How to Build Strategic Partnerships That Actually Drive Growth

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Early in my career, I worked with mid-market companies that believed growth was a matter of doing more — more hires, more campaigns, more spend, more tech. The logic was simple: If we could just replicate what the big players were doing — but do it leaner and faster — we'd win.

However, over time, I started seeing a different pattern. The companies that were breaking through, moving from mid-market to enterprise scale, weren't just scaling internally. They were unlocking growth by scaling *together* through strategic partnerships.

That shift matters now more than ever. Traditional growth levers are hitting their limits. Internal resources can only stretch so far. And in 2025's hyper-connected, resource-constrained business environment, companies that operate in silos are already behind. The next phase of growth will be collaborative. And it starts with rethinking how we build and lead partnerships.

Related: Don't Go It Alone: How to Use Partnerships as a Growth Strategy

The real problem: Scaling alone

isn’t scalable anymore

Too many organizations still treat partnerships like procurement – contractual, reactive and limited to service delivery. But when your growth strategy depends solely on what you can build or buy internally, you hit a ceiling.

And based on my experience, that ceiling shows up in two common ways:

1. Trying to scale everything in-house and burning out teams in the process.
2. Treating external relationships as vendor transactions, with no strategic alignment.

And both lead to the same place: stalled innovation, limited reach and slowed momentum.

Today’s realities demand more. Customer expectations are evolving in real time. Global supply chains remain volatile. Emerging tech reshapes markets overnight. No one has the complete toolkit anymore. That’s why strategic partnerships are no longer a luxury – they’re essential.

The 3 pillars of scalable strategic partnerships

Across the variety of enterprise partnerships I’ve supported through my work at SAMA (Strategic Account Management Association), three traits consistently separate high-impact relationships from the rest:

1. Shared vision and commitment

It starts at the top. C-level alignment on shared outcomes – not just deliverables – is what transforms a partnership from transactional to strategic.

I've found that executive sponsors play a critical role – not as firefighters or figureheads, but as connectors and catalysts. They provide access, clear barriers and model the partnership mindset across teams.

When executives are fully engaged, the organization's mindset shifts from simply signing a contract to forging a joint mission.

2. Complementary capabilities

Mid-market companies bring speed, specialization and proximity to the customer. Enterprise partners, on the other hand, often contribute scale, infrastructure and broader market access.

When each side stops trying to mirror the other and instead embraces what makes them distinct, something powerful happens: Partnerships shift from being dependencies to becoming true accelerants.

Ultimately, the goal isn't just to find partners with aligned capabilities – it's to find those whose strengths actively *amplify* your own.

3. Co-innovation and information sharing

This is where good partnerships move from functional to transformative. Truly transformative partnerships demand more than communication – they require radical openness. That means shared data environments, collaborative roadmaps and agile joint problem-solving across teams.

This isn't just coordination. It's value *co-creation* – a shift where every stakeholder is accountable not only for what's delivered, but for what's discovered along the way. That's how innovation scales.

Think about the farm-to-table supply chain, for example: Each partner plays a unique role, yet the system thrives on transparency, shared goals and coordinated action. That same

philosophy applies across industries when co-creation is the goal.

Related: How to Use Strategic Partnerships for More Explosive Growth

How to make your company partnership-ready

Strategic partnerships don't succeed by chance. They require structure, alignment and leadership. Here's where I recommend starting:

- **Clarify selection criteria:** Define what "strategic" means for your business. Look for complementary capabilities, not just convenience.
- **Assess cultural fit:** Alignment of values, pace and decision-making styles often matters more than product or price.
- **Resource the relationship:** Assign clear owners, allocate time and budget, and recognize partnership management as a core competency.
- **Establish governance structures:** Set regular cadences, steering committees and shared KPIs from the start.
- **Enable with technology:** Use shared platforms for visibility, coordination and decision-making across organizations.

But of course, even the best-designed partnership plans only work if they're supported by the right scaffolding.

Structure isn't a constraint — it's what enables execution at scale.

The future is collaborative

This foundation — clear roles, shared goals and supportive structure — is what allows strategic partnerships to evolve into something more: a living, connected system for growth.

Partnerships are no longer edge strategy; they're core infrastructure, and I'm seeing it everywhere:

- Healthcare organizations building interoperable data ecosystems
- Retailers integrating with logistics and AI partners to enhance CX
- B2B firms co-developing smart, connected products with tech innovators

Related: 10 Steps to Forming Long-Lasting Strategic Partnerships

This isn't just a trend; it's a transformation. And it's redefining how growth happens across sectors.

Strategic partnerships deserve the same attention as product strategy or financial planning — fully embedded in how your company thinks, plans and grows.

The question isn't whether to partner — it's whether you're building partnerships that help you scale *with* others, not just deliver *to* them.

Because the next phase of growth won't be powered by what you control; it'll be fueled by who you collaborate with.

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Here’s What Being an Entrepreneur Is Really Like — From Someone Who Did It

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Becoming an entrepreneur is one of the most exciting decisions you can make. But is it hard? Well, yes. It’s not a stroll in the park, but it’s also not impossible and can be incredibly amazing. Starting your own business is rewarding, challenging and everything in between. Here’s the honest scoop on what it’s like, from someone who’s been there over and over again.

1. You’ll wear many hats

When you’re just starting out and unless you have a huge budget, you are the CEO, the marketing team, the accountant and the janitor. Balancing all these responsibilities can be overwhelming, but it’s also an incredible opportunity to learn. It forces you out of your comfort zone and gives you the chance to truly understand the inner workings of a business. Look at it as an accelerated MBA, except the stakes are higher (and there’s no graduation ceremony).

2. Time management will be your new best friend

When you’re working for yourself, the lines between work and

personal life blur, big time. Suddenly, you're answering emails at 10 PM and brainstorming ideas while cooking dinner. The key is to prioritize and set boundaries. Learn to schedule your day like your life depends on it. Trust me, a little structure goes a long way in keeping the chaos manageable. I finally have learned how to manage my time, especially if you have multiple businesses. This is crucial to become successful.

3. You'll face rejection

Here's the thing about entrepreneurship – not everyone is going to believe in your vision. Investors may say no. Customers might not immediately flock to your product. This stings, but it's also a chance to develop some thick skin. Each no you hear is one step closer to a yes. Use rejection as fuel to refine your offering and improve your pitch.

Related: You Will Get Rejected – How You Handle It Will Make You Successful. Here Are 3 Ways to Turn It Into Power.

4. Your passion will be tested

Loving what you do is important, but passion is not the whole story. There will be moments when the going gets tough and motivation wanes. What keeps most entrepreneurs moving is their why – the deeper reason they started their business. Stay connected to that purpose, and you'll push through even the toughest days.

5. You'll have to network (a lot)

Networking is crucial to success in any industry, but it's especially important for entrepreneurs. Knowing the right people can open doors and provide valuable insights and advice. Attend networking events, join online communities and don't be afraid to reach out to successful business owners for

mentorship. Building a strong network can make all the difference in your entrepreneurial journey.

6. Failure is part of the process

As an entrepreneur, you will inevitably experience failure. But here’s the thing – it’s not the end of the world. In fact, it’s often just a stepping stone on the path to success. Embrace failure as an opportunity to learn.

7. Money management is crucial

Starting a business often means living on a tight budget. Maybe you’ll have to skip some dinners out or hold off on that big vacation – and that’s fine. Being mindful of where every dollar goes is essential, especially in the early stages. If you can master your finances now, you’re setting the stage for long-term success.

8. Success doesn’t happen overnight

Don’t believe the hype of overnight success. Those stories usually leave out years of hard work, failures and pivots. Building a business is a marathon, not a sprint. Celebrate the small wins along the way, because they’re what keep you going. Each step forward is progress, even if it’s not as glamorous as viral internet fame.

9. It’s the hardest job you’ll ever love

Here’s the truth. Starting your own business is hard. It’s exhausting. Sometimes, it’s lonely. But it’s also thrilling. Few things compare to the sense of accomplishment you feel when you see your idea come to life and know you’re building something that’s entirely your own. The hard work and

sacrifices will be worth it when you're doing what you love every day. So keep pushing, stay focused and never lose sight of why you started this journey in the first place. Your passion will see you through the toughest of times and lead you to success. Let rejection only fuel your determination to refine your offering and improve your pitch. The road to success is not easy, but it's worth it in the end.

10. You must keep learning and evolving to succeed

Finally, remember that starting a business is an ongoing process. You'll never stop learning and growing as an entrepreneur. Stay open to new ideas and opportunities, continuously seek out knowledge and resources to improve your skills, and be willing to adapt and evolve with the ever-changing market and industry. Embracing growth and constantly striving for improvement will help you stay ahead of the game and ensure long-term success for your business.

Related: 10 Ways Continuous Learning Can Take You From a Good Leader to a Great One

Final thoughts

I have even thought about giving up at times, but I somehow still keep going, and I am so happy that I've stuck with it. If you're up for the challenge, becoming an entrepreneur can be the most rewarding thing you'll ever do. It's not always easy, but the sense of accomplishment, independence and possibility makes it worthwhile. Are you ready to take the leap? Because, trust me, there's nothing quite like it.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/starting-a-business/heres-what-being-an-entrepreneur-is-really-like-from/488561

Chili’s Is Taking Aim at McDonald’s (Again) With a New, Quarter Pounder-Like Burger: ‘A Fast Food Flavor Profile Our Guests Will Recognize’

Chili’s announced a new burger Thursday with a recipe and name that might sound a little familiar: the Big QP burger. It sounds like McDonald’s Quarter Pounder, and pretty much has the same toppings: two slices of American cheese, pickles, ketchup, and diced onions.

However, per the company’s release, the Big QP has something its counterpart doesn’t — 85% more beef, making it “more value-packed” than Mickey D’s classic.

Related: ‘Gen Z Is Obsessed’: Chili’s Sales Are Skyrocketing Thanks to the Triple Dipper and Turbo Chefs

“We believe Chili’s 3 For Me menu, starting at just $10.99, has been the best value in the industry since we introduced it in 2022, and we just made it even better with the new Big QP burger, featuring a fast food flavor profile our guests will recognize,” said George Felix, Chili’s chief marketing officer, in the release.

The deal is paired with bottomless chips and salsa, fries, and

unlimited fountain drinks. Chili's claims it offers "a dining experience that's less expensive than a comparable meal at McDonald's."

CNN notes that this is the second time Chili's has made a run at McDonald's. In 2024, they added a Big Mac-like burger called the Big Smasher to their menu, and accompanied it with a shade-throwing ad campaign that declared, "See ya later, tiny drive-thru burger."

[embedded content]

The Big Smasher gambit paid off, reports CNN, bringing a 15% jump in same-store sales.

Chili's marketing department is working overtime — and with great success — keeping their brand in the hearts and minds (and stomachs) of its customers. Earlier this month, the company opened a "Scranton Branch," playing off the popularity of an episode of *The Office* where Pam declares, "I feel God in this Chili's tonight."

"We've seen the brand come to life on screen through the years, and that includes being tied to Scranton despite never having a location there," said George Felix, Chili's chief marketing officer, in a statement. "That changes this year with our newest restaurant."

Related: Is Chili's Cheaper Than McDonald's? Viral TikTok Says Yes.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/business-news/chilis-trolls-mcdonalds-with-new-big-qp-burger/490205

‘People Think I’m Crazy for Doing This’: Fyre Festival 2 Has Been Postponed — Again

Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. Fool me a third time?

Concert goers who purchased tickets to Fyre Festival 2, which was supposedly taking place from May 30 to June 2 in Isla Mujeres, Mexico, received an email this week that the event isn’t happening, per ABC News.

“The event has been postponed and a new date will be announced,” the message reads. “We have issued you a refund. Once the new date is announced, at that time, you can repurchase if it works for your schedule.”

Billy McFarland, the festival’s organizer, was convicted of wire fraud in 2018 for the infamous Fyre Fest disaster in the Bahamas in 2017. The scandal led to numerous documentaries and McFarland spending four years in prison.

Tickets for this version of Fyre Festival 2 went on sale in February with “FYRE Festival 2 is real” branding starting at $1,400.

“I’m sure many people think I’m crazy for doing this again. But I feel I’d be crazy not to do it again,” McFarland said when sales started.

But plans quickly unraveled (again) when officials in Playa del Carmen, Mexico, said last month that there was nothing on the books suggesting this event was happening.

“The municipal government of Playa del Carmen informs that no event with that name will be held in our city,” officials said in a statement.

Still, McFarland fought back on Instagram last week, claiming they had been working with the government and posted screenshots of what he said were receipts of the correspondence.

No comment from McFarland on the postponement news.

However, this is not the first “Fyre Festival 2.”

First, there was “FYRE II,” an event that was supposed to take place on a boat in The Hamptons, New York. *Entrepreneur* had viewed messages in summer 2023 from McFarland sent to “FYRE VIPs” canceling that event, “due to [the] imminent announcement/plans for a much larger FYRE II.”

Then, in August 2023, tickets went on sale for what was supposed to be the Fyre Festival 2, taking place in December 2024 in the Caribbean. Those ticket prices ranged from $799 to $7,999.

That event was also canceled.

Fool me four times?

Related: The Fyre Fest Island Is Being Turned Into an NFT-Run Luxury Resort

https://www.entrepreneur.com/business-news/fyre-festival-2-has-been-postponed-again-heres-why/490203

It’s Time to ‘Choose Better’ — Inside BODYARMOR’s Play for the Sports Drink Crown

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Everybody wanted to be like Mike — once upon a time. Gatorade’s legendary 1991 ad campaign featuring Michael Jordan didn’t just sell a drink; it ignited a movement, inspiring athletes, captivating marketers and cementing Jordan’s place as a global icon. The jingle still echoes in the minds of ’90s kids, a nostalgic anthem of an era when one brand reigned supreme.

But dominance never lasts forever. Now, Gatorade’s fiercest rival, BODYARMOR, is launching its own “Choose Better” campaign, enlisting the next generation of sports icons to redefine the game — and perhaps, dethrone the king.

Back in ’91, when *Be Like Mike* played during every commercial break of *Friends* and *Seinfeld*, Gatorade was the undisputed pioneer of the growing sports drink industry. Today, the industry has exploded into a fragmented, billion-dollar global market, with hundreds of brands vying for dominance. And who better to have on your side in a competition than some of the world’s fiercest athletes?

For this game-changing campaign, BODYARMOR has assembled an all-star roster of signed athletes, featuring Bengals quarterback Joe Burrow, WNBA star Sabrina Ionescu and Cowboys wide receiver CeeDee Lamb, among others.

Related: Kyle Kuzma Has Been an NBA Champion and an Underdog — Now He’s the One Telling His Story

Better choices

The campaign highlights the power of making “better choices,” showcasing the connection between healthy living and peak performance. The bold, fast-paced commercials depict athletes pushing through grueling workouts, pausing to refuel with a cold BODYARMOR before getting right back at it.

Campaigns like this don’t succeed because of big names — they work because of authenticity.

“BODYARMOR is about being better every day,” Burrow says to *Entrepreneur*. “That’s exactly what I try to do. Our messaging aligns perfectly.”

Burrow isn’t one to work with companies he doesn’t believe in.

“I’m not sure you ever fully get used to being on camera so much and seeing yourself everywhere,” the QB says. “I keep my partnerships very limited because, honestly, this [interviewing] can be uncomfortable for me at times. I want to ensure the people I partner with share my values. That’s why this one feels like the perfect fit for me.”

He’s not just saying the lines either; Burrow genuinely uses the product, carrying hydration packets with him daily. “I’m kind of a walking spokesperson,” he laughs.

Related: 28 Habits for Building a Successful Life in Business

Kobe Bryant’s contributions

Burrow’s NFL peer, Ceedee Lamb, agrees with the message as well, but another factor contributed to his decision to work with BODYARMOR.

“Kobe was my favorite player,” the Cowboys receiver shared. “I knew that he was a part of this, and I wanted to contribute.”

Of course, the ‘Kobe’ Lamb is referring to is the black mamba himself, Kobe Bryant, who was as dominant off the court as he was on it. Bryant invested early in BODYARMOR back in 2013, securing a 10% stake in the company for $6 million. That 10% is now worth over half a billion dollars, though the Lakers legend tragically didn’t live to spend it.

Image credit: BODYARMOR

Lamb isn’t the only Kobe fan on BODYARMOR’s roster. Sabrina Ionescu knew him personally before his passing. She has spoken about Bryant’s mentorship, particularly how he instilled in her the importance of meticulous preparation and attention to detail. One of those details is what you put in your body.

“I think it’s huge to understand what’s inside the drink,” Ionescu says. “You can clearly see there are no artificial dyes, just natural flavors and sweeteners.”

Lamb echoed this sentiment, adding, “I drink it every day. Naturally, I feel better. In the middle of the night, when you need something to quench your thirst, I promise you, if you have one of these, you’ll go right back to sleep.”

Each of these athletes has a demanding career that dictates how they spend their time. Yet, in today’s sports landscape, there’s a growing desire and expectation for them to be more than just a name on a jersey.

“There are two sides to every story,” Ionescu says. “Who you are as an athlete and who you are off the court. Obviously, on the court, you want to be known as a winner, but I want to carry that same mindset into who I am off the court as well.”

BODYARMOR products will now include updated packaging, new colors, fruit imagery and clearer distinctions between sub-brands.

The company is also reducing sugar in select products, enhancing their LYTE line with added nutrients, and introducing new products like Flash I.V. Zero and BODYARMOR CHILL.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/starting-a-business/inside-bodyarmors-choose-better-rebrand-and-the-star/490055

The $50 Software That Could

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In today's age, most professionals and business leaders understand the importance of backing up their devices—files, contracts, and documents are routinely stored in the cloud. However, one critical area is often overlooked: emails.

Email isn't just communication, it's your paper trail—your record of deals, invoices, approvals, strategy, and client history. A crash, deletion, or security breach could erase years of essential communication.

That's why Mail Backup X has become the email backup software trusted by more than 42,000 businesses worldwide. For a one-time $49.99 payment, ensure your emails are backed up for life (reg. $179).

How Mail Backup X works

This powerful software makes it easy to back up, archive, and restore emails across platforms like Gmail, Outlook, Apple Mail, Exchange, Office 365, and more. Choose whether to save backups locally or use your preferred cloud service.

All files are compressed to save about three times the usual space. Everything is also secured with AES 256-bit encryption, so nothing is vulnerable to prying eyes who want to get hold of your information, the company says.

When you eventually need to retrieve information, you can rest

assured that you took precautions *before* disaster struck. Need to recover a lost thread from two years ago? Or keep tabs on multiple business accounts from one place? Mail Backup X offers a searchable archive that lets you manage and retrieve emails quickly.

Why this deal is worth it

In a world where clients expect instant answers and flawless records, saying, “I lost that email,” just doesn’t cut it. Mail Backup X is the kind of email protection software that serious professionals use—one that shows you’re organized, proactive, and prepared. It’s not just about recovering data—it’s about maintaining trust, control, and continuity.

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A Major Theme Park Is Opening in the U.S. for the First

Time in 25 Years. Here’s What to Expect.

Universal is opening its long-awaited Epic Universe theme park to the public on May 22 in Orlando, Florida. The park was first announced in 2019 and cost around $7 billion to create, per CNBC.

Casandra Matej, CEO of Visit Orlando, told CNBC the new park is “the first major, entirely new theme park in the U.S. in 25 years.” Research seen by the outlet from Sean Snaith, director of the University of Central Florida’s Institute for Economic Forecasting, found that within one year of opening, the new park could generate around $2 billion for Florida and create more than 17,500 new jobs across the country.

At 750 acres, it’s the largest of all of Universal’s properties and features five themed worlds: Celestial Park, Dark Universe, The Wizarding World of Harry Potter – Ministry of Magic, Super Nintendo World, and How to Train Your Dragon – Isle of Berk.

But don’t worry, Harry Potter fans: This is the third Harry Potter-related theme park Universal has in the area. Nearby, Explore Hogsmeade is still open at Universal Islands of Adventure, and Diagon Alley is also open at Universal Studios Florida.

Related: Disney World Is Adding New Attractions and Themed Lands in a Massive Expansion – Here’s What to Expect

In Super Nintendo World, guests with Power-Up Bands can hit the familiar question-mark boxes of the Mario universe, track their Mario Kart score and play drums like Donkey Kong to unveil hidden effects and Easter eggs. (Adrian Ruhi/Miami Herald/Tribune News Service via Getty Images)

Although Epic Universe is less than 10 miles down the road from Walt Disney World, industry experts expect the new park to lift up the entire area, from hotels to restaurants to even more attendance at Disney-branded parks.

“It’s a rising tide that lifts all boats,” Matej said.

There are multiple roller coasters, restaurants, and three new hotels. There are also several boat rides.

Guests ride Stardust Racers, a new dueling roller coaster ride in Celestial Park, during a preview day for Universal Epic Universe on April 5, 2025, in Orlando, Florida. (Patrick Connolly/Orlando Sentinel/Tribune News Service via Getty Images)

The How to Train Your Dragon – Isle of Berk area, at the Epic Universe theme park in Orlando, Florida, US, on Saturday, April 5, 2025. Photographer: Thomas Simonetti/Bloomberg via Getty Images

Atlantic is a waterside, seafood-centric restaurant with a mostly glass exterior meant to resemble a giant aquarium. (Adrian Ruhi/Miami Herald/Tribune News Service via Getty Images)

https://www.entrepreneur.com/business-news/universal-epic-studios-orlando-opening-in-may-2025-photos/490138

Zoom Is Down for Tens of

Thousands of Users, Bringing Meetings to a Halt. Here's What We Know.

Zoom is down for tens of thousands of people, according to Downdetector. Users have been reporting outages since 2:38 p.m. ET.

More than 60,000 Zoom customers had logged issues with the video conferencing service by 3:08 p.m. ET. Nearly half of users reporting problems (46%) experienced issues with the website, while 38% encountered problems with the app.

Zoom's status page also appears to be down at the time of writing. The company previously indicated through the page that it was aware of the outage for Zoom meetings and was working to resolve it.

Zoom's investors page also appears to be down at press time.

Related: Amazon Is Replacing Chime, Its Proprietary Video Conferencing Software, With… Zoom

Zoom has 300 million daily active users and 192,600 business customers as of the fourth quarter of 2024. Companies like Capital One, Glassdoor, and Dropbox all use the company's videoconferencing service.

With Zoom down, users turned to social media. Some X users asked if Zoom was down for anyone else. Others expressed joy, frustration, and panic through GIFs.

Is Zoom down for anyone else? pic.twitter.com/G0ohPTb0ld

> *— Benji Hyam (@benjihyam)* ***April 16, 2025***
>
> *Zoom appears to be down?* ***pic.twitter.com/K7tySTCcya***
>
> *— Kristen Soltis Anderson (@KSoltisAnderson)* ***April 16, 2025***
>
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>
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This Critical But Misunderstood Strategy Can Help Your Business Grow — Here’s How to Use It the Right Way

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Most founders have zero interest in becoming celebrity CEOs — in fact, many of us actively avoid it. Yet, the personal branding industry has been projecting the same message for years: Be the face of your industry, become the #1 name

everyone recognizes, and build your personal platform above all else.

This advice is everywhere, and it's become the dominant narrative.

But here's what I've discovered working with high-level CEOs and founder-CEOs: Many of us want the exact opposite. We want our company to be the industry-dominating name, not ourselves. We're building organizations designed to outlast our tenure, not personal platforms dependent on our presence.

The great news is that founder branding can effectively support business goals without requiring ego-driven visibility. There's a more nuanced approach that serves both the leader's comfort level of spotlight tolerance and the company's strategic objectives.

Related: Why Personal Branding Is Crucial for CEOs in Today's World

The CEO's perspective: Why they don't want to be "the face" of the business

For established business leaders, the resistance to becoming "the face" of their company isn't about the imposter syndrome — it's a reflection of their strategic mindset.

Many are building with an exit in mind, and they know that being too personally synonymous with the organization's brand makes the business less "exitable." Others have already "made it" both financially and professionally, and they don't need the validation of being recognized everywhere they go. Their ego isn't tied to fame; it's tied to impact, longevity and legacy.

This stands in stark contrast to how personal branding is typically pitched. Most branding gurus conflate visibility with value, suggesting that more recognition automatically equals more business success. But seasoned founders prioritize business leverage, not spotlight. They're looking for strategic ways to elevate their companies without putting themselves center stage.

The business goal: Making the company the industry leader

Arguably, every visionary CEO shares one fundamental objective: positioning their company as the most trusted name, the go-to provider and the undisputed industry authority. Most don't see how executive branding connects to that goal. And yet, in today's business landscape, leveraging your thought leadership — and the expertise of your leadership team — is the most powerful path to establishing your company as a category leader.

Related: The 3 Biggest Mistakes CEOs Make With Their Personal Brand (and How to Turn Those Mistakes Around)

Thought leadership as the bridge

The lever that transforms companies into industry-dominant leaders is strategic thought leadership, and it works for several compelling reasons:

- People trust people faster than they trust companies
- It's easier to build a following around a person than a logo
- Human storytelling converts faster than corporate messaging

These principles remain true whether the person is seeking fame or simply sharing valuable insights.

This dynamic is even more pronounced now, in the age where AI Optimization (AIO) is replacing traditional SEO:

Search is shifting from keywords to questions – and AI engines pull from people with recognized expertise, not anonymous corporate pages. AIO increasingly favors named thought leaders with established digital authority. The credibility of a company is now tightly linked to the public contributions of its human leaders.

A company's findability and trustworthiness are now connected to its leaders' public contributions, whether those leaders seek personal recognition or not.

How executive branding elevates the company

The transfer of authority from executive to company happens through several key mechanisms:

Authority transfer: When a credible CEO speaks or publishes, the company's credibility rises in tandem. The market recognizes the organization's authority through the leader's contributions, without necessarily focusing on the person themselves.

Searchability boost: Search engines and AI platforms increasingly prioritize content with recognized thought leadership, creating a direct connection between executive insights and company visibility.

Media and partnership opportunities: Journalists, podcast hosts and event organizers want humans to interview and feature, not faceless brands. A CEO with a clear point of view opens doors for the entire organization.

Talent acquisition: Top talent is attracted to visionary leadership, not just job listings. Seeing the thinking behind the company makes A-players want to join the team.

Investor confidence: Executive visibility signals confidence, clarity and momentum – all crucial factors when securing funding or navigating acquisition talks.

I've watched transformation happen across multiple verticals. When a founder establishes subject matter expertise and thought leadership, it becomes a transformational marketing lever for their organization. Their ideas attract not only clients but also top-tier talent who want to be part of something intellectually substantial.

And this doesn't require being "everywhere." The narrative of creating content every single day on every single platform is completely impertinent to CEOs who are looking to grow their businesses rather than their fame. Instead, you need to build a strategic presence and consistent contribution in carefully selected channels. Naturally, for a company to be seen as a category leader, it starts with someone saying something worth hearing – and that voice often belongs to the CEO and his or her executive team.

Related: Why Harnessing the Power of Your Personal Brand Will Transform Your Business

Lead the industry – without the spotlight

The right kind of personal brand supports a company's rise to the top without requiring ego-driven visibility. This shift in mindset will become apparent to your stakeholders vis-à-vis the type of topics you align yourself with (thought leadership vs. lifestyle), the platforms you choose to build visibility on (LinkedIn and industry events vs. TikTok) and the KPIs you

choose to track (your organization's industry ranking and conversations open vs. social media likes).

So, how do you actually do this? Here's the strategy:

1. **Selective visibility:** Choose specific contexts where your expertise matters most – select industry publications, niche podcasts, targeted speaking engagements – rather than broad exposure.
2. **Focus on ideas, not personality:** Structure your content around concepts, frameworks and insights rather than personal stories exclusively. Humanizing content and storytelling are important, but they cannot be a standalone piece of your brand-building strategy.
3. **Strategic delegation:** As your content gains traction, selectively bring in other voices from your leadership team to further separate the company's expertise from any one individual. This is a key and usually overlooked piece by CEOs. If you want to ensure that you do not inadvertently become your organization's spokesperson, involve your key leaders in building their own thought leadership in tandem with you developing yours.

Founder branding isn't a binary choice between invisibility and celebrity. It's a strategic tool that, when leveraged with intention, builds your company's authority. Approaching your brand building strategically is crucial to ensuring that you meet the goal of positioning your company as an industry leader, rather than having yourself be perceived as a spotlight-seeking influencer-in-the-making.

The most effective reframing of executive branding is understanding that your goal is not to become an influencer. It's about becoming an instrument for your company's growth and industry dominance.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/growing-a-business/how-to-utilize-founder-branding-while-avoiding-the-spotlight/489244

Mortgage Lenders Are Checking Your LinkedIn to 'Get a Clearer Picture' of Potential Borrowers

Are mortgage lenders looking at your LinkedIn profile?

Faced with high mortgage rates, 6.62% for a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage at the time of writing, and soaring home prices, lenders are turning to social media sites like LinkedIn to better understand borrowers.

Kevin Leibowitz, president and CEO of Grayton Mortgage, told Realtor earlier this month that while the lender does not have "an official process" for looking through a borrower's social media accounts, they may still check unofficially.

"It is helpful to look at LinkedIn profiles during the application process," Leibowitz told the outlet. "It can give a clearer picture as to the job history, description, length of employment, locale, etc."

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The information might be necessary because “sometimes, a borrower doesn’t provide a full picture of what they’ve done for the last few years,” Leibowitz explained.

He stated that lenders could use LinkedIn to fill in gaps in employment and create a complete profile of the borrower.

So, while lenders primarily examine bank statements, credit reports, and tax returns when assessing a borrower’s history, their perception of a borrower could also be influenced by social media platforms like LinkedIn.

Related: Barbara Corcoran Says This Is the Interest Rate Magic Number That Will Make the Market ‘Go Ballistic’

What should borrowers do to maximize their chances of getting a loan? Mike Olson, a senior underwriter at the lender Second Street, told Realtor.com that every detail on LinkedIn should align with what is written on a loan application. This means the same job titles, locations, and dates.

He also recommended refraining from writing posts “that could raise red flags,” like posts about financial stress or job loss.

The median price of a home sold in the U.S. in the final quarter of 2024 was $419,200, up from $338,600 in the last quarter of 2020.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/business-news/mortgage-lenders-could-be-checking-your-linkedin-profile/490150