



“ *One of my greatest pleasures is assisting intelligent, driven and hardworking businesswomen to have greater confidence, presence and influence in their careers.* ”

Melissa Lewis,
Founder | Personal Brand, Presence and Image Specialist



Professional branding and reputation – why it matters

By Melissa Lewis

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Personal branding is fast becoming part of the global lexicon. But it wasn't that long ago that it wasn't even on the radar in terms of business success and career progression. It's exciting that people are really understanding the importance of 'brand you' and the role it plays in positioning you both personally and professionally. Your personal brand affects the image you project to the world and therefore how others respond to you, react to you and engage with you. These days it takes more than knowledge and experience to forge ahead in your career, especially in law. It's an environment saturated with highly competent professionals.

Your signature brand is walking the talk, even when no one is watching.

Whether you're leading a team, going for a job interview, meeting new clients or attempting to progress your career, it's clear that your personal brand has a large role to play. What is less clear to people, though, is the way your personal brand keeps building you up (or down, as the case may be) even when you aren't there. How does your personal brand benefit your business even when you leave that board room or office or hang up that phone call? Because personal brand and reputation are so intertwined that your brand, when implemented correctly, keeps working for you without you even realising.

Building a strong personal brand *reputation* along with your brand is how you develop trust.

This is how relationships are built which means people are more likely to trust not just you but the business or services that are related to you. This is exactly what will set you apart from others in your industry and this is what will get people talking about you and recommending you. This is what creates credibility and this is what will make sure you are at the forefront of people's minds when it matters.

Your brand *is* your reputation.

Your brand is what creates trust and credibility. It's not something that can be bought or paid for or studied. It's something that has to be developed strategically. But it can't be faked. Your personal brand is what happens when you let your authenticity shine through in a consistent way. Your brand isn't just who you say you are, it has to be backed up by everything you say and do. Many female

junior lawyers I speak with express frustration that some (mostly male) colleagues present themselves as more competent or qualified and talk themselves into projects and positions from very early on. Confidence is a wonderful asset and I work with women to make sure that they are able to express themselves so that their abilities are noticed. False confidence however, is another matter entirely. A brand is not about creating false perceptions. You need to be able to back it up with substance, credibility and consistency.

So, how do you make sure your brand is always working for you?

Make some important decisions about what you want to be known for. Make sure these core values are reflected in everything you do from the way you dress, to the way you communicate (and this includes all communication whether that's social media, talking with more senior or junior colleagues, the way you sign off an email, how long you take to return a phone call...it all matters). Make sure the work you do is a reflection of your brand and projects the image you want to be known for. And then, let your brand build a strong reputation that will appeal to those you want to attract. By further developing your personal brand you can cut through the noise and distinguish your unique skills. You worked way too hard to get lost within an organisation.

Let your personal brand guide you and you'll see the opportunities open up before your eyes.

Top Tips:

1. Get feedback: Ask colleagues or seek professional advice if you're unsure about how you are perceived.
2. Take control: Know what you want to be known for. You can't be all things to all people, so find out exactly where you can make your mark.
3. Do a mini stocktake: Update your LinkedIn profile, your headshots, your wardrobe, your social media, your email signature. Make sure everything is a reflection of who you are and your capabilities
4. Build yourself up: Surround yourself with people who enhance your brand, who help build you up, who are honest and provide quality feedback but who are also good for your confidence.
5. Be out there: Make sure your connecting and going to events with other likeminded professionals. Your personal brand is built on your reputation so you need to be out there, connecting with others, sharing experience and expertise.
6. Look up: Having a mentor is such a valuable asset when it comes to building your brand and career progression especially in the legal profession. Have someone in a senior position that you can trust with your professional development.

Style Confidante was founded by Melissa Lewis in 2011 after many years in the commercial property and shopping centre management industry. Style Confidante specialises in elevating the executive presence of high potential women leaders through developing their personal brand and image. Dedicated to empowering businesswomen on their journey towards greater confidence, presence and influence, Style Confidante readies women for advancement, particularly in the professional services, law and IT industries. Melissa has helped thousands of professional women leverage their unique strengths to become more visible and valued in a competitive environment.

Recent clients include leaders from Bendigo Bank, CBUS Superannuation, Procurement Australia, Ernst & Young, American Express, The Law Institute of Victoria, Victorian Chamber of Commerce, Telstra, KPMG, Eventbrite, Nova Radio, Hall and Wilcox and Shinewing Australia.

