

## Chapter 1

# The Brand Called YOU!

**N**o matter who you are, you have undoubtedly purchased products—and therefore *product brands*—from clothing to furniture, technology, and more. As a consumer, you are also personally branded by the various corporate brands you support, whether it be the McDonald’s arch on your cheeseburger wrapper, the Nike swoosh on your shoe, or the Apple logo on your iPod. Throughout your life, you have made decisions among competing brands, choosing some brands over others, and along the way you have built up attitudes, impressions, and beliefs—without even noticing.

What does this all mean? As an individual, you must acknowledge that you are a brand. And who better to market your personal brand than *you*. This means that at the end of the day, the success of your personal brand lies in your hands.

### **The Power of Brand YOU**

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Personal branding is about unearthing what is true and unique about you and letting everyone know about it. As a brand, you are your own free agent: you have the freedom to create the career path that links your talents and interests with the right position

and the ability to move both vertically and horizontally, now and throughout your career. You can even switch career paths when you feel it is necessary.

You also have the opportunity to stand out and make a name—through your brand—for yourself. The fact that owning a website is so easy gives everyone a chance to develop and market a personal brand that shows the world who they are and what they're capable of. For instance, on the Web, you have the opportunity to promote brand YOU by joining a social network and using your page as a billboard to advertise your talents and goals.

Thanks to technology, you can reap the same rewards as the billion-dollar brand names, from Trump to Gucci, through effective *marketing*. Creating a brand isn't just about technology, though. By focusing on delivering results, being remarkable, and learning new skills to adapt to our ever-changing world, you can make your brand memorable, and opportunities for success will follow.

### **Develop Your Personal Brand**

Many people may view personal branding as a form of self-promotion and selfishness. In some ways it is, but this doesn't mean it's a bad thing! Developing your brand makes you a more valuable asset, whether to the company you work for, a potential employer, or your own enterprise. Don't forget, it's your future we're talking about. Don't you want to make it a success? Furthermore, by effectively branding yourself, your career success will translate into happiness outside the workplace as well.

Don't think of the brand called YOU as being confined strictly within a single corporate environment. Even if your current job description and title put you in a corner, both literally and practically, you can—and should—stand out as an individual with a unique set of talents and marketable skills. Remember, no employment contract spans a lifetime, which means you have the mobility and freedom to shape your career path as you see fit.

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- If you're on a career path that makes you happy—*work it*. Make the most of your talents and skill set to achieve maximum success.
- If you're on a career path that does not make you happy—*change it*. Find the right path for you and focus on making it work.
- If you're unsure about your future—*define it*. Weigh all the factors that matter to you and find the career path that fits best.

You need to approach your career in terms of *differentiation* (standing out in the crowd) and *marketability* (providing something other people want or need). Why would someone choose your brand?

- A robust professional network
- Endorsements from respected colleagues
- Previous accomplishments with cataloged results
- A diversified and unique skill set

The same rules that apply to corporate brands apply to personal brands. The successful brand YOU marketing model has the proper mix of confidence, passion, likeability, determination, and focus. When you look at successful business leaders, such as Warren Buffet or Rupert Murdoch, you realize that each has a self-purpose, a call to action, and a desire to win. They all shared this marketing model, and you should too.

## **What Is a Personal Brand?**

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What is a personal brand? Since *personal branding* is used in public relations, marketing, *entrepreneurship*, social media, and more, many different interpretations of the term have arisen. I was able to solve this confusion by generating a wiki, which is a website that enables collaboration through real-time editing. I then or-

ganized a team of global branding experts, including William Arruda, Krishna De, and Mike Myatt, to edit the wiki and develop a definition that accurately summarizes the objectives and goals of personal branding:

If that definition seems confusing, it can be boiled down to this: *how we market ourselves to others.*

### **What is Personal Branding?**

“Personal branding describes the process by which individuals and entrepreneurs differentiate themselves and stand out from a crowd by identifying and articulating their unique *value proposition*, whether professional or personal, and then leverage it across platforms with a consistent message and image to achieve a specific goal. In this way, individuals can enhance their recognition as experts in their field, establish reputation and *credibility*, advance their careers, and build self-confidence.”

## **What It Means to Be You Inc.**

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We need to keep certain unspoken guidelines in mind when creating *You Inc.* Successful personal brands need to be authentic, have a good reputation, and be discovered by the right people.

### **Authenticity Is Required**

Why do you need to be real? Because everyone else is taken and replicas don't sell for as much! To be a brand means to be authentic. Marketing spin is counterproductive; people filter it out of their minds and send it into a black hole, never to return. If you are presenting yourself as a marketing manager for a *Fortune* 500 company when you are really a cocktail waitress at a nightclub, you obviously aren't legit.

You will notice that many individuals who label themselves as “experts” or “world-recognized” professionals are exaggerating.

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Those who pretend to be someone they are not run the risk of being exposed. Just as good romantic relationships are based on genuineness, openness, and a willingness to be up front from the start, in business, your relationships depend on *authenticity*. Authenticity showcases exactly who you are and what you can deliver. For example, if you brand yourself as a freelance writer, you should be able to back that up with a portfolio of solid writing samples.

There is a misconception that branding is all about changing who you are in order to fit others' expectations. While *image management* is typically just that—a product of conscious manipulation—personal branding is about sincerity.

**Beware of False Brand Images**

A false image may get you some short-term success, but over time, others will likely see through you—or a formal background check as part of a hiring process will catch you.

Being authentic also includes maintaining open communication and assuming accountability for your actions. Dishonesty will attract more attention than honesty, and the truth always comes out eventually. Rather than constructing a false image and working hard to maintain a deception, you should pay attention to what is truthful and amazing about you and work hard to make the most of it.

A company fails to maintain authenticity when it uses false *advertising* or when its sales force persuades prospective customers to purchase a product they won't enjoy. Would you trust someone who sells you an ugly jacket by telling you that you look gorgeous in it? Each salesperson needs to carry an accurate and truthful message, because that sales rep's customer interactions are a reflection of the corporate brand. Any malpractice must be cleared up and the proper spokesperson should apologize immediately. As your own best salesperson, you need to represent brand *You* authentically.

“Above all else, be yourself—be genuine—and you’ll find success no matter what you do.”

—Chris Pirillo, Internet personality  
and founder of Gnomedex

To be authentic is to be *transparent*—online as well as in person. Online deceptions are just waiting to be discovered. Thanks, Google!

Here are some examples of brands that maintain a positive online authenticity:

- **Redfin:** Glenn Kelman, known as the “see-through CEO,” set up a blog, where he posted about the nasty politics and bad practices conducted in the real estate business (*Wired Magazine*, 2007)<sup>6</sup>. He publicized Redfin’s internal debates and arguments about its website design. He even spoke about how he was at a college campus and not a single student went up to network with him. As a result of the blog, Redfin was closing many more deals a day, despite the comments section, where old-school agents fought back harshly.
- **Southwest Airlines:** Southwest started a coauthored blog by 30 employees from the top down to the bottom of the corporate ladder, with conversations relating to work life.
- **Zappos:** This company has a companywide wiki that acts as a feedback loop between employees and management to get problems resolved.

You need to represent yourself accurately at all times. Just like a corporation, if you don’t take ownership of your brand, you’ll be stuck forever with how the world initially judges you. To have a successful career and save yourself the agony of harsh judgment, make transparency and authenticity an important concern.

## **Your Brand Reputation Can Make or Break You**

Why do you think customers purchase from certain corporations over others? Why do companies spend the largest portion of their marketing budget on branding? Customers purchase based on trust and are willing to pay more for a product and brand they are comfortable with. Effective branding creates customer loyalty, even evangelism. Companies that maintain reputable brands are more successful in gaining and keeping customer attention.

So what does this mean for you as you think about ways to develop your personal brand? As a brand, you can achieve a positive reputation, much like the reputations of companies you admire. Beyond garnering customer attention and loyalty, a major benefit of maintaining a reputable brand—either individually or corporately—is that people will be much more willing to forgive a historically trustworthy company if it fails to meet a specific expectation, such as fast service, provided it show efforts to fix the problem.

In contrast, when a company has a long history of poor service and there is yet another problem, customers will be likely to seek better treatment from a competitor—and there are always lots of competitors eager for the business. Your brand reputation should operate in the same way—building credibility and showcasing your character, attitudes, and actions in ways that instill good feelings in others.

It is your responsibility to put your brand in a favorable light without engaging in excessive promotion. Too much self-promotion, whether among friends, colleagues, or potential contacts, can make you come off as egotistical or self-superior and have a disastrous effect on your brand. Your trail of self-promotion will leave behind a dark cloud that is visible to all. For example, an excessive self-promoter who constantly reminds coworkers of personal achievements in a desperate search for attention and gratification actually alienates potential colleagues and allies.

In attempting to brand yourself within an existing corporation, coming off as obnoxious and annoying will only result in repelling others and may make it more likely they'll either throw you under the bus if a problem arises or try to avoid working with you as projects come up. The workplace is a habitat where the fittest thrive, not by ruthlessly claiming superiority at every opportunity but by strategically positioning themselves as natural leaders. That being said, you can't sit back and watch others take what you deserve. You have to strike a balance to gain the visibility needed to rise to the top.

Making sure your brand reputation is seen as current is also important. When a brand doesn't seem relevant anymore and has no differentiating qualities that make it special, its reputation suffers. People will notice that you seem out of date and avoid your brand. You must ensure that your personal brand stays current, yet it must be consistent over time as well. For example, if you walk into a McDonald's, whether you are in Japan or in the United States, the product you purchase will be consistent, despite small cultural differences. Your brand must strike a careful balance between keeping up with the times and maintaining a consistency that your *audience* can count on.

## **Brand YOU—Only as Powerful as You Make It**

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### **The Power of Word-of-Mouth Marketing**

When promoting your brand, *word-of-mouth (WOM)* marketing reigns supreme, as your most important contacts are your friends, family, business partners, and acquaintances. WOM marketing is how to get people talking about you, your product, or your business. Typically, businesses succeed or fail based on referrals, and WOM is a proven way to gain more exposure and build trust fast. In today's increasingly connected world, people become famous, or infamous, because of WOM.

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Take Judson Laipply, who showcased his performance *Evolution of Dance* on *YouTube*. The video quickly skyrocketed to the front page of *YouTube* and was featured on countless blogs, social networks, and media sites. This viral effect allowed the video eventually to become the second-most viewed video on *YouTube* (of all time) with over 100 million views. How much did Judson spend on this campaign? \$0. People were so entertained that they shared it with their friends, who shared it with their friends, and so on.

According to a recent study by the Keller Fay Group, 92 percent of people make product decisions based on WOM recommendations<sup>7</sup>. When it comes to personal branding, you are the chief marketing officer for brand YOU, but what others say about your brand often has a greater impact than what you say about yourself. So every time someone talks about you, make sure what they're saying is positive and factual!

Managing your personal brand effectively is essential to controlling word of mouth. The public nature of the Internet has revealed poorly managed personal brands.

- **Exhibit A:** A bank intern faked a “family emergency” to take a day off from work, then dressed up as a fairy for a Halloween party and posted pictures on Facebook the following day (Valleywag, 2007)<sup>8</sup>. The incriminating photo was discovered on Facebook by the manager and passed around the office. The intern lost his position soon after.
- **Exhibit B:** A 20-year-old student uploaded pictures of himself dressed up in a jailbird outfit, celebrating a drinking and driving accident where he injured an innocent woman, onto Facebook (AP, 2008)<sup>9</sup>. Those pictures were found and used in court by the prosecution to convict him—he was sentenced to two years in prison.

You wouldn't want to end up like these two would you?

## Visibility Creates Opportunities

A key part of branding is visibility—clearly displaying your value to the world. The more people who either know you or have heard about you, the better. Opportunities for advancement and success will arise through your connections and visibility—created through the repetition and strategic placement of brand messaging. Effective brand messaging allows you to maximize your potential to create positive opportunities.

Brand visibility and awareness are the first steps toward its acceptance by customers. Becoming aware of a brand is the first step in a customer's purchasing process. If people don't know about you, your brand will go unnoticed. Instead of hiding under your bed sheets, push them back and let people know you exist! Visibility allows you to spread your influence. This book will teach you strategies for communicating your brand, but the main idea is that if you want your brand to be known, you have to make it known.

### The Power of Brand Visibility

Tim Ferris, author of the number one *New York Times* best-selling book *The 4-Hour Workweek* was virtually unknown to the world before his book was published. He ties his success directly to the relationships he built with influential bloggers and the journalists who wrote about his book when it came out. As each article was published, Tim gained more visibility, which resulted in new and exciting opportunities for him to gain even more personal awareness. This snowball effect placed his book on countless best seller lists, and he was written up in *Maxim*, *Fortune*, and *Wired*; discussed on CNBC; and the list goes on. With a single idea, Tim was able to promote his brand and become a business celebrity, and so can you.

Within an organization, the greatest opportunity for you to gain visibility is through *spheres of influence*. Your “sphere of influ-

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ence is an imaginary area between you and the individuals who have endorsed your personal brand. The goal of a sphere of influence is to capture the minds of as many of your colleagues or peers as possible and to convince them of your abilities, while establishing trust and mutual respect in the process.

### **Always Be Networking**

To expand your sphere, you must network effectively. The more people who come into your sphere, the greater your chance of success. Furthermore, the object is to get *influential* people into your sphere—they already have large spheres of influence, which you share if you have good relationships with them. With a strong sphere, you can persuade an audience to support you on a project or encourage a recruiter to hire you. As your sphere continues to grow, over time it will turn into a powerful network that can further your career and even open unexpected doors.

How should you go about expanding your sphere? Find ways to interact with your fellow employees and network with as many influential people as possible across groups, departments, and corporate hierarchies. *Networking* occurs in every situation you encounter with friends, colleagues, family, and even teachers. As you befriend others, they will be more inclined to become part of your social life and extend opportunities, possibly in their own corporations.

Don't forget to network outside of your company as well, because there is no such thing as job security anymore. Most people network only when they are searching for a job. When this happens, your intentions are obvious, and people won't go out of their way for you. Be sure to indicate what you're interested in, so when people hear of a job, your name comes to mind. Make your life one giant networking event!

### **How to Network Successfully:**

- Make a strong and favorable first impression.
- Try to remember at least three facts about each person you meet, including the person's name.
- Be conscious of people's feelings when talking.
- Find creative ways to give value or promote other individuals, and they will reciprocate.
- Be an active listener and take a genuine interest in what others have to say.

### **How Not to Network:**

- Interrupt a conversation and force your way into it.
- Ask for an internship or job without even introducing yourself.
- Fail to make proper eye contact or give a firm handshake when first meeting someone.
- Get drunk at an event and spill your beer on the person you are trying to connect with.
- Wear a low-cut skirt, tank top, or other inappropriate clothing to a formal meeting, event, or interview.
- Treat a new contact like a one-night stand instead of forming a relationship.
- Forget your business cards at home, thinking the other person will remember your name and contact information.
- Say you're too busy to help someone else, yet ask that person to support you, and forget to follow up because you're too busy.
- Position yourself as superior to your manager or coworkers.
- Have poor posture and no confidence.

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As you seek to rise in an organization, in order to further establish yourself, you must form relationships with others who are already well established. How? You must convince others that you have what it takes and display your intelligence and communication skills by *showing*, not telling.

Here are four rules for climbing the corporate ladder:

- 1: Strategize.** Always try to connect yourself with high-profile projects that align with your strengths.
- 2: Be efficient.** Finish projects before deadlines and always give recognition to the team when presenting your results.
- 3: Productivity is key.** Focus on productivity instead of the length of time you spend on a project.
- 4: Promote yourself.** Make sure influential people are aware of your best work, or you risk falling off the radar.

### **Be a Great Project Manager**

In the world of work, demonstrating solid project management skills has become the dominant force in supercharging your personal brand and establishing your reputation—it also looks great on your resume. In the workplace, a project is assigned to you with, hopefully, a specific deadline and the resources necessary for successful completion. Managing the project enables you to produce a measurable outcome, either positive or negative. It also gives you the chance to network with your peers and even across the organization, depending on the scope of the project. Finishing a project successfully creates positive momentum you can build on and a positive reputation. Your track record with projects will convince others that you can achieve the same or better results with the next project.

I learned about the importance of effective project management during college. My first full-time marketing job was with a

small product promotion and incentive travel company. One day, I noticed that a colleague was working on a promotional brochure. I showed interest in the project and delivered great results, demonstrating that I had the skills to take her brochures to the next level. Positive WOM about my abilities followed, and soon I was drafting brochures for companies such as WBZ Radio and The Ninety Nine restaurants. More employees quickly started taking notice, and before long, the CEO offered me a full-time position. This success also gave me the confidence I needed to pursue more work of this type. Taking on that project helped me focus and build my personal brand.

### **Perception Is Reality**

Let's say that one day you were sitting outside, having a barbeque with your family, and you observed a snake on the ground. Your first reaction might be to run away screaming, and your behavior would likely cause your family to follow suit. But maybe you all ran away for nothing. Maybe the snake was nonpoisonous and harmless. However, most people connect snakes with poisonous bites on a gut level, regardless of the reality. This simple case highlights the power of *perception*, a quick and intuitive process based on sensations.

Companies are constantly evaluated by the way they are perceived by the competition, their customers, and in the media. If you worked for Enron when its financial scandal was headline news, then your brand was negatively impacted by the misconduct of your company, regardless of whether or not you were personally involved.

Individuals are judged based on perceptions as well. For example, if you come to work wearing jeans in a conservative corporate environment, people may view you as not taking your job seriously, whereas if you "dress for success," people will likely view you positively. On the Web, it is likewise easy to control these

opinions and perceptions. By customizing your website to suit the brand perception you want to create, for example, you can influence public perception.

“ Brand is everything, and perceptions are 90 percent of a brand. ”

—Paul Kedrosky, analyst, CNBC Television

Think about the power of perception: if you are unhappy with a specific service or product, then you blame the company, right? Every employee selling a product or providing a service is a representative of the corporate brand, so if the employee's brand is perceived as poor, the company will suffer the same effect. In short, in many ways, the employee *is* the brand.

Aesthetics plays a key role in brand perception. Here are two everyday examples:

- 1: Hotel bathrooms.** When I go to a hotel or restaurant, I tend to judge the entire place based on my perception of the bathroom. In my opinion, if the business invests in a luxurious bathroom, the entire venue will echo that commitment to quality and service.
- 2: Restaurant parking lots.** I evaluate the quality and popularity of a restaurant based on the number of cars in its parking lot. The more cars, the more endorsements the restaurant has.

The point is, in personal branding and in life, little things matter! Each move you make is a chance for you to enhance how people perceive you and draw more people to your brand. Start by wearing professional clothing; having a positive attitude; and conveying a sense of trust, competence, and assurance with each person you meet and interact with.

Those with sluggish, passive, and unimaginative brands will not succeed if they try to communicate an energetic, creative, and dynamic brand to the world. Whether you are a CEO or a junior in high school, you can always evolve your brand. A prime example of brand modification is Madonna. As the years pass and she releases new albums, she repositions her brand to fit the times, using new music technology to remain current. Madonna may have professional image management advisors to coach her, but that doesn't mean you can't follow her successful lead.

## Technology and Brand YOU

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### The World Was Not Ready in 1997

The graduating class of 1997 encountered many uncertainties when they ventured into the postcollege “working world.” They had received little preparation for its challenges. Back then, teachers, family members, and guidance counselors made fewer recommendations that students get internships. Job opportunities were growing at a rate of 27.5 percent, the largest increase in history. There were also fewer bachelor's degrees granted between 1997 and 2000 (Scheetz, 1997-1998)<sup>11</sup>. Thus, the need to brand oneself as anything special seemed less urgent.

“ Back in 1997 when Tom Peters coined the phrase *Brand You*, he introduced a new idea—that ordinary people could become brands much like Michael Jordan or Tiger Woods. Flash forward to today. As publishing democratizes and flourishes, the media landscape has fragmented into millions of micro niches. ”

—Steve Rubel, senior vice president, Edelman

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When Tom Peters's visionary article, introducing personal branding to the masses, hit newsstands, many individuals weren't prepared, nor did they recognize the potential for using personal branding in their own lives. Instead of pursuing entrepreneurship, the majority sought cover by enlisting as corporate employees and trudged their way up the corporate ladder, because they were instructed to by parents, peers, and teachers. Entrepreneurs at this time connected and recruited primarily through offline means, often through networking events in their communities. Few people thought of using the Internet to bond with investors or join other entrepreneurs and partners through online communities.

Back then, a resume and a cover letter were the sole criteria for the job application screening process, and *human resource* departments collected thousands of them in their database systems. Candidates who appeared qualified on paper were granted standard interviews; hiring managers had only a resume, cover letter, and a standard interview at their disposal. It was challenging for candidates to express themselves freely, showcase their full range of talents, and stand out from the crowd.

“ In the past, people played limited economic roles. As employees, they worked within organizational silos where the boss told them what to do. Too many people were bypassed by circulation of knowledge, power, and capital, and thus participated at the economy's margins. ”

—Don Tapscott, bestselling author, *Wikinomics*

In the 1990s, the Internet existed in *Web 1.0* format—which meant stationary Web pages with little interactivity. Blogs, which are essentially online diaries written in chronological format, were neither mainstream nor user-friendly, and few people had the technical know-how to run them. Companies preached to users online without actively engaging in the conversations that could

lead to positive outcomes, such as the ability to cocreate new products and services.

The costs associated with online branding were sky-high, from developing and designing a website to advertising. Few individuals could afford to brand themselves online for the same price big companies were paying. Media relations were too expensive for most individuals to invest in, and the likelihood they would garner significant attention was minimal. Thus, people were forced to rely on traditional communication channels, including newspapers and print magazines, which provided great circulation at the time but were and are one-dimensional, allowing for little or no interaction.

Like Web 1.0, *Me1.0* was when people hid behind their corporate brand, using their corporate logo as a shield from the outside world. Individuals conformed to corporate policy and had few networking tools at their disposal, so the opportunities for most individuals to broaden and control their careers were limited. There were routine networking events for associations and industries, but there was no mention of connecting through the Internet. The typical career during this time tended to involve long periods of employment at a single company. This “personal brand chokehold” impeded employees, leaving them with few opportunities and one potential income source. Luckily, as time passed, individuals were ready to embrace the fine art of personal branding.

As the corporate landscape progressed to the new millennium, companies started to shift their focus from viewing their talent as “fixed assets” to acknowledging the quality and performance of each employee. People became a corporation’s greatest resource and most important product, and the expense of keeping them well trained was viewed as a solid investment (BNET, 2001)<sup>13</sup>.

## **A New Century, a New State of Mind**

Enter the 21st century and a new way of thinking, living, and planning for the future. The recruiting landscape has been com-

pletely reshaped. Almost two-thirds of the American population—around 194 million people—is online, where the majority of recruiting is now conducted (eMarketer, 2008)<sup>14</sup>. The competition to get jobs is intense; more than 1.5 million graduates will be receiving their bachelor's or master's degrees this year and entering the job market, when the job growth rate is expected to be its lowest in five years (CSM, 2008)<sup>15</sup>.

What else has changed? Human resource and hiring professionals now prioritize college major, interview skills, and demonstration of initiative as main factors when deciding whom to hire (collegegrad.com, 2008)<sup>16</sup>. They've also de-emphasized one's GPA in the selection process. Compensation is now a key focus area for employers, given that 56 percent of companies expect to increase salaries and compensation packages to attract, motivate, and retain strong performers (careerbuilder.com, 2007)<sup>17</sup>.

“ It’s frustrating because I know I could do great work for any company, but it’s hard to get that message across when I’m competing against so many other qualified candidates. How am I supposed to stand out? I don’t want just any job—I want a great start to a great career. ”

—Corey Merrill, graduating senior, Northwestern University

As a result of increasing competition, a large percentage of recent college graduates are still searching for a job. A recent Jobweb.com survey indicated that employers receive an average of 73 applications for each available entry-level position (Monster TRAK, 2007)<sup>18</sup>. Talk about being a needle in a haystack!

This intense competition for jobs is a driving factor in the acceptance of the personal branding practice. Another is the shift to Web 2.0, the transition from one-way communication to community-driven environments on the Web. Out of Web 2.0, *social media* was born.

This new form of media—different from traditional media outlets such as newspapers, television, books, radio, and magazines—is built on community participation. Now anyone can provide remarks on current events or formulate their own stories and receive comments from others.

The *New York Times* and *USA Today* have even implemented reader commentary as a standard application throughout their online articles. They've also borrowed the same sharing features that blogs have, such as *Digg* and *Del.icio.us*, which allow the news to be spread easily from user to user and lets users interact with various websites. You know that media has changed when 95 percent of the top 100 U.S. newspapers and 58 percent of the top 100 magazines offer blogs, and these numbers will surely grow in the next few years (eMarketer, 2008)<sup>19</sup>.

### **The Power of RSS**

RSS, which stands for Really Simple Syndication, has quickly become the backbone of how people receive their information online. RSS allows users to view content (feeds) from several websites in one central location. No longer do individuals have to visit many websites to read content. With RSS, people can subscribe to sites and have that content delivered to them. It's like having all the news you need find you, instead of you having to find it.

By 2001, the individual's role on the Internet had shifted from spectator to participant. (Wikipedia)<sup>20</sup>. Like Web 2.0, *Me 2.0* can stand in front of your brand and be an effective brand spokesperson. Blogging was finally adopted by the masses and regarded as a full-fledged phenomenon. Open conversations have replaced one-way dialog on a level playing field. To give you a snapshot, in 2007, there were more than 70 million blogs in the blogosphere (the entire body of blogs on the Internet), as tracked by David Sifry, founder of Technorati. Every day, approximately 120,000 new blogs are developed, with 1.5 million new posts each day world-

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wide. There is literally a new post created almost every second. Just think about it—every time you blink your eye, a new blog post is published! By 2012, 67 percent of the Internet population will be reading blogs at least once a month (eMarketer, 2008)<sup>22</sup>.

As blogs have taken off, *podcasting* has exploded in popularity. Podcasts make multimedia portable, production easy, and sharing seamless, and they have revolutionized the way in which we consume, promote, and distribute information. They also offer an entirely new system for building brand *You*. Now people can be watching a podcast of you anywhere in the world, even without a laptop or desktop computer. You can use a podcast to showcase your talents, such as a video of you speaking at an event, a music video you made with your rock band, or a promotion for your next big business idea. Podcast viewers can get a quick sense of who you are and what you're capable of in just a few minutes. Think of the Web as a giant consortium of talent agents, waiting and watching, trying to find the next big superstar. That superstar can be you!

“ Today's tools make it easier to create, manage, and manipulate a personal brand—and society has realized the value of strong, personal brands. ”

—Frank Gruber Sr., product manager, AOL

To sum it all up, personal branding is an amazing and versatile tool and is necessary in a world where technology is changing the way we manage our careers, express our value, and communicate with one another. Personal branding will grant you real meaning and opportunities for success in your life. I've seen many individuals embrace their own passion, in the workplace and socially, through the power of personal branding. They are excited to wake up each day with the confidence to live the life they always wanted to live—and that is exactly how I want you to feel. Personal

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branding is the ultimate Gen Y career catalyst. It will allow you to achieve your long-term goals in the short term and empower you to become the *commander* of your career.