

Scholarly Insights on Academic Branding

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“Branding is for Products, Not People!”

Sound familiar? You have reached a point in your academic career where you have a solid body of work, a track record of well-received conference papers, one or two industry-standard books, and a waiting list of co-authorship opportunities. Your résumé speaks for itself. [A tenured position](#) has either already been awarded or is just around the last bend of the [tenure track](#). You have a LinkedIn page that you never look at, and, at the insistence of your Department Chair, your [ORCID](#) assignment was moved from your to-do list to your done list. What else could you possibly need?

Branding: Perception of Value

Whether academic researchers like it or not, the corporate buzzwords of brand identity, perceived value, thought leadership, and message articulation have made the transition to academia. You may well be a tenured professor, but in the lexicon of brand design, you are a thought leader with unique expertise in a carefully articulated area of research.

You may be tempted to dismiss this as marketing gibberish and puffery, but the reality of modern academic research is that if you don't make the effort to build and carefully curate your brand identity, your institution may assign someone to do it for you. Doing so is considered to be in the interest of carefully managing your image and your perceived value to the institution and to the field of study for which you are known.

Time for Academic Branding?

Should an academic researcher build a brand? Let the answer come out from the researchers themselves, but putting this aside for a while, clearly there seems more to building an academic brand than a good conference bio and a LinkedIn profile. While you may receive urgent encouragement from your institution and earnest offers of resource [support](#) from your department to get this done, defining your academic identity

and building a strategy to communicate that identity to your colleagues in your field and the academic population as a whole, will be a personal journey.

Your résumé documents where you have been and what you have done, but it is only a generic template to provide required information. Does it really convey who you are as a researcher, where you stand in your field, and what you aspire to become in that field?

Branding starts from the premise of how you see yourself and how you want to be perceived. Ultimately, perception lies, like beauty, in the eyes of the beholder, but you control the content of the messages they receive in building that perception.

Begin with One Step at a Time

The process of building an academic brand should not be approached like an Oprah-style makeover. Once you craft your profile and put yourself out there as a polished, articulate, thought leader, it's impossible to take any of that back. Contributing to the Web is easy but erasing things from it is virtually impossible. Develop a plan and work through it step-by-step:

- *Take a fresh look at your résumé and standard bio* – do they truly represent who you are?
- *Do you have your own website?* – If not, claim the domain, pick a suitable theme, and start populating the site with content that is reflective of your newly crafted brand identity. If you're involved enough to start a blog, resist the temptation to post old articles. Post content that engages your readers and promotes a dialog.
- *Where are you on [Social Media](#)?* LinkedIn, Twitter, Academia.edu, ResearchGate, Facebook? Whichever platforms you use, make sure you are an active contributor offering valuable content to underscore your position as a thought leader. If you don't have the time, consider outsourcing the daily management of each account and concentrate on the content you'll be delivering.
- *Expand your [network](#) and visibility* beyond the hallowed halls of academia. Consider guest blogging or a TED talk to broaden your reach.

Taking these steps may feel strange at first. You pursued a research career for the opportunity of scientific discovery, not fame and fortune.

However, while being known for the work that you do is still important, your colleagues, students, potential collaborators, and potential research funding partners want to know more about you as a researcher and what you stand for. It is worth the investment of time to manage that message yourself, rather than leave it to your institution to do it for you.

Cite this article

Enago Academy, Scholarly Insights on Academic Branding. Enago Academy. 2015/07/14. <https://www.enago.com/academy/scholarly-insights-on-academic-branding/>