

The role and importance of personal branding in career development



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Mirza Sagdati

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Author: Mirza Sagdati
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ABSTRACT

The following thesis was conducted for DIGGID. It is a start-up company located in Tampere, Finland that provides personal branding and promotion service.

In the thesis I explored the concept of personal branding and how it affects individuals in their professional life. Personal branding is a fast-growing trend which is slowly turning into a tool. I tried to find suitable ways for DIGGID to position personal branding services and what value it can bring to different target groups. At the very end, I outlined the main recommendations which would make a commissioning company stand out in its field.

In the research process I defined the personal branding concept, its current practice and at what degree it is been used so far. The big part of my research had an aim to familiarize the reader with main strategies of personal branding and how to utilize those. Towards the end of the thesis, I integrated one HR survey and one landmark study which showed one different perspective of personal branding and its importance in career development. Those two studies together with the research have given the following recommendations:

- separate strategies for each target group of the company
- focus in specific aspects of personal branding
- operation enlargement, new practices and new methods to be used
- further development of marketing channels

All recommendations and conclusions author's points of view based on findings in the thesis writing process.

Keywords: Branding, DIGGID, Personal website, HR, Social Media, Career

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Case-company and thesis introduction

DIGGID is a freshly established start-up to whom I am one of the two co-founders. It was established in December 2014 in Tampere, Finland.

DIGGID is an online-based personal branding service which makes personal websites for professionals in different spheres. The service is making and delivering websites as its main product. Clients' websites are fully personalized; they are on the client's name domain (www.yourname.com) and are designed in the template of clients' choice. DIGGID websites' aim to provide the best professional appearance in the online world, where clients get to showcase their personality, work experience, CV, skills and the projects they worked on all in one place and probably the most importantly build their own brand. Websites are owned by clients themselves which makes them a personal asset.

The idea of the service is to change the practice of personal branding and personal promotion from passive to active. We in DIGGID believe that new professional opportunities start from people themselves and one prepares for it. Maintaining a good reputation in the online world is a new standard, therefore we are doing search-engine-optimization boost and make sure their websites provide a professional appearance and appear as a first google result to their name.

Our team at the moment has 4 members, two of us who are co-founders and two more interns who are in charge of the technical part of service development. The company has its first paying clients and at the moment is preparing for slow growth in next 6 months.

In relation to my thesis, the initial idea was to explore the topic of personal branding through DIGGID as case-study which is in the same line of business and use DIGGID's learning outcome in the research of the topic.

Since the focus is concretely on personal branding, and not branding per se, I will try to investigate to what extend personal branding is important in career development on an individual basis, what tools are recommended to be used and practical tips on different ways to utilize personal branding as your extra asset.

In my process, I will try to use this piece of academic writing to educate and promote personal branding as a strongly emerging need in this dynamic job-seeking market and familiarize the reader with the latest market standards and demands. Furthermore, I will try to base my findings on the real-life examples and test my assumptions before going further into any recommendations.

However, it is important to stress that all recommendations are a final outcome of subjective judgement of the author and should be taken as such. Needless to say, the focus will remain professional and author's best judgement will be combined with findings of the thesis research process.

This thesis will also be used to validate the assumptions of the case-company in the field of personal branding and strengthen its vision and position in the market.

1.2 Research Question

The research question of my thesis is:

- **How does personal branding influence your professional career development?**

The goal of my thesis is to do in-depth analysis of current personal branding practice, identify the level of effectiveness it has at the moment and measuring the impact it has on the professional life.

The end purpose of my thesis would be to explore, analyze and come up with tangible results/recommendations why young professionals should consider branding their expertise more actively, how to do it and what benefits doing this bring to an individual who is doing it.

1.3 Research Objectives

Objectives of my research are:

- To define the concept of personal branding;
- To investigate its role in current practice;
- To explain through real-life case study how brand identity affects perception of your expertise;

- To investigate how young professionals are using personal branding tools and comparison between active and passive ones;
- To identify and provide recommendations on how to use personal branding and make it develop your career.

2 THE CONCEPT OF PERSONAL BRANDING

2.1 Personal Branding

According to Collin Wright, personal branding involves managing your reputation, style, look, attitude and skill set the same way that a marketing team would run a brand for a bag of Doritos or bottle of shampoo. The idea is that you can develop a collection of symbols and associations with yourself, granting your name, face and work the same benefits that companies with solid brand equity (Coca-Cola or Apple) enjoys (Wright, page 6).

Interestingly, the author started to focus on building a personal brand after he decided to quit his previous job. This moment urged him and put this issue on the light. I guess situations when we are looking for new job opportunities are best to realize the need of building a personal brand. He was thinking of new way of presenting himself. These things are usually not even thought of. I assume you don't start your day by thinking "How should I introduce myself from today".

The author started introducing himself with "Collin is my name". He says that it was a bit weird to most of people, but he got remembered which was the goal of this little experiment. It was the worst with bankers and government officers, they always had impression he is messing with them.

However, there are important differences between building your brand and building company brand. Mainly, the focus is different. Good side of building a personal brand is larger number of opportunities to directly introduce yourself to your audience. That is also due to fact that company brand communicates with larger audience, therefore it is really tough to get to meet all of them. This advantage also has a small disadvantage called confidence. Confidence plays important role and lack of confidence will bring you a lot of issues of branding your personality, work, skills or anything else. There are many ways to work on it, but in this part I am just touching this point, later on I will elaborate how to increase it.

To sum this page up, building a personal brand is about making yourself be recognized for what you want to be, being consistent and persistent while building/maintaining it. Peter Montoya talks about personal brand in his book “The brand called YOU”. In his definition personal brand is you and it only supported by various communication tools we have available.

It is also an image which creates expectations in the minds of others of what they will get when they work with you. Finally a Personal Brand is a relationship that wields influence over prospects and clients.

The attributes of your brand will determine how much influence you have. For example, if your best friend the carpenter tells you that you need to stop smoking and lose weight, you're probably going to scoff, but if your personal physician tells you the same thing, you're going to take it more seriously. The attributes of the relationship give the physician more authority in his or her area of specialization (Montoya, Vandehey, location 251).

Personal brand is a very demanding process which takes a lot of time, effort and patience. If you want your brand to remain respectable you will have to work for it. How? Well, if people remembered you for something really creative, they will expect to see it again. Otherwise, you will be forgotten as one-hit-wonder. We have thousands of examples from music industry.

On the other side, repetition will not help either. You must make your work dynamic and interesting, which includes that “something extra” which you have and others do not. I believe after this example you will understand what I meant when I said that building a recognizable personal brand is really hard job which requires long-term commitment.

The timing of starting with personal branding is another frequently asked question. My answer to this is that it depends on you. It depends what you want to achieve with developing a strong personal brand.

Of course, good old rule “the sooner you start – the sooner you start” applies here as well. Strong personal brand is a result rather than a goal you set ahead of yourself, achieve it and there it is. Now you do not have to do anything about that goal. Strong personal brand pays off but only after some time; one will not see its clear benefits in the early stages.

I would have to touch the reasoning of personal branding, as well. Reasons are very different. I would like to classify them in few categories for now

so I can guide you in and later I will break them into much smaller parts:

- Building/maintaining/increasing your reputation. This is very important to huge number of professional in both online and offline world. The benefits of succeeding in this are more or less clear. Good reputation brings more customers/recommendations/reviews/word-of-mouth marketing. Reputation is a fragile thing, it is hard to build a good reputation, but too easy to destroy it.
- Building brand equity. This usually adds you more reliability and expert status to your name.
- Being associated with specific ideas. With time you will start to filter what you do and narrow down your brand. That will grow your influential field and increase your expertise in that focus. Idea people are opinion leaders who get respected in their circles. Recognition you might look for will come from people of same interest, so it is very important we prove ourselves among them

Those reasons are both short-term and long-term. They might appear confusing and unclear along the way, but that is the part of the process according to so many branding consultants. In order to make sure you stay focus on the idea of building a brand you really want it is smart to set a list of objectives ahead of you. Objectives are preferred to be measurable in order to illustrate your progress better and increase motivation over the time.

In September 2013 The Digital Marketplace platform has released an interesting “branding wheel” which visually allocates different branding components and their position in 3 different layers. The graph applies on both personal and corporate branding:



Figure 1 The “branding wheel” graph by The Digital Marketplace

2.1.1 *Start with your current brand first*

Regardless of when we decide we want to start developing, repairing or entirely changing our brand, we cannot skip the step of re-evaluation of our current brand. In order to do that, we need help from external environment. That help can come in form of perception. I should repeat again that your brand is not only about how you perceive yourself, but as well how others perceive you and what they connect you with.

In this part I will correlate to the so called “Labelling Theory”. Colin Wright is mentioning and describing it in his book about personal branding.

“There is a field of study in sociology focusing on what’s called Labeling Theory. This theory is based on the premise that an individual’s identity is partially (or largely, depending on who you talk to) determined by the words that are used to describe them. According to this theory, if a child is told they are bad over and over, they will end up being a bad person. On the other hand, someone who is told they are good-looking or intelligent will have a more positive self-image. This theory illustrates why it is so important to use the correct words when describing yourself, your work and everything related to your personal branding.”

Furthermore, Wright gives the following example: If you are a creative writer with little experience and are not yet writing full time (and you

work as a cocktail waitress to pay the bills), you would not want to introduce yourself as a cocktail waitress who wants to be a writer. You would introduce yourself as a creative writer, telling anyone who will listen about your most recent novel premise or how many hits your blog on the modern American tragedy received.

“Labels are powerful and thusly you should refer to yourself, even if just in your own mind, as the title you wish to achieve. You shouldn’t lie about it (introducing yourself as a Nobel Prize winner if you haven’t won one yet, or a doctor if someone is injured in an accident, for example, would be a bad idea), but always make sure you are preparing yourself for where you want to be, not where you are.” (Wright, page 12)

This theory implies that self-perception plays important role in personal branding. Besides, self-promotion is always helping achieve your objectives faster and more efficient. This theory is often misunderstood or blamed to be misleading people from their real self. However, theory does not suggest lying about who you really are. It suggests including in your everyday life the vision of who you want to become next to who you are at the moment.

Sub-consciousness is a powerful tool. We should use this passive operator in our favour by feeding it with positive reinforcement and personal objectives for the near future. Especially if you are about to change your brand, it is crucial how you will perform that and how deep you will plan it. As I already mentioned above, your brand comes from self-perception and perception of others, but it starts with self-perception.

Therefore, identifying yourself as such brings you one step closer to identifying the brand you represent at the moment.

Evaluating your current brand is most of the times very ugly moment, it includes honest feedback to yourself about your attributes, achievements, strengths, weaknesses and personality in general. In moments like this we tend to find our “status quo” not so desirable. However, to ones who approach this process constructively and try to benefit out of it, this can be an eye-opener and food for thought.

Balancing your strengths and weaknesses is unavoidable. What you probably want to do is design a formula for that balance so it becomes rather 75%-25% than 50%-50%, in the favour of strengths of course.

A list of those two can help. You could make 2 separate lists. In one you can add things which make you good and others like about you. Here you can include literally anything you consider valuable personal asset, the

element which makes you different from others. After being done with this list, you can move to second one and now list all the things you think others do not like about you and things you yourself consider require change. It can be an old habit, it can be an attitude in certain reactions or it can be the way of handling an issue. It can be anything. But before finalizing the list it is recommended to be brutally honest to yourself and do it for the sake of your own benefit.

It is important to remember that great people and great brands are not born such. Cultivating your natural talents, skills and attitude with constant fixing of features we do not get great feedback for is something they all do. Utilizing new ways and approaches is in my opinion the key element in here. Consider this an experiment which can be done in 10 different ways. In order to find way which works best for you, you ought to try all of them out first.

While fixing your bad habits, do not forget to keep your focus on your strong assets. Repetition is the shortest way to remembering. Make sure you deliberately repeat them and make sure you are being associated directly with them. Repetition will position you strongly and can be a key element in your brand development or brand improvement process.

2.1.2 *Personal Branding Strategy*

I talked with many young talents who are enthusiastic with the idea of personal branding, but I was surprised how few of them consider this a strategy. They talk of personal branding rather as passive presence on specific webs.

However, personal branding in order to be effective it needs to have consistent strategy behind it. Careful implementation of this strategy will determine the success rate of your personal brand recognition.

Whether you want your brand to stand in behalf of company, idea, organization or activity you might want to fulfil basic requirements first.

2.1.3 *How my set of skills shapes my brand?*

Your both current and future skills are your biggest assets for building a strong brand.

We tend to speak of skills individually. It is common that we read a list of 5-6 listed skills one after another but no clear link between them. When skills get combined they are more powerful. A set of skills brings much more to the table for both individual and the company that individual works for. Now, there are different sets of skills. If you really want to distinguish yours from others you might want to develop a set of skills which is hardly replaceable by your competitors on the market.

Developing a good combination of skills makes very good foundation of building a strong brand. Your skills will be needed as bricks when building a new house. Skills are, among many other things, your resources which will support your vision and materialize it with time.

I mentioned different set of skills. The more set of skills you decide to develop, the more you want them to be different and not conflict with each other. What do I mean by that? I will now give an example. If you are a student of entrepreneurship, you will develop sense of new business ideas, visualizing their implementation; plan the building process, working in the team etc.

Now, if you want to increase the value of your personal skills and yourself on the market, you will decide to develop some new skills you do not possess at the moment. Let's say you have an idea to work on learning event planning skills. That would, of course, add a new thing to your list, but it will not sound as breath-taking as if you would, let's say, learn coding in HTML language.

The example of learning these two different skills is not about evaluating which one is better, but rather which one complements with your already existing skills better. As entrepreneurship student you will soon start trying different business ideas in practice. If you possess for example coding skills, it will help the process incredibly more. One might notice that this is not story about selling your expertise and skills for bigger amount to some company, but about practicalities and functionality.

In addition, it is important to underline that not everyone can learn all the skills on the planet. This idea is not about delusional thinking. It is about opening up horizons for new combinations.

Finally, skill sets are learned. They will look really messy and bad in the beginning. After enough practice and learning, they start to look more sophisticated and confident. It takes quite a long time before one becomes an expert in a new skill. That is already a big reason for all of us to start learning new skills as soon as we can. No need to wait for anything. It is a long road between setting a goal and final achievement of that goal. That

is one of the biggest problems in this process; most people get stuck on setting the goals and lose their focus over the time.

2.1.4 *Events*

Events are in my opinion one of the best ways to communicate your qualities with people. Often, people tend to see each other more professionally than personally during events of any kind. Your participation to different events, especially events where people of same interests as you can be located, will have positive overall outcome.

Events are also a tool for working on building people's perception towards you. I can say from personal experience that one develops a sense of good networking on events. Networking is another important asset to effective brand placement. Meeting leaders from different spheres helps multiply your engagement many times and saves you a lot of efforts.

One of the best examples of personal branding in business is Steve Jobs. Steve Jobs did not get there in few years, but he was building his brand for decades. You probably noticed that he was always appearing in public with his black turtleneck.

What else you for sure probably noticed is that he is an "event" type of guy. He was first seen by millions of people during his presentations of new iPhone models. I will not go any further with his brand, but nevertheless he remains a person who can be a good motivation to us newcomers who are trying to find the most attention-grabbing way to get to the audience's eyes.

2.1.5 *Values, beliefs and life philosophy*

These three things probably did not matter so much in business 50 years ago. However, today they matter more than ever before.

Digital revolution brought transparency in business. Your customers, partners, followers, users do not engage with your product/service only but with your values. They are getting interested in why you provide what you provide. What is your view on that? What are you trying to achieve with that? What is your personal role in the whole process?

Personal values and beliefs are a magnet which effectively collects people of similar interests and opinions around you. The good infrastructure of

internet made communication very easy. I will go through the best communication tools of personal branding a bit later.

Famous TED speaker and opinion leader, Simon Sinek, gave an amazing speech in 2007 where he presented the golden circle. His speech was about successful companies who were selling their products by telling their customers “why they are making that product and why it is important for them?”

His golden circle has 3 spheres with one question in each: WHAT, HOW and WHY. He claims that almost every single company out there knows what they are producing/making/selling. Good number of companies knows to explain how exactly they do it. But very few companies can answer to the question why they are making that specific product? (Sinek, TED talks, Sep 2009)

The bottom-line of the example is that values matter. People want to do business with people, not companies and they tend to trust more people whose values they can relate to.

Attitude is playing amazingly big role in here. Of course, it is always challenging to explain the benefits one gets from a positive attitude since attitude is not measurable in numbers. However, the impact of attitude on your brand is enormous and noticeable.

We tend to easily remember both really cheerful and really ignorant people. They are both standing out from regular people, now it is only up to you how you decide to be remembered. Your attitude does not relate necessarily to you only, but has a big impact when working in a team. An expert with nice attitude drags more working opportunities to him and new contacts. Networking outcome is very different and positioning yourself much easier.

2.2 Importance of Personal Branding

Rapid technology development, social media and online world in general has changed some rules in job-seeking process. Jobs are changing and slowly becoming more interactive in terms of both hiring and job-searching. What does this statement exactly means? Well, I would answer it means that there is not universal approach to get there. Static tools such as resumes and cover letters used to be breath-taking but some 10 years ago. These days all job-seekers are expected to use various online tools effectively and creatively.

You would agree with me if I say that personal branding is quite young concept. However, this young concept is growing like crazy. Up-to-date recruiters are looking for the candidates who are following trends in online world. When you create a personal website, you show potential recruiters much more than just yourself and your data. That is also an illustrator of your ambitiousness, self-initiative and willingness to showcase yourself in a different and proper way. What else you are telling them is that you have quite good understanding of importance of personal branding and how to do it properly.

One of the myths I am willing to break in my thesis is the difference between personal branding and online presence. A lot of people assume that those are synonyms for the same thing. Well, they are not.

Having an online presence besides social media profiles is already something. This small move will differentiate you from so many candidates who are your competition on the job market. According to HR experts, nowadays employers are delighted by a candidate with a “colourful” application over “black and white”. By doing this, you increase your chances of being taken seriously.

Creating a personal website isn't only about shine and glory. It shows that you are transparent and nothing-to-hide type of person. Companies appreciate this characteristic; they are losing a lot of money due to inefficient recruitment and mismatches.

Being unique matters; it did matter before and it matters now even more. If you are applying for a job where you face competition, you might want to tell them how you are better and why they should choose you. Standing out from the crowd is the first step. Don't hesitate to give a signal you are different. Creating a personal website will significantly help you with this issue. Good tip is to mention it during the job interview or simply add it to your business card.

We have been hearing a lot about increasing job possibilities and ability to market yourself. To be honest, before starting this business I had no idea how to do it. I thought that I do that simply by applying for a job, no?

However, later I find out that we, students, who are about to start a career do it all the same. We fill in the application, send the email and wait. Some of us dare to take a phone and call the company. Very few of us though. If we think of the company's recruiter, he is having a really hard time trying to see the difference between 50 almost-same applications, right? That is why they end up with wrong matches and inefficient employment process.

If we take a slightly different angle on this topic, we will easily realize how much difference (in our favour) it makes by introducing yourself with a personal website as place where you have everything you need to show to the recruiters: personal data, skills, previous education and work experience, future plans, portfolio projects with multimedia attachments... This makes you become a versatile candidate.

”All people will have the self-awareness to closely manage their online identities and the virtual lives they lead, monitoring and shaping them from an early age so as not to limit their opportunities in life.

The internet now provides the opportunity for millions of additional people to gain exposure to identity. It’s what pops up when employers, dates, colleagues, friends, and pretty much anyone who meets us for the first time, searches for us online.” (Zuckenbergr, 2014)

The branding expert Rachel Gogos in one of her articles profoundly explains her reasons of developing a personal brand. Rachel is a founder of Brandid and she is certified personal brand strategist. Her work is focused on one-on-one approach and she is encouraging clients to take her personal branding program.

”When it comes to achieving career success, you are your own secret weapon. In many ways, entrepreneurs are their company (think of Steve jobs, whose “think different” mentality gave us apple). And you’ve got what no other business has: YOU. That is why Brandid’s personal branding consulting service focuses on what makes you, your brand, and your company unique.” (Gogos, founder of Brandid.com)

You can’t let the world know how special your business is until you’re able to articulate what it is that makes you exceptional.

Entrepreneurs—whether they’re artists or accountants—need to be able to identify the strengths they bring to their business which distinguish it from any other. It’s those distinctive qualities that will make a client choose to work with you rather than someone else.

1) Understand your personal brand

Together you’ll develop deep understanding of your personal brand through a series of exercises that allow you to step back and look at your business and your role in it. We even offer a specialized program just for women.

“This process of exploration is provocative, profound, and a catalyst for powerful change,” says Rachel. “Clients always tell me how surprised

they are by how much impact the results have. It's a real game-changer as far as how they see their business and themselves." (Gogos, Brandid official website)

2) *Create a personalized marketing strategy*

Once you've defined the qualities that make your brand one of a kind, the next step is developing a marketing strategy to help your personal brand gain recognition and traction. The Brandid team identifies the best methods and tools to connect with your target audience, and creates systems by which you can measure your success.

3) *Build an online identity*

Brandid will develop an authentic online presence for your brand, one that is true to who you are. It can be as specific as creating a logo or tagline, as visual as selecting your color palette, or as complex as building a multifaceted website, complete with a video bio to greet clients, and blogging capabilities to continue your conversation with them. Finally, the Brandid team makes sure your brand has a strong social media presence on Facebook, twitter, google+ and/or LinkedIn, among other media.

The values you define during your personal branding consultation will influence every step of your business expansion from creating your online identity to spreading your message through social media. Get in touch with us to begin the exploration." (Gogos, Brandid official website)

2.3 The Four Levels of Personal Branding

Many people make direct connection between personal brand and personal view of your education/expertise/ambitions. However, I must break it down that there is not a direct connection. Personal brand is how people see you and perceive you, not how you perceive yourself. This is sometimes hard to accept as we spend thousands to go to elite universities and have best working experience possible.

Personal brand transmits a message and that is what people are getting hooked with. Other personal details are less important. According to Peter Montoya, there are 4 basic levels of personal branding (Montoya, Vandehey; location 533-560):

1. *Awareness*. This is where everything starts. You need attention. You need people to hear about your existence first. This is the starting milestone of every brand, whether it is a personal or a company brand. You use attention to communicate what you do, why you do it and what value it brings to the customer. The way you transmit this

message is very important, sometimes you have just one chance of this luxury called attention.

2. *Affinity*. If first step goes fine and you managed to present your brand in an effective way, you managed to create some sort of connection with an audience. Brand is not rational. Most of people correlate with brands with emotions. Brand actually has a lot to do with emotions and feelings. For instance, it would be very hard to rationally explain why “Just Do It” by Nike became that popular. It makes almost no sense. However, their customers found that slogan which calls for action very appealing.

Producing positive feelings towards you will help you reduce the gap between you and your target audience.

3. *Understanding*. If you really got customers interested they will look up for you. They will want to find out something more. That means you used attention wisely and did first two steps well. While affinity has to do with emotions, in this step you have chance to also appeal to both one’s knowledge and feelings. This level allows you to deepen your relationship even more. You might also want to look representative and have your background sorted out. A bit later, I will be talking about the importance of social media profiles, websites and other channels of your personal brand.
4. *Decision threshold*. By now your customer has good amount of information about you, what you do and how good you are in that. There are also positive feelings towards your persona. In plain language, they like you. If you manage to execute first 3 steps in a good way, this step will be easy. By this time, customer has thought about considering you and he has reached decision making process.

This model proved to be functional. There are, of course, critics to it such as it is not quite effective as personal selling. However, we do not have unlimited time and resources to go and personally sell our expertise to every single potential customer. This is where online branding is beating selling and gives much wider range of opportunities and communication with environment.

3 ORIGINALITY IN PERSONAL BRANDING

While traditional branding focuses on set of activities whose main goal is to meet needs and wants of their customer, the focus of personal branding is on the other side. Personal branding, unlike traditional branding, is focused on individuals and showcasing needs of one itself.

However, whether we talk about personal branding or branding in general, authenticity takes place in every kind of branding. The process of branding

itself requires difference at the fundamental level in order to work. This is why authenticity became key element of successful brands because it makes unique brand identity.

While some branding experts define authenticity as “what clients want” personal branding answers the question “what you want”.

I have already touched the topic of self-perception and perception of others, like their role in personal branding. This applies here as well, with authenticity of branding. This aspect is important to be examined while building one’s brand because there are different perceptions of authenticity. If you want a strong brand, remember that perception of you by audience is the deciding factor whether your brand will get a green light or not.

Authenticity became even more important with rapidly growing trend of online branding. In the situations of branding through social media, this is a real challenge. Original way of communicating with your audience is really hard to be found since there is overflow of information all around social media. Being authentic in online world is a mind practice and unless it is learned well the continuity of long-lasting strong personal brand is impossible.

Rampersad is a branding guru whose work is mostly focused on online branding. According to him, your personal brand should emerge from your search for identity and meaning of life. If you are branded in an organic, authentic and holistic way, your personal brand will be strong, clear, complete and valuable to others.

„Your personal brand should be authentic, reflect your true character; and be built on your values, strengths and uniqueness (Rampersad, 2008).

4 HOW TO BUILD YOUR PERSONAL BRAND?

Most of the things we do these days can be easily found online. There are many social media application people use without being aware of what impact they can have. Also, it becomes almost inevitable that your future employer will search and have a look to your social media content.

In this chapter I will try to provide different personal branding tools, their description, why they are crucial in building a brand and what are the best monitoring tools for them.

4.1 Website

Personal websites are being often described as secret weapon if you are trying to find a job in your expertise. They brought personal branding to one new, compact and transparent level. As employers want to look deeper into candidates 'experience before they go further. Online presence allows everybody to find out more about each other. Since standard bar has been raised quite high, employers are not interested only in where you graduated from or where have you worked earlier. They want to know you as personality behind all that. They will for sure analyse you from different aspects in order to see if you make a good fit for the company.

What is the problem of personal websites these days then? According to latest researches the problem is following: 71% of professionals believe having a personal websites is a big help in job-seeking process, while only 6% have a personal website (Business Insider, Jan 2014). The problem lies in between; it is either the lack of coding skills (not knowing how to make one) or lack of time. Initially, when we decided to try this business idea out, we were actually solving this problem. We believe there is a way to provide personal websites to everybody who need one, regardless if that person doesn't have coding skills or time.

Personal websites will allow your resume to be less formal and more creative. Portfolio projects that you have been working on will for sure add extra value to your potential employers. Portfolio section is great since it not only states name, type and duration of your projects, but it also provides multimedia attachments to it, which make your experience working on those projects way more reliable.

4.1.1 Dos and Donts of Personal Website

One of the most known names of online personal branding - Bernard Kelvin Clive, in his book "REBRAND - The Ultimate Guide to Personal Branding" gives very good list of what things one needs to do and what things one should avoid doing. I will list his suggestions and elaborate his ideas. (Clive, location 1485 – 1935)

1. *Domain Names:*

This is a must. If you are about to build your online brand this is where you should start. Buying your own domain is easy and not expensive. Domain of www.yournamesurname.com makes you look reliable, trustworthy and well-presentable. Most young entrepreneurs have the personal website with own name in the domain where they present themselves, their ideas and what they do.

2. *Do not use sub-domains:*

You will see this online a lot and it is one of the most common mistake website-makers make. In author's opinion, this is a wrong place to start building your brand. Building a sub-domain makes you dependent on the website and its existence. Your name as extension to the actual domain lasts as long as the website itself. Besides that, it makes you look less professional and cheap. Instead, buying your own domain (which does not cost a lot anyways) is a much smarter move.

3. *Blog it Not:*

I also agree with author's advice here. He is stating that we should be very careful with blogging and think twice before we start using it. In other words, blogging is not for everyone. Most of bloggers do not see this issue the same way; this is why we have millions of blogs available which create cluster on the internet. This makes you less visible therefore it also makes your personal goals less achievable. Think outside of the box, vlogs on YouTube are probably better idea as you can easier engage audience. Besides that, find out who your audience is and what communication method they prefer.

4. *Website images:*

SEO results make brand positioning so if you wish to be positioned well online, try avoiding google images you download from other websites. That will make the picture you are using redirect to somebody else's website you are not even aware of. Try to provide your own graphics, pictures and infographics.

5. *Avoid complex logos:*

Your logo represents you. The good old saying "less is more" fully applies in here. Of course, most of personas do not go for it as logo is usually associated with companies. Freelancers do not want to be connected with same category as corporations, so there are other elements which can be used instead of logo, yet can do the same job logo does.

6. *Keep your website updated:*

This is probably the most important advice to take. An active influencer is always updated. I could not trust a website myself if it was not updated for months, yet it belongs to the very dynamic and changing industry. This speaks for the person behind the website – you. Sometimes even basic info can be mistaken, so always double check your email address, contact, address or phone number you input on your personal website.

7. *Modify your site:*

Doing this too often is not going to help you build recognizable brand, but keeping same old design for years is not a good idea either. Refreshing the design layout every once in a while brings refreshment in viewers eyes and that says you are paying a lot of attention on details on your website.

8. *Check and Validate:*

Always double check the content you put on the web. That very same content is part of you and your brand. Also, make sure you provide content which supports your values, ideas and your personality. Content ideas which are too different from one another can mislead your audience. Make sure you are consistent with your vision and ideas you are selling as personality.

9. *Do not just be personal, be also professional:*

I guess this is the most common myths about personal branding; most of people replace one for another. It is best you find the balance between personal and professional perspective. No need to be only one. No need to be both all the time neither. A good personal brand developer does not do everything by himself. Do not be ashamed to show that you ask other experts for help when you need it.

10. *Stop the Flow:*

Do not always blindly reach for latest software, design or trend. That is what everybody does. Building your own brand means distinguishing yourself from the mass. Make sure you know what tools you need to reach your audience best. Those tools do not have to be the latest ones. Besides that, if it works for everybody it does not mean it will work for you too. Test new tools you are planning to adopt and reflect to the old ones every once in a while.

11. *Make your design responsive:*

Make sure your website is fully responsive to all devices. Many of your audience might open it on tablet or smartphone and your website has to look equality good on any device. In DIGGID, we are currently working on responsiveness of our website on tablets and smartphones after few clients pointed out their dissatisfaction with how our web looks on those devices. If you are strategic player, you do not want to cut people from accessing you and your website. You do not want to stop people learning about you and your brand. That is why this represents one of the basic steps in build your brand or rebranding yourself.

12. *Do not assume:*

This is very good advice. Most of us sometimes forget that many people online do not know anything about us. Or even worse, they know few things and by that we think they know much more. This is easy to prevent. As a website owner do not hesitate to share your ideas, thoughts or news. Learn to share it in a simple and concise way. One of the focuses of your brand is to inform and educate and by doing that add the value. Doing this often will help you strengthen your personal brand.

13. Try new things:

If you follow all those advices and only them you will become a little bit monotonic and boring. Sometimes we simply forget to test some new things/ideas. As author suggest, think inside of the box, think outside of the box and think without a box. Make sure you try things differently from different perspectives.

4.2 Social Media Profiles

One might argue that social media is being mentioned way more than needed, but it is hard to talk about building personal brand and leave out social media activity.

Personal branding from a social media perspective represents the attributes which revolve around you as an individual both sociably and professionally. Depending on how well you know to exploit digital tools and social media channels will define at what extend you will get control over your online brand.

From the recruitment point of view, in terms of selling yourself and your expertise in such a competitive environment, the better you know to brand yourself the more chances you have to develop yourself on a professional plan.

Social media can get you the attention you want but not the trust you need. You've got to build trust (Clive, location 1035-1036).

Social media is a powerful tool when used right. Big part of online advertising has transferred on Facebook and LinkedIn. There are options where companies find Facebook advertising campaigns more affordable and profitable. Even besides advertising, just the pure presence on social media is already contributing to your personal brand. Social media channels are very practical when it comes to targeting and maintaining close communication with your target audience. LinkedIn is great for spreading your reputation among more "professional-minded" people.

However, one needs different content types for different social media. Content has to be adapted to the channel; this is what determines the outcome of your goals on the specific social media channel. The tricky part might be that same people are using Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google +, therefore we assume they expect similar content in all networks. The practice proves different point; they are using many social media because they expect to see different content provided by same person/company.

4.2.1 Social Media Monitoring Tools

According to same Clive's book ("REBRAND - The Ultimate Guide to Personal Branding"), there were following tools selected to monitor your social media activity and impact on your personal brand development:

1. *Talk Walker* (www.talkwalker.com) (Clive, location 1553)

It monitors the web for new content related to your name, your brand, your competitors or simply topics you are interested in. It works so that website is sending you alerts with new updates on things I mentioned in previous sentence and it emails you the most important mentions on the web related to you.

2. *HootSuite* (www.hootsuite.com) (Clive, location 1553)

This one is probably more known to wide audience than TalkWalker. HootSuite is used mostly by businesses and organizations, a bit less by individuals. One can organize a campaign which involves multiple social media networks.

3. *Google Alerts* (www.google.com/alerts) (Clive, location 1563)

This one is also quite known. Google Alerts work in a way that it emails you when it finds new results, web pages, articles that are matching your search wishes. Google Alerts is very practical way to monitor where you have been mentioned online. It can also be used for staying updated with other topics related to your field of work or your interests.

4. *Klout* (www.klout.com) (Clive, location 1573)

Klout is a website which is focus on social influence one has online. It makes ranking based on different social media profiles you have linked to Klout. It also allows measuring your influence.

5. *SocialMention* (www.socialmention.com) (Clive, location 1573)

This one is a social media platform which does analysis of generated content into one package. It is also a good platform to keep update with what has been going on online, who is mentioning you and in what context, how your product/service is being perceived or what competition is doing at the moment. It is not a perfect platform, but combined with others mentioned above, it makes a good set of tools which help you stay updated easily and time-efficiently.

6. *NetVibes* (www.netvibes.com) (Clive, location 1583)

NetVibes is a bit more advanced tool. It is different from others I mentioned as it has more in-depth expert analysis. It is also a bit more demanding so you might need slightly more time to get used to it. However, it is very user-friendly and well-designed.

4.3 Online Branding Techniques

Bernard Kelvin Clive gave a bit more theoretical list, yet quite comprehensive techniques which when used right can be turn into a benefit in practice.

He is listing following 7 techniques of online branding (B. Clive, location 1191):

1. What is Google saying about you?

Google became very powerful source of information these days. With the fast boom of SEO most of people got a little bit confused by how it works and what it can do for you.

Online presence became inevitable, whether you are actively contributing towards it or not. You might be the best expert in the field, but if nobody knows about you – so what? Online presence brings much greater reach and accessibility and if used smart it can have a huge impact on what you do for living.

First thing to do when building new online brand is check what is there about you on Google. People google people. Employers google potential employees. This is becoming a common practice. Secondly, try to analyze what kind of image your current information on Google create. Are you satisfied with that? Do you want to modify your image/reputation/first impression?

You can take control over your google results. That is not a myth. The change does not come immediately, it might take some time. In DIGGID, we are doing SEO boost of our clients' websites and position them on the top of google results once somebody googles their names. This creates very professional and representative first impression; personal website goes before any social media or other less significant links.

2. What is your name?

Your name and your domain name. If you do not have one (domain name), get one as soon as possible. Having a domain on your own name and surname makes really nice online presence. It also builds your brand the fastest as people find it easier to remember.

There is also your social media profiles which represent great set of tools which is helping you build your online brand. Make sure you interconnect your social media with your personal website. This way you will have compact package of information at one place.

3. Profiling:

Once you have your website and profile on different social media channels there is next step: profiling. What does your profile/website/online presence say about you? In what light it represents you? What message it is sending for you? What ideas you communicate with your audience? What kind of reputation you are building?

Visuals are really important elements at this point. It is widely known that human brain memorizes visuals the best as our visual memory is much stronger than any other. Appealing visuals can make you be remembered fast.

I do not think one can give a rule of what kind of visuals are best or what type of profile picture is the most appropriate one. That depends on what kind of brand you are building. Presence on multiple social media allows you to combine different images of you. For instance, you have Facebook where you might showcase more "casual" version of yourself.

Then, there is LinkedIn where you might want to look more professional. You also have Twitter, where you might want to be influencer and a leader type. The balance among all these will create an overall picture of you as an expert in your field.

4. Go viral! Get Interactive!

Internet made a revolution in communication because it is the first media which offers 2-way communication at the same time. That was not a case with radio or TV. That also means interaction opportunities. Make sure you listen to your audience, their needs and their wants. The feedback is being given more frequently than ever before, that is a chance for one to improve in much shorter period of time.

Advertising made many customers get distant from businesses as they felt not heard or listened. Customers do not want to be manipulated; they want to be talked to and heard. Customers are the most important investment and a good relation with them always pays back. However, this is a double-edged sword; if you ruin your relations with customers you might close your all business opportunities as well.

- *Relationships:* I mentioned relationships earlier and how interaction that internet provides can help us maintain them. Relationships are the key to customer loyalty. Yes, they are really demanding and sensitive, that is why very few people/companies are good at it. Customers want to do business with people, not companies or corporations. Make your clients feel that you are behind that name, behind that logo and that you are listening to their needs. Communicate your values and beliefs with them; that is how people connect with brands easiest and fastest.
- *Word-of-mouth:* Make your customers talk about you. There is not a better way of promotion than word of mouth marketing. People are more likely to trust a personal recommendation than some billboard on the street. This is a powerful tool for building trust. Make your customers feel worthy of money they are paying. Make them see the value in what you are doing.
- *Social Proof:* Make sure recommendations are not left alone. Support what people are saying about you with the social media activity and content over there. People are more likely to share content of a person they really trust. That way you get another free promotion and much greater coverage/traffic. Online communities are great place to start doing this. In there, the word spreads really fast, especially when there is something interesting and exotic going on.

5. Be generous

Just as you want to be promoted by others, the same applies for everyone. Be generous with help and appreciate your coworkers, partners and people

who are supporting what you do. Especially people who are in the same industry as you, people who are opinion leaders and opinion makers. That will put you in the same league and will reveal you both have same values which drive what you do.

The same applies for feedback or review of other products and services. Being generous to competition can also be viewed as virtue.

6. Stories that sell

One might add they become really popular in last 10 years, but I believe they always were. Stories have a power which other communication forms do not. They are memorable and appealing. Try telling how you build your brand with a comprehensive story and you will see how people react to it.

There are not many good storytellers, but if you happen to be one of them make sure you use that gift and try to gather your audience around that. Stories also add value to your skills and expertise. They can also help in building trust with customers.

Good story is easy to be remembered and to be retold. Try to make your customers spread your story; this is one of the best ways of people hearing about what you do.

7. Be the expert: Pick yourself

Try to position yourself as expert. People tend to trust experts. Do not just claim you are an expert, but prove you are one. Communicate your knowledge with your target audience. That will convince them and give more accurate picture with whom they are dealing with.

If you believe in yourself and what you are doing you need to show it. An expert is loyal to his own stands and perspectives. Try listening other people's views, but also try explaining your own point of view as well.

And finally, experiment with new things and new forms of expression/expertise/ideas. Do not be afraid to start a new silly project, even if you failed last 3. It is important that the idea behind the project is new and authentic. The best ideas did not seem best before they became that. On the other hand, many great ideas failed due to bad timing or bad execution. In both cases, you cannot find out which kind you have if you do not give it a try.

5 SPECIALIZE TO STRENGTHEN YOUR BRAND

Long before "self-branding" became a business school buzzword, Ellas McDaniel developed the ultimate personal brand: Bo Diddley. Bo Diddley is his professional name, "Bo Diddley" is the title of his first record, and the "Bo Diddley beat" is the popular term for the rhythmic juggernaut energizing his music.

—Joseph Tortelli, Goldmine Magazine

Specialization is a must-do thing if you are after creating a long-lasting brand. Specialization in certain field gives you additional credibility you will use to make people trust your expertise and your judgement. An effective brand does not exist without being a specialist in your field.

Specialization also brings some freedoms with it. You have greater choice where you can select your business direction, work with fewer clients or position yourself as an elite service specialist.

In the book “The Brand Called You” Peter Montoya and Tim Vandehey talk about benefits of specialization in context of personal branding. They listed following benefits as the most important (Montoya, Vandehey; Location 1069):

- *Differentiation:* This is probably the starting point of every specialization. Specialization process itself, as the name might suggest, is aiming to narrow down your skill set and knowledge so you can set apart from competition by doing one or few things the best. Differentiation in specialization process is inevitable. It makes an expert unique and authentic.
- *Presumed Expertise:* When you present yourself as specialist in anthropology, mechanical engineering or pharmaceutical industry people presume you have skill set which makes you good in that field. This brings extra value to your opinion and your advices. It also brings extra money you are charging your clients as your expertise is rare.
- *Clearer Client Understanding:* Clients sometimes do not have the same information about what you really do. Many times your title gives them some idea what is that. However, it is way more complex than that. This is why positioning yourself with a different title is already setting you apart, but even more important; it gives more accurate picture to clients about what you do – what you charge them for.

- *A focus on your strengths:* Probably the most obvious benefit of specializing in something is developing further your strengths. You should rather focus on what you have instead of what you are missing. Specialization allows an expert to have a narrow focus and crystalize the expertise in that area by pushing the limits of already existing strengths. Another benefit here is that you end up working what you love, and one cannot put a price tag on that luxury.
- *Clients prequalify themselves:* I think that most of us have experienced in spending time with the “expert” who turned out to know very little about what he/she is doing. The same goes with clients. You probably do not want anybody as your client. Specialization makes you be one of the best in the particular field and then you can easily position yourself and tell your audience what kind of clients you are interested to work with. Specialization also can save you a lot of money. An expert who is not specialized enough must stay competitive at the market by promoting much more than rare experts I just wrote about earlier. Brand marketing is not only expensive, but also unpredictable.

5.1 Three Steps of Specialization

I believe we got a clear message that personal brand is about your clients more than about anyone else. Knowing your target audience brings you to the next step where you can modify yourself or your business to the needs of your target audience. This part is focused on investigating your target audience and designing an efficient connection between your business model and clients. (Montoya, Location 1125)

STEP 1: Identify your target market:

Whatever you do for living you are depending on your customers who are coming from the target market. Now, the common confusion is that a lot of professionals are confusing target market for ideal clients. Those two are very different. Ideal clients might come from your target market, but they represent small sample of it.

Target market in general takes much bigger number of potential customers. A target market can be chosen by different parameters. It can be a certain demographic group, a location, interest group, gender, ethnicity, religion... You start from here. But the question here is how to find a suitable target market? How do you know that the target market you are aiming for is the right one? In order to test that, you need a description

of your ideal client profile. Next thing is look for potential demographics. When doing this there are 4 questions one should consider:

- *Is chosen target market big enough to ensure my income plans and goals?*
- *How is competition situation in the target market I chose?*
- *Do I prefer working with clients from that specific target audience?*
- *Is there a need for what I am doing?(Montoya, Location 1143)*

Once all 4 questions are fulfilled, you might conclude that you have a fit with your target market. That does not mean that there is not a better target market. That is why you do not take a first target market fit, but you do testing such as market analysis, competition evaluation, industry potential, local trends, canvassing and many more.

Next thing you do is evaluation of the target market size. How big should your target market be? That depends how far did you go with the online brand development and what are your goals. In also depends on your clients, to be more precise if you have a paying clients or you are still trying to get them. However, since the focus of my thesis is not only freelancers who have somewhat established brand, I will not get into further details or examples.

STEP 2: Design service for your ideal client:

Once you have chosen your target audience and ideal client, you are ready to start developing your personal brand. You are supposed to redesign your product/service according to your target's needs and make sure you deliver it so it meets their needs. This way you will also communicate your product/service value to the clients without saying it loudly.

It is good to be consistent with your service and specialize what you are selling as well. You are also selling your expertise with the service/product so specialization has to be complete not selective. Be very careful when anticipating what your audience really needs. Specialization brings values to customers' eyes, so use it wisely.

STEP 3: Reinvent your business model

Good part of your personal goals achievement depends on your customers. If you want to make your online brand strong, you must incorporate your customers who will advocate for it.

Often different business models brand developers are adopting turn out to

be a wrong fit. Business model is easy to be modified, but must be modified according to customer needs and attributes. There are other elements to consider which are crucial for making it successful. Some of them are: communication channels you are using to stay connected with your target market, the simplicity of your product/service, user experience, pricing, technological development, availability, product/service positioning etc.

6 WHY PERSONAL BRAND FADES?

The answer to this question is rather not only one. It will depend on who you are asking. The reasons given by Bernard Clive in his book “REBRAND: The Ultimate Guide to Personal Branding” seemed like the complete set so I decided to integrate them into my thesis as most adequate answer given to this question.

In the book, he is giving 10 reasons explaining why personal brands are fading. (B. Clive, Location 1686 to 1935)

1. Lack of clear direction:

This is happening in so many cases according to latest studies. Personal brand like any other goal must have its vision or direction if you may. It has to be planned and monitored throughout its execution. When one starts changing the message too often, one starts losing authenticity. We must remember that personal brand is you and you must stick to your values and goals rather than pleasing your target audience.

This is really important as understanding of your brand direction implies understanding of your own goals and beliefs. An original brand is being noticed; a fake brand is being smelled quickly. One has an easy decision when choosing between these two.

2. Self-promotion:

No matter how challenging this is, make sure you do not turn your personal brand into a promotional tool only. In DIGGID, this is the common challenge with our clients. Most of them perceive a personal website as promotional tool only, but it has to be more than that. The focus of your brand has to stay on the product/service you are offering and that means focus mainly on your target audience, not on you.

3. Inconsistency of content and delivery:

This is another very common problem of building your personal brand. One of the goals of everyone’s brand is clients/customers and they further mean loyalty. Loyalty can come as result of your consistency in what you

are doing. Once you destabilize it, it starts reflecting on the business in general. After all, brand is a long-term investment so if you want to keep it successful and lasting you might want to make sure you are consistent with content and delivery of it.



Figure 2 Brand Consistency Components

4. *Lack of credibility*

Since business transferred online there is much more attention people pay to credibility. It is much easier to mislead people online. That is why trust is something you should not gamble with when it comes your brand and customers related to it.

The value you are offering to your customers must stay visible to them. Even a small degradation of it can position you differently on the market. Probably good example of this is tourism industry. The most credible tourism websites are so influential that just 2 bad reviews can position you so bad that you will not get even closely as much clients as you are getting at that moment. There is also a word-of-mouth which is the most effective way of oral marketing. People trust personal recommendation because there is person behind it recommending it. The same applies for brands and people standing behind those brands.

5. *“Hype without Help”:*

Hype and a lot of noise around you is not always a good idea. Yes, it can draw attention, but it can also have impact on brand reputation. After all, you do not want your clients to think you do something you do not.

6. *Dishonoring your audience:*

In other words – cheating on your target audience; making one promise and not fulfilling it. Selling features that do not exist in your product. Building false expectation and do not delivering what your audience expects. This is probably the shortest way of losing trust and therefore your target audience as well.

7. *Insecurity:*

How to avoid insecurity in this competitive environment? Probably there is not a formula which can totally eliminate it. However, what you could do is convince yourself that if you are competing with the best, you are one of the best ones, too. It is not hard to play in A league, most of times you will lose only because of one mistake. But that is where most of learnings come from. And yes, this is slowly disappearing as you are getting better in what you do. In other words, your brand becomes more secure as it becomes stronger.

8. *Superstar syndrome:*

I guess this is partly because personal brand is often confused for celebrity or being famous. That is technically true as personal brand allows more people to know of your existence and what you do, but that is not necessarily how it should affect you. This looks very ugly especially if you are building personal brand for business purposes. Clients do not enjoy watching you/the company/the organization showing off or thinking they are much better than clients. This only creates a gap between you and your audience. Do not make yourself inaccessible. Do not make yourself look egocentric neither. Do not leave the event after your speech but make a full use out of it by staying and networking with audience afterwards. Invest in communication every day; this will make your audience advocate for you and spread the word around.

9. *Redundancy:*

As book author says “everything that does not grow, dies!” There is so much true in this sentence, especially when it comes to brand. That is the only way of keeping your brand alive. Keep improving yourself all the time and your brand will improve too.

10. *Do not be money driven:*

Money is a fuel, not a goal. Keep your focus on money as well, but do not make your entire vision go around money. Pricing is always tricky, but it gets even trickier once the greed is a pricing model you use for what you do. Underpricing your product/service is also bad. Try to evaluate a real value of what you are selling and charge for it properly.

Money should not be a priority, your priority is to offer value to your audience and keep them loyal to what you have to offer.

7 HR PERSPECTIVE ON PERSONAL BRANDING

Personal branding surely has different applications and one of the most common is recruiting. More and more students start to identify the importance of utilizing personal branding in the job seeking process or I better say the help it gives to the job candidates. When it comes to this aspect of personal branding and what role it can play in increasing your chances to get hired, HR experts are the best people to be asked what their perspective on this issue is.

The recent studies show the job market is getting bigger, but that does not necessarily makes landing a job position any easier. As big number of candidates have same access to modern technologies used when applying for the job which further causes a cluster among candidates themselves and make HR's choice really difficult. HRs receive around 100 application per job position in average.

7.1 “HR Professionals Recruiting Habits and Trends” Survey

In this chapter I will be referring to the findings of survey “HR Professionals’ Recruiting Habits and Trends” conducted between June 11 and July 9, 2015. The research was executed by the market research company “Research Now” for the portal Domain.ME – the famous provider of the .ME domains. The survey of this research was spread among HR experts in USA and collected their opinions on personal branding importance in HR circles. The survey was the main component of the research and it included 300 HR experts throughout USA. HR experts who responded are professionals recruiting for big companies on the regular basis.

7.2 Survey Focus

The survey's main investigation points were:

- *The ratio between job candidates applying with personal website versus candidates with traditional CV.*
- *The differentiation level that both personal website and CV provide.*
- *Which tool is more informative and more insightful?*

7.3 Survey Key Results/Findings

The survey results showed that besides social media presence, a personal website makes a very valuable asset for individuals to present themselves to the companies when applying for a job vacancy:

- *68 % of HR professionals are looking to assess personal qualities that aren't perceptible from a traditional resume;*
- *Half of survey respondents believe a personal website helps to "humanize" a candidate;*
- *Nearly one third of the HR professionals surveyed agreed that a personal website can provide a competitive advantage in the job market;*
- *Four-in-ten (4/10) recruiters would be more inclined to contact a candidate with the personal website when considering two candidates with seemingly equal qualifications (PR Newswire Survey Report, 2015).*

Domain.ME remains a big name in web domain industry. The platform constantly follows the trend of personal websites and the amount of online users who slowly decide to get a personal domain name and the website. Predrag Lesic, CEO of Domain.ME gave his comment on this research and the results.

"This new research confirms that we are moving beyond the age of 'be careful what you post' and into an era of digital presence and savvy to differentiate yourself in the job market," said Predrag Lesic, CEO of Domain.ME. "The survey shows that, while recruiters continue to scan social posts for red flags, they view digital assets as tools to better understand candidates and to help them make more informed hiring decisions. The candidate who offers that content has an advantage in telling their personal story. A personal website could improve a candidate's chances of being discovered," added Lesic (PR Newswire article, Aug 2015).

7.3.1 Online Content

The survey also points out that proactive approach and updated personal content HR managers can find online helps candidates to increase their chances for an interview or job position itself:

- *61 % of recruiters in the survey said that online content helps them identify "red flags" with candidates;*

- *One-in-five recruiters surveyed said they "frequently or always" screen candidates on Facebook, and nearly half check candidates' Facebook at least some of the time;*
- *The types of online content most likely to hurt or eliminate a candidate from consideration are: risque photographs (71%); negative comments about work (69 %); negative comments about a current or former employer (66 %); and inappropriate language or cursing (65 %);*
- *Conversely, content that could be featured on a personal website, including self-authored articles about one's profession or involvement with community activities, are viewed by more than a quarter of recruiters as content that would enhance candidacy (PR Newswire Survey Report, 2015).*

7.3.2 New recruiting trends

Besides these findings, HR experts added that so called “proactive recruiting” is uprising trend at the moment. Big number of recruiting experts tends to spend some time researching online after going through the resume/CV/website.

Furthermore, around 78% of respondents answered that websites, the increased availability of information they provide and proper online visibility are growing trends in HR branch. 83% of them stated that future jobs will rely much more on the online content every one of us provides and maintains in the next 5 years (PR Newswire Survey Report, 2015).

7.3.3 Personal website advantages for HRs

The eBook publication of the research called “Personal Website Gives Job Seeker an Advantage in a Competitive Job Market”, published by Domain.ME, and indicates the following findings:

- *HR industry was significantly impacted by the development and increased use of ICT. Recruiters are relying on online content to screen and find potential candidates.*
- *More than half of those surveyed admit to screening candidates on Google at least sometimes.*
- *Surprisingly, Twitter is the least utilized among social media for candidate screening. (US Survey: HR Professionals' Recruiting Habits & Trends 2015, page 2)*

As traditional recruiting process becomes outdated, personal websites appear as an answer. HR professionals themselves believe that personal websites help both the candidate and recruiter to make the better fit.

- *67% of those surveyed claim that a personal website provides more insight than a resume alone.*
- *59% of HR professionals believe that personal websites provide a dynamic representation of personal and professional qualifications. (US Survey: HR Professionals' Recruiting Habits & Trends 2015, page 2)*

In addition, many HR professionals stated that personal websites can bring a competitive advantage to the candidates using them. It also leaves more positive impression on HR contact person.

- *For 55% HR professionals' personal website increases their interest in learning more about the candidate.*
- *Between two candidates with seemingly equal qualifications, 39% of recruiters would be more inclined to contact the candidate with the personal website.*
- *Proactive recruiting has been evaluated as one of the most influential trends in recruiting process. More than half of recruiters conduct an active online search in addition to considering online resume submissions.*
- *42% of recruiters say that less than 1 in 100 job seekers are utilizing personal websites as a leverage to enhance their candidacy. (US Survey: HR Professionals' Recruiting Habits & Trends 2015, page 2)*

7.3.4 Online content distribution among social media by HRs

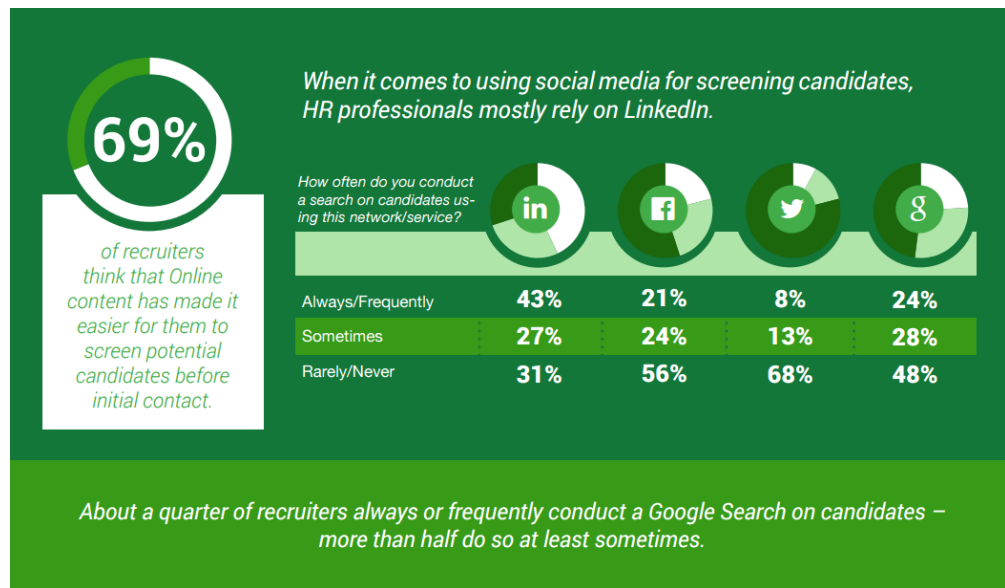


Figure 3 The HR candidate search on social media

HR professionals shared what social media they use mostly to learn more about the potential candidates/applicants. 69% of respondents claimed that online content makes the hiring process easier and smoother. The research showed that LinkedIn is among the most visited ones, where around 43% of HR representatives frequently check candidates LinkedIn profiles.

7.3.5 Online information relevance

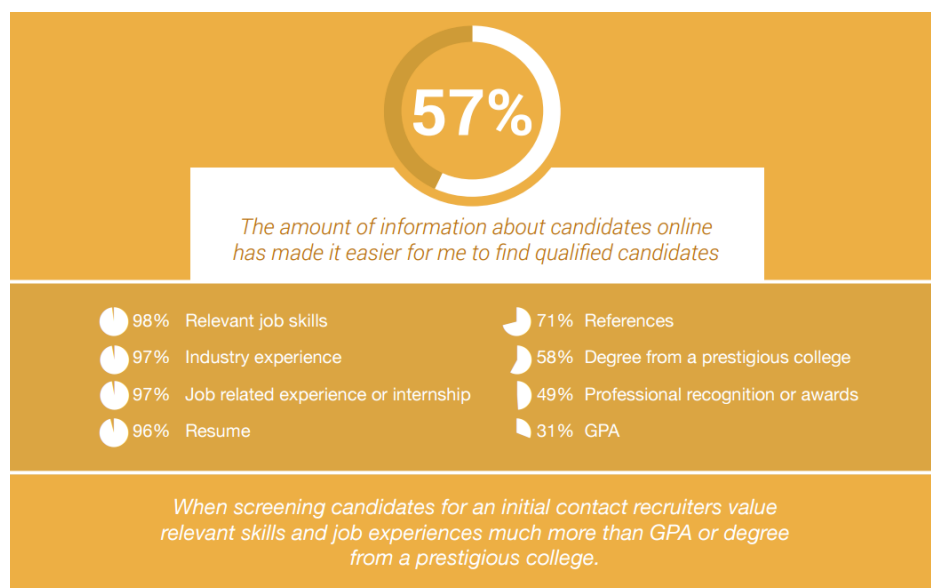


Figure 4 Candidate online information relevance priority by HR professionals

More than a half of respondents said that online available info about the potential candidates helps the process. On the priority list, big 98% of them are interested in relevant job skills first, 97% said experience is what they are looking for, 96% added that resume matters, 71% are looking for references, while only surprisingly low 31% is interested in GPA.

7.3.6 Personal branding trends and their impact on modern recruitment



Figure 5 The HR Recruiters Trends

The big increase of personal information which can be found online brought HR experts more transparent and resourceful way of preparing for the interview. Big 78% recognized that this phenomenon has had an impact on HR profession. 83% believes that in next 5 years the HR recruiting process will be even more online-based.

35% find proactive recruiting model more effective than previously used passive submission model. 34% pays attention to the fit of personality and company culture. 26% focus rather on non-active candidates than active job seekers.

7.3.7 Does personal website humanize the job applicant?

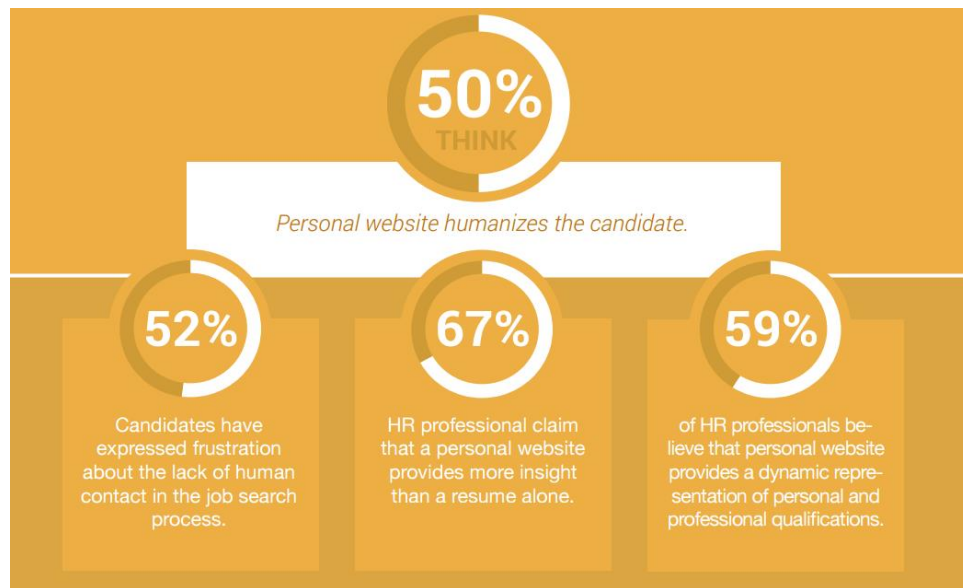


Figure 6 Personal websites humanizing the job candidate

One of the positive sides personal websites have during the application period is that they often succeed to humanize the candidate and bring his/her personality in first plan. 50% of HR respondents recognized that which is a good sign. 52% of the candidates showed disappointment and dissatisfaction due to lack of human contact in the job seeking process.

With increased number of application HR representatives receive it gets harder to reply to every one of them. That is why a lot of candidates do not get any reply which often causes ambiguity. 67% of HRs said that they prefer personal websites over resumes alone as websites provide better picture of a candidate. 59% of them recognized that personal websites provide a dynamic representation of personal qualities and qualifications.

7.3.8 Personal website content relevance



Figure 7 Personal Website Skill Demonstration

60% of HRs said they had a positive impression after receiving a personal website during the application period. They also discussed professional achievements they value the most: creativity was on the first place with 73%, 72% value ambition too, 69% said innovation matters, 61% acknowledged the awareness of personal branding in the candidate.

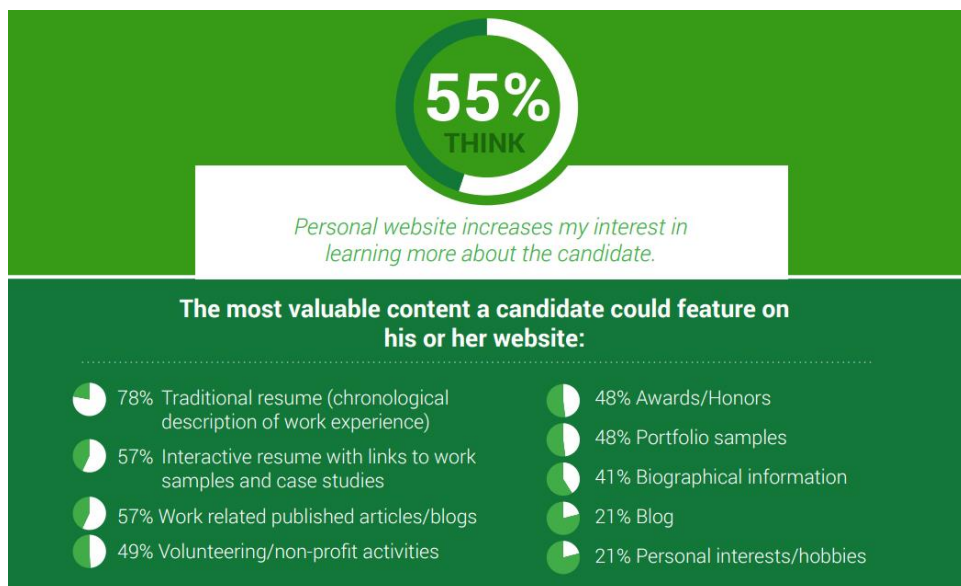


Figure 8 The valuable content on candidates website

We can see from the answers showed above that more than a half HRs has increased interest to learn more about the job candidate when one applies with personal website. 78% think traditional resume should be included in the website content, 57% prefer more interactive resume with links and attachments, 57% check work related publications, 49% values

volunteering and non-profit activities and 48% is interested in awards just like in portfolio samples.

7.3.9 Number of job applicants with personal website



Figure 9 The number of job candidates having personal website

One third of HRs agreed that personal website gives a competitive advantage over other candidates. 4 out of 10 would be more eager to contact the candidate with personal website (between two candidates with equal qualifications). Their experience shows that less than 1% of applicants actually apply with personal website. 42,2 % of HRs had that experience.

8 LANDMARK STUDY ON PERSONAL WEBSITES AND CAREER SUCCESS

8.1 The Study and the Survey

The landmark study was conducted in January 2015 by Branded.me – personal branding platform and .ME Registry operating under as Domain.ME. This was the first online study ever made on this topic. The study itself tried to explore the links between personal websites and their contribution to career development.

The results showed that professionals these days are receiving multiple benefits from having and maintaining a personal website. 71% of survey respondents claimed that having a website is either very important or important in helping build their personal brand, 70% said their website is

either very important or important for getting new opportunities. Also, 70% of those surveyed believe employers are checking their online brand before the interview. (Branded.me study report, Jan 2015)

On the question of what kind of benefits personal website brings, about half answered it brings job offers and over half answered professional and networking opportunities. 63% added that personal website is more valuable for long-term career than a resume, 85% think that it will become much more important in next 5 years when it comes to career success. (Branded.me study report, Jan 2015)

8.2 Survey Methodology

The study and its results are based on a survey distributed in USA between December 2 and December 16 2014. The survey had a total of 15,072 respondents. Only 600 (4%) qualified based on the required criteria of having a personal website. The qualified 4% or 600 respondents were asked questions related to having personal website.

The study tried to balance the age and gender criteria and the distribution age was the following:

1. 10% 16-20 year old
2. 29% 21-32 year old
3. 28% 33-49 year old
4. 33% 50-69 year old

The survey was answered through GMI's Global Test Market double opted-in panelists who have registered in order to participate in the online survey designed for this study.

8.3 Key Results/Findings

All key findings listed above are taken from the infographic report of the study released by branding platform Branded.Me. The main findings are classified in 5 different questions. The infographic link can be found in the sources.

Q1 - Who has the personal website?

84% of people who have personal websites received benefits from the site, yet only 4% of people currently have one. (Branded.me Study infographic, Jan 2015)

Gender structure:

- 49% male
- 51% female

Age structure:

- 16-20 5%
- 21-32 32%
- 33-49 38%
- 50-69 25%

Q2 Who has the personal website?

- 75% build it themselves through a website builder
- 19% hired a professional web designer
- 6% got it through some other way they did not specify

Q3 Why does not everyone have one? (What is the biggest struggle in building the site?)

- 43% time consuming (79% among those said it took a week or longer, 49% said it took longer than 2 weeks)
- 23% good design
- 21% technically challenged
- 9% too expensive

Q4 What are the benefits?

84% of professional web owners answered they get clear benefits from the website.

- 51% receive new customers/clients
- 48% receive new job opportunities
- 53% receive professional recognition

Q5 What is the most important personal branding asset?

- 53 % personal website
- 21% FB profile
- 12% LinkedIn profile

Q5 Personal websites - Now vs Future?

- Now – 63% personal website is more valuable than resume
- Future – 85% personal website will become more important in the next 5 years

8.4 Additional Report Highlights

1. Blogs as tools can increase job offers:

- 65% of professionals with own website have a blog
- 62% use their blog for career development purposes
- 61% received a job offer because of the blog
- 79% consider blog very important asset for the personal brand (Landmark study report, Branded.me, Jan 2014)

Blogs were evaluated as valuable tools, but there were respondents who do not utilize blog in the personal brand. 63% of those added that managing the blog is challenging, 73% blog management is difficult due to lack of time for writing the blog content (Landmark study report, Branded.me, Jan 2015)

2. Personalized domains are commonly used:

- 72% have personalized domain name
 - 73% say personalized domain is very important for the online brand
 - 66% have a personalized email associated with their domain name
 - 84% have a domain ending with .com
 - 23% have a domain ending with .net
 - 14% have a domain ending with .me
- (Landmark study report, Branded.me, Jan 2014)

The report opinions given by Branded.me CEO and Domain.Me Director of International Sales can be found at the in the article link given below in the sources area.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendation section consists of author's suggestion made based on the research, analysis and personal conclusions. Following recommendations are aimed to help the commissioning company in the further development process.

9.1 DIGGID's Guide to Personal Branding

The author suggests that the thesis material this document exist can be used by the commissioning company to create a guide to personal branding which could be converted into a PDF, eBook or infographic document and put on the company's website as free material.

Furthermore, the author considers that the free document would increase the company's recognition and website traffic. The document itself can be used as part of promotional campaign when marketing to the student target market

9.2 Current Situation Assessment

9.2.1 The start-up development strategy and target audience identification

As emphasized in the introduction part, DIGGID is looking for a new development strategy which will take the company specifically into personal branding business. Its current target audience contains both university students and freelancers who are very different target groups.

The personal branding trend is getting bigger with every coming year. While it used to be partly unknown, now it started getting more media space and more buzz. That change has impact on the need recognition for personal branding among DIGGID's target groups. However, based on findings and conclusions gathered in the thesis writing process, the author suggests that DIGGID develops two separate strategies for students and freelancers. The strategy for reaching student market can be more homogenous than the freelancer strategy.

9.2.2 Strategy for university students

During the previous feedback sessions with university students the company learned that students are keen on building a personal brand mostly for job opportunities. This opens a big space for DIGGID but only if positioned in the right way to the student audience. This will probably require a new separate marketing strategy to students and different pricing model.

Author would also like to emphasize the need for communication and development of branding culture among students. The phenomena of personal branding is relatively new, a consistent communication through the articles, blogs or other media channels is necessary in order to educate the target audience.

9.2.3 Strategy for freelancers

Freelancers are more heterogeneous target group and segmentation of different freelance experts company is willing to reach is a priority. Many freelancers who are for instance, in IT programming/development business are skillful to make a personal website without a website platform. For freelancers in technical positions, the author suggests the company promotes the branding benefit together with website making.

The company can sell expertise to freelancers who are in need of that. The product itself must have an added value to the website in order to make this specific freelance group perceive the value in the amount paid.

Other groups of freelancers are looking for revenue increase through the branding so the approach of marketing the service to them should be different. The pricing model for freelancers needs to be adjusted to the amount spent per client. As the author pointed out, the freelancers are more demanding target group which take more time per client than students do.

9.2.4 Automatization of the registration process

In this recommendation, the author aims to illustrate the benefit of automatization of current registration and website making process. The conversion rate inside both target audiences will surely increase with more advanced sign-up process which takes less time.

Other branding platforms offer clients to make website themselves, but the website remains under the URL of the platform itself as subdomain. DIGGID offers to the clients the unique domain name which surely is a competitive advantage.

Another recommendation on this topic would be a free trial period for new clients who might have a lack of trust towards the start-up and the service it offers. This way the trust would be established much faster just like the product quality can be tested before paying for it.

9.3 Personal Branding and Recruitment

The role of personal branding in recruitment process gets more important. The author's findings indicate that this importance is seen from both sides: HR professionals as recruiters and job applicants. The HR survey used to analyze current trends and values of personal branding from HR perspective emphasizes the need of branding with personal websites among job candidates.

9.3.1 HR Survey summary

The survey's main points:

- Online recruitment trends;
- The increased number of applicants means bigger need for differentiation;
- Personal websites more preferred tools than resume by HR professionals;
- Around 70% of recruiters claim personal websites are insightful and resourceful tools from which they can learn about the job candidate;
- 4/10 recruiters are more likely to hire a candidate who is applying with personal website (among two candidates with equal qualifications);
- More than half of HRs agreed that a personal website is humanizing a job candidate and makes a more personal impression.

9.3.2 HR Survey recommendations for DIGGID

The author has chosen the following suggestions which could be applied by DIGGID:

1. The HR survey findings can be used to sell the DIGGID's service better to the student target audience as it contains the data related to the job seeking and recruitment.
2. The findings are affirmative to what company is doing and it can be used to check the market need.
3. The HR survey data are suggested to be transformed into a DIGGID's unique infographic meant for further promotional purposes.
4. The company could utilize some already existing clients as the successful cases of branding with personal website who managed to materialize its benefits.
5. The survey findings suggest the more efficient way of social media to be utilized into personal website as the main branding tool and all together to be used for branding activities.

9.3.3 Landmark survey summary

The survey's main points:

- The impact of personal website on career development;
- Big number of website owners receive benefits already in first year;
- 51% of them got more client because of the website, 49% of them got job opportunities thanks to the personal website;
- 72% of respondents have a personalized domain name, 83% has domain name ending with .com;
- 85% of respondents expect personal website to be more important in next 5 years.

9.3.4 Landmark Survey recommendations for DIGGID

The author has chosen the following suggestions which could be applied by DIGGID:

1. The survey results can be used as market validation of DIGGID. The service the company offers is getting more important, the author suggests that the company keeps personal websites in the main focus of the service.
2. Just like in first survey, the suggestion is that the findings of this study can be used for DIGGID's promotional material in the form of infographic or eBook.

3. The study proves some obvious job opportunity and client maximization benefits, the suggestion to DIGGID is to use those results specifically in the process of personal selling (presentations, focus groups, workshops).
4. 84% respondents who have personal websites received benefits from it, yet only 4% of people currently have one. This illustrates the gap between the need and the users of personal websites. This information can also be used as market potential in personal brand field.

9.4 New Practices and New Methods

The author suggests that the company tries new selling practices and test different target audience groups in order to identify the reasons for such small number of personal website users. The landmark survey investigated the personal website and career development link and clearly shows the benefits of users. However, if 84% respondents who have personal websites received benefits and only 4% of respondents have a personal website that indicates the value proposition problem.

Another suggestion on this issue is to develop a new testing strategy with smaller focus group offering personal websites for free and measuring the results of clients who are using website for job opportunities.

9.5 Development of Marketing Channels

So far the company has been using website as the main marketing channel, relying on FB and LinkedIn page mostly, in that order. For bigger conversion rate the bigger audience needs to be reached and that requires wider specter of marketing channels.

Top 3 suggestions on this topic:

1. Affiliate marketing.
2. Partnerships with other website where your target audience can be found.
3. Advertising.

Already existing channels are to be used in the future, preferably in a consisting way with systematic activity. Furthermore, different channels should be used for different purposes and the parameters of measuring results should be adjusted to the goals of the channels.

9.6 Team and Source Enlargement

Based on the research and data collected during the thesis process, the author believes that bigger team is needed to provide bigger growth in the next 6-12 months. The growth should be based on increased number of clients who will as early adopters play marketing role among their social circles.

In addition, the author suggests more developed overall 6 or 12 month marketing strategy for which there will have to be secured bigger number of financial sources.

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