v 1.2

Personal Branding Checklist

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10.8.2006

Preface

I know this article is a little long for a blog entry. I think Word was showing it being over ~~34~~ 29 pages. As such, I've converted it to downloadable files if you wish to read it offline and/or in a different viewer.

[PDF](#) | [FlashPaper](#) | [HTML (ZIP)](#)

I've been wanting to write something like this for a long time. I've felt my success in the Flash industry stems mainly from creating and selling a brand for myself. It takes a lot of continous work, but is a lot of fun and pays off in multiple ways. Hopefully from this article, you'll find a lot of value and helpful advice. Anything else? Disagree with something? Drop it in the comments.

Since this article is so big and I am extremely busy, I'll increment the version number when I make edits.

Contents

Introduction

This is a checklist of items one needs for an all-encompassing personal branding strategy. Personal Branding is the process to market and sell you as a brand in order to gain success in business. Personal Branding is a continual process just as knowing yourself is a continual process. As you grow, so does your brand. The need for personal branding arises from the fact that globalization has increased competition in the workplace. As the wheat is separated from the chaff, if you are left standing, you are left standing with others of good caliber. The playing field is now that much more challenging since your competition is as good as, or better, than you.

To paraphrase David Samuel, the bloke who got me into Personal Branding after I saw him speak a few years ago, he speaks of why you need Personal Branding. His audience was a group from a large telecom.

> "If we were to classify people based on aptitude, they are A's, B's, C's, and D's. Because of globalization the C's and D's have been outsourced. They're gone. All that's left is you. You are now in competition with a bunch of A's and B's. You are now clamoring for attention amongst a talented group of people. How do you now get noticed? How can you shine and be recognized for additional opportunities? How can you be successful when everyone around you is just as talented, or more so than, you? If everyone around you is capable, and of A or B caliber, how do you compete with that?"

You build a personal brand, and sell it. You sell not just yourself, but your brand, to your superiors, or clients in the case of contractors and consultants.

The same reason people buy Coke instead of Pepsi, or American Eagle instead of Abercrombie & Fitch where the products are extremely similar is because of the brand. The public perception of the company's product is created and marketed in such a way to enhance the product, or even be the product. Soda is soda, pop is pop for those of us with less sensitive taste buds. The similiarities end, however, when you compare Coke vs. Pepsi. Even taste tests are meaningless; it's the brand that sells it.

Checklist

1. Know What You Want
2. Be Able to Articulate What You Do
3. Elevator Pitch
4. Be Positive
5. Have a Blog / Website / MySpace, or other online presence
6. Business Card
7. Multiple Email Addresses
8. Phone
9. Signature
10. Logo
11. Personal Goals
12. More than 1 resume
13. Mentor
14. Networking Outlets / Contacts
15. Wardrobe Style
16. Multiple IM Accounts
17. Alias
18. Mantra
19. Speaking & PowerPoint Template
20. Passion

Let's start with some brief definitions.

Checklist Definitions
1. Know What You Want

Identify what you want, and start walking towards it.

2. Be Able to Articulate What You Do

When someone asks what you do, answer them immediately with a clear, concise, and confident response.

3. Elevator Pitch

Be able to describe who you are and what you do in the time it takes to ride an elevator.

4. Be Positive

Be positive.

5. Business Card

A 3x5 piece of paper or mini-CD that has your personal contact information clearly printed on it.

6. Have a Blog / Website / MySpace, or other online presence

Get your brand online.

7. Multiple Email Addresses

Get more than 1 email address.

8. Phone

Get a phone.

9. Signature

Your signature is who you are, your title, and your contact information. You should put this on everything you touch.

10. Logo

A visual image that positively identifies your brand.

11. Personal Goals

Set goals for yourself that help you reach your wants.

12. More than 1 resume

Customize your resume to the potential employer or client.

13. Mentor

Find a guru and have them teach you.

14. Networking Outlets / Contacts

Continually develop your network by attending industry meetings and conferences.

15. Wardrobe Style

When you are going to be near people who you wish to sell your brand to, dress to impress.

16. Multiple IM Accounts

Get more than 1 IM account.

17. Alias

Obtain a positive nickname.

18. Mantra

Collect sayings that enforce your brand.

19. Speaking & PowerPoint Template

Speak about what you do and have a hot looking PowerPoint template to show.

20. Passion
     Love what you do.

Thorough Definitions

Now, let's get more thorough in our definitions.

1. Know What You Want

The most important thing is to know what you want. If you have a clearly identified target of desire, you can walk that path with confidence.

One of the biggest problems with management is the delegation process; the process where someone in the position of authority asks someone else they are in charge of to accomplish a task. The delegation process is a series of steps that must be followed in order to ensure success. The first step is personal: "Know what you want". If you don't know what you want, you cannot articulate to others how to accomplish the task, because you don't know what it is. You are setting them up to fail because you cannot define success. If you don't know what you want, you'll be walking in aimlessly with no purpose.

Identify what you want, and start walking towards it.

2. Be Able to Articulate What You Do

When advertising a product, people need to be able to identify what the product is to garner context. Sometimes this works in reverse where by not advertising the purpose, you create a mystique that has proven effective. This doesn't work however when you are meeting someone new for the first time, and they ask what you do. Simply saying, "Jesse Warden, man of mystery" doesn't accurately portray what I do. The business world revolves around work. While jobs may decrease, the amount of work will not; there is always work to be done. You are a cog to the machine, whether corporate or independent, and you want to sell yourself as an effective part of that whole.

By giving a clear, concise description of what you do, the other party immediately can identify applicable value if any. If they are a potential employer or client, you want them to have this clear impression of you. If they don't have an immediate need for your skills, they may later. They will remember you and what you do later if you left a good & clear first impression. "I remember that networking engineer that I met at that conference, she'd be a good candidate for this opportunity."

The interest in what you do is at its apex when the other party asks; be ready to immediately answer, and thus take most advantage of it. This also sometimes spawns additional conversation, which in turn leads to more rapport building opportunities.

If you cannot articulate what you do, others will perceive it negatively. It doesn't matter if you're the hottest C++ programmer out there; if the other party doesn't get that from your description, they have no knowledge that you're the hottest C++ programmer out there. They'll think things like "He's some type of developer". If a C++ job comes up, they are more apt to immediately think of the person that accurately described that they coded C++ first.

"What do you do?"

"Yeah... I like do computer stuff..."

vs.

"What do you do?"

"I live, eat, and sleep programming in C."

Hotness.

Additionally, not being able to articulate what you do has a host of other negative perceptions that it gives off. It makes you sound inarticulate. Communication is key in globalization, and in business in general. It's a flawed process to begin with; someone who is good at it immediately has perceived value and personified charisma. Finally, trust is conveyed if you quickly and confidently describe what you do.

When someone asks what you do, answer them immediately with a clear, concise, and confident response.

3. Elevator Pitch

So now that you know what to say, how do you say it? You use an elevator pitch.

An elevator pitch is a short description of who you are, what you do, and it's spoken in the time it takes to ride in an elevator with someone. Usually 3 sentences. They are designed to be short so you can quickly and effectively describe who you are and what you do. If you meet an important person in passing and are in the elevator, this is one scenario. Another is when someone who may have a potential opportunity is at a conference or meeting. You could utilize the 20 seconds after the meeting to introduce yourself and create a good, informative first impression in a limited timeframe.

It's called a pitch because you are trying to sell yourself to the other person. That also means this can change depending on who you are talking to. Just like sales pitches can change based on the audience and demographic, so to can elevator pitches. It helps if you can figure out a little about the other person before you give your pitch. You often don't, so don't plan on it. If you can, make the most of it.

"Hi, my name is Jesse Warden."

"What do you do, Mr. Warden?"

"I'm a computer programmer."

"Oh really? I used to work in the IT division. What type of programming do you do?"

"I specialize in Adobe Flex, which creates Rich Internet Applications. I typically work with server-side developers as well as designers in various design agencies. Working with a variety of people who have different skill sets rocks!"

I like to add my feelings so people immediately know I am passionate about it. That's just my style. Your elevator pitch should show your style as well, if applicable. I like to talk, a lot. Therefore, Elevator pitches are hard for me. I want to spew details to people. However, it is best to give them the synopsis, and let them ask for more details.

Remember:
- Who you are
- What you do
- What type of industry

Be able to describe who you are and what you do in the time it takes to ride an elevator.

4. Be Positive

No one likes negative people. People like positive people. If you are positive, people will want to work with you. Positivity implies you can provide solutions, will be successful when thrown into the fire, and will generally raise the morale of those around you.

Be positive.

5. Business Card

While old skool, it's still effective. Business cards should be personalized without being annoying. It's ok to have a weird shape for example, but the ho better fit in someone's wallet. If not, they will immediately

have a negative impression of you. Those little CD ones are hot and will make people think you've got it together.

Having your first & last name, professional title, company name if applicable, phone number(s), email(s), and website are the bare minimum. These help drive people to your web presence. They, too, should match your brand. If you are a Spartan, clean, no nonsense programmer, a clearly readable and Spartan card that matches the style of your web presence, if any, should match.

Misspellings are unacceptable. If you accidentally printed out 300 cards with the wrong email, take the loss and get it done right. It's unprofessional to get a card with a verbal disclaimer.

"Just ignore the top number... it no longer works, use the bottom."

...bad, bad.

A lot of local FedEx, Mailbox Ect. and others can make large amounts of custom business cards, cheap. Cheaper than Kinko's, too!

Finally, your website can go down. A business card doesn't require a server, nor power to be viewable; it's just paper and ink, and that works reliably on it's own.

6. Blog / Website / MySpace Page

Being accessible anywhere, anytime is now technologically possible. In the past, you'd slip your business card to someone, hoping it wouldn't get lost in their already overflowing wallet, they'd see it, and remember to associate the card with the hopefully good impression you made.

Now, you can have who you are immediately accessible to anyone with an internet connection. A personal website allows you to collect the good things about you in one accessible place. You can then use that as a tool wherever you travel... and it's larger than 3x5.

"Do you have a resume?"

"Do you have examples of work?"

"What type of work have you done in the past?"

Are all questions that can be answered verbally, via IM, or event phone by:

"Sure, just point your laptops web browser you have open there to www.jessewarden.com."

The best is if you have a previously prepared web page that showcases your work nicely. You can then guide the potential employer/client through onsite. Self-guided are cool as well. A lot of designers have portfolio sites, websites that showcase their design work online. They can both stand alone allowing anyone to see their work without any hand holding, or used onsite during an interview in a guided presentation.

You can also upload multiple resumes to your website to be always available. It's just really handy to have all of that in one place.

Depending on your industry, any associated files and documents can be there as well, either hidden (non-linked to) or protected so only you can access them. There are many sites out there devoted to storing your data, but this is stuff you WANT people to see so it's ok if it's found.

A blog is great too. It shows a history of you writing about your industry. That immediately sends a powerful statement. It implies you are knowledgeable in your industry, if not a cut above the rest, if you can write a lot of content over a long period of time. You also will have a long record which can showcase your vast amount of knowledge, and even growth in the industry. If you have multiple blogs, one for personal stuff and one for professional postings, it's easier because you don't have to explain away personal posts that may be uncomfortable to talk about in an interview.

Remember, you're never sorry for something you didn't say. If you said it on the internet, you can be sure it's saved, somewhere. People have been pretty harsh about such things on the internet since there is more accountability for what you write being in the public domain as it were. That said, those of us in tech recognize and appreciate things in context, and should take that into account. Most don't, so be warned.

Blogs are also nice because of their communal nature. If you have a comments to show, this gives the impression that you are involved in the industry. This yet again raises you as being perceived as knowledgeable. Comments that show positive feedback or thanks are even sweeter. You can even play on the negative ones if you responded in a professional way, attempting to initiate dialogue or healthy debate. Leaving comments that point out weaknesses in your arguments, or are just plain corrections on your inaccurate reporting show that you are not afraid to admit you're wrong, and have documentation of such. Anything racist, offensive, or politically incorrect should be deleted unless it applies to the industry you are in. Some people don't understand that an anonymous commenting system allows ANYONE to comment, and yet they can hold you accountable for content on your website. I feel the risk is worth it, though.

Finally, My Space pages. When I was in college studying multimedia, one of my respected professors told me that you need your own domain if you want to apply for a web designer job. Local companies like Mindspring (now Earthlink) and others wouldn't take you seriously

if you put geocities.com/~cablesland as your portfolio URL vs. jessewarden.com.

I think times have changed. Creating a website takes a LOT of time and a wide array of skills to setup and maintain. If this isn't your primary discipline, it's kind of ridiculous to do so in a day and age where a plethora of web applications exist for solving these various needs. If you are a web designer, sure, I can see how it's relevant, but battling hackers, blog spam, and shoddy web hosting providers is time consuming, expensive both monetarily and time wise, with little perceived return on investment.

Why pay for website space when places offer it for free? Why go through the laborious process of setting up a blog when many services exist that make it easy to setup and handle all the spam and hacker issues for you? To me, people who do that are effective, not lazy. In a day and age where time is precious, and attention sparse, anything that helps you get things done quicker seems good. Effectively using those tools to develop your brand seems like a good thing. Web mail, too, is nice vs. a domain specific one. Access anywhere with built-in spam protection is great! While it is professional to have "jesse@jessewarden.com" vs. "m00g0076y@aol.com" when in communication with a client, having something like gmail or others is fine; they handle the spam so you don't have to. That shows your smart... or at least appear so, and that's what matters.

Get your brand online in some fashion.

7. Multiple Email Addresses

While it can be a pain and cause confusion to clients, its worth it, even if you only advertise one. If your mail server goes down, you can at least be in email communication via another email address. Additionally, you don't have to use work email for job offers that could get you fired.

You don't have to inform everyone of all of your email addresses. You can tell clients the one you want them to use, and friends the rest. Email filters, however, will triumph over these efforts.

Finally, some email addresses can have more than one purpose. For example, I have a Gmail address not just for the spam filtering and

web browser access, but because I can check it through my cell phone's web browser. Since you can't always control what types of email people send you, you can set the tone that your Blackberry cannot view PDF documents, so people won't even try and instead will stick to text only. Flickr has a creative use of this. You can send an email with an attached image to an address they give you for your account. It'll extract the image from the email, and post it to your Flickr account.

8. Phone

Having a phone is good for many reasons. First, email and IM conversations suck. They are not as effective as actually talking to the person. If you can't talk in person, voice communication is the next best thing. Having yet another way to be accessible via a decent form of communication is a good thing. Phone calls are instantaneous, assuming you're awake and your phone is on, garnering immediate results. You have opportunities to use the aforementioned tools like your elevator pitch, as well as being positive and passionate over the phone. It's hard with shoddy cell phones not to interrupt people sometimes, but that's the nature of the beast.

Additionally, text messages have the benefit of being quiet. If you are in a meeting, or in someplace where you cannot make a phone call, a text message is a way to communicate using the same device. They are quicker on some phone networks, and more reliable than multimedia and email messaging (at least at the time of this writing). You can use one hand, and immediately pause mid-typing without being rude. The send / receive methodology allows you to send a quick message and go do other things while the message is being responded to. The latency can work in your favor.

While it may be painful, try not to use l77t with people you don't know. Leet, also spelled l33t and l77t, is a loose internet language. It replaces some words with symbols and has other colloquialisms. It's handy for devices that make it hard to type, but again, you need to portray a professional impression. People hear you speak in their head when reading text messages, and bad leet grammar doesn't leave a mature one.

"lol, y0r da m@n n0\/\/ d0g!"

vs.

"Ha ha, that was quite funny, Dr. Watson."

However, unless your device has a keyboard, prudence can come through after a decent report has been established, you can begin with the abbreviations.

"yes" vs. "Yes." No capitalization and no period. No problem.

"I'll be there b4 8." vs. "I'll be there before 8." Ok if you are on a personal basis with the other party, but not ok if it is a potential employer or client. Use your best judgment; typing this proper sentences without a proper keyboard is tough.

Get a phone.

9. Signature

Next to knowing what you want, I think this is the most important, regardless of industry. Your signature is what identifies you. People associate your signature with you, thus it is a direct reflection of you. Signatures give context to who you are, and provide people with valuable information, namely, an email address and website. When people are searching on Google for answers to their questions, they may come upon a forum posting or archived email list thread where you answered the question they are seeking answered. If your signature stands out, you've just gained a new fan.

At a bare minimum, they should include your name and email. That way, when emails are forwarded, it is immediately apparent who wrote something, and how to get into contact with them.

Having your website is nice too because sometimes it can differ from the domain your email is on. While my current work email is jesse@universalmind.com, my website is jessewarden.com, thus, I include both my company's website and my own.

Any extra is up to you. I personally like short and sweet signatures.

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vs.

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jesse@jessewarden.com
http://www.universalmind.com
http://www.jessewarden.com
cell: 123-456-9000
home: 555-867-5309
AOL: KickPunch@aol.com
MSN: misnomer456@msn.com
Yahoo: MagnetoCheeto@yahoo.com

In an age where screen real estate is in high demand, even with multi-screen & widescreen displays, if it fits in an email window, you are visible, and having your brand visible and recognized is a good thing!

Some people like to put their mantra's or a favorite quote. Be careful in your choices of these. When in doubt don't put one, as you could offend or alienate someone based on your literary or movie character preference.

The most important thing is that your signature needs to be text. Accompanying an image with your signature is dangerous. We're going for reach here, trying to get your brand everywhere. Not all email clients, web apps, nor devices support images and HTML layouts the same. You cannot depend on accurate representation of your brand and that is a bad thing. What you CAN depend on is that if you make your signature text, it'll show up correctly in Outlook, Outlook Express, Thunderbird, Gmail, Hotmail, and even Gmail on my phone.

Temper that Spartan, lowest common denominator approach with your industry and technological reach. If you are building your brand in a big company like IBM for example, you can be sure most have Lotus notes. If you design it, you can depend on for the most part that others will see it. If most of your customers have Outlook, you can get away with a lot of HTML & CSS formatted designs. Temper the value of the visual perception with the reach of your audience.

One last thing to watch out for: canned responses. They are rude, non-personal, and dehumanize your brand. You are a person building a unique and personal identity. You want to ensure that your signature is separate from your response. People are not machines, and shouldn't be treated as such. Seeing this shows I'm sending mixed messages, and have apathy towards my signature's perception:

> I'll get that file to you right away!
>
> - Thanks
>
> Thanks,
>
> Jesse Warden

Closures to emails are similar to letters, thus you need to tailor closings to the situation. "Love, Jesse" to my wife, "Sincerely, Jesse R. Warden" to those in business, and "Peace Out!" to my homies. Don't let a machine write sincerity for you; it's cold, shallow apathy at that point.

If you are a programmer, every piece of code ever written by you in the public domain via some open source license or merely uploaded to your blog should have your name, email, and website listed in it, visibly. If you have code floating around in the wild that you've written that does not have your name in it, fix it now. I built my career by putting my name, email, and website url in my code. You can too! There is nothing better for a programmer than looking on the net for that one piece of example code to help, finding yours, and immediately recognizing it's exactly what they are looking for. They are henceforth your biggest fan.

Your signature is who you are, your title, and your contact information. You should put this on everything you touch.

10. Logo

Shape and color are the 2 most important things in design. They evoke emotions, and shape peoples perceptions towards what they represent. Brands have a visual representation in the form of a logo. While "Coca-Cola the product" is a bubbling, syrupy black liquid that extinguishes any flame that comes near it, "Coca-Cola the brand" is

the white script text on red background. The logo is the visual bridge of association for the brand the pneumonic device people have in their heads of what the brand represents. If they see a logo, they should immediately recognize the brand it represents. That is the litmus test of a successful logo.

Nicknames are even invented around the logo, thus completing the loop of brand recognition. IBM's referred to as "Big Blue"; their logo is blue, and they are a big company.

Zorro had his trademark "Z" scratched with a rapier into his victim's clothing, or places of interest for the antagonists to see. It sent a clear message that he meant business, and struck with quick, fierce resolve. So much so, his logo required quite an impromptu canvas, written in swashbuckling candor. That same "I mean business" logo also struck hope into the hearts of downtrodden thousands.

It wasn't just the letter "z".

11. Personal Goals

Life can be measured by how many breathes you take. A journey can be measured in how many steps you take. In working towards what you want, you do so via milestones. Personal milestones are a set of goals. Setting personal goals for yourself helps gives your desire purpose, shows trackable progress, and helps build your self-esteem as you build up a set of personal accomplishments through attaining goals.

My greatest stretch of personal programming growth was a stretch of 2 years. In those 2 years, I had a set of goals for myself. My overall milestone was to be able to duplicate a favorite game of mine in code. The more I dug, the more complex things I found that I didn't know how to do. Daily after work, I'd pick something I didn't know how to do.

"These characters in the game somehow know how to walk to a point I click on the screen."

Then I'd dive in for hours, researching online, writing my own test code myself to compare my results with others. When I'd get a final

result, the rush was awesome. I'd do it other ways to see if there were better ways of doing things. Then, I'd do it again.

"These characters seem to know how to walk around things. How in the heck do they know how to do that?"

The abyss of complexity was open at that point. Sometimes I'd take 2 steps backwards in order to re-learn the exact same approaches. The whole time I had a file structure that was proof of my accomplishments. It also showcased how far I had come. I'd open code just 6 months old and go, "Dear God... I wrote THAT!? What an idiot.. you do it THIS way now...". Made me feel really good to see I was making progress. A lot of the time I'd get angry I wasn't progressing fast enough, but I could not deny the reasonable proof of progress.

By having a goal to shoot for towards your want, you have a clear path, and thus purpose in your day to day life.

12. More than 1 resume

You do not "have a resume". You have a template of your skills in digital form that appears as a resume at first glance, but in fact is a living, breathing document. Every single potential employer or contract should receive a customized resume. This can be as minute as a modified Objective, the top part of your resume, to an entirely different design and set of content.

When applying for a "in the trenches" job, your resume's objective should clearly express your desires to work hard, get your hands dirty, and yearn for the approval of your employers on a job well done. If your objective showcases you enjoy leading teams, enjoy managing multiple teams, and are also skilled at delegation, an employer will question why you are applying for a hands on job when you are clearly looking for a management position instead.

You never lie. Lying is wrong, immoral, and shows that you are not being true to your brand. If you are a trench warrior, proudly announce it as such, and having your objective on your resume clearly indicate your bayonet is ready for duty. If you are a leader, and want to guide your troops to victory, then articulate in words that you are more than ready for marching orders. Life is too short to shortchange

yourself and others. Happiness is the ultimate goal. An honest goal, both to yourself and others will help you attain goals towards that path.

You shouldn't be all over the map, either. Your objective should be directly related to your ultimate want. If your objectives are all over the map because your wants are, this isn't necessarily a bad thing. You will attain goals quicker, with more satisfying results if you focus your wants into a singular purpose. It makes things a lot easier to articulate. At least to an employer. If you have grander goals in your head, no problem. Just make sure your employer reads an objective that is applicable to the job you are applying for.

Skills can be readjusted based on the job. For example, I sell myself 100% as a client developer. I make no illusions I want, nor am I willing to do server-side development. Flex? Yes. Ruby? Hell no. If I have a dry run of contract / consulting, you can be sure I'll be changing my tune to adapt to market conditions. I'll only do so, however, when I'm extremely broke. Even so, even Flex jobs can be tailored for. For example, consider the following scenario:

"We're looking for someone with experience with Flex to interface with some legacy systems as well as Spring and Hibernate."

I am NOT going to showcase Flash first in my list of applicable skills. They are looking for Flex, why did you put Flash first? Yes, yes, those of us in the software industry know that job ads are typically not written by geeks, thus are the dumbest things ever written because they do not accurately represent the job in question. Thus, we are of the opinion not to take them seriously, assuming we'll hash out the details in the interview. Don't make that assumption. At the very at least, give them the benefit of the doubt, take them seriously, and organize your skill set to the job. If you are clearly not qualified, don't apply, nor try to finagle your skill list to match. Again, all of these edits and modifications done per job/client are honest and sincere.

Each potential employer or client gets their own, unique resume.

13. Mentor

Every great warrior had a mentor. Daniel LaRusso had Mr. Miyagi. Plato had Socrates. Riker had Captain Picard. Albert Einstein once said

he was not great, but stood on the shoulders of giants. Great teachers have great disciples. Great students have the aptitude to be great. Someone who can remove obstacles to your learning, who have valuable experiences in which they can pass on, and can proficiently convey them to you are mentors. They guide you along your chosen career path, nurturing you, and warning you of common pitfalls.

Surrounding yourself with people who are better than you ensures you will be positively influenced. You want to be surrounded by people who raise you up, not drag you down. I quit smoking, not by my willpower alone, but rather the support group I had surrounded myself with. In the software industry, you have ample opportunity to be confronted with people who are insanely smart, have multiple degrees, and/or are brilliant in some fashion. This industry is extremely hard, and changes often. By its very nature, it ensures that only reasonably smart people can stay successful for any length of time. From day 1 your skills are marginalized. Daily your knowledge becomes out of date. Our brains are a depreciating asset that we can't write off for taxes.

Collectively, however, we flourish amidst no or competing hardware / software standards, varying economic climates, and an overall young industry still finding its way.

The same can be said for you. Your personal brand should allow you to be surrounded by people of similar mindset. They should be better than you. Together you positively grow.

...that's slow, though. The best way to become better, quickly with less hardship and wasted time is a mentor. Someone who has "done this before" and "done it well". Mentors are naturally hard to find. Some do it out of philanthropy, or by circumstance. They just happen to be a lead on a project, and end up becoming someone who you learn a lot from. Depending on how the management structure is set up, they may even have an opportunity to do a form of MBO's, or management by objective where they allow you to do learning exercises dictated by them that help you grow. And quickly. Having an expert accessible for questions and support while you're doing something new is invaluable when the early first steps can be intimidating, anxious, and downright frustrating.

Transformational leadership is the best kind. Making another a better person is one of the coolest gifts you can receive in your professional life. If you find someone who can be your mentor, you don't need to be formal about it, just find some way to work with them. It can be a

risk on new jobs where you have no guarantee the person even has any desire to fulfill such a role, or that they won't quit and you'll be left wondering what's left for you at your current position now that your mentor is gone. I personally think it's worth. The number 1 reason for turnover in companies is because of changes in management. If you don't click with your leader, you won't be able to perform at your optimal ability, nor will you grow.

Find a bad ass, and become a groupie.

14. Networking Outlets

Most of my jobs nowadays come from referrals. Meaning, someone I know knows someone who needs my skills. They act as a liaison to connect us. That friendship, whether genuine unconditional, or purely business rapport, is generated from networking events. These are basically anytime where you can meet people. They don't have to be applicable to your industry, but that's typically where I've had success. I go to local industry meetings because they are fun. A lot of times, however, I meet someone new. They could be another developer like me, a designer who does similar work, or a business owner looking for talent. All of these people have value in multiple ways, and you to them.

They can tell you about their work, and thus their real world experiences. Since we're all in the same business, you can learn new things, challenge old beliefs, and merely reaffirm the current. You can identify the person by name and skillset. If they are a skillset similar to yours, you can later leverage that when you cannot take anymore work and someone is looking for someone. I'd love to say yes to all the work I get, but I can't. Still, clients are ultimately looking for someone to perform the job, even if you were their first choice. They will be happy to get someone to perform the tasks. If you refer a good candidate to them because you currently are unable to do so, that makes you look valuable in their eyes... and you didn't even code anything, you just sent them an email!

Same goes for someone of a different skill set. One of my weaknesses is that I know too many people like me. I don't know enough designers, nor server-side coders beyond a blog I read regularly. That doesn't allow me to make a personal recommendation which makes

the referral not as valuable, nor can I guarantee the quality of the referrals' work. That could make me look bad.

Both allow you leverage on bigger projects. If you are involved in an initiative where you need a multiple amount of talent, you suddenly are looked at as an extremely valuable member if you pretty much hand pick the entire team... that also gives you more control over who you work with on projects. Both are great things.

This works both ways. People refer me, both contractors and clients, to those in need of talent.

I make this easy for them. My personal brand is clear: Jesse Warden is a Flex Developer.

That way, when whomever, wherever is talking about how they need a Flex Developer, I want to make sure I'm the first person they think of. I don't want them thinking, "Oh yeah... that Jesse guy, I wonder if he's a Flex dude." That would be a failure of me clearly articulating and selling my brand. You want to be the first person they think of for a particular job, whether it be as precise as a Mach-2 ColdFusion developer or a "dude who knows server-side technology".

It's really nice having people get you work so you don't have to stress about it!

15. Wardrobe Style

Business is a game. You either play it, or get played by it. Part of that game is knowing when to dress for success. When it's 2:00 am and I'm deep in debugging some jacked code, there is no way in hell I'd be wearing a tie, nor shoes for that matter.

When I'm in an interview? Suit, tie, and a haircut. You cannot be overdressed to an interview, only a club or party. While I've heard of some successful sales meetings done by those not following the norm, they are an exception to the rule and definitely unique edge cases. Like good hygiene, you want people to perceive you as confident, have a rudimentary recognition of style, and overall like you have it together. You do that by looking good.

There are times when conforming to play the game is good. Suit to an interview, tux to a wedding, sensible hiking boots on the trails; you dress to the occasion where it is reasonable and generally accepted appropriate to do so. You look hot at da club, comfy when chillin' at home for the weekend, and your normal attire while in public for nothing special.

The style you choose reflects you. Times, fashions, and the attitudes towards them change over time. There is a wide gamut of clean cut and unkempt. Do what feels right when it's appropriate. When you are at an industry event, interview, or other occasion where you may have an opportunity to make a professional encounter, dress to impress. If you can't do that, dress so you feel confident; preferably the first, but the 2nd is a great plan B. Looking good is part attitude; the clothes can only do so much.

Wear the clothes, don't let them wear you.

16. Multiple IM Accounts

Communication is a flawed process. That said, being accessible makes business easier. Easy to reach helps contribute to "easy to work with". Your brand wants to be perceived that way. Yes, I frikin' hate being called on Saturday's too, but that doesn't mean you have to answer the phone, just that your message is cordial and you sound professional... and you actually do return phone calls.

Instant Messaging accounts have a few pro's can con's. You can have multiple IM accounts easier than you can multiple emails with multiple services, all for free. Spam is easier controlled than email and text messages. There is less security risk, more context to your online status for others to see in real-time, and you can carry on many conversations with many people simultaneously. There are a few minor cons like people not respecting the status', giving the impression you are there but not answering IM's, and not being online. There are a few others, but overall, instant messaging, whether by PC, phone, or some other device are a great way to be connected, with more control.

Just about everyone is on IM. That is a good thing; you want your brand to be known and thus accessible by everyone when you deem it appropriate. Again, we're going for reach here. That can also be a bad thing. I sign on IM at random times because when I do, I get

swarmed. I can spend an entire afternoon and evening just IM'ing. Therefore, at least one professional IM is good to have in addition to your personal one. This way, you can control access.

The more accounts you can get, the better! The most common are AOL Instant Messenger, Yahoo! Messenger, and Microsoft's MSN Messenger. Trillian is a decent, free client for the PC that allows you to use one program to sign into all 3 vs. 3 programs at the same time. Adium is one of many equivalents for the Mac.

17. Alias

An alias is a nickname. One or more is useful. Some are bequeathed by coworkers, childhood friends, or other associates. Usually, they are meant to identify and thus label a personality quirk that uniquely identifies you. You can utilize that to develop a sub-culture for you. Those that know you identify you by that alias.

Lucky Number Slevin's "Happy Cat", Scarface, Borris the Bullet Dodger; all add a mystique, identify a strength, and/or clearly set a tone and style. You want something that is positive in someway. While negative ones do have sensationalism, and sometimes garner attention, you want to be able to have it up come up in a client meeting and not get too nervous trying to explain it. Like what you do, the reason's behind it should flow off the tongue.

"Why's he called Borris the Bullet Dodger?"

"'Cause he can dodge bullets."

These are useful in a lot of areas, some non-professional which can draw ties to your professional life. Email address prefixes, IM names, signatures... or you can just keep it on the down-lo. There is nothing wrong with your given name. There is everything right with building a club that "knows" your alias.

You can develop a sub-culture for your brand via those knowing your alias.

18. Mantra

Mantra's, sayings, and quotes are all good to associate yourself with. At the very least, you can gain inspiration from them in times of need. Many have come before us, and as Carl Sagan said when referring to the 0.12 blue pixel that was earth in the last picture Voyager 1 took 4 billion light years from our planet: "Earth is where we make our stand". Like a mentor, a lot of great authors and poets exist that you can garner good lines from that represent your attitude towards life, or just situations in general. They can give you purpose, put things into perspective, or just garner a light hearted laugh. Whatever matches your style; it should enhance your brand (say, on your not-so-concise signature), and help some get better context of who you are by who inspires you.

"Live long and prosper." - Spock

"Just do it." - Nike

"Nuts!" -- 101st Airborne Division, Brig. Gen. Anthony McAuliffe in response to the Nazi's asking for their surrender at Bastogne, France

19. Speaking & A PowerPoint Template

If you are building a brand, it is best if you go out and speak about what you do. This builds the perception you are an expert in your field. You typically do this via good ole' PowerPoint presentations. They get a lot of flak but it's how things are like it or not. Therefore, to make the most of it, it is best to have one that has a design that is loyal to your brand. If you have the dough, hire a designer to create one for you or get a networking contact to do so for free, perhaps in the return for a favor or future referrals, or as a portfolio piece for them. You could show their name on their design in your intro slide for example. Exposure for artists is a good thing so play on that.

Speakers can speak at 120 words per minute on average. Audience members can listen to and comprehend 500. Therefore, there is no way you can retain all of their attention via words alone. It helps to have a consistent brand image that they associate with you to help keep their attention. If they've read the slide for the 3rd time, at least they are viewing the composition and associating it's positive design with you.

Get a branded PowerPoint Template, and go speak about what you do.

20. Passion

This makes or breaks a lot of people. Without passion, all of the above really doesn't work. People can see if you have passion on a subject. When you speak about something you love, that glow comes through. Even if your audience doesn't love it like you, there is no denying when someone is passionate about something. It is what drives you, and everything in you do in building your brand should erupt from that passion. When you give your elevator pitch to someone, the words will be strong with confidence, emboldened by love. You dig this stuff, and people will hopefully be as excited about it as you are.

Some people don't know what they want. They have a will to find it out, though, and that is just fine. In that case, you fallback to what you are good at; what you bring to the table. EVERYONE has something to bring to the table. Unless you are a C or D. In that case, find out how to become a B or A.

Some know what they want, but aren't there yet. This could be a position, a new job, or they are just learning. This is fine too. Personal brands change and grow just like people do. Just stay on top of it as you transition, and you're good to go. I marketed myself as a Flash Developer in the past, and now I'm a Flex Developer.

Life is short. Follow your dreams. Love what you do. If you don't know what it is you want, see #1.

So, how do I fare at my own advice?

1. Know What You Want

I want to save the world. I want to protect my country. I want to work for various Intelligence and Defense type agencies. I want to be a sub-contractor so I can manage the project, and remove all red tape. I want to keep coding Flex 2 for a living. I want to get out of the services industry and into product development.

2. Be Able to Articulate What You Do

I am a computer programmer. I write computer code in a language called ActionScript, MXML, and CSS. This is similar to how a lot of websites work with HTML, JavaScript, and CSS. I usually sit at home on my computer, fingers furiously typing away code. I read blogs and attend industry events to keep up with this ever changing industry. My clients typically are in need of programs to better their existing, out of date processes through internally deployed software solutions. These are usually deployed on their internal networks via an Intranet.

3. Be Positive

It's on like Donkey Kong, beootch!

4. Elevator Pitch

Hey, my name is Jesse Warden, a consultant with Universal Mind and I'm a Flex Developer, nice to meet you. I am basically a computer programmer who focuses on the front-end, the part of software that the user sees. I typically work with a team of developers, most of which handle the back-end database and server-side/middle tier work where I focus on the front end, the client. Together we build Rich Internet Applications that are typically deployed on internal networks via an Intranet for large companies. These typically are built to improve their existing and usually out of date processes. It friggin' rocks!

5. Have a Blog / Website / MySpace, or other online presence

http://www.jessewarden.com - "My Name Dot Com"
http://www.universalmind.com - "My Company's Name Dot Com"

6. Business Card

Er... I had one 3 years ago... not anymore, though. Oops.

7. Multiple Email Addresses

jesse@jessewarden.com
jesse@universalmind.com
jesse.warden@gmail.com

8. Phone

Pimp phone with Flash Lite 2, camera, video, and Bluetooth. My plan sucks, though... gotta fix that.

9. Signature

_____

Jesse Warden
Flash, Flex, & Flash Lite Consultant

email: jesse@universalmind.com
cell: 678.231.4896
www.universalmind.com

_____

10. Logo

11. Personal Goals

To do some Flex 2 training.

To speak at MAX.

To find a solution to my need for a cheaper Flashcom solution. Red5 is free, yes, but not in time and expertise needed to run a server and maintain it. This will allow me to finish some of my collaborative app ideas. Any hosting service running Red5 servers?

Release some more code on my blog for others.

Do a new version of a Flash component set, either for Flash Player 8 or Flash Lite 2, or both.

12. More than 1 resume

Every time someone asks for one, I open the Word Doc I have on my computer, edit it, and send off.

13. Mentor(s)

Troy Bennet @ The Art Institute of Atlanta

Kenneth Payne @ Tradeware (now Tradeview) software.

Bobby Roberts @ Surgical Information Systems

Christopher Skogen @ BellSouth

Thomas Burleson @ Universal Mind.

Hopefully I'll get back on a project with Thomas in the future to get more learn on. In the meantime, I read blogs written by smart people.

14. Networking Outlets / Contacts

Atlanta Adobe User's Group, keeping in contact with professor at the Art Institute of Atlanta, and speaking at conferences. Email lists and blogs help too so I can keep tabs on the community.

15. Wardrobe Style

I aim for being comfortable over presence. Obviously for the first impression I do my best to dress to impress, but once I've established a rapport, and confirmed I am on good terms, my dress code reverts to what is comfortable. No tie, no khakis, no shoes (if possible).

16. Multiple IM Accounts

I have 3 AOL ones, 2 MSN ones, and 2 Yahoo ones.

17. Alias

JesterXL.

18. Mantra

Booya!

Kick, punch, turn, and chop the door! -- Master Onion, Parrappa The Rappa

Let's get it on!

I am going to annihilate this project.

...why do the bugs even try? For real.

It's all good.

Think. Act. Do. -- Factol Rhys

Live long and prosper. -- Spock

19. Speaking & PowerPoint Template

Here is an older one I've used in Breeze meetings and here is the new one I use now that I'm a full time consultant.

20. Passion

I love technology. I feel I am good at it and have something to offer mankind, thus justifying my time on this planet. I want to help people, just not sure how yet. Originally figured I could join the US Army, but that fell through because of priorities, so assuming I can make a positive contribution in the Intelligence or Defense community.

This is a good exercise to do about yourself. If you can answer these questions in 2nd person accurately, then you have a well defined brand. Can peers answer the questions the same way?

Final Tip

To paraphrase David Samuel again, he told a story of a software developer of 25+ years who came to him and asked for mentoring. He wanted to get into a more managerial role, but felt uncomfortable talking about himself.

David's response?

Get over it.