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Fast-Track Your Brand

by Suzanne Bates

What is a personal brand? And why do you need one? Your brand is, in essence, your reputation. Reputation is the most important asset you have in business—especially when you're dealing with someone's finances.

But your reputation isn't *who* you are; rather, it's what others *believe* about you. Your brand, or reputation, cannot be manufactured. A successful brand is built on what is real and authentic about you.

People know an authentic brand when they see one. It gives you enormous influence and also enhances your company's reputation. Building your personal brand as an actuary takes work, but those who are willing to put in the time and effort see big results. Here are some tips to help you fast-track your brand building and take you to the next level.

1. **Take massive action.**

Determine who you want to reach, and what you want to accomplish when you do. Analyze your client base. Look at the people you have on your team who can help you build your brand. What outside resources will be required?

If you're going to invest time and resources anyway, you might as well accelerate the process and get it done faster. The more committed you are to massive action, the faster you'll see results.

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Your plan will develop as you go.

2. **Leverage, leverage, leverage.**

You write a story for a speech. That story goes into your blog. It becomes the basis for a magazine article. The article is pitched to a reporter, who interviews you for a major newspaper.

One speech, video, article or event can be the catalyst for an entire campaign. Repurposing is not only allowed; it's incredibly savvy.

3. **Get comfortable *being* a brand and put yourself out there.**

It is so important to think of *yourself* as a brand. You are a leader with a reputation you can leverage.

But you can't build a brand sitting in your office. You have to get out there. There's no substitute for shaking hands, showing up and making a personal connection with your clients and colleagues.

4. **Do the things only *you* can do.**

No one else can write a book that has my name on the cover. But I can rely on a lot of other people to help make it successful. The marketing director at my company can set up speaking engagements. The public relations (PR) firm can pitch interviews.

Focus your time and energy on the activities that you do well, and let others do what they know how to do.

5. **Get pros to help.**

As you build your brand, you will find that you need to get comfortable giving speeches and media interviews. Likewise, it's crucial to keep in mind that everything around you is an extension of your brand, representing who you are and what you stand for.

To fast-track things like this, get some expert guidance. Find a coach who can help you deliver the perfect speech. Hire a wardrobe consultant for your clothes and a designer or decorator for your office. Tell them what image you want to project.

6. **Help other people get what they want.**

Don't underestimate the power derived from helping others. People will remember your generosity, and they will tell other people about you. They won't forget the favor you did for them. Helping other people is a fast-track brand-building activity, and

you can also feel good about giving back.

7. **Ask: What do I want to do that I haven't done yet?** That word *yet* is important. It implies you want to stretch and grow. Where do you want to be known? What are you doing well? What aren't you doing yet that you'd like to do well?

Investing in success is important for any size business. It takes time, money and planning to build a brand—but you can accomplish a lot with a little, if you're smart and have a good team. You'll be excited about the outcomes, and you'll see direct results from what you achieved. Commit to raising your visibility and seize opportunities as they come along.

Suzanne Bates is author of the new book, *Discover Your CEO Brand: Secrets to Embracing and Maximizing Your Unique Brand as a Leader*, just out from McGraw-Hill. Founding CEO of Bates Communications, a firm that transforms leaders into powerful communicators who get results, Bates is also author of thepowerspeakerblog.com and two other books from McGraw-Hill: *Speak Like a CEO* and *Motivate Like a CEO*. Visit her website: bates-communications.com.



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