Branding Yourself Online

How to Use the Internet to Become
a Celebrity or Expert in Your Field

by Bob Baker
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**This is a free shareware file that features the introduction and
a sample chapter from the book *Poor Richard's Branding Yourself Online*
(Top Floor Publishing). Please share this .pdf file with friends and associates
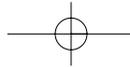who could benefit from getting more recognition online.**

For more details on the full-length book, visit the author's site:
http://BrandingYourselfOnline.com

In this Age of the Individual, personal branding is vital to your success. This
new book explains how you can use the Internet to quickly and inexpensively
become an expert or celebrity in your field of choice.

Big companies understand the importance of brands -- if the product is
recognizable, customers are more likely to embrace the idea behind the
product and buy it. The same holds true for individuals. People will not only
listen more intently to a familiar voice, they'll become raving fans for life.

Poor Richard's Branding Yourself Online offers tons of ways you can use the
Internet to become a recognizable authority in your area of expertise. Find out
the best ways to maintain a personal Web site, distribute free articles, get listed
in directories and databases, publish an e-mail newsletter, and carve an
indelible identity on the Net.

Whether you have a product or service to sell, a talent to promote, or just
want to increase your online network of contacts, personal branding will bring
you more recognition and respect ... and more profits.

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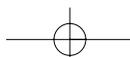
For more details on the full-length book, visit Bob Baker's Web site:
www.bob-baker.com

While you're there, get a FREE subscription to one of Bob's e-mail newsletters!

INTRODUCTION

As I began writing this book in the summer of 2000, a phenomenon was taking place on American television. A program called *Survivor* was setting new records as millions of people tuned in to watch the weekly show over the course of a 15-week period.

As you may remember, *Survivor* gathered together a group of 16 "average" people and plopped them on a remote island in the South China Sea for 39 days. At regular intervals the castaways were subjected to challenges that tested them physically and mentally. They were then required to vote each other off the island one at a time. The last remaining survivor won a million dollars. More than 50 million people watched the final episode, second only to the Super Bowl in ratings.

Each castaway received a certain amount of cash to compensate them for their time on the island; but many of them profited in other ways. Some appeared in commercials, sitcoms, and movies. Others endorsed products and were featured on magazine covers. Some wrote books or hit the road to cash in on public speaking engagements.

Why did these people do so well? Had they trained for years to live a life in the public spotlight? Not likely. They were in such demand because, through this TV show, millions of people had come to know them and identify in some way with who they are.

The Professor and Mary Ann …

These castaways were hardly cookie-cutter images of each other. Like their *Gilligan's Island* descendants before them, they were a varied cast of characters: the conniving corporate trainer, the crusty old Navy seal, the redneck truck-driver, the dim-witted doctor, the cute pixie girl, the emotional mother, and so on.

Each had his or her own distinct personal identity, and more importantly, millions of people knew who they were. In essence, these people suddenly had reams of opportunity because they had each embedded their personal brand image into the minds of millions of people.

That message is at the heart of this book: When lots of people know who you are and what image and message you stand for, you are put in an incredible position to better your life and profit from your notoriety. The Internet provides an excellent, cost-effective tool to accomplish that end, whether you want to become a celebrity or expert in your field, or simply hope to promote a new business, idea, or cause.

You may not have the opportunity to star in a blockbuster television series; but you most definitely have the power to hone a strong personal brand identity and then use the Internet to reach tens of thousands of people (or more) with your focused message.

Your Journey Begins Now

The good news is, you won't have to spend 39 days on a deserted island to become a recognized figure in your chosen field. Using the online branding tactics in this book, you'll be in control of determining who you are and how you want to be portrayed to your potential customers and fans. You'll decide what specific messages are sent out into the world and through what avenues those messages will travel.

The key to establishing a personal brand identity in the cyber world is focusing on who you are and what you stand for and then getting the word out through a variety of Internet channels that are frequented by the people most likely to be interested in your message.

As people start seeing your name and the benefit you offer, an impression begins to form. At first, ten people will be attracted to you and what you do ... then 50, and then 100. Before you know it, thousands of people will not only know who you are, but will come to view you as the resource of choice on your particular subject.

As your circle of online influence grows, a multiplying effect takes place and your notoriety suddenly starts growing in bursts. A critical mass occurs, and before long, you find yourself in the enviable position of being an online celebrity of sorts, or at least a well-known expert among people who are immersed in the topic, craft, industry, or idea you represent.

If the Internet Gives the Individual So Much Power, Why Isn't Everyone Using It?

The answer to this question is simple: Given all the opportunities the online world offers, most people just don't use the Internet in the most effective ways. Worse yet, many ambitious folks who try to establish a business online actually
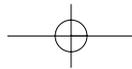
do themselves more harm than good. Here are just some of the ways people defeat themselves online:

- They use offline strategies that don't work on the Internet.
- They spend too much money getting set up online (or move too slowly because they believe having an Internet presence is an expensive process).
- They unknowingly engage in marketing activities that not only fail, they make people angry.
- They send out mixed messages about who they are and what they offer— and end up confusing people.
- They don't follow up consistently enough and give up before their efforts have had time to take hold.

Since so many people don't know how to use the Internet effectively, you're left with a world of opportunity to hone your image and your message and create a personal brand that will cut through the clutter and raise you to a higher level of recognition and success.

What's In This Book for You?

Over the next dozen or so chapters, I supply you with the tips and tools you'll need to effectively create a brand name for yourself online. First, we talk about what personal branding is, why you need it, and how successful people are using it right now to further their careers. We also discuss the best ways for you to determine the perfect brand image for you, as well as methods for hammering home that image so it makes the most impact in the least amount of time.

This book points out the right ways and wrong ways to use e-mail, shows you what options you have for setting up your Web site, and reveals the best ways to publish a brand-building newsletter online. You also get the lowdown on networking through other people's Web sites, newsletters, and online forums.

On top of that, I cover the best ways to get free publicity on the Internet and go over a lengthy potpourri of effective online and offline strategies for driving your brand image and identity onto the computer screens and into the consciousness of the masses.

Most importantly, you learn that branding yourself online can be accomplished on an extremely low budget. In fact, many of the tools you'll use to promote yourself are available at no cost whatsoever.

There's a thrilling journey ahead of us within these pages. Let's get started.

—Bob Baker

CHAPTER ONE

The Brand Called *You*

Let's get right to the heart of the matter. If you're reading this book because you want to know more about corporate strategy, market penetration, paradigm shifts, business models, strategic partnerships, or any other business buzz word flavor of the week, you may be in for a big letdown. Here's a revelation: This book isn't about learning how to use the Internet to promote your product, your service, or even your small business. Nope. It's all about promoting *you*. That's right, *you*!

You may have excellent products or services to offer, and the steps outlined in this book can help you sell more of them online; but the approach I recommend involves *you* taking center stage, *not* the product, service, or business itself.

Before you get the wrong idea, personal branding has nothing to do with bragging or being self-centered. As we discuss throughout this book, the focus should always be on the customer or person whose attention you're trying to grab; but the way you present yourself is deeply rooted in who you are as a person.

Why Brand Yourself in the First Place?

You may be asking, "Why do I need to brand myself online? How does it benefit me?" The answer is that branding allows you to take control of your online identity and influence the impression that people have of you in their minds, which helps you accomplish any number of the following things:

- Establish yourself as an expert in your field
- Connect with like-minded people on a large scale
- Focus your energies on feeding your life's purpose
- Build a solid reputation within your industry
- Become self-employed doing something you enjoy (or gain credibility and be in a better position to land the job you really want)
- Increase your notoriety and improve your perceived value in the marketplace

- Develop your circle of influence within a particular business niche
- Earn praise and recognition from a growing number of people who embrace your message
- Become a celebrity in your chosen field

As you can see, the reasons people brand themselves are many and varied. If you're an artist, branding will help you connect your name with your technique and attract more fans (and more paying customers). If you're a Web designer, branding allows you to mix your attitude and distinct perspective with your technical skills so more people hire you. If you're a writer, branding paves the way to reaching a loyal readership without having to kiss the, er, feet of a major publisher.

Not everyone has the same end-goals in mind; but there's one aspect that is consistent for everyone who successfully brands himself or herself online: interweaving an individual's name and personality directly with the product, service, or idea being promoted.

In this chapter, we look at some real-world examples of people who have effectively branded themselves and examine the reasons why their approaches work. I detail how I have used branding techniques successfully in my own career. We also discuss some of the obstacles you face concerning Internet identity issues and how to overcome them. Finally, we address the attitude and mindset you need to fully brand yourself online.

What Dave Teaches Us About Personal Style

While doing research for this book, I read an article that pointed out how the fast-food business was flat. Even though many "hamburger and fries" companies were spending millions on TV and print advertising, only one was at that time showing an increase in market share. It was Wendy's, which always features owner Dave Thomas in its commercials. He may be low-key, but he also projects a familiar, guy-next-door appeal that strikes a chord with customers. While his competitors were using theme songs from popular boy bands and focusing on menu items, there was Thomas humbly telling us about Wendy's.

Even the Wendy's Web site (shown in Figure 1.1) reflects that personal style. Pay a visit to **Wendy's**

FIGURE 1.1: Wendy's owner Dave Thomas serves as a good example of using a personal brand identity to promote a business.

Restaurant at http://www.wendys.com/index0.html and you'll find a picture of Thomas in the top right corner along with this text: "Thanks for stopping by Wendy's restaurant. Use the menu bar below to get your fill of fun, information, and entertainment. If you ever need help, click on Dave. You'll find him at the top of every page. Please note, this site is best viewed with a hearty appetite." Now that's a great example of creating a warm, human atmosphere on the Internet.

When it comes to promoting on the Internet, a personal approach is the ideal route to take. Although glitzy advertising may still work in the offline world, when people go online, they don't connect with logos, theme songs, or mission statements. They connect with people, and starting today, I want to help you become one of those people that a growing number of Web surfers connect with on a regular basis.

Playing the Name Game—*Many of the most successful companies use the appeal of a real person to sell the brand name. When you think of popcorn, who comes to mind? Most likely, the late Orville Reddenbacher and his distinct nerdish look. Remember Victor Kiam? He was the guy who liked Norelco electric shavers so much, he bought the company and for years appeared in its TV commercials. The fashion world is filled with the names of top designers: Tommy Hilfiger, Donna Karon, Calvin Klein, and so on. Even local car dealers have been playing the branding game well for years. Their commercials may be schmaltzy at times; but you can't deny they're filled with the personality the owner brings to the table. Most people prefer visiting a car dealer named Ernie Hudson Chevrolet over a place with a generic name like Midtown Auto Mall.*

Advertising Doesn't Pay Online

You may have heard that advertising on the Web (through banner ads, pop-up windows, and other display ad marketing) has been a dismal failure. With passive media such as TV and radio, people often let ads wash over them between programs and songs; but in the interactive arena of the online world, the user is in control, and users have made it abundantly clear they don't care to interact with advertising.

When most people power up their computers and log on, it's usually to get specific information or to accomplish a predetermined task: check e-mail, research a topic of interest, purchase a book, download a favorite band's song, see people without clothes on (yes, it happens), or get up-to-the-minute news. To achieve these goals, people routinely ignore anything that resembles advertising. They scan the screen in search of something that piques their interest. Then they move on.

It can be a cold, mechanical world online. The challenge is to make the experience warm and inviting—to create the feeling that a real human is on the other end of that product, service, article, newsletter, or Web site. That's why creating an honest and personal connection with people online is so crucial.

You Are the Brand

The concept of branding yourself as an individual is not completely new. A fall 1997 cover of *Fast Company* magazine screamed "The Brand Called You" in large type. Business guru Tom Peters wrote the main article, which carried the tag line "Big companies understand the importance of brands. Today, in the Age of the Individual, you have to be your own brand." I encourage you to read the story, which you can find online at **The Brand Called You**, http://www.fastcompany.com/online/10/brandyou.html.

In the article, Peters encourages business people to start thinking of themselves as "the CEO of Me Inc." To create a brand name for yourself, he suggests you evaluate your strengths and track record and ask yourself, "What about me makes me different?"

What's Your Definition of Branding?—*In his book* Circle of Innovation, *Tom Peters writes, "Branding means nothing more (and nothing less) than creating a distinct personality ... and telling the world about it."*

Why Tom Peters Is Successful

Peters was the ideal author to write the aforementioned article. Ever since his best-selling book, *In Search of Excellence*, was published in 1982, he's hammered home his identity as a forward-thinking, passionate troubadour in the modern business world. The guru also has a site devoted to ... who else? Himself. You'll find it at **TomPeters! Online**, http://www.tompeters.com/, and displayed in Figure 1.2.

One look at his home page reveals several common factors used by people who successfully brand themselves online. For starters, his Web address is his own name. Additionally, his site features the following sections:

- Tom's Latest Observations
- Who's/Where's Tom?
- Tom's Ideas
- Tom in the Media
- Subscribe to Tom's Newsletter
- Tom's Latest Cool Friend

FIGURE 1.2: Tom Peters' home page does a good job of establishing his name as a brand name.

Branding Draws People Like Magnets

It may seem a bit self-centered, but reinforcing your own name is key to creating a brand name for yourself. Once you fill a niche and provide a unique perspective on your area of expertise—and once people are drawn to what you offer—they continue to return to you not only because of what you do, but also because of who you are and what you bring to the subject.

There are thousands of business guru wanna-bes who serve up advice similar to Peters'; but there's only one Tom Peters. His ideas are written in a staccato, rapid-fire, almost stream-of-consciousness style. It's far from your typical business writing, and that's why he gets a disproportionate amount of attention—because he earned it by establishing his own personal brand identity.

Being Branded on Your Own Terms

While it's true that Peters has a lot of good advice on personal branding, his books are filled primarily with tips on building your identity while maneuvering within an organization or company—in other words, while working for someone else. The purpose of the book you hold in your hands, however, is to give you the tools you'll need to develop a personal brand that stands on its own.

You aren't attached to a company or a product line. You don't have to hide behind a logo or separate business entity.

The goal is for you to be known entirely for who you are as a person and what you stand for. You aren't just another generic consultant, freelance writer, artist, musician, graphic designer, or whatever your chosen vocation is. Instead, you establish yourself as (insert your name here), a (insert your specialty here) who is known for (insert your unique perspective here). When you play the Internet branding game correctly, you set yourself apart by attaching to your name a quality that's unlike anyone else's in your field.

The Web Can Make You a Star*—Gina Imperato, writing in* Fast Company *magazine, perhaps summed up branding online best when she said, "Some people think of the Web as a cavernous online library. Others consider it an electronic global village. But the Web is also the world's biggest stage. If you're an expert in a field that people care about, if you're connected to people whom others want to meet, or if you have a sense of style that lots of people enjoy, you can reach a potential audience of millions—and have impact around the world. You can become a star." Read Gina's entire article at* **The Web Can Make You a Star***,* http://www.fastcompany.com/online/12/webstar.html.

How Branding Propelled My Career

You may be wondering if it's really conceivable to create a brand name for yourself without a big advertising budget or the support of a large organization. I'm living proof that it is quite possible. Years ago I made a decision to find a way to make a living doing something related to my love of music, art, and writing. Branding allowed me to do just that.

Since I was a teenager (in the mid 1970s), I've played in pop and rock bands as a guitarist, singer and songwriter—and put out three independently released albums. In 1987, I combined my passion for music with my interest in journalism and launched a music magazine called *Spotlight* in my hometown of St. Louis, MO. Like many musicians in my area, I was frustrated by the lack of coverage the media gave to local artists. My magazine filled that void. An early branding lesson was learned: Find a weakness in what the competition is doing and exploit that niche.

I didn't have a journalism degree or a financial backer—just an old Mac Plus (talk about the Dark Ages) and a desire to make it work. Advice: Never let a lack of traditional resources stop you from pursuing your goals. I've always made the best use of whatever I had to work with at the time—a trait that proved invaluable when I got involved with marketing myself on the Internet.

Taking on the Role of "Expert"

By 1992, *Spotlight* magazine had developed a solid identity as the voice of the St. Louis music scene. I was appearing regularly on local radio and gaining a reputation as a local music expert. That year I also hooked up with a publishing company that put out my first book, *101 Ways to Make Money in the Music Business*. Now I was not only Bob Baker, the St. Louis music news guy, I was also a published author and music business expert. A year later, I became an internationally published author when the Japanese version of the book was released. Cool beans, huh?

It was during these years that I honed my skills as a marketer. Whether I was seeking exposure for my music magazine or national coverage for my book, I became fascinated by publicity and the art of using clever marketing angles to establish a name and identity. I read every PR book and article I could get my hands on, and it paid off. Over the years, I've not only been covered by the media in St. Louis, but got plugs in national magazines such as *Keyboard*, *Windplayer*, and *Music Connection*.

Because of my interest in PR, I decided to narrow my identity within the music business category to music marketing and publicity topics only—and, more specifically, to marketing ideas for independent bands (meaning bands not yet signed to a recording contract). Another branding lesson: You can't be all things to all people. Narrowing your focus often strengthens your identity. In 1995, I self-published *The Guerrilla Music Marketing Handbook*, a manual I not only sell consistently, but also use as a tool to further solidify my brand name within this category.

Marketing in the Trenches—*Jay Levinson's excellent "Guerrilla Marketing" series of books was the inspiration for my self-published* Guerrilla Music Marketing Handbook. *Visit Jay's site at* http://www.gmarketing.com/ *and soak up some of his advice.*

Entering the Wired World

Another important step took place in 1995 when I signed up for an AOL account and joined the online community. The prospect of reaching thousands of people without the expense of printing or postage was intoxicating. One of the first things I did was start a music marketing e-mail newsletter called *The Buzz Factor*—one of the first of its kind on the Internet. Another lesson: Being one of the first in your category—especially in a new medium—is a tremendous advantage.

In 1996, I took my interests in the visual and performing arts and launched a second e-mail newsletter, called *Quick Tips for Creative People*. With it, I took the same marketing ideas I offered to musicians and applied them to people in creative fields of all kinds. I immediately started building a separate e-mail subscriber list made up of artists, writers, crafters, photographers, actors, and more. Branding lesson: The best approach is to stay focused on one core identity; however, if you are compelled to pursue other interests, don't broaden your original brand image. Doing so will only water down the appeal of that identity. Instead, launch a separate name, site, newsletter, message, etc. for the other brand.

Following this advice, I first registered the name of my music-marketing newsletter, *The Buzz Factor*, as a domain name—and http://www.thebuzzfactor.com/ was born (shown in Figure 1.3). The home page clearly indicates who the site is for and what benefit it offers, plus it makes a plea for every visitor to sign up for my free weekly e-mail newsletter (a topic we cover in-depth in Chapter 5).
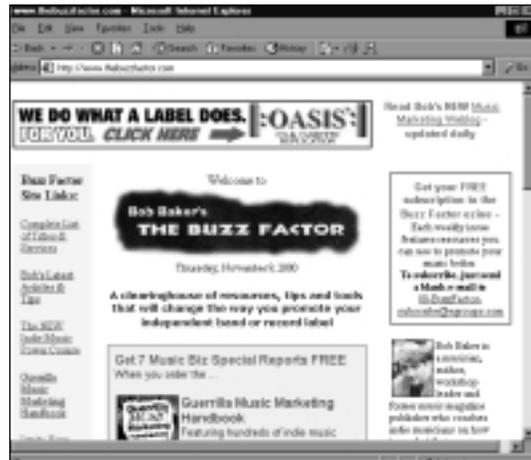

FIGURE 1.3: My independent music-marketing site, The Buzz Factor, helps establish my identity as someone who can help bands and record labels promote their music.

As I mentioned, I made *Quick Tips for Creative People* a separate identity; but that domain name would have been far too long. I wondered what Web address I should use. The solution was easy: my own name. Soon after, I launched http://www.bob-baker.com/ (seen in Figure 1.4), a site with a design similar to The Buzz Factor— but for a different target audience, as the home page greeting indicates.

FIGURE 1.4: A look at the home page of my Quick Tips for Creative People site. Notice how my name and the purpose of the site are established early.

The Internet Becomes the Great Equalizer

In 1997, I hit some speed bumps. After 10 years of running my local magazine, I ceased publication to pursue my music and creativity-related publishing goals; but I soon faced some financial obstacles (a nice way to say I was up to my ears in debt). At that time, I was still using a good amount of direct mail to promote my books and my name. I suddenly had no money to fund my career path. What then? Give up? Hardly. What I did have was an Internet connection, a couple thousand e-mail subscribers and a good idea, and that was all I needed to continue.

Since then, I have used the Internet almost exclusively to promote my Web sites, newsletters and brand name (or names). Both sites have grown in popularity, racking up to 500 visitors a day as of this writing. The number of subscribers to both newsletters has increased more than five fold and continues to grow every month. The number of sales generated by both sites has also risen steadily.

The moral of this story is that branding myself online saved me from having to wander aimlessly in the offline world. While news of multi-million dollar Internet startups (and the crashes and burns that followed) bombarded newspaper headlines, I was spending about a buck a day to build my online identity and attract attention to my name and what I offered. I used low-cost, guerrilla tactics instead of a big ad budget. I used creativity instead of cash. It can be done. Are you ready to make that concept a reality for yourself?

Lessons from the Original Poor Richard

The book you're reading is part of Top Floor Publishing's "Poor Richard's" series. As you may know, the name is a reference to *Poor Richard's Almanack*, first published by Benjamin Franklin in 1732.

How appropriate that a modern book on Internet branding pays homage to one of the original practitioners of personal branding. More than two hundred years after his death, the identity of Benjamin Franklin is alive and well. The name and bespectacled image of the elderly statesman is indelibly etched into the consciousness of millions of people the world over.

As you may know, Franklin was one of the original signers of the *Declaration of Independence*, the inventor of bifocal eyeglasses, and the person who discovered that lightning is electricity, among other things. He was the Leonardo da Vinci of his era, and he did a fine job of making a name for himself.

Franklin also took personal branding to a new level when he created the identity of "Poor Richard" Saunders, the fictitious publisher of his almanacs.
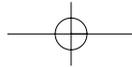
Every annual issue was filled with weather forecasts, jokes, recipes, and sayings that have since become part of the American psyche.

Benjamin Franklin's Legacy—*The man also known as "Poor Richard" Saunders is credited with founding the first post office in the United States, starting the first hospital in America, being the first person to identify industrial lead poisoning, discovering ocean currents, improving the way streetlights operate, and much more. Not a bad list of accomplishments to have one's name linked to.*

This history lesson demonstrates the uncanny parallels between Benjamin Franklin's life in the 1800s and today's Information Age. Franklin believed in the following:
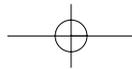
- Having a central source of information accessible to everyone
- Sharing information and interacting with others in lively discussions
- Using mottos and simple phrases to communicate meaningful ideas
- Compiling useful how-to information and publishing it so that others could profit from it (while he profited from it as well)
- Using a sense of humor and personal style to communicate with the masses

All of these traits are essential to your success in branding yourself online. I believe the use of "Poor Richard" in the title of this series serves a commendable purpose. It's a tribute to a man who more than 250 years ago—long before the power of electricity was even harnessed—combined the workings of his brain with the need to discover and share information in new and profound ways. Benjamin Franklin was a pioneer in communicating his ideas via the best means available in his era.

The Internet Identity Crisis

The online world is an exciting frontier. The Internet presents so many opportunities and countless ways to accomplish personal goals with far more ease than at any time in human history. However, it's also a mysterious and confusing terrain for many people. More and more news headlines are filled with stories about security breaches, hackers, credit card fraud, and copyright infringement. It's not surprising that millions of people are leery and cynical about fully embracing the Web. As someone who is now dedicated to branding yourself online, it's important to be aware of this stigma and—as we discuss in a moment—know how you fit into the picture.

One of the reasons the Internet has become such a vibrant melting pot of ideas is because people feel less intimidated when expressing themselves online. The cyberworld creates an electronic barrier between a person sending a message

and the individuals receiving it. People feel as if they're protected when communicating in the anonymous environment of e-mail, message boards, chat rooms, and more.

This syndrome is so prevalent that many people assume new identities altogether while online, as if they were attending a giant cyberspace masquerade ball. Men pose as women, teenagers pretend to be adults, older folks act like children, and unscrupulous con men dupe innocent people into revealing personal information. This quandary creates a lot of skepticism among people who venture onto the Web.

Cyberspace Theater—*"On the Net, protected by a mask of anonymity, people can be quite dramatic because their identity is hidden,"* says theater director Elyse Singer in Rock Diva Online. *"They create characters and play roles just like in a theater space, but their stage is cyberspace."* Read the full article at http://www.cyber24.com/htm2/6_112.htm.

Out of fear of being ripped off, Web surfers now use extra caution to protect themselves. You've most likely heard the advice before: Don't give out your password; don't enter credit card numbers on unsecure servers; don't open an attached file from someone you don't know, and don't post your phone number on message boards. In other words, when you're on the Internet, watch your back and look out for the bad guys, who could be lurking just around the corner in the next e-mail you open or Web site you visit.

## It's Time to Expose Your Identity

Right in the middle of this distrustful online atmosphere comes your new commitment to brand yourself on the Web. That means you not only reveal yourself online, you go out of your way to make anyone who will listen aware of who you are and what you do. Unlike many folks who communicate behind a veil on the Internet, you are honest and forthcoming—perhaps even a little extroverted and controversial. But you don't express yourself behind the haze of a fishy e-mail name. Instead, you state your case confidently and make it clear who is sending your message—because, after all, you *are* the message. Let's take a look at some of the key branding attributes that will help you stake a claim in these murky Internet waters.

How to Overcome Online Identity Obstacles

Although we delve into some of the following topics in more depth in other chapters of this book, here, in a nutshell, is how building your personal brand online is essential when dealing with consumer insecurities on the Internet. To succeed online, you must do the following:

Build trust—Not only must people know who you are, they also need to feel certain that you conduct yourself honestly and with integrity. You build trust with everything you do—and don't do. If you promise a response within two days, make sure you don't let more than 48 hours slip by without responding. If you offer a weekly newsletter, stick to that schedule (I've made the mistake of straying from a publishing schedule—and I can tell you, business is better when you deliver what you promise).

Have a consistent theme—Being clear about who you are and what you offer instills confidence in the people who are attracted to your message. If you create confusion as to what you represent, it leads to uneasiness and skepticism in the people you're trying to win over. For example, Terri Lonier's **Working Solo** Web site, at http://www.workingsolo.com/, (shown in Figure 1.5) does a good job of telling visitors what they're in for when they arrive.
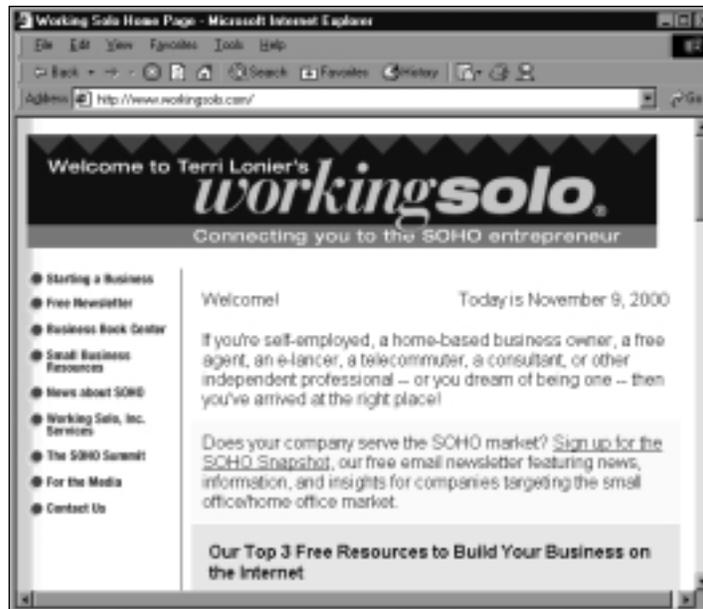
FIGURE 1.5: Terri Lonier's Working Solo site is clear about who she is and what she does. Clarity conveys confidence.

Use repetition—The best way to build trust is to become a recognizable name that stands for something specific. Consider this scenario: You're hiring a Web site designer. You receive e-mail pitches from two designers. You've been receiving one designer's e-mail newsletter twice a month for the last six months; but the other designer is contacting you for the first time. Based on samples at their Web sites, both appear to be equally talented. Which one are you most likely to go with?

Be available—People stay away from Internet marketers who appear to be hiding something. To brand yourself online, you absolutely must come out of the shadows and stand proudly in the direct sunlight. That means on your Web site and in your e-mail newsletters you must include options for contacting you, including an e-mail address, physical address, and phone number. (A fax number is helpful, but optional.) Even if people never use them, it demonstrates that you're not afraid to be available. If you don't want to use your home contact info, rent a post office box and use a business voice mail number, as I've done for many years. I don't get many business-related phone calls; but I still spend $8 a month for voice mail so I can display the number on my Web sites.

Assure people you won't abuse their personal info—This practice is pretty common these days, and for good reason. People are concerned that their e-mail addresses and other personal data will be sold or rented to other companies, and that they'll be bombarded with unwanted e-mail messages (known as *spam*). However, it's also important to collect e-mail addresses and other information from people who are interested in who you are. Therefore, whenever you ask for personal details, let people know how that information will be used. Then stick to using that info as you promised.


Your Privacy Statement—*If you ask people for their e-mail addresses, include a statement like this near the sign-up form: "I do not sell, rent, trade, or give away e-mail addresses. Your information is safe and secure, and will only be used by me to send information you asked for."*

Why Branding Yourself Is the Best Solution

Using the personal online branding techniques in this book is the best way to overcome the paranoia so prevalent among people who venture onto the Internet. Building a laser-focused identity and solid reputation quickly evaporates the natural skepticism your potential fans and customers have when they first hear of you. Here are a few more branding concepts you should keep in mind as you establish your identity online:

Touch people—Unscrupulous Internet marketers are out to make a sale by any means necessary. On the other hand, people who effectively brand themselves online are interested in making personal connections with a particular group of people. Make it your job to do some or all of the following on a regular basis: Inspire people; reveal memorable personal experiences; express your gratitude; take a stand on a current issue; stir
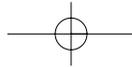
things up; vent your anger toward a common obstacle you share with your audience; recount your success stories, and make people feel good about themselves.

Teach people—I can't think of a field whose practitioners wouldn't benefit from educating their target audience. Copywriter Bob Bly (http://www.bly.com/) has not only written several books on the craft of writing marketing and PR copy, he also offers free articles on how to hire a copywriter and, once hired, how to best work with one. The benefit of offering this free information, of course, is to position Bob Bly as the best person to hire when a copywriter is needed. Teach your customers something that helps establish you as the most knowledgeable person in your field.

Exploit third-party endorsements—You telling people how great you are is one thing. Having an objective party (whether it's a customer, media outlet, or respected expert) say you're cool, now that's something to brag about. When you win an award, get a raving review, receive a comment from a happy customer, or get a recommendation from an authority in your field, it validates your contribution to your area of expertise and builds your personal brand and reputation as a person in your field to be reckoned with.

Maintain your visibility—By the time you finish reading this book, you'll have a full arsenal of tools to help you keep your name and brand identity in front of your target audience. It's vitally important that you make consistent visibility your goal. Whether it's contributing an article to a Web site, being interviewed on the radio, arranging a cross-promotion with a company or other expert, or being quoted in a magazine feature, the more your name and message is embedded into the public consciousness, the more you will be respected, admired, and trusted.

The Online Branding Balancing Act

Building an online brand can be confusing. Where do you put the focus? On you, or on the type of customer or fan you're trying to attract? As children, we're taught to think of other's needs before our own. We're scolded whenever we act in any manner that resembles being self-centered. However, any adult who has ever read a self-help book on positive thinking knows that the prevailing advice is to love yourself and take care of your own needs first. Talk about an identity crisis!

The same goes for personal branding. Focus too much on yourself and what you offer and you're "branded" as being an egomaniac; but if you cater so much
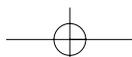
to the customer that your personality fades to the background, you end up being just another generic online peddler. The answer lies in finding the right balance.

The objective of branding yourself online doesn't mean you stand on a hilltop and shout, "Hey, look at me! Don't you think I'm cool?" Instead, successful branders discover what avenues they need to use to reach the people most likely to be interested in their message. Then they use those avenues to confidently say, "Hello, this is my name and this is what I do. Now here's what I think about it and here's how I can help you pursue this particular path." The most successful people (online and offline) don't have to twist arms to convince other people that they are worthy. The quality of who they are surges through everything they do. It's a natural byproduct of the image they project and the information they distribute.

At the same time, it's not unusual to have some self-doubt. You may have some reservations as to whether you're truly worthy to take on a brand identity; but people who are successful in branding themselves feel confident that they are deserving of attention. Make certain your chosen field is one that's right for you. Don't pursue it unless you're willing to attach your name to everything you do in an ongoing effort to increase your notoriety, and don't wait for someone to give you the green light before you assume your new role. An attitude of worthiness doesn't come from an outside source; it comes from within.

Marketing consultant Dan Kennedy (http://www.dankennedy.com/, shown in Figure 1.6) refers to this frame of mind as *self-appointment*. Instead of waiting for approval, a degree, a promotion, or reaching some predetermined level, truly successful people decide that they are already worthy of success and start acting like it. "Most people wait around for someone else to recognize them, to give them permission to be successful," Kennedy writes in his *Ultimate No B.S. Business Book*. "You don't need anybody's permission to be successful. If you wait for the establishment in any given field to grant you permission, you'll wait a long, long time."

Benjamin Franklin's Opinion—*"God helps them that help themselves."*
—Poor Richard's Almanack

Noted self-help author Wayne Dyer (http://SuccessLISTS.com/wayne-dyer/) has similar advice on the concept of success that can easily be applied to personal branding. Dyer contends that success is not a destination you reach. Instead, success is something that exists inside of you that you bring to everything you do. It's not something you go and get; it's something you make a decision to be and demonstrate through your actions. The bottom line is your attitude of success can and should be displayed confidently without you feeling guilty for promoting yourself.

FIGURE 1.6: Dan Kennedy's home page demonstrates how he "self-appoints" himself to be a source of good marketing advice. Notice the clever use of his name, cartoon image, and confident (yet personal) writing style.

Are You a Self-Promotion Introvert?—For more inspiration on how to overcome promotional shyness, read Dan Kennedy's article "How to Sell Your Way Through Life," available online at http://www.dankennedy.com/dkartcl1.html.

Additional Resources for Your Branding Homework

Do you want a few different perspectives on building a brand name? Here are several articles from various Web sites that cover the subject well:

Building Your Brand Online
http://www.aibn.com/buildbrand.html

Tips on Creating a Brand Identity for Your Site
http://www.infoscavenger.com/brand.htm

How to Build an Online Brand
http://www.startitnow.com/book01/ch03/a04.htm

The Brand Called URL
http://www.fastcompany.com/online/resources/brandurl.html

You Are Your URL
http://www.fastcompany.com/online/04/urls.html
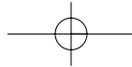
Build Your Marketing Muscle—*While this book gives you the tools you need to brand yourself online, you should absorb as much information as you can on the broader topic of marketing and promoting online. A great place to start is* Poor Richard's Internet Marketing and Promotions *(Second Edition) by Peter Kent and Tara Calishain, Top Floor Publishing. Get more details on this title at http://topfloor.com/pr/promo/index.htm.*

Build Your Brand with Online Resources

http://www.canadacomputes.com/v3/story/1,1017,1056,00.html?tag=81&sb=125

How to Build an Online Brand

http://www.fm.co.za/00/0929/admark/cam.htm

Web Site Promotion and Marketing Strategies

http://www.infoscavenger.com/promo.htm

Are you getting excited by the prospects of branding yourself online? Good. In the next chapter we get busy crafting the best brand identity for you.

Branding Yourself Online

How to Use the Internet to Become a Celebrity or Expert in Your Field

by Bob Baker
www.bob-baker.com

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**This is a free shareware file that features the introduction and
a sample chapter from the book *Poor Richard's Branding Yourself Online*
(Top Floor Publishing). Please share this .pdf file with friends and associates
who could benefit from getting more recognition online.**

For more details on the full-length book, visit the author's site:
http://BrandingYourselfOnline.com