

Self Marketing Yourself to Find a Job During Tough Times

A career brand is an image that portrays you as an expert in your field, attracts your ideal employer, and reveals how you can help their business. How can you promote your career brand effectively, to stand out among increasing competition in the workforce? Self-marketing!

Before you begin self-marketing, you need to understand:

1. What you are going to market about yourself
2. Who you are going to market yourself to
3. Why you are going to market yourself to them

This article offers some important tools to develop your career brand and understand your self-marketing plan.

Goals of Self-Marketing

1. Provide direction to help eliminate trial and error. As a result, save time and money.
2. Network with key industry players.
3. Identify your transferable skills. Marketing these skills, not just job history and accomplishments, puts you in higher demand (i.e., more interviews).
4. Determine what other industries your transferable skills fit into. The industry you are in affects the success of your career. Market yourself in growing industries (green-collar, biotechnology, nutrition, IT). Steer away from dying 5. industries (textile, printing, newspapers, steel manufacturing, etc.).
6. Resolve any setbacks that hurt your career and prevent you from getting interviews. Fix your resume so it does not portray you as "a job hopper", "lacking education", or "unable to advance at a company".

Create Your Own Mission Statement

Just as mission statements provide direction and purpose for companies, individuals can benefit from having their own personal mission statement too.

Your mission statement says what is important to you. Write yours before starting a career to get on the right path and connect with companies that have similar values and beliefs. You can revise it or write a new one at a career crossroads. Its sense of purpose is great motivation!

What to include:

1. Goals - Aspirations in life (short-term and long-term)
2. Core values - Who you are and what your priorities are
3. Successes - Professional, personal, etc.
4. Offerings - How you can make a difference for the world, your family, employer or future employers, friends and community

Integrate Assessments into Your Career Branding

Career and personality assessments reveal consistent patterns in your traits, characteristics, strengths, preferences, and skills. The assessment results may lead you in a new career direction. If you have an established career, they tell you how well your traits and branding messages align with your career path.

Present your distinctive and noteworthy traits to your targeted employers. Remember that not all recurring patterns contribute to good branding (e.g., introversion). Disregard any pattern you feel is not really you.

Incorporate the assessment results into your career branding materials: resume, cover letter, elevator speech, interview responses, portfolio, business card, etc. Convey a consistent branding message throughout all of these materials. But you can use different branding statements for different industries.

Self-marketing is not just about selling your specific skills. Everyone has skills. They get you in the door, but not necessarily get you the job. There can be 100 or more applicants per job posting, and they all have the same or better skills as you. How can you stand out as "the one"?

Develop a tag-line. A great tag-line tells people exactly what a product is and how they will benefit from using it. This is what employers want to know about you! Specifically, how you will help them make and save money. Tell them how much money you helped a previous or current employer make or save on a given project, sale, or time period.

Dear Career Journal...

Did you have a diary or journal when you were young? It helped you express feelings when no one else would listen, or when you did not want anyone else to listen! Similarly, a journal can help and guide us in our professional adult life too.

Writing in a career journal allows you to set aside time to think and learn more about yourself and your career. Just as when you were younger, using a journal allows you to express emotions (good and bad) about career progress. When you read past entries, see how far you have come!

Use your career journal to:

1. Write your personal mission statement
2. React to self-assessment tests
3. Do a SWOT (Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats) analysis
4. Evaluate your current situation
5. Reflect on your successes and failures
6. Devise career goal ideas (breaking into a new career, as a volunteer or consultant)
7. Think about career alternatives
8. Establish daily or weekly career-related objectives or tasks
9. Develop action plans to achieve your objectives and tasks
10. Make checklists

11. Record network contacts, job interview results, etc.
12. Develop job correspondence material (cover letters, resumes, thank you letters, etc.)
13. Practice job interview questions and answers
14. Gather salary information
15. Jot down ideas and information you like and want to use in the future
16. Record things you want or need to learn, skills to improve upon
17. Discover and explore your workplace values
18. Record your job-related likes and dislikes (and employers' likes and dislikes)
19. Note lessons learned
20. Develop ways to improve the workplace
21. Review job-search trends
22. Develop plans for achieving promotions
23. Document the career paths of your peers that you want to emulate
24. Prepare for job performance reviews

Do not keep your career journal at your workplace. Keep it at home on your computer or in a notebook. Try to set a regular time of day to work on your journal, maybe right after work. Maybe before work to get yourself motivated and focused on what you can achieve that day!

Your journal is always ready, and no matter where your career path leads you, you can continue to use it throughout your professional life.

Key Marketing Tools:

Strategic Marketing Plan - Your plan answers these questions:

1. What have I accomplished, where am I now, and where will my career be if I do not take action?
2. Where do I want to go with my career?
3. How do I get to where I want to go?
4. How do I put my plan into action?
5. What do I need to change if I am not getting success?

Market Research

Understand trends in your career field. Consult resources such as the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook. Interview industry professionals. Study the companies you would like to work for. Use this information for your cover letter, resume and job interview.

Marketing Mix

You are probably already familiar with the 4 P's of marketing, or the "marketing mix".

The 4 P's are product, promotion, place, and price. Translate these in terms of you and your career for job search success.

Product

You are the product with unique characteristics, features, and skills. Expose your "product features" in your tag-line and resume. Let employers know your work experience, leadership experience, professional memberships, technical skills, education and training.

Make sure that your on-line marketing tools (i.e., Facebook or MySpace) are cleaned up and employer ready. You do not want a potential employer to see something on your personal networking sites that will land you in trouble.

Do not forget "packaging", to properly present yourself and your credentials to potential employers.

Promotion

This is your cover letter, resume, phone calls, correspondence and interviewing.

Promotion tools include anything that you can use to get a job interview and ultimately get a job offer.

Be memorable by utilizing multimedia marketing like email, follow-up phone calls, or try using regular priority mail envelopes to send resumes, cover letters and other "marketing materials". This increases your career brand and distinctiveness.

Place

This includes everywhere employers can access you. How are you reaching employers or people who can connect you with employers?

1. Internet job-searching and applying to job postings
2. Cold calling
3. Networking with current and former coworkers, colleagues and alumni
4. Speaking with recruiters at staffing and employment agencies and company HR departments
5. Visiting your university career centers and alumni offices
6. Attending professional association meetings and seminars

Price

Price includes all aspects of the compensation you can receive from potential employers, as well as your strategies to get the price you want, and that the employer feels you deserve. Your price not only includes salary, but also insurance, benefits, paid time off and perks.

Call in the SWOT Team!

Performing a SWOT Analysis, used in marketing planning, is helpful to use in your career planning. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

It answers:

1. What are your Strengths and Weaknesses (in your internal environment)?
2. What are Opportunities and Threats in your career field (external environment)?

Strengths

Internal, positive aspects which you can capitalize upon, such as:

1. Work experience
2. Education
3. Technical skills and knowledge (e.g., computer skills)
4. Personal characteristics (e.g., superior work ethic)
5. Strong network of contacts
6. Involvement with professional associations and organizations
7. Enjoying what you do

Weaknesses

Internal, negative aspects that you plan on improving, such as:

1. Lack of work experience
2. Inconsistent major with the job you are looking for
3. Lack of specific job knowledge
4. Weak technical knowledge
5. Weak skills (leadership, interpersonal, communication, teamwork)
6. Weak job-hunting skills
7. Negative personal characteristics (e.g., no motivation, indecisiveness, shyness)
8. Weaknesses identified in past performance appraisals

Opportunities

External, positive conditions out of your control, but you plan to leverage or add value:

1. Field trends* that create more jobs (e.g., globalization, technology)
2. Field needs your set of skills
3. Opportunities for advancement in your field
4. Location
5. Strong network

Threats

External, negative conditions out of your control, but you may be able to overcome:

1. Field trends* that diminish jobs (e.g., downsizing, obsolescence)
2. Companies are not hiring people with your major/degree
3. Competition from college graduates with your same degree
4. Competitors with superior skills, experience or knowledge
5. Competitors who attended better schools
6. Limited advancement in your field (too competitive)
7. Limited professional development in your field
8. Find hiring/employment trends in your field. Go on-line to ABI/INFORM, Business News Bank, and Lexis/Nexis.

After completing your SWOT Analysis, add the results to your Strategic Marketing Plan. Also, use your SWOT results to develop the following in your Plan:

1. Career goals
2. Marketing strategies
3. Action plan with deadlines

The Elevator Speech

The Elevator Speech is a clear, concise introduction that can be delivered in the time it takes to ride an elevator from the top to the bottom of a building. It can be as short as 15 seconds or as long as three minutes. Write down your Elevator Speech, and practice it so it comes naturally. Be ready to deliver it!

Use it at:

1. Networking events (including "unconventional" ones, like shopping)
2. Career fairs
3. Cold calls to employers
4. Voice-mails
5. Your current workplace, when you encounter the higher-ups
6. Job interviews when asked, "Why should I hire you?" and "Tell me about yourself"

Your Elevator Speech includes:

1. A greeting
2. Your name
3. Your industry or field
4. Accomplishments, background, qualifications and skills
5. If you are graduating soon, what school and what degree
6. What you want to do and why
7. Why you enjoy what you do or want to do
8. What interests you about the listener's company/business
9. What sets you apart from others
10. Your tag-line that you developed!
11. Your mission statement that you developed!

Finally, capture their interest and request action.

1. At a career fair: "May I have your business card, and give you my card and resume? Can you add me to your company's interview schedule?"
2. Networking: "What advice do you have for me? What employers do you suggest I contact?"
3. On a cold call: "When can we meet to discuss how I can help your company? May I send you my resume?"