

PRAVIN THAKUR IS A DIGITAL MARKETING, PERSONAL BRANDING, TECHNICAL LANDSCAPING, AND CREATIVE DESIGNING EVANGELIST WITH OVER 15 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE AND RICH EXPOSURE TO ONSHORE AND OFFSHORE PROJECTS ACROSS INDUSTRY VERTICALS THAT GAVE HIM A CHANCE TO ENGAGE WITH CLIENTS FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM, THE US, THE UAE, AUSTRALIA, AND THE DOMESTIC MARKET. A VISITING FACULTY AT MUMBAI-BASED B D SOMANI INSTITUTE OF ART & FASHION TECHNOLOGY, THAKUR LOVES TO COUNSEL PEOPLE ABOUT THE EMERGING CONCEPT OF PERSONAL BRANDING THROUGH HIS POWER-PACKED LECTURES. IN AN INTERVIEW WITH *MONEY INDICES*, HE DECONSTRUCTS THE CONCEPT OF PERSONAL BRANDING

BY ARCHANA NAIR

BRANDING



1 Could you give us an educated view about the concept of personal branding?

Personal branding is about understanding what makes you unique and making it relevant to your target audience. It is definitely not about becoming a celebrity and being known to the masses by creating a false image of yours. It is about achieving the goal of making your target audience think of YOU when they think of YOUR industry vertical, or personal qualities, or BOTH. It is about using that goodwill to contribute to any corporate brand i.e. (employer) or for self. A strong personal brand is a combination of your offering/services associated with trust,

reputation, and ability to stand out from the competitive clutter. It is neither a celebrity concept nor a motivational topic, as it was misinterpreted in the beginning stage in India.

2 Could you tell us a bit about the culture of personal branding in the Indian scenario?

Over a period of time, while practising personal branding and trying to promote it, I noticed that the subject is gaining visibility in the Indian market due to its online presence. Since it is a fascinating subject, other players were entering the market as individual trainers or in form of companies talking about the topic. The subject also started gaining

A PERSONAL MAKEOVER

attention from the corporate world as they wanted their resources to benefit from personal branding, which, in turn, could benefit the corporate organisation itself. To a small extent, personal branding in the current scenario is still misunderstood and incorrectly promoted through its (unwarranted) comparisons with soft skills development, English communication, etc. These may be the elements of self-development, but they are still not all about personal branding. People are still a little reluctant to invest time and money in their self-branding and also are not educated to use the free resource on internet appropriately for personal branding. Individuals are more inclined towards social networking just for fun rather than creating a balance between social and professional networking to build personal brand image.

3 What's the relevance of a personal brand in the current competitive scenario? Why personal branding is considered so important in professional life?

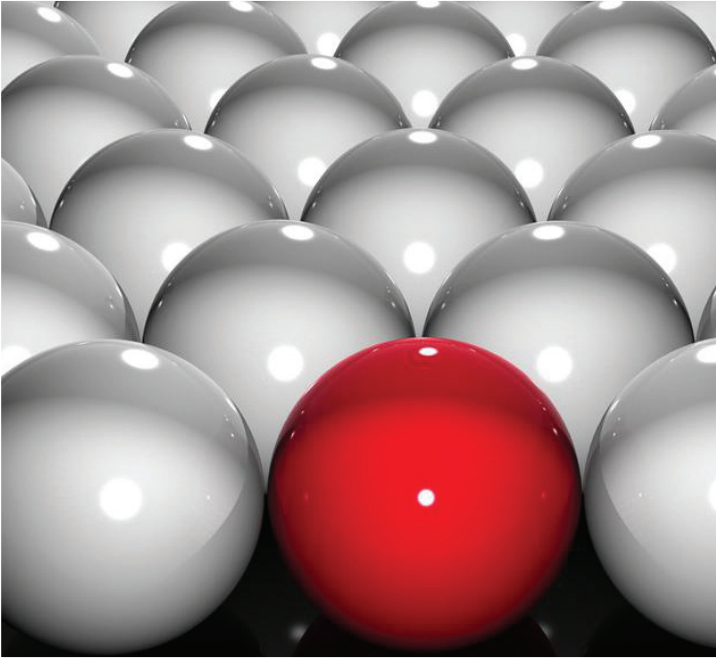
The mass of qualified academic crowd with good percentages is increasing at a tremendous rate, leading to an increase in the clutter of talent pool. Recruiters have a tough time selecting a candidate for a respective opening as a lot many people fit into the criteria. Hence if people self-brand themselves appropriately, it will create a visibility for them while getting employed. During the economic crisis, corporate brands don't wind up their business but layoff jobs to cut the cost for sustaining in business. In such adverse situations, an organisation selects and retains their best and efficient team. So, a strong personal brand in an organisation certainly brings the advantage of job security. A good personal branding strategy leads to network expansion of professional as well as personal audience. Today, finance plays a pivotal role in the success of business startups. Similarly, a strong network plays a key role. Hence having a good personal brand

image is an advantage to entrepreneurs willing to launch themselves in business as they can capitalise on their goodwill to make the new business successful.

4 When and how should we start on personal brand building?

Whether we like it or not, we are branded each day of our life since early school days till we die. So if we don't brand ourselves consciously, people around start branding us. The concept is about constantly working on your brand image and making it stronger. To start with personal branding, I will mention two key factors:

- 1 Personal Brand Discovery: It is about knowing what makes you different, your strengths, and weaknesses.
- 2 Personal Brand Communication: Having a consistent personal brand statement in all your interactions, be it a casual meeting or a professional meeting, or even if it's about your presence in any media, both online or offline.



Tips on personal branding

- 1 Have a personal domain name. Domain names are unique. It is like investing in real estate in online space. If it is available, grab the opportunity to purchase the same, because if it is sold, you can't own till it is available again.
- 2 Apart from your name, optimise your website for keywords related to your industry domain in search engines.
- 3 Have crisp, classy, and consistent brand collateral communicating consistent message. Consistency can be created with colours, fonts, usage of images, tag lines, etc.
- 4 Update profile in every digital space available, such as social networking, professional networking, resumes in job sites, blogs etc.
- 5 Personal branding is not just about promoting yourself all the time. It is also about promoting and endorsing your personal and professional peers as it leads to strong network retention. Participate in events hosted in your area of specialisation. It increases knowledge and also helps in networking.
- 6 In the course of creating your personal brand, don't promote fake and artificial things about yourself to inflate the popularity as it will surely result in negative branding sooner or later.
- 7 Creating awareness in offline networking by effective communication to ensure every person you meet know about your offerings. Exchange business cards even if you are a student.
- 8 Ensure your domain knowledge is not outdated as it will diminish interest of the prospective audience.
- 9 Carry yourself in an appropriate manner for relevant occasions. Your visits, attitude, and attire shouldn't always be casual.
- 10 Associate your name with all your creations, products, and services.
- 11 Personal introduction should always start with your industry domain, followed by the name of the employer and designation and not vice versa.
- 12 Don't jump off and get into business conversation right off while meeting someone. Start with areas of common interest to build a relationship.

5 What is your advice to young business professionals on establishing their personal brand?

Young business professionals may not necessarily be young in terms of their experience. For example, a person may have significant experience and start his/her new business. It is obvious that people like to do business with people they know or with persons they have been referred to by their known network. The reason is simple: presence of trust and expectation of security, as they know the person. First of all, create a consistent personal brand image in the mind of consumers, which should make them think of trust, quality, and service. Secondly, promote the quality and not just for competitive price. They need to adopt a strategy that can make the consumers think of their name when it comes to a product/service. If their product or service is a success and if they go on to launch/offer a new product/service, the chances of the success of the second launch also increase as the consumer market knows the promoter. Moreover, young business professionals should have presence in online space with a personal website. Above all, they need to ensure their presence in Google search by being among the top 10.



For example, whatsapp.com is a great success in the market, but many people don't know the person behind it. If people know the promoter, his/her ongoing product will receive the same mileage. The conclusion is that when people think of a product or service, they should be able to relate that product/service with the creator. Hence let the creations be known to the world with their name, not just corporate/product brand alone.



CHANDA KOCHHAR,
MD and CEO of ICICI Bank



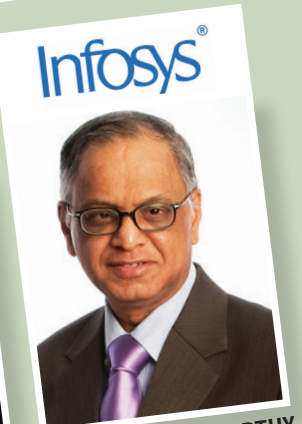
LAKSHMI MITTAL,
Chairman and CEO
of ArcelorMittal



VIJAY MALLYA,
Chairman, UB Group



JAWED HABIB,
Managing Director of Jawed
Habib Hair and Beauty Ltd



N R NARAYANA MOORTHY,
Co-founder of Infosys

Social Media & Personal Brand Building

Social media is more like reputation management with the people you meet in digital space. Effective use of social media can boost personal branding. Here are some basic uses:

- 1 Status updates on social sites can display one liners about latest achievements or current professional activities
- 2 Social media can be used like a newspaper to inform people about events, webinars, new launches, etc. And there are no costs attached.
- 3 Galleries shouldn't contain pictures of your social life all the time. It can also feature a couple of good pictures from your latest professional portfolio. It creates awareness of your domain.
- 4 Instead of constantly keeping in touch with an existing network, one should

spend time in exploring people who can be added to his/her professional network via reference of a mutual friend in contact.

- 5 Endorsing people you know on professional networking sites is a good practice for network retention.
- 6 Constantly post new content, driven by social and professional objectives, as fresh content always attracts people and keeps them interested.
- 7 While approaching a new prospect for a job or a business venture, social media can be used to find a mutual contact who can act as a reference.
- 8 It can also be used as a research tool to do initial analysis about a person's likes, dislikes, and social nature before you approach him/her for a business venture.

