

# You and Your Changing Brand

By John Knox



What distinguishes Ralph Lauren from Giorgio Armani? Or Wolfgang Puck from Paula Deen?

Each of those is a lucrative business brand that evolved from a personal brand. Businesses, like individuals, evolve, and they do so for various reasons. Sometimes, for example, new technologies demand that the business change to keep up, which is why NBC evolved into television after beginning as a radio network.

On occasion, external events create new opportunities for the business. For instance, when research linked smoking to cancer, Philip Morris repositioned its Marlboro brand from a woman's to a man's cigarette. Another reason for a business to evolve is because new markets open up. That's what happened when an expanding senior population led financial institutions to offer reverse mortgage products.

At a recent meeting of the [Independent Communicators Roundtable](#) (ICR), the discussion focused on personal branding and its connection with branding our businesses. During the discussion **a brand was defined as the perception of your product, company or service in the minds of your audience members.** It's not what you think it is: It's what they think it is.

Brand creation begins with information-gathering and some thorough introspection about your needs, values, goals, passions, vision, strengths and unique characteristics. The goal is to understand what value you bring—in other words, your unique selling proposition. Only after you truly understand your unique selling proposition will you be ready to communicate the culture of the brand through a website, a presentation, Tweets or other creative techniques.

Among various **tips** that were shared at the ICR meeting, these five bits of advice might help you develop, refine and promote your brand:

1. To get an honest assessment of how you are perceived by those who don't know you, ask a friend to look you up on Google and tell you how you come across (on LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook, for example). Offer to do the same kind of "audit" of him or her
2. Develop a 15-second "elevator pitch" and a 50 to 75 word bio that would go at the end of an article that you'd publish.
3. Comment on blog posts and join the conversation. The more that you can establish your voice on-line, the more comfortable you will feel with live comments.
4. Maintain your brand in your non-work activities. For example, if you volunteer at your child's preschool and you're a PR person, join the publicity committee, not the teacher compensation committee.
5. Select friends wisely. Consider who you relate with and how they are perceived on-line and off. Your professional colleagues and who you network with affect your brand.

In the hope of stimulating an exchange on this topic, I encourage you to comment on these questions:

- Is it good or bad to mix your personal interests with your business persona?
- How can you maintain consistency between a new and an old brand as your brand shifts? Is that even necessary?
- How aggressively should you communicate the brand's evolution, or is it better to make those changes quietly?



***John Knox owns [Knox Communications](#), a San Francisco-based public relations and marketing communications firm that began in 1989. Knox Communications specializes in health care and other professional services.***