or identity often shifts, develops or changes over time. In fact, Angelina Jolie, as previously described, is a good example of this.

Think about yourself. How have you changed over the past few years? Has your image also changed? It is likely that the way you see yourself has changed slightly and it is also very likely that the contexts in which you move have also changed. Adapting your brand
is therefore a way to display many facets of your own character, interests and values and it is something that happens quite naturally.

If you find yourself adopting an image that seems contradictory to your sense of self in order to fit into a certain environment, it is worth asking whether that particular environment really suits you or not. For example, someone who has personal brand values of creativity and non-conformity may be very uncomfortable working in a corporate setting where immaculately pressed suits and shirts are required.

Evaluating and adapting your personal brand

Now that you have looked at what personal branding is and how a brand may change, you are ready to look at your own brand, see whether it is working effectively and decide what (if anything) could be changed.

Personal branding involves three stages:

1. Firstly, you need to decide what you want our personal brand to be. This requires you to clarify what you think is important, how you would like to be perceived by others and your purpose/context.
2. The next stage is to check that your personal brand is working. This involves evaluating whether the outward manifestations of your brand (i.e. your appearance, language and behaviour) match what you want your brand to be. It also involves getting feedback from other people to see how you are actually being perceived.
3. The last stage involves identifying the things that you want to change about yourself to make your personal brand more effective.

On the next few pages there are several quizzes that can help you with each of these three strategies.
Stage 1: What do you want your brand to be?

Motivations quiz

This quiz will help you to identify the things that motivate you and your ambitions. To complete the quiz imagine you have reached the end of your life. Ask yourself what you would have liked to have achieved and how you would like to be remembered by people. There are some ideas listed below: tick any that appeal to you and feel free to add your own.

I would like to be remembered as someone who….

☐ Served or helped those who were in need
☐ Was always a great listener
☐ Was always good at carrying out orders
☐ Helped people to achieve their potential
☐ Was good at bringing projects to a successful conclusion
☐ Mastered some technique, or field
☐ Did something that no one had ever done before
☐ Excelled and was the best at whatever it is you did
☐ Pioneered or explored some new technology
☐ Fixed something that was broken
☐ Made something work when everyone else had failed or given up
☐ Improved something, made it better, or perfected it
☐ Combated a negative idea/philosophy/force/influence and prevailed
☐ Made an impact and caused change
☐ Did work which brought more information/truth into the world
☐ Did work which brought more beauty into the world through painting, craft designing, constructing etc
☐ Did work which brought more justice, truth and ethical behaviour into the world
☐ Had a vision of what something could be and made that vision real
☐ Developed or built something when there was nothing
☐ Set up a successful business
☐ Exploited and influenced a situation/market before others saw the opportunity
☐ Put together a great team which made a huge difference in its field, industry or community
☐ Was a good decision maker
☐ Was acknowledged by everyone as a great leader
☐ Had status in my field, industry or community
☐ Was in the spotlight, gained recognition and was well known
☐ Was able to acquire possessions, things or money
☐ Did work which involved great accuracy and attention to detail
Personal brand qualities quiz

This quiz will help you to identify your personal brand qualities by asking you to select key words that describe yourself and by asking you to identify how you would like to be described by others. Have a look at the list of adjectives below, then:

1. Tick any of the adjectives that describe how you would like to be perceived by others
2. Tick any of the adjectives that generally describe how you see yourself

Feel free to add any other adjectives that aren’t listed.

- Creative
- Attractive
- Forward thinking
- Dynamic
- Relaxed
- Upbeat
- Reliable
- Powerful
- Considerate
- Efficient
- Successful
- Credible
- Sharp
- Elegant
- Approachable
- Professional
- Dramatic
- Helpful
- Stylish
- Versatile
- Modern
- Quirky
- Caring
- Warm
- Effective
- Capable
- Imaginative
- Decisive
- Down to earth

Brand statement exercise

This exercise will help you to write a short, punchy statement which sums up what you want to achieve, what your purpose is, what your values are, how you see yourself and how you want to be perceived by others. It will become a way of articulating clearly what you want your personal brand to be. Having a brand statement will have a multitude of benefits such as:

- Enabling you to introduce yourself clearly, comfortably and succinctly in situations where you need to impress others (i.e. when networking, meeting potential employers or at a job interview).
- Enabling you to be 100% sure about what you want your personal brand to be so that you can check that it is working.
- Enabling you to be clear about your purpose and what you’re all about so that you feel more certain and confident about your career aims.

A brand statement should be short and punchy and easy to remember. It can include your values, career goals, strengths, purpose, what you find motivating and how you see yourself. Examples of brand statements could be:

- An entrepreneur: ‘I use my business acumen and creativity to spot opportunities and creatively take risks to do things that no-one else has done for financial reward’.
- A youth worker: ‘I encourage, empower and inspire young people to adopt positive outlooks on life and to contribute to the world’.
- A civil engineer: ‘I design and build the structures that society relies on every day with efficiency, resourcefulness and professionalism’.

Now take some time to create your own brand statement. Use the values and motivations that you identified in the previous two quizzes and think about:

- How you would describe yourself
- How you want to be perceived by others
- What is unique about you
- What your key values are
- What your key aims/objectives are
- What you can offer an employer
Stage 2: Is your brand working?

Now you have identified what you want your personal brand to be, you need to check that it is working. This involves assessing yourself and getting feedback from others regarding the factors that we identified earlier. To recap, these are:

- choice of clothing (colour, shape)
- personal grooming
- body language
- facial expressions
- movement
- speech
- use of language
- behaviour

In the lists below tick all the boxes that apply to you:

**General style**
- Natural and comfortable
- 'It'll do' attitude
- Not bothered about fashion
- Well co-ordinated and stylish
- Always appropriate
- Classic
- Creative
- Fashionable
- High maintenance
- Trendy
- Dramatic
- Expensive
- Designer
- Clashing styles

**Choice of clothing: colour**
- Bright
- Clashing
- Safe and conservative
- Colours that suit me
- Neutral (black, white, grey, brown)
- Soft pastel colours
- No idea which colours suit me
- Often wear patterned clothes

**Choice of clothing: shape**
- Tailored
- Well fitting clothes
- Clothes too tight
- Clothes loose and baggy
- Figure hugging
- Wear clothes that flatter my body shape

**Personal grooming**
- Overlooked
- Always wear make-up (women)
- Always do a full length check before leaving the house
- Always immaculate
- Shower every morning
- Unshaven
- Never wear stained or worn clothes
- Well fitted clothes
- Iron my clothes
- Always style hair in the morning
- No dandruff

**Body language**
- Strong handshake
- Weak handshake
- Dominating handshake
- Limp handshake
- Upright posture
- Slouched posture
- Comfortable posture
- Stiff posture
- Weight evenly distributed
- Weight mainly on one foot and hip
- Tendency to fold arms
- Tendency to put hands on hip
- Tendency to use hands to illustrate point
- Tendency to sit on hands
- Not sure what to do with arms
- Touch face frequently
- Hand over mouth
- Chew a pen
- Open and inviting hand gestures
- Often sit forwards
- Often sit back
- Often swing on a chair
- Cross legs
- Sit with legs apart
- Sit with knees together
Facial expressions
- Often smile
- Lots of eye contact
- Look down frequently
- Frequently frown
- Serious expression
- Dead pan

Movement
- Walk in a relaxed way
- Fast and purposeful when walking
- Stroll at a snail’s pace
- Jerk knee or foot when sitting down
- Fidget with keys/ hair/ face

Speech
- Soft
- Forceful
- Powerful
- Loud
- Distinctive
- Accented
- High-pitched
- Low-pitched
- Monotonous
- Use intonation
- Lacking in clarity
- Well paced
- Fast paced
- Slow paced

Use of language
- Use slang frequently
- Always use language that is appropriate to the person that I’m speaking to
- Use figurative language
- Brief, factual and to the point
- Frequently use hyperbole/exaggeration
- Often use humour
- Don’t finish sentences
- Use verbal mannerisms too frequently (eg ‘um’ or a favourite phrase like ‘sort of’ or basically’ or ‘I mean’)
- Use jargon
- Frequently agree with others
- Frequently disagree with others
- Never state own conclusions
- Always give opinions
- Always use language that is respectful of other people’s race, religion

Behaviour
- Listen and show an interest in others
- Dominate conversations
- Join in group activities
- Don’t speak in group situations
- Encourage others to join in
- Interrupt others frequently
- Abrupt
- Remember people’s names
- Direct about asking for what I want
- Take responsibility
- Say ‘no’ firmly without causing offence
- Prone to emotional outbursts
- Emotionally sensitive
- Express feelings assertively
- Pay other people compliments
- Show sympathy for others
- Don’t give up when faced with set backs
- Strive for a job to be completed
- Frequently moody

Look over the boxes that you have ticked and ask yourself whether the factors that you have identified support the brand that you want to present. For example, if you want your brand to be one of dynamism and assertiveness but you have identified that you generally have a deadpan expression, a weak handshake and a slouched posture you perhaps need to work on these areas as they obviously aren’t contributing to your personal brand.
Getting feedback

It is impossible to really know how we are being perceived by others without getting feedback. Choose a few people who you trust and who will be honest enough to answer the following questions:

What kind of image do I project?

What impression do I make on others when I first meet them?

How do other people react to me?

What one behavioural trait might be worth changing?

What aspect of my image/appearance might be worth changing?

If you feel comfortable, you could also ask another person to complete the Personal Brand Qualities Quiz and the Is your brand working? exercise whilst thinking about you. This will give you more detailed information about how you are frequently perceived by others.
Stage 3: Action plan

Now that you have identified what you want your personal brand to be and have checked how well it is working, you can complete a plan of action to clarify what you want to change and how you will make these changes.

People like to action plan in various ways. Perhaps you use an electronic diary or write lists or maybe you use an electronic portfolio like Pebblepad. You need to choose a method of action planning that will work for you and which will keep you motivated. The table below can be used as your personal branding action plan, or you could take some of the ideas from it to help you action plan in your chosen format. When planning, always ensure that your goals are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound). The following form encourages you to create SMART goals.

Advice on completing your action plan

Things I want to change:
Ensure that you are as specific as possible when filling in this section. For example ‘my choice of clothes for accountancy interviews’ is better than ‘my appearance’

Why do I want to make the change?
Specifying why you want to make the change will remind you about the benefits that this particular change will bring and will therefore stop the action plan becoming merely a list of tasks which you are unmotivated to complete.

What specific steps will I take to improve this area?
Breaking your goal down into smaller steps will help you to clarify exactly what you need to do and will make the goal seem more achievable.

For example, if your goal was to improve your ability to remember people’s names, the steps that you might take could be:

1. To ask other people how they remember people’s names
2. To read a book on improving your memory
3. To experiment with different methods (carrying an address book, entering names onto your phone etc)

When will I complete each step by?
Setting yourself a date by which you will have achieved each step will help you to stay focused and will encourage you to actually complete every step.

How will I know when I have successfully made the improvement?
This section will ensure that the goals that you have set for yourself can be measured and that they are therefore realistic and achievable. It also forces you to assess objectively whether you have successfully made a change, avoiding the possibility of you thinking that you have when in actual fact, you haven’t. For example, if your goal is to speak more clearly and loudly in a group situation, you may ask a friend to give you honest feedback at the end of one month to tell you if you have made an improvement or not.

How will I ensure that I maintain the change that I make?
This section encourages you to figure out a strategy to maintain the change on an ongoing basis. For example, if your goal was to wear brighter clothes you may decide to donate your duller clothes to a charity shop preventing you from ever wearing them again!
## Personal Branding Action Plan

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<th>Things I want to change/ improve</th>
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Further information

Reference books
We have many books relevant to the topic of personal branding in the Careers Centre including:


This book contains a chapter about using speech and body language effectively.


Contains a section on etiquette and dress in the workplace.


Includes a section on body language, identifying what you really want and building relationships through making good first impressions.


Sections on communication and body language.


This book is a comprehensive guide about all issues related to personal branding. Ask one of the Careers Advisers to view it in the Careers Centre.

Workshops
We run workshops on a wide variety of career topics including personal branding. Every Summer we run a three day course Brand New You! which is specifically about personal branding. Check the *Workshops and Events* section of our website [www.wlv.ac.uk/careers](http://www.wlv.ac.uk/careers) for latest news.

Help with personal branding
Our Careers Advisers can guide you through a process which enables you to identify your values, motivations and career goals. The Careers Advisers can also give you feedback on how effectively you present yourself in your applications, CVs and interviews.

To see an Adviser, drop into the Careers Centre on MD Concourse from Monday to Friday, 11:00am – 4:00pm in term time and from 1:00pm – 4:00pm in vacations. Special arrangements operate on other campuses. Ring 321414 or see our website for details.

Titles in the *Employability Skills* series

- Job Hunting
- Your CV
- Interview Skills
- Effective Application Forms
- Presentations
- Assessment Centres
- Psychometric Tests
- Getting the most from Volunteering
- **Personal Branding**
- Creative Job Search Strategies

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