



It's Not New Age Nonsense – Here's How to “Be the Brand”

[Carita Rizzo](#) - May 31, 2016 - [Marketing](#)



“Be the brand,” is something freelancers and new entrepreneurs hear all the time. But what does it mean?

When it comes to the art of branding yourself as a person it's easy to think of the Kardashians. There is hardly another example of a family that has excelled in being a brand as well as they have. Or Oprah – the woman has her OWN network. But what if you're not a “personality” – or even in a business where who you are as an individual has an impact on what kind of product you deliver?

Being famous doesn't matter. What matters in branding is what you want to be known for to the rest of the world.

To build your brand, “you need to be good at something,” says Yahoo social media editor Angela Kim. “Find out what that niche is. Hone in on what you're good at, and from there see where your audience lives and start building out your platform that way.”

We talked to three business owners about what it means to truly embody your brand, and how to build it from scratch.

Become the Expert

[Meghan Cleary](#) hadn't planned on becoming the expert on anything and everything shoe related. The former Wall Street marketing expert was shopping around a fiction novel when asked if there was a non-fiction idea she wanted to pitch as well. She came up with the idea for a book called “The Perfect Fit: What Your Shoes Say About You” and it sold.

But Cleary knew publishing a book didn't mean anyone would read it. “I had a history of marketing, so I was very cognizant that – especially with books – they could live and die in a month, and no one would ever hear about them again. So I wanted to be fully prepared for when my book came out and have a whole platform around being a shoe expert,” she says.

For a year and a half, Cleary built her brand by learning everything she could about footwear, writing long features for a shoe-focused magazine, and offering herself up as an expert to women's magazines and fashion outlets.

"Branding is the story you get to tell."

"What was fun was that I decided I was going to be a shoe expert and I started telling people that's what I was, and I had a book coming out so I had credibility," says Cleary. "And I identified three key messages that I wanted to transmit about the book, but they were also very much about who I was as a person, and who I was as a brand."

She nailed her own marketing campaign, appearing as a shoe expert on the Today show, MSNBC, Extra and more, and a decade later Cleary's brand includes two books about what our footwear says about us and her own her own line of shoes.

You Do You

When realtor [Tami Halton Pardee](#) started building her own brand, she recalled a story about a girl and her dad walking along the beach.

Millions of starfish had washed up on shore and the little girl kept grabbing them and throwing them back into the sea. "Honey," says her dad. "Why are you doing this? It's not going to make a difference." The little girl looks at a starfish and throws it into the sea and says, "I bet it made a difference to that one."

Pardee always believed that home buying is a very individual experience, so the moral of the starfish story became the realtor's business philosophy, and the starfish her logo. "We're making that difference for each person, one by one," she says. "I take them into the next chapter of their lives."

More than picking a motto that felt good from a marketing perspective, the most important thing for Pardee about branding herself was to really believe what she was projecting out into the world.

"Me and my company are pretty much one," she says. "Your branding should align with your core values because you live your brand. You are your brand."

Projecting an image of a different person would be nothing short of exhausting, she points out. "If your brand is not aligned with who you are, you're going to fail," she says. "You have to feel that it totally represents you and who you are. If you don't do that it's not going to make sense to you, and if it doesn't make sense to you, it won't make sense to anybody else."

Be Specific About Your Skills

Three years ago, Miami-based personal trainer [April Buchwald](#) decided she wanted to leave the business she had built with a partner and go out on her own. "I felt it was time to brand my name," she says.

To market what she did best, Buchwald started her own Instagram account and Facebook page, using photo and video to demonstrate her very particular skills. "You're selling yourself. And I was selling what I was really good at, which was suspension training. Instead of focusing on a facility and equipment, I was focusing on, 'Who is April Buchwald.'"

It worked fast, she says. In fact, an Austin-based company called Onnit discovered Buchwald's Instagram posts and approached her for a collaboration. "They saw what I was capable of doing with my suspension training and now we're in the process of building a program."

In “being a brand” Buchwald knew she couldn’t be everything to everybody.

“It’s being honest about what you’re giving the customer. You’re representing something you’re passionate about and putting the word out there about what you have to offer,” says Buchwald. “I’ve been focused on this one goal, and I definitely reached it.”