

Building brand YOU

Inside or outside business hours, if you want a successful personal brand you have to constantly work on it, writes **Amy Birchall**





Do a Google image search for Virgin boss Richard Branson and you'll find photographs of him wearing astronaut suits, riding motorbikes and "surprising" bikini-clad models at press events. His trademark grin is visible in almost every picture.

As the photographs suggest, Branson's personal brand is energetic, cheeky and adventurous. He has built a personal brand that reinforces the brand of Virgin Group.

The impact of this on Virgin's success has been significant because people have come to expect what they see from Branson is what they will get from Virgin companies.

However, it is not just the Richard Bransons of the world who should be worried about their personal brand and how it may impact their business. Interactions online and offline affect how people are perceived and may impact their reputation.

Personal brand strategist and author of *Brand Yourself* (Dennis Jones & Associates, 2011) Rachel Quilty says it is vital to be in control of these impressions.

"Building your own personal brand is essential in today's career market," she says.

"If you have an excellent personal brand, reputation and references, you will be hired first, promoted quicker and afforded more authority and respect.

"Personal branding can also afford you more mobility within your industry."

Quilty says your personal brand is a reflection not only of yourself, but of the

quality of your product or service. "If you have a strong brand, your product and service will be good and your prices justified," she says.

Quilty's comments are reinforced by AIM research. According to AIM Victoria and Tasmania's 2012 Personal Branding report, 93 per cent of business professionals surveyed said personal branding skills were necessary to be an effective manager.

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Interestingly, those in senior management roles were more likely to rate their personal branding skills as superior to those of their colleagues. Seventy-five per cent of CEOs and 61 per cent of senior managers ranked their personal branding skills as higher than average, compared with just 31 per cent of team members.

Strategic connector and radio host Amanda Rose says she relies on her strong personal brand to raise her profile, meet new people and attract business. Her role is to help businesses, community groups, sporting organisations and government departments find new partnerships and business ventures.

"There's no question your personal brand influences the company you work for. If you enhance your personal

brand, it will have a direct result on the business," she says.

"If your business is your personal brand, like mine is, then building it is going to mean that more people know who you are. They'll know what you're about and are more likely to want to work with you."

Rose says it is important to remember building a personal brand is not a job reserved for office hours.

"Everything you do, even socially, affects your personal brand. You need to think about whether what you're doing is going to help or hinder your brand," she says.

"This means thinking about what you tweet, what you say in media interviews and choosing the right functions to attend. Everything you do will affect your brand.

"You can't just say, 'Oh, it's Friday night. I'm taking a night off from being a brand and going out with the girls'. It doesn't work like that."

If a Google search of your name yields more negative (or incriminating) results than positive, Rose says the damage can usually be repaired.

"If you have bad reviews online, for example, ask the people who posted those reviews what you did wrong," she says.

"Ask why your service was ineffective. People like to be asked what they think.

"Honesty will get you out of anything, including a bad reputation." **MT**

* Turn to page 38 to find out how to use social media to boost your personal brand.



BE YOURSELF

Personal brand strategist Rachel Quilty's advice for building a strong brand.

- ✦ **Specialisation:** Focus your brand on an area of achievement. The best positioning you can have is that of an expert, an authority in your area of expertise.
- ✦ **Leadership:** Your image is a reflection of what you're capable of. Do you dress and look like a first-class professional?

- ✦ **Personality:** What does your personal image say about you or your company? It may be a person's appearance that captures your attention, but it's their personality that captures your heart.
- ✦ **Visibility:** You must be seen repeatedly and consistently. Attend networking functions, go on committees, send thank-you notes. Often people will give a reference or testimonial for no other reason than they know the person.

- ✦ **Be persistent:** Be your own brand. Don't follow trends or fads. As Judy Garland once said: "Always be a first-rate version of yourself instead of a second-rate version of someone else."
- ✦ **Congruency:** Your public behaviour should always be consistent with your private behaviour. Treat everyone the same and always be the same. People largely accept you, at least initially, at your own evaluation of yourself.