Monday Tips
All About You: Top 10 Personal Branding Tips for Students

What are the key elements of a student's personal brand? Here are 10 tips to jump-start your branding efforts:

1. Be authentic. Before you even think about your personal brand, you must think about who you really are and what you really want. What have you accomplished so far? What are you passionate about? What are your goals? If you find it difficult to analyze yourself, ask friends or relatives to describe your best qualities and greatest achievements or take a self-assessment test online or through your college career center.

2. Learn how to introduce yourself. Once you're more clear on who you are, the next step is being able to communicate that to others. "Tell me about yourself" is a much harder assignment than it seems, especially in professional situations. Learn how to concisely, confidently say your name, your recent history and your goals, then practice, practice, practice until you're comfortable telling your own story.

3. Show your confidence. While it's never a good idea to project arrogance, many students err on the side of self-deprecation. Even if you feel inexperienced or awkward in professional situations, never make fun of yourself or put yourself down. If you project confidence and comfort with yourself, others will be comfortable with you.

4. Develop the tools of the trade. Just as a company or product needs marketing materials, you need various items to "market" yourself to recruiters, networking contacts, grad school admissions committees and others. These materials include your resume, cover letters, email address, voicemail message, online profiles and website or blog. Every representation helps to reinforce the brand you want to present, so be professional and consistent across each medium.

5. Show your cards. Business cards are a great way to show your professionalism and desire to keep in touch with the people you meet, and they are increasingly popular among career-minded students. Don't worry if you don't have a title or company; just print simple, professional-looking cards with your name, phone number and email address and, if you'd like, your college and major. VistaPrint is a good resource for free or inexpensive business cards.

6. Dress for success. Make sure your personal appearance matches the image you want to project. Find out what kind of clothes are appropriate for your desired industry and invest in the best you can reasonably afford. When in doubt, err on the side of formality. A great strategy is to have one or two reliable, high-quality outfits that are appropriate for a job interview or professional event and keep them clean and pressed at all times.

7. Build a professional online image. Everyone is Googling everyone else these days. So be vigilant about your online identity. Even if your social network settings are tight, take down any photos of partying, drinking or "unprofessional" behavior just in case. Then, enhance your brand online by creating a strong profile and becoming active on LinkedIn, the professional social network.

8. Take a writing class. Guess why the "I Judge You When You Use Poor Grammar" group on Facebook has over 400,000 members? Even in the days of IM, texting and Twitter, writing and speaking skills still matter. Use proper grammar, capitalization and spelling in all professional communications (that means no LOLs, BRBs or ROTFLs!).

9. Ask for feedback. Find a professional you trust—a friend, relative, professor, etc.—who will be candid with you and ask this person to tell you if there are any areas where you're getting in your own way. For instance, do you say "like" or "you know" too much? Do you come across as hyper, entitled or uninformied? If necessary, take a class or get some coaching in any area where you could use some polish.

10. Reassess your personal brand regularly. Your experience, ideas and ambitions are going to evolve as your career develops, so make sure your personal brand is keeping up. Just as you should regularly update your resume, remember to regularly revisit your self-introduction, wardrobe, online profiles and other elements of your personal brand every few months. Be flexible. "Brand You" is always a dynamic work in progress.
Monday Worksheet
Your Elevator Pitch: The Foundation of Your Personal Brand

What is an elevator pitch?
Imagine stepping into an elevator in a downtown office building. As the doors close, the person standing next to you says, "Hi, I'm a recruiter at your dream company. Tell me about yourself." Are you prepared for an opportunity like this? Could you concisely introduce yourself, your background and your career aspirations in the time of a quick elevator ride—30 seconds or less?

"Elevator pitch" is a popular term for the basic introduction of who you are and what you're looking for. It can be used in a variety of professional situations such as networking events, career fairs, cover letters and formal interviews. (The elevator, of course, is optional.)

Why is an elevator pitch important?
In most situations, you won’t have time to tell someone your life story or to list every accomplishment on your resume. The best elevator pitches provide enough background information and enthusiasm so the other person wants to continue a conversation with you.

Here is a simple 4-step process for developing a strong and effective elevator pitch.

1. Know yourself.
The first step to introducing yourself effectively is knowing who you are and what makes you unique. Ask yourself the following questions and jot down your answers:

Which of your previous jobs, even if they were part-time jobs, internships or volunteer positions, provided you with experience relevant to what you hope to do now? If none, what about your college major or extracurricular activities?

What are your strongest skills?

What are your strengths and passions, career-wise?

What kinds of jobs, companies or industries are you pursuing now?

From PricewaterhouseCoopers' eBook on Personal Branding
What can you say about yourself that will set you apart from other entry-level job candidates? What makes you memorable and special?

2. Craft your pitch.
   Think of your pitch in three parts:
   
   1. **Who are you?** Remember that your primary goal is simply to introduce yourself. Share your name and place yourself in context by explaining what school you attend, what you’re studying or where you currently work.

   2. **What are your major accomplishments/passions/unique skills?** Leverage the skills you listed earlier and frame them in a way that is meaningful to a potential employer or networking contact. What can you say that will make a recruiter remember you or a networking contact want to know more about you?

   3. **What do you want/Where are you going?** Laura Allen, founder of 15SecondPitch.com, calls this the "call to action." This is the part of your pitch that lets the other person know what you’re looking for and the topic you’re interested in talking about. Don’t be pushy or aggressive, but do be forthright about the fact that you’re looking for a job.

Finally, be sure to tailor your delivery to the interpersonal circumstances of the moment: the goal is to maintain a conversational tone and not sound rehearsed. Think of the above elements as “sound bites” that you can mix, match and cater to each unique interaction.

Some examples:

1. "Hi, I'm Natasha Brown. I'll be receiving my BBA in Accounting in May from UT-Austin and I interned last summer at PricewaterhouseCoopers in the Assurance practice. I also participated in the firm’s community service project in New Orleans, which was an incredible experience. I'm also the vice president of UT's business fraternity. I'm currently seeking an auditor position in the Chicago area, which is why I'm here at this conference."

2. "Hi, my name is Rob Smith. I'm currently a junior at Boston College majoring in business with a minor in Chinese language. I spent last semester in Beijing, where I studied and had a really exciting internship with a small American marketing firm working with Beijing's tourism agency. I saw that your agency has added some Chinese clients lately, which is why I'm eager to apply for one of your internships."

3. "Hi, my name is Marcos Sanchez. I'm an English major at NYU and I'm pursuing publishing internships. I'm really active with several organizations on campus, helping them design their websites. I'm also a big advocate of social media and have helped some nonprofit organizations create their Facebook fan pages. I saw that your magazine is doing a lot of great things in the social media space..."
Draft your elevator pitch here:


3. Consider body language.
The effectiveness of your elevator pitch is not just based on what you say, but how you say it. Did you know it takes only seven seconds for people to make 11 impressions about you? You may be completely serious, passionate, and confident about what you have to say, but your body and clothing may be sending a different message. Image matters. When practicing and delivering your elevator pitch, consider:

- Posture
- Eye contact
- Volume
- Tone
- Facial expression (smile!)
- Clothing
- Handshake

Once you're satisfied with your elevator pitch's content and delivery, be sure to practice it enough to comfortable and confident. If possible, try to video or audio tape yourself to see if you have any speech tics (like "um" or "you know") or if you have a nervous habit like putting your hands in your pockets or brushing your hair aside. Your goal should be a natural delivery that feels confident but not canned.

Once you're happy with the way your intro sounds to your own eyes and ears, try it with friends, family members, advisors, or career services counselors. Remember that every time you test your introduction and get feedback, you're also getting more and more comfortable talking about yourself.

Good luck!

Additional Resources
- www.pwc.tv - don't miss the rest of our Personal Brand Week Worksheets and Top 10 Lists
- www.15secondpitch.com - check out the free "Pitch Wizard" and "Before and After" videos
- 5 Steps to Professional Presence: How to Project Confidence, Competence, and Credibility at Work by Susan Bixler and Lisa Scherrer
- You've Only Got Three Seconds by Camille Lavington and Stephanie Losee

From PricewaterhouseCoopers' eBook on Personal Branding