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## Personal Branding... Lessons Learned from Michael Jordan

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Although Michael Jordan may have last laced up his high tops in 2003, he now ranks first in Repucom's Celebrity DBI, which tracks awareness and consumer sentiments for nearly 4,000 celebrities in the U.S. Jordan is now the most marketable person in the U.S., ahead of icons such as Oprah Winfrey, Bill Gates, and Tom Hanks. He posts top 10 scores for aspiration, endorsement, and influence. And Jordan's awareness level is unrivaled at 98%.

Jordan has evolved into one of the most marketed sports figures in history. He has been a major spokesman for such brands as Nike, Coca-Cola, Chevrolet, Gatorade, McDonald's, Ball Park Franks, Rayovac, Wheaties, Hanes, and MCI. Jordan has had a long relationship with Gatorade, appearing in over 20 commercials for the company since 1991, including the "Be Like Mike" commercials in which a song was sung by children wishing to be like Jordan.

The Jordan brand remains a cash cow for its owner Nike and its namesake MJ. You may be interested to learn that total retail shoe sales hit \$3 billion last year with a market share of 64% in basketball compared to 29% for Nike-proper, 3.6% for Under Armour, and 2.3% for Adidas. And Nike has bigger plans with a goal of doubling the brand's revenue by 2020.

The real power of Jordan has revealed itself in the sense that his earning power has transcended from his athletic years into his personal brand after his athletic retirement. In 2015, Jordan

became the first billionaire NBA player in history and the world's second-richest African-American behind Oprah Winfrey and Robert Frederick Smith. In addition to his riches, Jordan is ranked as the greatest athlete of all time in a poll that goes through all the major sports:

1. Michael Jordan
2. Babe Ruth
3. Muhammad Ali
4. Serena Williams
5. Peyton Manning
6. Joe Montana
7. LeBron James
8. Tiger Woods
9. Tom Brady
10. Wayne Gretzky

Source: Stanford University Sports Business Report

So, how has Jordan's brand taken off even though he is no longer visible on the court? Simply put, he is still relevant, bold, and cool. And he is seen as doing things "differently" as he did in the NBA when he accepted a \$5,000 per game fine for wearing shoes that were not one solid color. Personal branding extraordinaire – Michael Jordan.

### **Personal Branding. What Is It?**

Personal branding is the method people use to market themselves and their careers as brands. It is the process of establishing an image or expression in the minds of others. In the book, *Be Your Own Brand*, David McNally and Karl Speak convey that a strong personal brand means that you are communicating your sense of purpose, vision, and value that reflects and embodies the real you. Personal brand is the "perception or emotion, maintained by somebody other than you, that describes the total experience of having a relationship with you," state McNally and Speak.

Your personal brand is all about you, as a person, but in a more public sense of how you project your image to the outside world. Personal branding includes the perceptions, qualities, and characteristics people associate with you, your name, how you conduct yourself, and your professional position. In a very fundamental sense, your personal brand is your reputation. It is what people say about you when you leave the room. The most successful personal brands are an authentic reflection of that person's true qualities. Consistency is also essential in personal branding. The more customers experience the same values and emotions through each interaction with you, the more they will trust, respect, and value a similar relevant experience every time. You earn your brand. It is the reward for the hard work of building meaningful and authentic relationships with your audience.

You should view your personal brand as a trademark, an asset that you must protect while continuously molding and shaping. Glenn Llopis, contributor to *Forbes*, states, "developing your personal brand is essential for the advancement of your career. Your personal brand should

represent the value you are able to consistently deliver to those whom you are serving.” That being said, a survey conducted by the Glenn Llopis Group evidenced that less than 15% of professionals have fully defined their personal brand, and less than 5% are living it consistently at work.

In your quest to enhance your personal brand, there are six related terms and strategies that will help you:

**Brand Identity** - a set of individual components, such as a name, a design, a set of imagery, a slogan, a vision, etc. which set the brand apart from others.

**Brand Awareness** – the consumer’s ability to recall and/or recognize your brand. This is a key component in the customer’s purchase decision process.

**Brand Communication** – relates to your ability to transmit a clear, consistent message to your target audience.

**Brand Trust** - the intrinsic believability in your brand

**Brand Differentiation** – the degree to which the consumer is able to distinguish your brand from others in the marketplace

**Brand Equity** – the totality of your brand’s worth. People pay more and stay loyal to brands they trust.

It is important to note that a personal branding strategy does not mean self-promotion. Rather, the value you consistently bring in serving others. Every time you are in a meeting, at a conference, or involved in a customer engagement, you should be mindful of what others are experiencing about you and what you want others to feel and sense. The more you express your natural self, the more successful the interaction.

### Social Media and Personal Branding

Michael Jordan has over 27 million Facebook fans, and the Nike-run Jordan Twitter account has 1.7 million followers. Social media wasn’t even a thing when Jordan retired, but that does not mean that he hasn’t used it. Just the opposite. Michael Jordan has adapted his marketing and brand to the latest techniques.

Today, personal branding has created great interest because of the rise of the Internet. The growth of the virtual world has created the necessity of managing online identities. Because Individuals want to portray themselves a certain way to their social circle, they work hard to maintain a certain image on their social media sites. Far too often, the social media presence does not reflect the authentic personal brand they desire in the business environment.



While social media can be an aid in your personal branding initiatives, it is essential that you realize that developing your personal brand is a never-ending journey that extends well beyond social media.

As you may have experienced first-hand, employers are now increasingly using social media tools in order to vet applicants before offering them interviews. Such techniques range from searching the applicants Facebook or Twitter feed to conducting large background checks using search engines and other tools.

## 12 Strategies to Build Your Personal Brand

I would like to suggest the following 12 strategies to build your personal brand.

1. **Discover your natural strengths and unique abilities.** You will gain enhanced success as you focus on your God-given talents as well as those activities that give you energy and enthusiasm.
2. **Emotionally engage the customer.** Research substantiates that more than 50% of the customer experience is subconscious, or how the customer feels. Emotional engagement is the foundation of the customer experience journey.
3. **Create a positive first impression.** An “impression” is a strong effect produced on one’s intellect, feelings or conscience. As your first impression is lasting, it is critical that you make it a good one.
4. **Deliver a unique message.** Your brand requires a value proposition which is clear, concise and compelling. Your message must summarize why the potential customer should buy your products or services and how they exceed that of your competition.
5. **Live servant leadership.** A strong personal brand is achieved through a selfless approach to leadership... one that places serving others including customers, community and country as priority number one.
6. **Be process, not product driven.** Today’s consumers have come to expect you to sell them products. Your brand will be enhanced when you lead with a process, not product-oriented approach. Process is best defined as a series of actions or steps to achieve a particular end.
7. **Invest in relational capital.** Your ability to invest in the qualities of credibility, integrity and authenticity will elevate your brand and help you to build deeper relationships.
8. **Teach the customer something they don’t know.** Today’s customers are demanding more depth and expertise from insurance and risk management professionals. Your brand will take off when you bring new ideas and find innovative ways to help their family and/or business.
9. **Know your ideal client.** Professionals with the strongest personal brands have laser focus on their ideal client. And they are recognized for their expertise in an industry and/or product line.

10. **Statement of purpose.** In crafting the purpose of your professional existence, you will gain clarity and confidence about your personal brand. When you map out your principles and point of view, you are hard to replicate.
11. **Become a story teller.** Storytelling is the art of using language, visualization and/or physical movement and gestures to reveal the elements and images to a specific audience. Storytelling enhances brand awareness, trust, communication and differentiation.
12. **Social media strategy.** It is essential that you discover your customers' preferred online communication channels. Use social media to its fullest to demonstrate the unique and authentic you.

Although the brand of Michael Jordan may seem far reaching, there are many lessons that can be learned and applied to your career. Your personal brand... own it!

#### About the Author

Scott Addis, CPCU, CRA, CBWA is the CEO of Beyond Insurance and is recognized as an industry leader having been named a Philadelphia finalist for *Inc. Magazine's* "Entrepreneur of the Year" award as well as one of the "25 Most Innovative Agents in America." Beyond Insurance is a consulting firm that offers leadership training, cultural transformation, and talent and tactical development for enlightened professionals who are looking to take their practice to the next level. Since 2007, the proven and repeatable processes of Beyond Insurance have transformed individuals and organizations as measured by enhanced organic growth, productivity, profitability, and value in the marketplace.