**Sell More Books By Building Your Personal Brand**

**By Brian Jud**

Think of the top brands in any category. What do they all have in common? They create a clearly identified personality that distinguishes them from competitive products or services so that their brand promise can be easily communicated and understood.

You need to do the same thing and create a personal brand that distinguishes you from your competitors and persuades others to recognize your value. This will help your target readers understand why they should purchase your content instead of a competitor’s book next to yours on the shelf. It may also make it more likely you will succeed when you approach a publisher, distributor, business buyer, print editor or a TV or radio producer.

The process is simple: describe what you do, not what you are. Instead of telling people you are an author (one of X million) describe an outcome: “I help parents raise healthy children.” In a few words, tell how your content benefits the reader/buyer. Then close with your brand statement: You are the Chairman of Child Development, or the Professor of Productivity, or the Master Motivator or the Top Dog in the pet industry.

A strong, well-managed personal brand benefits you in several ways. It separates you from the crowd, particularly among those target people who matter to you. It can also help you expand your network and attract new opportunities. And on a deeper level, the process of building a personal brand can help you uncover, celebrate, and share the unique abilities you bring to the world. Here are a five steps to help you do that.

### **1. Define your purpose**.

 Begin by asking yourself why you wrote your content initially. What difference did you intend to make to those in your target audience? What benefits did you plan to deliver to your readers? Then explore how your intentions connect to your mission, passion, and vision.

**2. Perform a self-assessment**.

Define the characteristics that impact your brand. These could be your credentials, such as your education and significant personal experiences and achievements. This also includes the professional expertise you have developed through your career, interactions, hobbies, and interests that give you the credibility to claim your brand position.

Use your self-assessment to create the first draft of your personal value proposition (PVP). This statement has four components: the group you will target, the problem they want to solve, the solution you provide and your distinctive capabilities. Here’s a template:

I help (your target readers or buyers) who want (the problems they want to solve) get (the benefit of your content) by offering [the unique, memorable, and meaningful value you provide).

For example, my PVP is, “I help authors and publishers who want to sell more books get large, non-returnable sales by offering help through my experience making profitable sales to non-bookstore buyers.”

**3. Discover your existing brand among your publics**.

You already have a personal brand, whether you know it or not. However, by not developing it intentionally you let others define it for you. Find out how people describe you and then decide if you want to change or reinforce that image.

Do this by identifying your key audiences (target readers, colleagues, family and friends) and selecting people from each group who you trust to give you honest and objective feedback. Also include someone who has rejected you (a publisher, distributor or retail-store manager). Monitor your social media to learn how people describe you in their responses to your posts (“That was a creative post.” Or, “You always share insightful information.”)

Ask open-ended questions, such as “How would you describe me to a stranger if I wasn’t with you?” Do not ask leading prompts like “Do you think I am a good writer?” Then compare their opinions with your own assessment. How do they align or differ? If different from your self-assessment and how might you align them?

### **4. Construct your personal narrative**.

A brand is built on the actions you have taken and that your audiences have processed. Use that information to refine the first draft of your personal narrative. Think about times when you have felt most authentic, alive, positive, and productive; when you have stood out from others; when your uniqueness made the difference between success and failure; and when you have fully embodied the brand you want to have.

Create your personal narrative to follow your four-part PVP. After you recite it, what will you say when the person says, “Tell me more.” Your PVP becomes more memorable, accessible, and persuasive when you convey it with a story.

What would you say when an interviewer asks, “How did you got started?” You could describe your writing process, which probably will not interest people. Or you could tell a brief story. “My first book was about how to get a job. I started selling through bookstores because I thought that was the only way to do it, one book at a time. I soon learned about large distribution discounts and returned books. There had to be a better way. So, I thought, ‘who else could use the information in my book?’ and that led me to sell to colleges and 50 state departments of labor, both of which buy in large, non-returnable quantities.”

The interviewer may ask, “Where are you from?” You could answer with a simple “New Jersey.” Or, you could say, “A suburban part of New Jersey, where I spent my childhood making money by mowing lawns and shoveling snow.” This shows that you are industrious and resourceful without explicitly saying so.

### **5. Embody your brand.**

At every touchpoint -- store events, media interviews, podcasts, blogs and social -media posts -- consciously or subconsciously you are communicating your brand. Your target people are forming opinions about you, and each social interaction can move your personal brand closer to or further from your ideal.

Always be aware of the messages you are sending. If you are running late for a store event, you could explain it with something like, “The traffic was terrible, I’m exhausted and stressed out.” You are communicating negativity and missing a chance to reinforce appealing aspects of your brand. If you instead respond with something more intentional, such as “The traffic wasn’t great, but I used the extra time to listen to a really interesting podcast on non-bookstore marketing,” you signal your positivity, productivity, and desire to learn.

Personal branding is an ongoing process. Regularly assess how your PVP and narratives fit into your current professional and personal context and how they are being received. Then tweak or reinforce them accordingly.

The personal branding process takes work. But over the long run it will allow you to better control your professional and personal image and thus the success and impact that you can have in your world.

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