

PERSONAL BRANDING FOR EDUCATORS: FULFILLING YOUR BRAND'S PROMISE AS AN EDUCATOR

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What Does Personal Branding for Educators Look Like?

As an educator, you may think your activities are very different from those of businesses or entrepreneurs. However, there is at least one thing that connects you, and that's the importance of developing a brand identity. The right branding can set you apart as an educator and unify your message in and out of the classroom. Personal branding for teachers includes anything that helps add strength, identity, and definition to your work in a way that students, parents, and the surrounding community can recognize. The proper branding can also help you establish authority and loyalty in spaces outside of the classroom, such as state and national publications. Don't think of a brand as a logo, a product, or colors and font choices. Your brand as an educator is your promise to your various audiences.

Why Do Educators Need a Brand?

If you develop a personal brand as an educator, you can share your mission and vision with others in an efficient and consistent manner. At every point of contact with students, parents, community members, teachers, and other outside audience members and organizations, you must live and breathe your brand. There are a few basic steps involved in personal branding for teachers.

Step 1: Positioning

When people interact with you, what emotions do you think that they feel? What comes to their minds when they think of you, and how do they differentiate you from other educators? Your brand positioning includes how you explain yourself and helps your audience understand who you are through shared values and emotional connections. Are you inspiring? Do you evoke positive emotions in those around you? Do you motivate your students to excel? To flesh out your positioning, take notes on what sets you apart from other educators, what you want people to feel when they interact with you, and what actions you'd like to inspire in others. This should come naturally to you. You're already doing this in classroom settings, so this is just putting your intentions down on paper and making sure you're consistent in your thoughts, words, and actions.

What brands come to mind when you think about strong positioning? One great example of this is Nike. The company goes beyond selling shoes, instead selling empowerment, determination, and athleticism. Even though a pair of Nikes may set you back more than a lesser-known brand, people are paying for the prestige and qualities attached to the shoes and other athletic gear. When you're trying to differentiate yourself from others, you need to think about who is in your target audience and how you can connect with them. What are their needs, concerns, and motivations, and how will your programs address them?

Creating a Brand Mission

Once you can distill what you offer as a solution to your target audience into a singular thought, you've got your brand's mission. Your mission should identify the problem you solve in a rational or emotional manner while staying distinctive and relevant. Identifying your mission isn't always easy, but you can start by brainstorming: What do people say about you and your programs? What words get used most often to describe you? What are things your students remember years later? You may find some distinctive traits after answering these questions.

Use the following brand mission and purpose statements to inspire you:

- Tesla: "To accelerate the world's transition to sustainable energy."
- PayPal: "To build the web's most convenient, secure, cost-effective payment solution."
- Southwest: "Connect people to what's important in their lives through friendly, reliable, and low-cost air travel."

Tying It All Together

Think about instantly recognizable brands. What do they have in common? Consistency. They have consistent color schemes, themes, jingles, taglines, and promises. Any communication that goes out from my business revolves around our mission statement—every communication, client contract, team member acquisition, and brand identity piece is consistent. I also use the same jewel-tone color scheme throughout every aspect of the business. My mission is clear: "to create a platform for thought leaders to step into their power, connecting them with influential brands, while creating magic in their business." The mission statement establishes the position of what is expected in our work, team, image, brand, and most importantly, our results.

Step 2: Brand Personality

Once you've identified your positioning, it's time to determine your brand personality. This extends from the core of what you do as a short list of characteristics that define your brand's behavior. As an educator, there are probably some common words that come to mind—curious, helpful, innovative, caring, etc. Think about the combination of traits you have that makes what you do distinct from others. Perhaps you can fill in the following sentence: "I'm that perfect mix of ____ and ____, with a little bit of ____ thrown in." If you're not sure where to start, you could ask students, fellow team members, parents, or other members of your community about your brand personality. Here are some questions you could ask:

- What top five things do you think I bring to the classroom or campus?
- What makes my programs special?

- If you were describing me to someone who didn't know me, what would you say?

Use the data you collect to build your personality list. From there, you can refine your positioning statement and identify the one message that will weave through everything you do and speak to your target audience.

Step 3: Marketing Your Brand

It can be hard to know where to start when it comes to marketing yourself as a brand. Even marketers have a hard time doing that for themselves, so you're not alone. Here are some things you can do to market yourself to your community:

- Website creation and design: A website serves as a great hub for everything you do and is a great place to start building consistent branding. Oftentimes your district will provide you a page on the district website for this very thing.
- SEO: Use search engine optimization to target your ideal audience. A marketer or SEO specialist can help you with this if your district does not allow you to have a page on its site.
- Social media: Posting on social media can be a great way to connect with parents on your programs. You can also create events, stream live video, ask interactive questions, and more. Again, tap into the social media assets your district already provides you.
- Podcasts: It may be cliché to say that there's a podcast for everything these days, but there really is. Look for podcasts on topics related to your brand personality or your programs, and inquire about being a guest on the show. Lots of podcasts are looking for content ideas, so it can be a win-win. You could also start your own podcast about a topic that you're passionate about. Educators are looking to learn from other educators, so share your expertise!
- Press releases: Are you doing something newsworthy in the classroom? Connect with your communications department and ask how to get support in sending out a press release. Oftentimes, your communications department will have a form or process already established to help you, or there may be a service available. Make sure the community knows about what's happening in your classroom by issuing a press release.
- Video content: In addition to Facebook Live, you could create live and/or on-demand content using platforms like YouTube, StreamYard, Twitch, and Zoom.

Building a personal brand can help you gain attention and funding for your programs. It may seem frivolous or optional, but when it comes down to getting support for your activities, it's essential. Whatever you decide to do to market your brand, remember to be creative while still maintaining consistency. If you work on taking small steps toward building your brand, it won't feel as insurmountable, and a year from now, you'll have created a niche for yourself where you can stand out from the crowd.

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