Work Daze: A brand new brand you

by Bob_Goldman

Life is so unfair. In today's economy you actually have work to look for work, taking valuable couch time to counterfeit diplomas, or invent accomplishments like winning the Nobel Prize for Barbecue.

It's just not enough to be a conniver and a kiss-up. These days, you also have to be a brand.

"Branding" â€” that's the buzzword in employment circles these days. Potential employers want to be able to pluck you out of the great morass of generic job seekers simply because they instantly recognize in you something unique and memorable â€” like Kleenex, Coca-Cola, or ex-lax.

According to reporter Alina Tugend of The New York Times, branding professionals can teach you how to wrap your scared, feeble, inadequate self in a bright and bold new label, complete with unforgettable name and button-cute graphics.

Like Dan Schawbel, the author of "Me 2.0: Building a Powerful Brand to Achieve Career Success," who suggests the key to building your brand is finding your niche. You might think you have already found your niche â€” it's under your desk â€” but for Schawbel the secret for creating your brand is to "discover your passion" and "put it together with your experience."

For example, your passion for thrift could be put together with your experience stealing other people's lunches from the coffee room refrigerator to create a kind of Robin Hood brand. You steal from hungry and give to the rich, mainly yourself. Gee, I see a lot of Wall Street firms typed up offer letters already.

Whether you brand yourself as proven and reliable, like Metamucil, or calm in the face of stress, like Zanex, or wild and sexy, like Desenex, establishing your brand is only the first step in the branding process. That's right, Mr. and Ms. Brand X, you also have to market yourself.

The favored place to let your branding flag fly is the Internet. "It's about building a community," says Veronica Fielding, the president of Digital Brand Expressions. Makes sense. You certainly don't want to meet anyone face to face, which would mean the logical place to expose the brand new Brand You is one of the popular antisocial networking sites, like Facebook, or Linked-In. Start with your online profile. Instead of putting down prosaic, expected information, like your blood type, or the name of your favorite Jonas Brother, use graphics to make your online persona match your brand.

Let's imagine that your brand identity is designed to show your aggressive approach to business problems. You would want to upload photos of bloody battle scenes of carnage and slaughter, the better to demonstrate what you will do to the competition, or any co-worker who uses your pencil.

Important as it is to establish your brand's unique and scary presence, it is only the beginning of your online networking efforts. "You want to find groups," Fielding suggests, "alumni, former employees of your last jobs, trade groups." The idea here is to join the group and then wait in hiding â€” a cyberspace stalker â€” for opportunities to "establish yourself as someone insightful" by "chiming in with your opinion."

Unfortunately, your opinions are usually quite lame, which is probably why you are looking for a job in the first place. But don't let that stop you from promoting Brand You. Demonstrate you are a team player by butting into online conversations with supportive messages, like "you guys are big doo-doo heads." Demonstrate your abilities as a "people person" by adding a smiley-face emotogram to every e-mail, even the e-mails that include threats and promises of retribution.

Now that's the way to build a brand.

The experts also suggest that you promote your brand in the offline world. Don't go out in sweats and old T-shirts; you never know who you might run into. In the same spirit, be sure to sleep in your best Armani interview outfit. You never know when a fire will break out, and you'll find yourself on the sidewalk with a prospective employer.

Another piece of good brand advice is from author Sherry Beck Paprocki, who cautions that you shouldn't hover over the free buffet at a networking meeting, because she "would hate to have three meatballs in my mouth and try to explain what I want to do."

This wouldn't be a problem for you, of course. As anyone who knows you knows, having three meatballs in your mouth is what your brand is all about.

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