



Personal branding for tennis coaches

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ABSTRACT

This article identifies the need for personal branding in one's career – a phenomenon that has gained importance in recent years. By establishing a personal brand coaches are able to differentiate themselves. Four key steps in establishing a personal brand are identified: self-assessment, creating one's personal brand, marketing one's personal brand, and evaluation and adjustment. In addition, the role digital media channels can play in the process is discussed.

Key words: personal branding, career, digital channels, social media

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INTRODUCTION

Tennis coaches should start establishing a personal brand, whether a small club, a large academy or a professional player employs them.

A brand is a particular identity or image regarded as an asset. A personal brand can therefore be defined as the identity or image that makes a person valuable. The phenomenon of personal branding has gained importance in recent years, and is no longer unique to professional athletes and celebrities. Peters (1997) expresses that everyone needs to understand the importance of personal branding, regardless of age, position or the business they are in. Individuals are CEOs of their own companies: Me Inc. The article 'The Brand Called You' (Peters, 1997) is attributed in bringing the concept of personal branding to a wider audience. The web, in particular the rise of social media, has since made personal branding a must for one's career.

Advantages of personal branding

Employers, potential employers and customers have access to - and take advantage of - the opportunities digital channels offer them. They vet whether a coach's skill set is satisfactory for the job and whether a coach is sufficiently trustworthy and reliable to coach them or their children. Regardless of someone's intentions, the world forms an image of them and their capabilities. If people do not manage their own brand, then someone else will do it for them (Kaputa, 2005). By establishing a personal brand individuals have the ability to control, to a certain extent, how others perceive them. Personal branding is a great tool to differentiate oneself (Shepherd, 2005) – to sell oneself – and can help in every area of life (Hearn, 2008). A personal brand will make an individual stand out among the crowd. In 2007 the ITF estimated that there were 40,000 coaches in the USA alone (Crespo, 2010). That is an abundance of supply (i.e. tennis coaches) for both potential employers and customers. A well-crafted personal brand could get one noticed in this abundance of supply.

Another advantage of personal branding is the positive effect it can have on one's career (Khedher, 2013; Ward & Yates, 2013). Establishing a personal brand requires self-assessment, yielding a clearer view of future goals and how those can be achieved. Ward & Yates (2013) mention how personal branding can enhance one's career with promotions,

increased responsibility and additional visibility. Furthermore, establishing and managing a personal brand gives motivation to develop additional skills.

PRACTICAL

A well-constructed personal brand will answer the following type of questions: Why are you as a self-employed coach acquiring new customers over other coaches?

Why should the academy choose you over other coaches to coach a new talent?

How does a top-100 player know you can help him/her reach the top-30?

Essential steps in constructing your personal brand



Figure 1. The personal branding process.

There is no one right way to create a personal brand (Peters, 1997). Personal branding is an ongoing process (Hearn, 2008). Constructing and managing it requires time and effort. Peters (1997), Shepherd (2005), Khedher (2013) and Ahmed (2014) all provide key steps in the personal branding process. The process can be outlined by four phases. The first phase is self-assessment. The second phase is the creation of the personal brand. The third phase is to position the brand – to market oneself. The final phase is evaluation and adjustment.

Self-assessment

Ahmed (2014) correctly points out that personal branding is not about building a special image for the outside world. It is about understanding the unique combination of attributes – one’s strengths, skills, values and passions – that makes one valuable and packaging them in a way that differentiates oneself. However, the path to understanding this ‘unique combination of attributes’ is oftentimes difficult. A good starting point is assessing one’s strengths and weaknesses. Other elements that should be evaluated are values, interests and dreams. Having a goal (e.g. a certain job) and knowing the target audience (e.g. young talents or professional players) are key elements to know before establishing a personal brand. A 360-degree feedback from peers, employers or customers can provide new insights. This is especially useful when a person finds it difficult to make a personal assessment. It also provides a view of one’s ‘pre-branding’ image.

PRACTICAL
Basic questions that can help you in your personal assessment:
Who are you?
What do you do best?
What have you done lately that makes you stand out?
What places, activities and people give you energy?
What motivates you?

Create a personal brand

After concluding the self-assessment process people have insight into the personal characteristics that makes them valuable. It is then about determining which qualities or characteristics make a person distinctive from colleagues (Peters, 1997). A coach cannot be specialised in every aspect of the game (NLCoach, 2010) and should therefore make a choice. Hearn (2008) encourages people to distil their top ten qualities into a few outstanding attributes that might help them achieve ‘top of mind’ status in their target audience. The target audience includes the people one would like to acquire as new customers (e.g. new tennis players for an independent coach). It also applies to people one would like to have in their network and could assist in achieving one’s goals.

PRACTICAL
To finish the ‘creation’ phase it is desirable to end up with a personal tag line or brand statement. For example:
I give fun and engaging tennis lessons (value) to children and beginners (target) that make them want to play tennis every day.
I am a tennis coach specialised in strength and conditioning (value) and can help professional tennis athletes (target) reach their maximum potential.

Market the personal brand

Marketing the personal brand should be done both offline and in the virtual world, and has as goal to increase visibility. Finding the right mix of communication tools is hereby essential (Ahmed, 2014). Positioning one’s personal brand occurs through self-presentation, nonverbal cues (appearance, manner), verbal disclosures (information about the self), and actions (performance, citizenship) that shape others’ perceptions (Khedher, 2013)

PRACTICAL
To increase offline visibility for your personal brand you could do the following:
Attend network events or conferences for (tennis) coaches.
Be part of a tournament organisation or give a free clinic.
Write articles or discuss in panels.
Leveraging digital media channels

The Internet is especially a useful tool in marketing one’s personal brand. Although the medium is an important part of managing your career, Ward & Yates (2013) note that developing a footprint on the Internet takes time and focus. With the rapid rise of social media channels in the last decade and a half it is obvious people can and should leverage these channels to market themselves. Digital media channels can be utilised to establish and communicate with one’s network. In addition, it is a way to get feedback about one’s personal brand and work.

PRACTICAL
This is how you can leverage four popular channels in positioning your personal brand:
LinkedIn: Network for business professionals that can be seen as an interactive online résumé with references. Join discussion groups for tennis coaches or about tennis related subjects. That way you will expand your network, learn new things and stay up-to-date in your field of work.
Facebook: Great way for individual coaches to stay in contact with the people they coach. You have the possibility to share interesting content or just information on training.
Twitter: Use your Twitter page as a way to show others what your interests are. Tweet interesting articles to your followers or share your thoughts on a tennis match. You can also use your profile to communicate with people you coach.
Blog/Website: A blog or website is a good way to express the way you feel about topics that are of interest to you (and thus your personal brand). You can also use it to show people your accomplishments and skills or your goals and dreams. Redirect people to presentations, articles or other material.

Evaluation and adjustment

As with every process, the personal branding process asks for evaluation after implementation. Putting metrics in up front can help to evaluate a personal brand (Ahmed, 2014). One can ask feedback from customers or employers. One can also set up quantifiable metrics. For example the number of tennis players one coaches, the average results of players one coaches or attaining a higher coaching level. The evaluation could indicate adjustments that need to be made. Yet as time passes and one’s career changes, there is always a requirement for adjusting and evolving one’s personal brand.

CONCLUSION

Personal branding is the process of identifying and managing the image and attributes that make one valuable. The process should be done regardless of age or the business one is in. It gives people the opportunity to differentiate themselves from others and can have a positive effect on people’s life and career. Yet as establishing a personal brand takes time and effort, people should start right away with the sequence of self-assessment, creating and marketing the personal brand, and evaluation and adjustment.

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