

Personal Branding Trends for 2015

by William Arruda



When Tom Peters coined the term “personal branding” in his prophetic article “The Brand Called You” in 1997, he was describing a world of work where employees think of themselves as brands and use all the same assets, resources and tools that corporate brands have to remain relevant and achieve their goals. Well, nearly 20 years later, Mr. Peters’ vision is coming

to fruition, spurring many exciting trends for 2015.

In 2014, the groundwork was visible across multiple communication platforms. Many aspects of the world Tom Peters described became commonplace. Paired with the impact of digital, the scene is now set for important transformations in the year ahead. Here, I share the top ten trends that will impact the brand called YOU.

1 The Social Organization: Employees Build Their Brand in Bits and Bytes

When I started my personal branding business 14 years ago, companies were reluctant to encourage personal branding among their employees. They thought “If I help my employees build their brand, they’ll be more attractive to my competition and I will lose them.” That fear has been replaced by the reality that when you help your employees build their brand, you create authentic brand ambassadors. At the same time, you enable them to perform at a higher level and to become more deeply engaged in your organization. Today, most major companies integrate personal branding programs into their talent and leadership development programs.

That same fear about personal branding is even more profound when it comes to social media. But that’s changing too. It used to be “If they have a LinkedIn profile, they must be looking for a job.” In fact, many companies blocked access to social media (some still do!). Well, those walls are crumbling.



Companies that want to stay ahead of the curve are developing social media training for their people. Nearly all of my personal branding training engagements in 2014 included content on helping employees inside companies use LinkedIn and other social media to do their jobs better and to promote the company's brand. And although companies say social media training is important, many still don't provide it. According to an Altimeter study, digital leaders at companies say social media training is one of their top three priorities, yet 62% of companies don't have this type of training. Learning how to tap the potential of social media offers an exponential competitive advantage for the companies that adopt this in a big way.

In 2015, companies that become truly social organizations will see unprecedented levels of success, while laggard organizations will have to face the reality. Social will no longer be an optional add-on.

2 Time Trumps Money: Individuals See the Value of Outsourcing

As it becomes more evident that time is truly the most valuable resource, our willingness to outsource our non-core activities will increase. In *The 4-Hour Workweek*, Tim Ferriss told us to ditch the 9-5 mindset and free up time to do things you find fulfilling and productive. This is becoming a reality. More and more, I'm hearing of professionals at all levels in the company seeking out and engaging resources to help them do their job better and run their life – all in support of living their brand authentically. Outsourcing is easier and more affordable than it used to be, thanks to services like Elance and Guru.com.

According to Elance, 1.2 new jobs are posted every minute. Professionals use elance to edit our Blog posts, spruce up our PowerPoint presentations, build our personal web sites and Blogs, and perform a multitude of time-sucking tasks that don't need to be part of your skill set. We need these services more than ever because we've gotten smarter about discerning the talents that are innately part of our brand. We can't afford to invest our time in efforts that someone else can execute more effectively (that means cost-effectively, too).

This trend will grow as individuals focus on what they are great at and become more comfortable outsourcing everything else. The economic downturn caused many companies to adopt a DIY mindset that prevented us from paying for things like editing or concierge type services. This approach, which backfires in an era of 24/7 opportunity, has been replaced by a personal branding mindset – the desire



to focus our time and other resources on what we do best, what we are evaluated on and what brings us joy.

3 Viva la Video: Everyone's Ready for Their Close Up

Every year since I started sharing my personal branding trends, I have included a nod to video. This year, the nod has become a red alert. Video use is accelerating faster than anyone could have predicted. To get the most from this important communications vehicle, companies large and small are building their own high-end studios and providing video training to their execs and thought-leaders. YouTube has gotten into the act, allowing YouTube Channel owners to use their New York studio at no cost if they have 5,000 subscribers and agree to incorporate their advertising service.

And it's not just formal studios. The real explosion will happen in the creation and distribution of less formal videos, which deliver all-important authenticity and credibility. videoBIO CEO Catharine Fennell (Disclosure: videoBIO is a partner of my company, Reach) said, "Companies are embracing video technology for communications and other business processes. Our biggest growth application is videoBIO Recruiter being used by hiring teams for recruiting, interviewing and screening new talent. This survey from 2012 says that about 75% of recruiters use video recruiting at least occasionally. I predict that by 2015, virtually all large- and medium-sized businesses will use video in the recruitment process.

Companies are now looking to video as a way to enhance internal communications too. In fact, 93% of internal communications teams now see videos as an important tool. "No more long, cumbersome marketing documents - no more boring presentations. Video is how companies and business should communicate," says Mark Leaser, Worldwide Offerings Manager, IBM Lotus Software Services (Disclosure: IBM/Lotus is a former employer of mine). "You can do it yourself and save thousands of dollars. We are using video in a wide variety of ways - for internal education and communications as well as for external marketing and customer relations."

People are getting used to video as a communications tool thanks to their smart phones. All the barriers to video - bandwidth, storage, distribution, complexity of creation - have been removed. The last remaining barrier is people's comfort level with using video. In 2015, that wall will fall. Expect to see a lot more videos from

your colleagues, clients, and network contacts. It will come in the form of video mail, video proposals, Vlogs and links to video content.

4 Coaching for All: It's Not Just for the C-Suite Anymore

Once reserved for the most senior executives, coaching is becoming more pervasive throughout the organization. Because companies continue to do more with less, they need every employee engaged and are relying on coaches to help develop talent to drive results. As coaches become integral to corporate leadership development, the expectations for return on investment will remain high. That's why more and more companies will establish mandatory standards for the coaches they hire. The International Coach Federation (ICF) has seen membership soar as companies seek to engage credentialed coaches with proof of performance.

According to Magdalena Mook, the Executive Director and CEO of the ICF, "Membership has been growing consistently over the past several years and currently ICF is a home to over 23,000 trained coaches. The number of coaches pursuing their professional credential has doubled in the last two years to over 15,000 active credential holders and the interest keeps growing, with close to 250 new applications every month."

Another trend related to coaches is the integration of coaching skills into leadership development programs. Companies are training their talent to adopt coaching skills to use in leading their teams. The executive coaching trend dates back to the 1970s, but the true manifestation of this movement will be explosive in 2015 and beyond. Embrace coaching now – in yourself and in your team members – to advance your brand.

5 Smaller. Faster. Simpler. Better.

With 140-character Twitter tweets and 6-second Vine videos, the need to communicate our value on a smaller screen and in smaller amounts of time is clear. Bios are shrinking. Articles are becoming Blogs. Blogs are becoming tweets. Everything has sped up and the space is getting smaller. Deb Dib, my co-author of *Ditch. Dare. Do!*, regularly spouts a phrase that sums this up: "So what? Make me care. And do it fast."

One of the urgent reasons for this trend is the rapid adoption of mobile computing. When was the last time you read a long article or white paper on your iPhone or iPad? According to Cisco, mobile data traffic grew 81 percent in 2013 alone, generating 1.5 Exabytes of data per month in the latter part of the year, compared with 820 Petabytes per month by the end of 2012. And Cisco reports that mobile data traffic is expected to reach an annual run rate of 190 Exabytes in 2018.

The way we communicate and conduct business will all be subject to the new paradigm: Smaller. Faster. Simpler. Better. Even the performance evaluation process in companies will benefit from this. Sigh of relief for those who dread those endless performance evaluation forms they need to complete each year. Companies will move to regular, brief feedback models in 2015 provided via smartphone apps. Recommendations and testimonials have already experienced this phenomenon in the form of LinkedIn endorsements. Want to provide a recommendation for someone? Just check a box.

One other way to say a lot with few words is with pictures. The rise in the use of infographics as a communications tool is one result. Expect more tools and resources to help you create and integrate images into your communications, and expect your emails to start looking a lot more interesting!

6 Everyone is a Blogger: Citizen Journalism Becomes a Reality

When Blogging came onto the scene, lots of people started Blogs. Many posted regularly, making earnest efforts to deliver quality content, yet they found themselves having little impact on their personal brand. What a drain on their limited, valuable time. They were missing one important ingredient: an audience. And building an audience is hard work. Many professionals who took up Blogging at the beginning of the Web 2.0 revolution have since abandoned their Blogs because the benefit did not justify the effort it takes to maintain a Blog and keep it current.

Enter LinkedIn's Blogging platform.

It comes with an audience of 300+million potential viewers. Your content can be seen not only by your connections, but by the hundreds of thousands of members of the groups to which you belong. And the culture of LinkedIn users makes sharing articles as commonplace as it is easy. That has a dramatic impact on

views. In addition, popular posts get shared via LinkedIn Pulse – making your content even more visible.

As they see the power of this medium, more and more people will use LinkedIn as their Blogging platform so they can build and engage their audience. Blogging will have a resurgence thanks to LinkedIn, and the brand traits of LinkedIn will benefit the personal brands of its users. This is a complete departure from the stand-alone blogs of yesteryear that weren't linked to a respected brand customized for professionals. LinkedIn will be seen by some as a content source – competing with many of the traditional web-based media outlets.

7 Digital First, Real Second: First Impressions in Bits and Bytes

In the past, most first impressions were formed in real-world connections, often with a handshake, and we might have searched the web to learn more about those people we had already met. That paradigm has flipped: the handshake is now the second impression. In his eye-opening book, *Ctrl Alt Delete*, digital media expert Mitch Joel speaks of a digital-first posture. He acknowledges that the web is often the first place we go when we want to learn about something – or someone. In the new world of work, people often learn about us first on the web before meeting us in person. That means your digital identity has just become your first impression. Actor, humorist and social commentator Will Rogers once said, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression," making it that much more important to build a stellar, authentic online profile that is congruous with who you are in the real world.

Even in companies with robust intranets, employees learn about their colleagues through Google searches. There's good news in this. According to a study done by Chitika, you only need to focus on page 1 of Google results because most people never go beyond the first page, and the first three links get almost all the clicks. And since your LinkedIn profile is likely to show up at the top of page 1, it's pretty much the only thing you need to make a good first impression.

8 Work The Way You Want: The Truly Flexible Workplace

Although a lot of folks are still facing long-term unemployment, those who are fortunate enough to possess rare, highly desirable skills, paired with a unique

personal brand, are finding themselves with a different kind of competitive edge in the hiring process. Look for employers to start granting a lot more flexibility. Work anywhere anytime is more and more becoming the norm. It is no-brainer – companies can have the best talent regardless of where they are located, and they save money on the cost of facilities while enjoying better loyalty and engagement from employees. And current employees are demanding more flexibility in how and when they work. According to their web site, FlexJobs saw a 194% increase in 2014 over 2013. FlexJobs is a professional job service that connects flexible job opportunities with professionals who seek them.

Of course, making this work for organizations sometimes requires a few paradigm shifts: trusting employees, training them to work in a truly virtual environment and investing in the right tools that allow for this to happen successfully.

Look for rigidity of employment contracts to wane and all kinds of options to open up. To obtain the best talent, companies will be more open to custom schedules, varied amounts of vacation, and custom benefits packages. And they'll be hiring a lot more contract workers. According to the Associated Press, contract workers made up less than half of one percent of all U.S. employment in the 1980s but now account for 2.3 percent. Economists predict contract workers will play an even larger role in the years ahead.

According to a recent AICPA and CIMA study, 33% of respondent organizations predict that over the next five years at least HALF of their workforce will be composed of external talent - consultants, contractors, freelancers and outsource providers.

How soon should you start building your brand? Now!

9 Brand on the Run: Mobile Branding Becomes Commonplace

The use of apps to build and manage your brand will explode. Building your brand while in line at Whole Foods or on the subway on the way to work will be commonplace thanks to the numerous apps that have recently launched and will launch in the coming months. There are apps to help you uncover your brand – like What Color is Your Parachute – and hundreds of apps to promote the brand, such as valuable social media tools to help you manage your profiles and stay visible to

your contacts. Networking apps – some for online networking and a new group of apps that allow you to link virtual and real networking. Meetup, for example, helps you find Meetups around topics of interest to you including social media, tech, business and entrepreneurship. LinkedIn now has two apps. The newest, LinkedIn Connected, helps you stay on top of what’s happening with your network. Evernote Hello helps you remember people and make meetings memorable too. When you meet new people, you can enter their information, scan their business cards or connect to a group of people. Evernote Hello will also automatically access related information about the people you meet from your calendar, your Evernote account and online networks.

Look for more and more apps that focus on all aspects of personal branding to launch in 2015. Choose the ones that will help you and add them to your smartphone and to your daily action list.

10. Digital Brand You: A Personal Web Site for Everyone.

2014 was LinkedIn’s single biggest year for incorporating personal branding features into your profile. As a result, your LinkedIn profile will become the primary home of your brand – eliminating the need for most professionals to have their own web site. With the latest features they have added - which include long form content posting (see #6 above), allowing you to change the order of the content and add images, videos, presentations, whitepapers, etc. to your Summary and Experience sections of your profile – you have everything you need to convey your brand in an authentic, differentiated and compelling manner. And the latest feature - a custom visual background – helps you differentiate your profile from the myriad competitors who do what you do. The custom background powerfully reinforces your personal brand with color and/or images.

Combined with the fact that your LinkedIn profile will likely show up in the top spot when someone types your name into Google, it’s clear that there is no longer any reason for most-career minded professionals to build their own web site or Blog. LinkedIn will continue to build features that help you build Brand You, and as a result, you will see more and more people spending time on that platform.

Just as Tom Peters created a vision for personal branding in general, you can think about these trends and begin creating a vision for how they will impact your brand



in the coming year. Then build your personal branding plan and take one action on it every day in 2015. The possibilities – and the payoff – have never been so grand.

About William Arruda

A citizen of the world with boundless energy and a genuine passion for human potential, William Arruda is the founder and President of Reach, the global leader in personal branding with representatives in 45 countries and products that have been used by more than a million people. A personal branding pioneer with more longevity than anyone in the field, he has been credited with turning the concept of personal branding into a global industry. He has appeared on BBC TV, the Discovery Channel, Fox News Live and NPR and he's been featured in countless publications, including Time, Fast Company, the Wall Street Journal and Entrepreneur. He is the bestselling author of the definitive books on executive branding, *Ditch. Dare. Do!* and *Career Distinction* and he writes a regular column for Forbes.



www.williamarruda.com

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www.reachpersonalbranding.com

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