

Building Self-Equity: How to Better Market Yourself

By Christian Buckley

What are you doing to build your personal portfolio? I'm not talking about how many shares you own in eBay, or whether you've diversified your investments into the bond market. I'm talking about furthering your own development, refining your individual skills, nourishing your network, and working on your own personal presentation. Because no matter how good your business or technical skills, presentation is critical.

As a former student in industrial design, I know all about the importance of presentation. I can't tell you how many times I saw inferior designs and thrown-together solutions receive praise and, in many cases, superior grades due to an excellent presentation. Presentation guides perception. As I learned through some painful lessons early in my career, awareness of perceptions can make or break a career – so make them work to your advantage.

What are you doing to change those perceptions, to improve your personal presentation, and to start building self-equity? Think of self-equity as equity in a house: you want to make sure you make upgrades to your house that will provide long-term benefits, and increase the overall value of your home. If you neglect your home, you could see a drop in that value. The same can be said for your personal growth.

Here's a quick list of areas where you can improve your self-equity:

1. **Image.** While I'm not a member of the "fake it 'til you make it" club, how you dress does impact your overall presentation, and can affect how others perceive you. By taking some time to look professional, it shows others that you want to be taken seriously. And people will not take you seriously until you invest some time in yourself. Take a look in the mirror. Would you invest in you?
2. **Connections.** Are you plugged in? Do you network? When it comes to networking, many of us just don't have the time or the motivation to get out two or three nights a week to the plethora of networking events crowding the community calendars these days. While it is important to engage face-to-face with other business and technology professionals on a semi-regular basis, the options for virtual networking are increasing. Are you using the latest tools? Are you participating in any online communities? These sites can be a great resource for making connections.
3. **Skills.** For some, the best road is to go back to school. If formal education is just not an option, find an alternative. What are you currently reading? What are your hobbies? What are you learning in your job, and can you increase your role? Is your work fulfilling your needs to grow?

Many larger companies offer a diverse array of extracurricular activities for those interested in expanding themselves. For example, find out what non-profits your company sponsors. Or get involved in a local speaking or technology special interest group. Each



of us is surrounded with a variety of educational opportunities – you just need to start looking.

4. **Presentation.** Presentation is everything. For starters, when was the last time you refreshed your résumé? Once you've brought it up to date, why not develop a blogging site to share your skills and opinions with the world? Do you have a website? These are only ideas – not everyone should go out and build an online presence, but these are options for presenting your ideas or packaging the product that is you.

If finding a new job is your goal, I can't put enough emphasis on cultivating a good list of references. As with your outward image, presentation is the first impression you'll leave, so make sure it's a lasting one.

5. **Priorities.** What are you doing to make a change today? There is no reason why you cannot implement some aspect of this list each and every day. Turn off the television, put down that romance novel and start making plans on how to improve your self-equity.

The key to change is simply taking action. For further reading, I recommend a great Fast Company Magazine (www.fastcompany.com) article by Tom Peters called "*The Brand Called You*", (<http://www.fastcompany.com/online/10/brandyou.html>) printed in the August/September 1997 issue. I discovered this article while attending graduate school, and have institutionalized it in my own life.

Building self-equity should become a regular part of your daily and weekly schedule. Once you take the step and build a plan, and then put that plan into effect, these activities become healthy habits that will increase your self-equity and generate value to your professional life.

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