

Enhance your image and personal branding

Increase your chances of success in the business world by packaging and positioning yourself in the most authentic and captivating way possible.

By Marlise du Plessis

When the world sees you, what do you want it to see? In today's competitive world of business, the Internet and social media, the need for personal branding, a marketing strategy focused on your most important product, YOU, continues to increase.

When creating your personal brand, start by being you. Know your values, passion and vision. Consider both the successes and failures that created the person you are today. Identify the unique strengths that set you apart from the pack, and think about who you want to be, so that you can focus your resources on strengthening those characteristics.

Next, package yourself so that your image echoes your brand. It's a fact of life that people judge a book by its cover, and you only have seconds to make a good impression. This includes your complete image – your outfit, shoes, accessories and personal grooming.

Look the part in your best colours, the right styles for your body shape, and a wardrobe to suit your lifestyle. A well-groomed image conveys your commitment to professionalism, attention to detail and concern for your clients. It is an investment in your self-esteem, a message sent to the world that you are confident, professional and successful!

Chata tip: Don't be afraid to include your own style in your professional wardrobe, as long as it is in line with your corporate culture and dress code. Personal style is what sets you apart from the crowd, what makes you memorable – perhaps an interesting scarf or accessory or fresh elements of fashion that flatter you. Be authentic and consistent in your style, and the image you project.

Finally, walk the talk – follow through on a confident image with appropriate body language and impactful vocal impression. Live your brand in everything you do – at the office, away from it, and in the online environment. Branding extends beyond the boardroom to everything you do, write and say, to your personal and public life. Think about how you look when you are out and about, even in your leisure time, as you remain a representative of your brand. You may come across current or potential clients or colleagues! Have a strong knowledge of your particular business, together with relevant soft skills. Use your personal, professional and social media networks to communicate, market and promote your brand, and you will soon be on the road to success!

Chata tip: Consider these general pointers when building your brand:

- Introductions: Always introduce yourself with your full name and a firm handshake;
- Telephone: Speak slowly, clearly and with confidence. Smile while you speak and always be polite – even on your voicemail;
- Meetings: Always arrive on time and turn your cell phone off/on silent;
- Emails: Keep your language business-like. Check your spelling, and never copy anyone unnecessarily; and
- Dining: Always keep your food options balanced with your guests, and never ask for a to-go box.

Think about how you see yourself, and how others perceive you, and build a personal brand that works for you. Remember, people will judge you by the image you project, and you never get a second chance to create a good first impression - your image is, therefore, your future!

Next month: If your day includes chairing an important business meeting, addressing a key group of customers or negotiating a strategic deal, your image can be the key to your self-confidence, and ultimately determine your success! ■

Marlise du Plessis is a Chata Romano Image Consultant, www.chataromano.com.