6 Data-Backed Reasons a CEO Should Take the Time to Build a Strong Personal Brand



“The brand called you” is definitely a thing. What are you, as a business leader, doing to build your “you” brand?

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Does it matter if a company’s CEO has a strong personal brand? For the answer, think back to the past and the era of the *anonymous CEO.*

For years, in fact, most companies had founders and CEOs you never would have heard of unless you read the *Financial Times* or the *Wall Street Journal* religiously — and maybe not even then. Large, blue-chip firms were guided by anonymous men —

yes, *men,* back then – and the average person was clueless about the names and identities of these captains of industry who set the course of the business world.

All that's changed today.

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As Tom Peters predicted in his seminal *Fast Company* article "The Brand Called You" way back in 1997, we live in a different environment. These days, companies are becoming more human and more accessible, and CEOs are part of the trend. Social media has done even more to flatten many of the barriers separating top-level decision-makers from the public.

As a result, this changing corporate culture has made it esssential for CEOs to establish personal connections both inside and outside their companies. So, it's absolutely worth a CEO's time to build a strong personal brand – and honestly, if any top decision- makers out there haven't yet started this task, they're coming from behind.

1. Personal branding leads to more content shares.

Companies constantly share content on social media these days, but it doesn't always get engagement. The fact of the matter is that people trust other *people* more than they trust *brands* – and that fact shows up when they share content.

Want to increase your company's penetration and engagement? Share it through a personal account. According to a webinar moderated by Paul Dunay of Social Media Today, content shared by employees of a company has eight times as much engagement as content shared by the company itself.

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“We noticed this with the marketing campaigns we designed for our clients,” said Ismael Sidi, founder of Majesti, when I reached him for his thoughts. “I even noticed it with my own content. People just like to hear from other people more than they do brands. When CEOs share their company’s content with a personal comment, it gets a bump that you can’t replicate any other way.”

2. Personal branding makes authentic engagement easier.

As noted by CEO Hangout, 77 percent of all brand conversations on social media involve people who need advice, help or ideas. CEOs who are active personally on social media and have a strong personal brand are able to leverage that in a way that makes their company stand out.

One of the most visible CEOs currently is John Legere, widely credited with T-Mobile’s turnaround in fortunes over the past several years. His hallmark personal style is best exemplified by his Twitter account, where he constantly interacts with people on a personal level.

T-Mobile, firmly seated in last place among the four major U.S. wireless carriers, transformed itself from stagnancy to life, and picked up significant market share to – according to data compiled by Statista – to overtake Sprint and start pushing Verizon and AT&T.

3. A CEO’s reputation is the company’s reputation.

When PR firm Weber Shandwick conducted an opinion poll of top decision-makers, 44 percent of the market value of companies was attributed to the reputation of their CEO. Now, that’s staggering.

Personal branding these days isn’t just about your own personal reputation, but the reputation of your company. And because of increased transparency and the prevalence of social media, you can’t really opt out of it.

4. Personal branding is excellent for risk mitigation.

Since your reputation is your company’s reputation, personal branding is more important than it’s ever been for managing that risk. Fully 87 percent of executives surveyed in a 2014 Deloitte report called reputation risk their biggest strategic concern.

“We’re extremely concerned about what people think of the CEO with our company’s clients,” said Danny Tran, CEO of Highstoke Media, in an email exchange. “I’ve seen it in action over and over, both positively and negatively. My company’s reputation is the same as my reputation. Either you manage that reputation or the public will manage it for you.”

5. Personal branding creates a real competitive advantage.

Competition is stiffer than it’s ever been in most sectors of business. Lowering barriers to entry has made it easier to enter many industries, so standing out from the pack matters more. Legere and other highly visible CEOs understand this; and Legere’s company, T-Mobile, uses him as figurehead for many of their marketing efforts.

That’s no accident.

Per Nielsen, 92 percent of people surveyed trust recommendations and word of mouth over brand messaging; and having a CEO who’s actively endorsing the company’s message,

even through “personal” platforms, is a huge asset for any company that can successfully leverage it.

“My business and my personal brands are indistinguishable at this point,” Stephanie Burns, founder of Chic CEO, told me via email. “Chic CEO was originally somewhat different, but as my profile grew, they intertwined. The trust people have in another person over a faceless logo is irreplaceable.”

6. Personal branding functions as a type of parachute.

Let’s be real: Most CEOs today don’t stay with the companies they founded. Twitter founder Jack Dorsey is one example; he’s bounced from Twitter to Square and back again. Then there’s Steve Jobs, who, famously ousted from Apple, built Pixar before returning to Apple.

Your personal reputation matters because you might not always be at the same company. Will people follow you to another job? Will other employers hire you? Your reputation may be tied to the company you lead right now, but it might not always be.

Related: The 5 Keys to Building a Social-Media Strategy for Your Personal Brand

Manage your reputation while you can. This will pay dividends for your company, pay dividends for your career and help people gain trust in you, personally. Start working on your personal brand now and don’t wait for other people to build it for you.

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