

# Branding Yourself Online

How to Use the Internet to Become  
a Celebrity or Expert in Your Field

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**This is a free shareware file that features chapter 2 from the book *Poor Richard's Branding Yourself Online* (from Top Floor Publishing). Please pass along this .pdf file to your friends and associates who could benefit from getting more recognition online.**

For more details on the full-length book, visit Bob Baker's Web site:  
**<http://BrandingYourselfOnline.com>**

In this Age of the Individual, personal branding is vital to your success. This new book explains how you can use the Internet to quickly and inexpensively become an expert or celebrity in your field of choice.

Big companies understand the importance of brands—if the product is recognizable, customers are more likely to embrace the idea behind the product and buy it. The same holds true for individuals. People will not only listen more intently to a familiar voice, they'll become raving fans for life.

Poor Richard's Branding Yourself Online offers tons of ways you can use the Internet to become a recognized authority in your area of expertise. Find out the best ways to maintain a personal Web site, distribute free articles, get listed in directories and databases, publish an e-mail newsletter, and carve an indelible identity on the Net.

Whether you have a product or service to sell, a talent to promote, or just want to increase your online network of contacts, personal branding will bring you more recognition and respect ... and more profits.

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For more details on the full-length book, visit Bob Baker's Web site:

**<http://BrandingYourselfOnline.com>**

**While you're there, get a FREE subscription to one of Bob's e-mail newsletters!**

## CHAPTER TWO

# Crafting Your Best Brand Identity

If you've read Chapter 1, "The Brand Called You," you're sold on the idea that branding yourself online is a good thing. You're pumped and ready to promote your brains out. But before you proceed, hold on! It's vitally important to have a solid idea of exactly what kind of identity you want to expose to the world. The last thing you want to do is start out with one message, switch to another, and then decide a third image is the one you really want. Once people get an initial impression of what you stand for, the thing that keeps them coming back—and turns them into loyal fans—is consistency.

In this chapter, we cover how to use a fan-club mentality to position your brand identity and why narrowing your focus is the best way to attract attention. We also talk about a list of questions and self-evaluations you must consider before embarking on your branding endeavors. Once your message is determined, we discuss the best ways to convey your image to the masses. Throughout the chapter, we look at examples of people who are successfully branding themselves online and off and how you can borrow their brand-building tactics to use in your own promotional efforts.

### Develop a Fan-Club Mentality

Admit it, recognition is a wonderful thing. When people praise you for a product you create, an idea you express, or a service you render, it feels good. I've been playing in rock bands for years and know the satisfaction that comes with having fans. It's great to meet people who are touched in some positive way by what you do.

The term *fan* is typically associated with people in glamour fields—actors, athletes, rock stars, comedians, etc. Most people, though, circulate in nonglamour fields and are used to dealing with customers, buyers, and patrons. In fact, I used to describe people who complimented my articles and books as "happy readers," or if they purchased something, "satisfied customers." But since honing my online identity, I regularly receive e-mail messages from people who

write something like “Hi, Bob. I’ve been a subscriber to your newsletter for six months. I’m a big fan.” There’s that glamour word again.

Sure, you could use your brand name to cultivate customers, visitors, members, users, or whatever you call people who are attracted to what you do; but your online efforts will be more effective (and a lot more fun) if you make creating *fans* your primary goal. *Patrons* are people who visit your Web site, subscribe to your newsletter, and pay for your services. *Fans*, on the other hand, cheer you on, rave about you to their friends, follow everything you do with interest, go to great lengths to attend your public appearances, and more. Which would you rather have?

Successfully pinpointing your online brand identity as an individual can mean the difference between attracting patrons and creating fans. Here are some examples to clarify this concept: *Self* magazine has readers; Oprah Winfrey’s magazine is read by fans. The Republican National Committee has members; Rush Limbaugh has fans. The radio program *All Things Considered* has listeners; Howard Stern has fans. *Entertainment Tonight* has viewers; David Letterman has fans. The Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders have admirers; Pamela Anderson has ... you guessed it, fans.

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*What Can Stephen King Teach Us?—Stephen King maneuvered around his publisher when he sold previously unpublished novels to fans directly from his personal Web site. This bold move proves that the magnetism of a brand lies in the creator, not the company who sponsors him or her. The Internet allows talented people who aren’t afraid to promote themselves to bypass the institutions they once depended on for success. Why go through the middleman when it’s so easy to directly reach the public at large?*

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Titles, business entities, and logos sometimes sneak into the public consciousness and become popular through massive advertising campaigns; but the real power of brands lies in the essence of an individual. Why else do so many companies hire Michael Jordan, Mark McGwire, Cindy Crawford, and other celebrities to hawk their wares? The magnetism of certain well-known individuals is so strong, companies hope some of that good-vibe attraction will rub off on their products. To find out more about celebrities in a variety of fields, take a look at **The Celebrity Cafe**, at <http://www.thecelebritycafe.com/>, shown in Figure 2.1.

What do you have to do to inspire people you don’t know (yet) to become your fans? Here are some of the reasons people may enthusiastically connect with you, along with real-life examples of famous people who illustrate each reason:



FIGURE 2.1: The Celebrity Cafe site features interviews with countless celebrities in a variety of fields and is a good source for finding out how well-known people position themselves and take advantage of their appealing qualities.

- Fans strongly agree with your distinct point of view (Dr. Laura Schlessinger, Ross Perot)
- Fans are entertained by you (Chris Rock, Rosie O'Donnell)
- Fans respect your background and the experiences you've been through (Jesse Jackson, Sen. John Glenn)
- Fans admire your talents (Eric Clapton, Wayne Gretzky)
- Fans are inspired by you (Deepak Chopra, Brian Tracy)
- Fans are impressed by your reputation (Steve Jobs, Cal Ripken Jr.)
- Fans think you're attractive (Brad Pitt, Bo Derek)
- Fans are drawn to your outrageousness (Dennis Rodman, Richard Simmons)
- Fans are impressed by the people with whom you are associated (James Carville, Prince William)
- Fans enjoy your personality (Catie Couric, Regis Philbin)

Please note, though, that many people who attract fans do so for more than one reason. Consider pop star Madonna, one of the most prolific self-promoters of the past couple of decades. Her fans could easily claim all of the reasons listed

previously to connect with her. Your appeal doesn't have to be one-dimensional (and you don't necessarily have to dance in a leather suit to be noticed), but your public identity must be focused for you to have any chance of widespread notoriety.

## Positioning Is Important

Al Ries and Jack Trout coined the term “positioning” in the early 1980s in their book, *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*. Although a few years have passed since the book was released, the core ideas they express are just as true today. *Positioning* refers to the way a product, service, or person is presented to the buying public. To properly position yourself on the Internet, you must consider many factors:

- Your name
- Your Web address (URL)
- The benefits of what you offer
- Your personal strengths and weaknesses
- The strengths and weaknesses of your competition
- How people generally perceive the category in which you seek an impact

Ries and Trout contend that positioning is not something you do to a product, service, or to yourself. It's something you do to a human mind. It's all about perception and how you fit in—especially when compared to the other perceptions that already exist in each potential fan's brain. Crafting the best identity for you is an inside job. In other words, you shouldn't conjure up an image you feel would be cool and then mold yourself into that identity. The brand you create should be based on who you truly are as a human being. It should reflect your real skills and personality. Remember the pop duo Milli Vanilli and the fallout that occurred when it was discovered they didn't actually sing on their best-selling album? Faking it doesn't work.

The same goes for the person on the other end of the positioning equation—your potential fan. A person's preferences and view of the world are influenced mainly by the memories and attitudes that already exist in his or her mind, which explains why most people aren't easily swayed by dazzling advertising blitzes and publicity campaigns. If they were, every dotcom company that ran a Super Bowl ad would be prospering today. The truth is, they're not.

Remember the Pets.com sock puppet? The company used the mascot in a flurry of television ads in early 2000. Nine months later, when the Web site shut its doors, it was just another stray dog that had lost its way. The mistake Pets.com made was assuming that, since consumers were spending millions online buying books and airline tickets, people would also buy pet supplies in the same manner—if only the company got the word out on a grand enough

scale. But people didn't bite for many reasons: They simply weren't ready to purchase pet products in the same way they purchased books, plus there were already a number of competitors in the pet category.

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*The Sock-Puppet Saga*—The defunct *Pets.com* Web site may not have persuaded the public to buy pet supplies online; but it did do a great job of promoting its sock-puppet mascot, which was featured extensively in its television ad campaign. In fact, the puppet ended up being the site's top-selling product. When a toy for humans is one of the best-selling items in a store selling pet products, you know you're in trouble. Lesson: Clever gimmicks alone won't guarantee that your brand will succeed.

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Bottom line: The mental perceptions that exist inside the minds of people who make up your target audience are just as important as your ideas about how you'd like to be perceived. Online book sales offer another example. In the mid 1990s, who was in the best position to sell a lot of books on the Internet? Perhaps brick-and-mortar behemoths Barnes & Noble or Borders? You'd think so. But who sells the most books online today? That's right, Amazon.com—the first book-selling identity to make a splash on the Internet.

For every 12 books sold online, 11 are purchased through Amazon—a company that in short order established itself as the online retailer of choice for people who want to buy books. Barnes & Noble and Borders have expended a lot of money and effort trying to play catch-up; but the mental perception has already been established that Amazon is the leader, and once ingrained, that perception is hard to undo.

## Define Your Brand Focus

You may not be a corporation or big-name celebrity; but the lessons learned by examining high-profile names can help you craft your online brand identity. For instance, one of the key elements that propel successful brands—and successful people—is having a defined focus. After all, that's what a brand name does: It stands for something specific to a particular group of people you hope to transform into fans.

Let's look at an example on a smaller scale. Rebecca Kemp is an artist. Like thousands of artists, she is promoting herself through her Web site and other online avenues. To keep from being lost in the over-saturated cyberspace marketplace, she sets herself apart by focusing on her specialties: wildlife and fantasy art. Take a look at her Web site, **Becky's Wildlife & Fantasy Art**, at <http://www.wildlife-fantasy.com/> (shown in Figure 2.2). She not only sells her artwork imprinted on T-shirts, coffee mugs, and mouse pads, Kemp also holds animal trivia contests, publishes an e-mail newsletter, exchanges links with other wildlife and fantasy artists, offers an affiliate program, and more.



FIGURE 2.2: Becky's Wildlife Art site provides a nice example of how a person can brand himself or herself as a specialist online.

At the top of her home page, she prominently displays the name of the site: “Becky’s Wildlife and Fantasy Art,” so there’s no doubt about what type of art she enjoys and creates. Becky could have easily decided to be more generic with her marketing approach and call the site Becky’s Art Site; but what is a Becky’s Art Site besides a site that has something to do with art and is maintained by someone named Becky? Name recognition means nothing if the name isn’t associated with something specific. Art is too broad a subject. Does it refer to abstract, still life, landscape, portrait, impressionistic, or what?

You need to supply your potential fans with a hook on which to hang your name. Becky could have zeroed in even tighter on her specialty by choosing either wildlife or fantasy to be her primary specialty. Plus, she might have specified a particular medium, such as Becky’s Wildlife Watercolor Art or Becky’s Fantasy Pastel Art. Still, her site serves as a good example of how one person can effectively home in on a specialty area and exploit it.

Regardless of what your general area of expertise is, you must focus on a particular slice of the pie and make certain your name is attached to it. Think of this concept as Nitro (your name) and Glycerin (your specialty). Either ingredient alone is powerless. Put them together and you have an explosive combination.

Imagine that you suddenly develop an interest in left-handed bowlers. Not knowing where to turn for more information, you head to your favorite Web search engine and type in the keywords “left-handed” and “bowler.” After looking through a few uninformative links, you come across the name Harold Fernburger. One click later and you’re at Harold’s site looking over a cornucopia of articles, photo galleries, message boards, and links to all things left-handed bowler-related. You subscribe to Harold Fernburger’s *Southpaw Strike* e-mail newsletter and vow to return to his site often, since he adds new information every week.

What just happened? Before you made this discovery, the name Harold Fernburger meant nothing to you. It was just another name in a sea of names. Before you stumbled upon his site, the topic of left-handed bowlers gave you no reference points or associations; it brought up a blank screen in your mind. Once you found his site, the two things—the name and the specialty—were not only connected, they were welded together in your brain. The next time you go looking for information on lefties who wear those funny shoes, you’ll most likely head straight to Harold’s site (or use the key words “Harold Fernburger” in a search). That’s the difference between fuzzy branding and having your name and identity sharply in focus.

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*Be First, Be Fresh, Be Different*—To succeed at branding yourself, you -need to be first in a category ... not just first in being associated with a product or service, but first in the mind of a fan. According to Laura Ries (who co-authored the book *The 11 Immutable Laws of Internet Branding* with her father, Al Ries), if you’re not first in your category, you should strive to be the opposite of the leader. “If Coke is focusing on the older generation, Pepsi should focus on the younger generation. If McDonald’s is focusing on kids, Burger King should focus on adults.” Visit the authors’ Web site, Ries & Ries, at <http://www.ries.com/>.

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Pop quiz: What’s your primary goal as you move toward branding yourself online? That’s right, to help people make the connection between your name and what it stands for. Getting your name out there is a noble goal; but it means nothing if your name gets out there without its loyal travel companion: your unique identity—the thing that sets you apart from other people in your general field. Here are a few examples of people carving out a defined niche on the Internet:

**Sam Gugino**—Gugino is a journalist who could probably write well on any number of subjects; but he uses his Web site to clarify his specialty. Gugino is a food writer and wine columnist who provides wine and nutrition guides, recipes, and more in a monthly e-mail newsletter. Also note how he has cleverly chosen his Web site address. <http://www.samcooks.com/>

**Bob Johnson's Auto Literature**—Johnson's site obviously sells literature on cars and trucks, which is a niche category by itself; but Johnson further focuses his identity by specializing in factory literature: owner's manuals, repair guides, etc. <http://www.autopaper.com/>

**Manfred Schmidt Collectible Cameras**—As his home page explains, Schmidt took his passion for a particular aspect of photography and became a full-time dealer of antique and collectible cameras and accessories. His Web site spells that out for visitors. <http://www.manfredschmidt.com/>

**Troy Hartman**—If you're interested in skydiving and daredevil aerial feats, Hartman is your man. His site, depicted in Figure 2.3, is all about him and his many high-profile skydiving stunts. <http://www.troyhartman.com/>



FIGURE 2.3: Troy Hartman's Web site focuses on his career as a skydiving stunt man. He doesn't confuse people by also covering any other interests he may have. It's all about Hartman and skydiving.

## How to Determine Your Brand Identity

Before you run headlong into cyberspace to promote your brand, it's important that you have a rock-solid understanding of how your brand is presented—and why it's the best identity for you. What follows are a series of questions and self-evaluation exercises to help you uncover your ideal brand image. Even if you feel you already know who you are and what you stand for, these exercises will help refine your brand so you'll have the best chance of success on the Internet.

My advice is don't just go through these questions in your head. Grab a notebook and write your answers and thoughts in a concrete form that will allow these concepts to sink in and be put to use.

### What Are You Passionate About?

If you don't have a passion for your chosen area of expertise, your career will be filled with challenges. Many people pursue vocations because of family pressures or the urgings of school authority figures. Others decide to enter a career based on what they perceive as a hot trend or a guaranteed moneymaker. Unfortunately, the road to fame and fortune is littered with failures and unhappy business people who were sidetracked following a path that led to low satisfaction and lower self-esteem. Having a passion for the subject related to your brand identity is crucial.

To discover some of the things that really matter to you, write down answers to the following questions:

- If you won the lottery and never had to work another day in your life, what things would you want to accomplish?
- If you were told you had six months to live, how would you spend your time?
- At the end of your life, what would you most like to be known for?
- What reoccurring interests have you had since you were a child?

The most fulfilling careers allow you to make money doing something you'd do anyway for free. Before you start wondering if there's cash to be made by reclining on a couch and watching game shows or football, realize that most people have to dig a little deeper to find their true calling. We all have personal passions that creep up on us at regular intervals; activities we're drawn to whenever we have spare time. Those interests may hold the key to discovering your online brand.

It's also important to choose a brand identity that gives you a sense of contribution—a feeling that you are fulfilling a purpose and that your work will have an impact long after you have passed on. Additionally, successful people who follow their true calling can usually trace their skills and talents back to childhood. For instance, my fascination with music, writing, and art started when I was in early grade school. What interests have popped up regularly throughout your life? Have you ever given them serious thought or have you simply dismissed them? Instead of suppressing those inclinations, examine them with a more objective eye.

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*Do What You Are*—Paul D. Tieger and Barbara Barron-Tieger, in their book *Do What You Are*, write: “The secret of career satisfaction lies in doing what you enjoy most. A few lucky people discover this secret early in life, but most of us are caught in a psychological wrestling match, torn between what we think we can do, what we (or others) feel we ought to do, and what we think we want to do ... Concentrate instead on who you are, and the rest will fall into place.” Visit the authors’ Web site, *Personality Type*, at <http://www.personalitytype.com/>.

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If you’re reading this book, you probably already have a brand identity in mind. If that’s the case, ask yourself the following questions:

- Will you feel good getting up every morning to work on this topic?
- Are you excited by the thought of being known for years to come as a specialist in this field?
- Will you feel proud describing your work to others?
- Are you optimistic about the prospect of succeeding in this field?

If you answered “yes” to all of these questions, you’re on the right track.

### What Are You Knowledgeable About?

When asked about the ingredients to a successful career, business consultant and author Tom Peters once commented, “You have to know a lot about something of significant value to a bunch of potential clients.” That advice sounds simple enough. So, what do you know? Look in your notebook at the list of things you’re passionate about and answer these questions:

- What do you already know about this subject?
- What direct experience have you had in this area?
- How easy is it to access experts and other information resources in this field?
- In what areas are you lacking information?
- What would you need to learn to feel comfortable saying you are an expert in this field?

The first thing you must do is determine whether the branding identity you are considering is based on a curious fascination with a topic or your first-hand experiences. I decided to become a music-marketing consultant for independent bands after years of playing in bands, interviewing musicians, circulating in the music business, and actively marketing my own interests. I had the experience to back up that career direction.

That doesn't mean you shouldn't pursue an identity about which you still have a lot to learn. Only you can determine how wide the gap is between your interest level and your ability to deliver what's expected of you in your chosen field. You must also decide how much time you're willing to spend to get educated on your topic. Regardless of how much you currently know about your area of expertise, you must commit to ongoing study and research. Attend conferences, read books, compile a list of online resource, and most importantly, maintain a sense of wide-eyed curiosity about your chosen field; because, if you lose interest in it, so will your fans.

### What Solutions Do You Provide?

The word *solution* is overused in the business world these days. Look through the *Yellow Pages* ads and you'll find countless businesses with names like Computer Solutions, Furniture Solutions, and Gardening Solutions. What's next? Pizza Solutions? Beef Jerky Solutions? Resolution Solutions? The reason this word is so popular is because it speaks to a crucial marketing issue: The most successful people provide valuable solutions to problems.

Think about it. Diet experts offer solutions for people who have a problem with being overweight. Entertainers have the answer for people faced with having a potentially boring party. Real estate agents smooth the hardships involved with selling a house. No matter how positive an image you have, the real reason customers and fans are drawn to you is rooted somewhere in a problem that you solve.

People take action because they either want to move closer to pleasure or away from pain. Of the two reasons, pain is the greater motivator. For example, when you had a college term paper due, the idea of how much pleasure you'd have hanging out with your friends was stronger than the pain associated with not starting the paper. But as the deadline grew closer, the painful idea of a failing grade far outweighed any pleasure you might get from being sociable; so you got moving on the term paper. The prospect of pain is a motivator, and you'll have a much more effective brand identity if you consider how your expertise provides the solution to people's problems.

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**Benefits Versus Features**—People who successfully brand themselves know the difference between stressing features and benefits. A feature is an attribute or description of your product or service (blue, small, quiet, comfortable) while a benefit is how a customer personally gains from the feature (save time, save money, feel good, be respected). It's important to always attach a corresponding benefit to every feature you mention; for example: "With XYZ Web Hosting, you get 50 Megs of space, which means you'll have peace of mind knowing you won't run out of room."

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## Narrowing Your Focus Equals Power

This may be the single most important piece of advice in this chapter: *You can't be all things to all people*. Many ambitious people who brand themselves online make the mistake of trying to appeal to too broad a range of potential fans. Don't get caught in this trap. To create an indelible brand name for yourself, you must stand for something specific and *not* be a generalist in a wide-open field. Let's see how this principle works with some celebrities:

**Rush Limbaugh** is not just another lively radio talk show host; he's a passionate character who preaches about conservative values and embraces the Republican Party. Does everyone agree with him? Absolutely not. Does he try to appeal to the widest possible audience? Not a chance. Whether or not you agree with his politics, he knows his niche and sticks with it.

**Eric Clapton** has etched his place in musical history by being closely associated with blues-based rock music. It's reasonable to assume that a man of his talents could also flawlessly play reggae songs, Irish jigs, Appalachian folk tunes, and more. However, the songs he writes and the albums he releases are consistently focused on the blues. Couldn't he sell more records if he played all styles of music? No, because fans embrace him for what he's known for.

**Wayne Gretzky** is one of the greatest hockey players of all time. He often endorses hockey-related products and events. Some may say, "But sports is sports, and Wayne should be a spokesman for athletic competition of all kinds." Not so fast. Gretzky is most effective when he sticks to the specific niche he's most associated with.

Attempting to be all things to all people may seem like it expands your potential market of fans, but it actually does just the opposite. The wider you cast your branding net, the more watered down your message becomes. Remember, the human brain works by recognizing patterns and making connections. The more specific your brand is (to a point), the better your chances of inspiring a connection.

You could try to position yourself as Pat Smith, the gourmet chef; but the generic category of gourmet chef is blurred by the existence of hundreds of cooking and food-related experts and Web sites. There's no glue to make that identity stick in someone's mind. On the other hand, if you are Pat Smith, author of *How to Prepare Low-Carb Gourmet Meals for Under \$5 Per Person*, you've moved closer to occupying a distinct position in your fans' minds.

If given the choice between being a big dog in a small yard and a small dog in a big yard (my apologies to fish lovers for not using the traditional metaphor),

smart online branders aim for being the big dog. Another thing that happens when you narrow your brand focus is that the people who are attracted to you tend to be more loyal. For instance, the controversial Goth band Marilyn Manson only appeals to a small sliver of the general public; but people who do appreciate them are often cult-like in their devotion. The thin slice of the music fan pie that they command is more than enough to allow them to make a living playing their brand of music.

Contrary to typical corporate strategy, as an individual, you don't have to win over a huge percentage of the population to be hugely successful. If you made your name and brand identity known to just one-tenth of one percent of the United States population, you'd have more than 250,000 admirers. That's enough to establish you as a bonafide celebrity; but you'll only reach that level if you carefully choose your brand niche and own the category.

"Okay, Bob," you say, "what if my brand niche—the one that I'm genuinely passionate about—is in a category that's overpopulated with brand name people who have already established themselves?" The solution (there's that word again) is to create a brand-new category.

Consider the area of exercise experts, which for years has been filled with high-profile names from Jack Lelane and Richard Simmons to Kathy Smith and Jane Fonda. How do you break into such an overcrowded category? You don't. Instead of fighting the mental perception battle on such a wide front, you create a new battleground altogether—one that you dominate exclusively. Billy Blanks was just another martial arts practitioner until he became known for Tae-Bo. He didn't produce a set of videos on aerobic exercise or weight training or stair stepping. He created a completely fresh category, and now he's the Tae-Bo king. What category can you create and turn into your kingdom?

Think about the narrow-focus branding concept as you look over this list of Web sites that have effectively defined their online niche:

**Jobs 4 HR**—Monster.com is the clear leader in the general job site category, so this smart company sets itself apart by specializing in one area: jobs for human resources professionals—all HR-related, all the time. <http://www.jobs4hr.com/>

**Varsity Books**—Why compete with Amazon.com and try to sell every kind of book imaginable when you can specialize? Varsity Books, shown in Figure 2.4, does just that in the college textbook market. <http://www.varsitybooks.com/>

**Baby's Away**—A lot of companies are in the rental business, from cars and moving vans to furniture and cleaning equipment. Baby's Away rents only one type of product: items that parents might need to care for their babies while traveling. <http://www.babysaway.com/>



FIGURE 2.4: Varsity Books doesn't try to sell all kinds of books to all kinds of people. It's brand identity lies strictly in offering college textbooks online.

## Developing Your Brand Identity Statement

You've probably heard the phrase, "unique selling proposition," also known simply as USP. It's been around since the 1950s, when advertising agencies started using the phrase to describe how their clients should present the benefits they offer to potential customers. Well, it's a new millennium, so I've taken it upon myself to coin a fresh phrase for a new generation. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the Brand Identity Statement (BIS).

*A BIS is a concise phrase or motto that sums up what you do, why you are different, and how you provide a benefit—in other words, it lets potential fans know why they should care to know more about you.*

Developing your BIS allows you to take all the ideas we've discussed thus far in this chapter, mix them in a blender, and compress them into a short, snappy statement of no more than 10 or 15 words that describes who you are and what you stand for. That's a lot to ask of a dozen or so words, but it can be done.

Your BIS should be crafted to include not only a description of what you do, but also a benefit to your customers. M&M's classic "Melts in your mouth, not in your hands" (only eight words) is a great example. The BIS I use to promote my The Buzz Factor Web site is "Resources, tips and tools that will change the

way you promote your independent band or record label.” (Okay, I cheated and used 17 words, but you get the picture.)

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***A Source of Inspiration**—Not long ago I changed the BIS for my The Buzz Factor Web site from “Resources, tips and tools to help you promote your independent band or record label” to “Resources, tips and tools that will change the way you promote your independent band or record label.” It’s a subtle change, but I think it adds more impact. I was inspired to make the alteration after reading Chris Pirillo’s Poor Richard’s E-mail Publishing, Top Floor Publishing. Get more details online at <http://topfloor.com/pr/email/>.*

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The ideal BIS tightly focuses on exactly who you are, what you do, and how it benefits potential customers and fans. It should leave no doubt in the prospect’s mind as to what he or she gets from you. You can use your BIS in two ways; one is internal, the other external.

**Internal**—A good BIS keeps you focused on your marketing message. Every time you send an e-mail, write a press release, post to a discussion group, or update your Web site, refer to your BIS. Doing so ensures that your brand image is crystal clear. You don’t want your home page to convey humor while your e-mail newsletter is grim and serious. By constantly keeping your BIS in mind, you make sure the messages you send out over the Internet stay focused on what’s going to establish your brand identity in the shortest amount of time.

**External**—You can also use your BIS as a personal slogan that appears on all your Web pages, banner ads, newsletters, press releases, e-mail messages, and more. That way, whenever someone hears or sees your name, he or she will be reminded of your core identity. Remember, your goal is to make mental connections that merge your name with what you stand for. Having your BIS appear every time your name appears online is one of the best ways to help people make that brand-identity connection.

Here are some real-life examples of Brand Identity Statements in action:

- Canada’s Helios Design and Communications uses “Hard-hitting design, done right the first time.”
- H&B catalog of Jazz CDs ~~claims to be~~ “A mail order service for people who know jazz.”
- Copywriter Luther Brock, who calls himself “The Letter Doctor,” uses the phrase “High-response sales letters for firms on a limited budget.”
- Chicago’s Smart Studios promotes itself with the BIS “Great sounds. Cool people. Killer studio.”

To make your online branding endeavors easier, keep your BIS message simple. Most people feel they need to fully explain themselves; that potential customers (fans) won't understand them and what they offer unless it's laid out in great detail. The reality is that people don't have time to absorb your whole story at first glance. Give them a simple message that quickly cuts through the clutter and leaves no doubt.

For instance, when Domino's Pizza was expanding and gaining notoriety decades ago, it could have tried to appeal to customers by telling them, "When you get home after a hard day at work, you and your family members are hungry. You want to eat a good, hot meal but don't have the time and energy to make it yourself. We can save you all that hassle and deliver a fresh pizza to you, and we'll do it within 30 minutes or less. If it takes longer than 30 minutes, we'll give you the pizza free." Well, people wouldn't have had the time and energy to muddle through the 72 words of that sales pitch. Instead, Domino's used 13 words to quickly convey its brand identity: "Fresh, hot pizza delivered to your door in 30 minutes or less, guaranteed." When creating a BIS, remember, less is more, so keep it short.

### Don't Bore People to Death

I've lost count of the number of Web sites, e-mail newsletters, and online articles I've read while having to fight off yawns and wandering thoughts. I've seriously considered printing off some of the more mundane Internet promotions and placing copies in a drawer near my bed, just in case I ever suffer from insomnia. All it would take is a couple paragraphs of this dreck and I'd be sleeping like a baby.

Heed this lesson: When you communicate with people in an effort to promote your online brand image, you must be exciting, energetic, interesting, captivating, and intriguing. Whatever you do, don't bore people to tears with humdrum marketing materials. Let your personality shine through with everything you do. Don't be afraid to be conversational, to loosen up, and communicate with your fans as if they were sitting across a table from you. Be funny, be bold, be optimistic, and above all, be yourself.

A great example of light-hearted online branding principles in action is the Web site by illustrator Bob Staake, **BobStaake.com** at <http://www.bobstaake.com/> (see Figure 2.5). Staake is an accomplished artist, author, and graphic designer. Over the years he's developed an inimitable, yet recognizable cartoon style of drawing. His illustrations have appeared in *MAD* magazine, on MTV and Nickelodeon, and in 26 children's books and how-to titles. Staake knows how to make good use of his name and personality online. Here are just some of the labels he uses for sections of his site:



FIGURE 2.5: Illustrator and graphic artist Bob Staake makes good use of his name and a light-hearted approach to promote his brand online.

- Bob Art
- Bob News
- Bob Press
- The Daily Bob
- Bob-O-Rama
- Bobliography

What I like about Staake's site (besides the fact that it repeatedly uses *my* first name) is that he's filled it with tons of fun and informative content that reinforces who he is and what he does best. You can browse hundreds of examples of his artwork in any number of styles, take a step-by-step tour

of how he creates some of his digital designs, get a sneak peek at children's books he's currently working on, send free Bob Staake greeting cards by e-mail, purchase some of his original art, and a lot more. If this isn't making good use of the Internet to build a personal and professional identity, I don't know what is.

Perhaps you feel the nature of your brand niche is perpetually void of personality. After all, how can you possibly be the life of the party if your specialty is accounting, tax preparation, dry cleaning, or plumbing? The same used to be said of car maintenance and repair. That is, until Tom and Ray Magliozzi made their mark on the world. Their *Car Talk* program on National Public Radio is heard by a throng of listeners every week in 450 cities; their newspaper column is syndicated to more than 300 newspapers; and their Web site, **Car Talk**, at <http://cartalk.cars.com/>, gets a lot of traffic. Why? Because the Magliozzi brothers bring warmth, humor, and personality to a useful subject that was previously thought of as dry and ... well, mechanical. Think seriously about how you can lighten up your brand identity and make it more interesting for your growing crop of fans.

Before you move to the next chapter, go through your notebook and nail down the ideal way you want to present your brand on the Internet. Next up: We gather the tools you need to launch your online branding attack.

# Branding Yourself Online

How to Use the Internet to Become  
a Celebrity or Expert in Your Field

by Bob Baker  
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