

How to Use LinkedIn to Develop Your Personal Brand

By [Kate Paine](#), Personal Brand Strategist

Whether you're a professional, a small business owner, or a job seeker, you need to recognize the importance of your personal brand. Your personal brand is the image you reflect, your story, your values, and your expertise. In essence, your personal brand is your reputation.

The realization that "you" and your image are a brand can be disconcerting. We tend to associate brands with businesses and products; not ourselves. By developing your own personal brand, however, you can shape the way that potential customers, employers, and your peers see you.

Reflect upon your values, your integrity, and the things that make you, you. Be sure that's the way you want to be perceived and develop your personal brand accordingly. In today's online world, there is no better tool to develop your personal brand than with your LinkedIn profile.

Most people still perceive LinkedIn to be a job-seeking tool. And admittedly, that was the purpose behind LinkedIn's creation several years ago but LinkedIn has since developed their online offerings, beyond just a repository of electronic resumes, into a robust marketing tool for individuals and businesses.

Cutting and pasting your physical resume onto a LinkedIn page is no longer a good practice. A potential customer, client, or hiring manager wants to learn more about you. They want a "value add" when they arrive at your profile page.

It still amazes me how many LinkedIn profiles lack even basic personalization like a photo. LinkedIn reports that people who

include a professional-looking photo makes you 14x more likely to be found on LinkedIn. If you think about yourself as a brand, then your photo is like your logo. Some people are self-conscious about putting their image online, so don't just grab one of your profile pictures from Facebook; get a professional-looking photo, which will showcase your authentic self.

When developing your profile to highlight your brand (you), use the Summary section to tell your story and show your human side. Remember: we are more than our job titles and we all want to connect with people we know, like, and trust. A reader wants to learn about who you are and not just what you do.

A solid profile tells the reader a story and makes it relevant to why you do what you do. The goal is to weave your story and your professional experience together into a compelling LinkedIn Summary. Your profile should help someone learn why they should retain your services or hire you at their business. If you can do this one thing, your profile will be very different from others who still use some form of a digital resume.

You want a prospective employer, client, or customer to read a few sentences into your profile and say, "Wow, I've got to meet this person!" Remember, though, that authenticity is key. The person who walks into the office for an interview or to present a proposal needs to be the same person reflected in their LinkedIn profile. Be honest, be true, and be your best self not only on LinkedIn but across all your social media profiles, and most importantly in REAL LIFE!

It's a cliché but your goal is to stand out from the crowd and the internet is a very, very big crowd. If you know your story (and, yes, everybody has one), values, abilities, and are able to communicate them effectively, you will already be a leap above others. And don't confuse "professional" with "boring"; you can have a professional profile that is still interesting

and engaging.

Try to associate your personal brand with others who are seen as influencers and thought leaders. For example, did you attend a school with an excellent reputation? Or work for a company that has a recognizable name? Make sure they're listed in the education section, with links to those relevant organizational or company LinkedIn pages. Creating a network of people, businesses, schools, and organizations on your profile will, by association, enhance your personal brand, and expand your network, too.

You also want a potential employer or client to be able to find you among all that online chaos. Like Google, LinkedIn has a search algorithm, which is designed to give searchers better, targeted results. Having a search engine optimized profile will help you get found online, not only because of your name, but because of your skills and expertise. Tying in search engine optimization (SEO) with a sound profile is extremely effective.

LinkedIn is not the only tool clients or hiring managers use to learn more about you. To maintain a strong, authentic personal brand, you need to be aware of all its aspects. Perhaps it's time to refresh your Facebook profile, delete some of those old Tweets, or simply Google yourself and see what shows up. Once you know what's out there, you can start to gain more control of your online presence and manage your personal brand.

It's not enough anymore to simply recite your elevator speech about what you do. Leave people knowing your story and how your expertise and thought leadership can help them, and they'll want to learn more. They'll want to connect both in person and online.

Do you know your story?