

Removing the barriers to marketing yourself



By [Donna Rachelson](#)

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Billions of rands are spent on branding and marketing campaigns every year by companies in South Africa wanting to attract new customers and grow market share. Marketing professionals will tell you that the fight for consumers' attention is fierce - ensuring your product or service stands out in a cluttered and competitive market is hard work.

Similarly, you'll hear HR professionals talking about the "talent war" and "critical skills shortages". The job market has become increasingly tough and candidates need to find some way of differentiating themselves from the pack.

We all understand that we live in a competitive world, yet we shy away from branding and marketing ourselves in a personal capacity. Why? Surely developing and marketing your own distinctive personal brand gives you an advantage over your competitors and ensures that you reach your target market?

I believe it does. Personal branding and marketing, when done well, can raise your profile, increase your visibility, build a reputation that precedes you and assist you in achieving better business results. That said; I've found that there are a lot of misconceptions about personal branding and marketing, and some people, while knowing they should be doing it, are often fearful of it. I've put together a list of a few myths around personal branding and marketing and some tips on how I believe you can avoid potential pitfalls associated with them.

Myths

- **Myth no.1: I will be seen as arrogant if I market myself as a professional.**

This is the greatest fear of many professionals and I believe that it stems from the fact that most of us have never received any formal training on how to brand and market ourselves. We have developed strong technical skills and competence, but we have no idea about how to showcase these to the world without seeming egotistical.

When we perform our technical roles, we know what the outcomes will be, whereas when we brand and market ourselves, we are not sure what the results will be and whether there will be positive feedback or payback.

Contrary to popular belief, creating a personal brand and marketing it is not about making a lot of noise about how wonderful you are. It's about identifying your strengths and what makes you distinctive from other people in your field. It's about better communicating the value you deliver as a professional; raising your profile and getting other people to talk about you in a positive light.

- **Myth no.2: Personal branding and marketing is only for people who want to be famous.**

This is something I hear quite often and it's simply not true. Personal branding and marketing is about exerting influence in your chosen profession. It's not just for celebrities and politicians - it's for anyone who understands the importance of perceptions and managing them effectively.

You might be an accountant, a sales manager, an engineer or an IT specialist - whatever the case, you can benefit from creating and marketing a dynamic personal brand that assists you in acquiring new business, relating to colleagues and raising your visibility within and outside of your organisation.

- **Myth no.3: Branding and marketing myself may be too risky.**

Yes, there is risk involved in branding and marketing yourself. If people get to know your brand, they have certain expectations of it. Think about Tiger Woods: he was always seen as the ultimate family man - a husband and a father - which is why the news of his philandering did such damage to his personal brand. He didn't deliver on his brand promise.

Little risk, however, often means little reward. Those with the most successful personal brands are often those who are prepared to "put themselves out there" and take a risk. While it may carry a risk to brand and market yourself, if you don't do it, others will do it for you and that maybe more risky. We are all branded, whether we like it or not.

Furthermore, if you go out and market yourself with a high degree of authenticity, people will begin to trust your brand and what you have to offer.

• **Myth no.4: My technical skills will earn me the recognition I deserve.**

Imagine you are interviewing two candidates for a job. They have exactly the same qualifications and the same work experience, but one just stands out to you more than the other.

Many professionals are often confused by the fact that some people may have the same technical training and competence as they do, but just seem to be noticed and get ahead more quickly. The reason is that these people are adept at marketing themselves. In fact, in many cases visibility is more important than ability.

There are millions of insurance brokers or event planners in the country, all offering similar services. What makes you stand out from the rest? You may be the best web developer in the country, but if nobody knows that, you're not going to get the work - the guy who is out there marketing himself will get it.

• **Myth no.5: Branding and marketing myself means pretending to be someone I'm not.**

Many people have the misperception that when you brand and market yourself you need to project something that is "not you". This is the greatest misconception of personal branding and marketing - it really all centres around authenticity. It's about understanding what makes you unique, different and memorable and packaging these skills and characteristics in a way that lifts you above the crowd.

When you brand and market yourself effectively, you are telling others what you stand for in a way that is not imposing. If you have done it well, people will think they have developed the perception by themselves.

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