

How to Build Your Brand on a Budget

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About two and half years ago, I grew tired of living the “[starving artist](#)” stereotype. Having worked in professional theater for six years, I was all too familiar with the anxiety-inducing realities of unstable income, insufficient pay and no benefits.

I wanted to continue [living my dream](#) without the limitations of financial uncertainty. But with a degree in theater and a resume of tap dancing punctuated with personal assistant gigs, I knew I didn't have much power to negotiate non-soul sucking work on terms that would afford me the flexibility for the continued pursuit of my passion.

Like many folks trying to figure out “what next,” I took to the Internet, starting a blog with a basic free template. Little did I know that carving out that small space on the World Wide Web would be the [start of a personal brand](#) that would command more money and opportunity than I had ever imagined.

Why Personal Branding Matters

In today's post-recession world characterized by wage stagnation and underemployment, unprecedented opportunities have arisen for personal brands. With consumers increasingly favoring authenticity and personal recommendations over more traditional corporate messaging, those who can leverage and scale their messages, cultivating loyalty and trust within a consumer community, are highly valuable – regardless of whether or not they meet more traditional requirements, like professional degrees and experience.

In addition to unprecedented opportunity, successful personal branding comes with the added perk of accessibility. With minimal barrier to entry, building a personal brand is a budget-friendly way of advancing a career. It might even help you earn more money. My two-plus years of free and low cost blogging opened my once-limited career options up to prospects previously reserved for those with pricey advanced degrees and years of corporate experience.

Having now been recruited by start-ups and Fortune 500 companies alike, I've experienced the power of personal branding first-hand. To understand how others might build and leverage their own personal brands for increased career and income opportunities, I reached out to leading experts for their tips on how to [build a brand on a budget](#).

Deliver Value

“Brand-building is first and foremost about cultivating a strong internal brand-led culture, designing your core strategies and operations to deliver the value you promise,” says Denise Lee Yohn, author of “What Great Brands Do.”

More than spending money, clarifying your message and knowing what unique value you add is essential to building a successful personal brand. You should be able to answer these questions: Who is your audience? What are you helping them achieve?

If every action, from social media updates to content creation, is motivated by the answers to these questions, your personal brand can grow exponentially.

Forget dollars and cents as you get started. Value is the currency of the brand economy. If you can deliver it at every turn, you can facilitate organic growth more effectively than any advertising budget.

Create Content

To successfully and affordably deliver value, create engaging content. “In a world where so many messages are coming at us, it’s increasingly likely that expensive paid advertising will be ignored,” says Dorie Clark, author of “Reinventing You.”

That’s why she says simple blog posts can be so powerful. “Instead, people are turning to recommendations from friends about what’s cool, such as interesting, shareable content like great blog posts or podcasts. If a company or an individual wants to establish their brand, starting to blog regularly or to use social media in useful ways is the best thing they can do.”

Invest in Your Message

Avoid getting caught up in unnecessary ad spending or “buying” followers on social media. Instead, devote the resources you have available to delivering more high-quality, high-value content.

“Deliver on-brand customer experiences. That will have far more impact on people’s perceptions of your brand than any spending you’d do on advertising or promotions,” Yohn says. “A brand can’t just be a promise, it must be a promise delivered. Invest first in delivering on your promises.”

Personal branding is a value-driven, human endeavor. While the creation of a successful personal brand can be enormously beneficial to the bottom line, it does not require any [extravagant spending](#) or upfront monetary investment to succeed. And that’s good news for all of us!