

You as a Brand: Tips for Managing Your Data Career

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ABSTRACT

Yes! You are a brand. The branding you advertise to the target market (your manager and colleagues) is very similar and just as important as the branding that goes into a product or company. All brands require management to be successful. During this talk, we will review how you establish your brand, using social media to promote your brand, and simple ways you can maintain your brand. You will walk away with some strategies you can implement immediately.

INTRODUCTION

Early in my career I was advised to “always be thinking about my next step.” Some interpret that statement to mean the next company where you will work and sounds disloyal. It should be interpreted as any next step that makes sense to your career – so it may be a move within your department or company. It may mean going back to school. And yes, it may also mean working for another organization.

This paper applies marketing terms to your career. It uses the analogy of you (or really your career) as the product that you can market. It discusses how to determine your brand, promote your brand, and manage your brand. By thinking like a marketer, you can easily get to your next career step.

ESTABLISH YOUR BRAND

It's impossible to market a product or service without knowing what you are selling. How do you think of yourself as a brand? You only need to know three things: skills, passion, and market need. This topic discusses how to determine these three areas.

WHAT IS MY SKILLSET?

When a marketer starts to develop an ad campaign one of the first questions asked is “What is the benefit of this product?” You can think of yourself in the same way, what career-related skills do you have? Try to think of at least 25 or more skills you have.

Try to find the right level to describe the skills. Don't be too broad so instead of “data analyst”, you might list “SAS® programming” or “statistical knowledge”. If you have special skills, such as “good macro programmer” – that counts!

Don't limit yourself to hard skills. Many hiring managers consider soft skills part of the job. If you are good at explaining technical concepts, you work well on a team, or others have noted your knack for logical thinking, you should list those skills. You might want to search the internet for lists of skills to help you generate ideas. Also consider adding your hobbies or special interests.

This theory is probably easier to apply after you have finished college and been in the workforce for a few years. During that time, you learn more about yourself and your skillsets.

WHAT IS MY PASSION?

Your passion is what you really love to do. One way to identify your passion is to think of which tasks put you in a flow state. The flow state was best described in a Ted Talk called [*Flow, the Secret to Happiness*](#) by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. He describes activities where you are so lost in the task that don't even think about eating or resting. You are in a flow state when engaging in this activity. It is your passion.

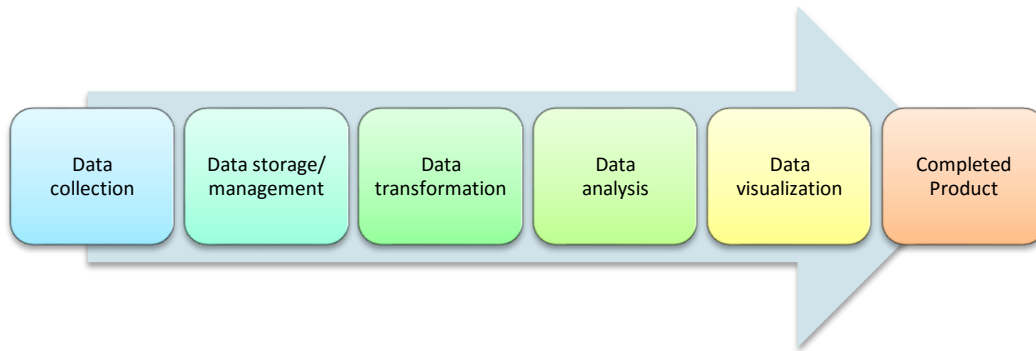


Figure 1 Data Analysis Process

Think of the points in the data analysis process that you particularly enjoy. In the proceeding figure, the data analysis process is shown at a high level. Use this figure to think about which areas of the process you most enjoy. Maybe you enjoy transforming data more than data visualization? Or maybe you enjoy parts of this process not show, such as teaching others about data analysis or managing the process.

Your passion also includes your hobbies or other interests. Perhaps you play music or volunteer your time for a special cause. These passions may guide you toward specific industries or companies. For instance, if you like building robots then you may be more drawn to manufacturing companies.

WHAT DOES THE MARKETPLACE LACK OR NEED?

The reality of finding the sweet spot is that you must have a customer for your skills. There are multiple ways to collect this information, an easy one is to assess the marketplace by reading industry specific publications. You can ask your manager what skills are required for upcoming tasks or what skills are needed to get to the next level of your job. You can read wanted ads for jobs you find interesting. Determine what specific skills are listed most often. If these skills don't match your skills, then determine how you can get the needed skills.

GET TO THE SWEET SPOT

Once you determine the three areas (or maybe determine what is needed) then you know your career sweet spot. The sweet spot is where all three areas overlap. This is the best combination of your skills and passions applied to what the market needs.

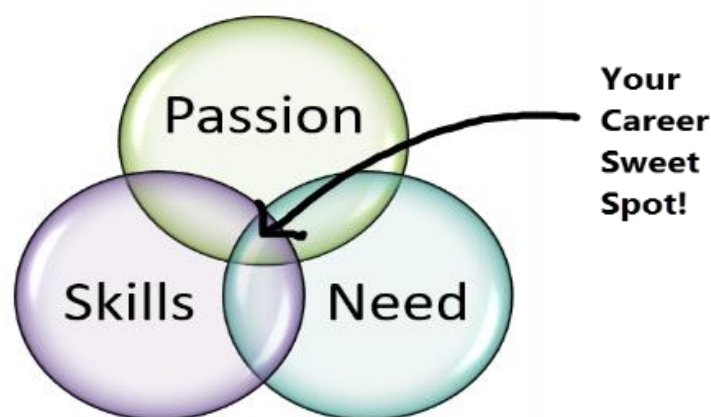


Figure 2 Career Sweet Spot

One quick note! Sometimes you must repeat this exercise multiple times to find a combination that works. For instance, you might find that there's not as much market demand for a SAS programmer who is passionate about saving gum wrappers as you first thought. Or you might find that you are not as

passionate about a topic as you were three years ago and now want to try something new. Don't be discouraged – it's a process not a destination.

You can then use this knowledge to start promoting yourself either within your organization or even the world! This combination of skills, passion, and market need – that's your IT factor.

PROMOTE YOUR BRAND

Marketers use multiple methods to promote their product. There are brochures, billboard advertising, social media, and some even put their names on sports arenas. These methods are to ensure there is brand awareness to encourage sales. Marketers also recognize the value of having networks to support their cause.

BUILD YOUR REPUTATION

Most marketers will tell you that the best advertising is *word-of-mouth*, which is when other people talk about or endorse your product. When others endorse your product without you asking them – that is real sales. You can probably think of at least one product you own that you think everyone should have. These products solve problems in a delightful way. Most likely these companies are quick to address any issues and continually improve their product. People endorse these products willingly!

You want the same for your brand. You want a reputation for using your skills well, being passionate about your topic or area of expertise, and being someone on whom other rely to deliver a good product.

BUILD NETWORKS

Companies use a sales force to help educate the consumer about their products. A good sales force is a large network of people. You should strive for the same network with your brand.

Networks are simply other people in your company, your industry or with a similar skillset or passion. There are multiple ways to network with other professionals. One mistake I see people make is that they get so focused on their small world, they never do anything to help others. Then they lose their jobs or want to change careers and desperately try to build a network. The takeaway - build your network when you don't need it.

Here's some ideas how you can build your network.

Attend Events

There are multiple events you can attend to meet others and expand your network.

- If you work for a large organization, attend your company's social events. This allows you to meet others who work outside of your daily environment.
- Attend local, regional and national user groups. If you are unsure where these events take place, the SAS website lists them.
- Attend conferences about your area of passion.
- Attend local meetups around your area of interest. You can find meetups here: www.meetup.com

Participate in Communities

You can also participate in online communities where you can meet others who share similar professional interest such as SAS Communities, SAS-L, or Communities SAS.

USE THE PROMOTION CHANNELS

There are multiple ways you can promote your brand and build a following. Perhaps the most likely for professional content is Twitter and LinkedIn. These are similar networks where you can create a free account and share content with the world. These are social sites – so be social. (This means you talk to others!)

Using Twitter

Twitter provides you with a free account, which is also called your profile. You can describe yourself and provide a picture. Other people can follow you, which means they can see all of your messages or tweets. Likewise, you follow others who share similar interests. Similar interests are denoted with a hashtag – such as #dataScience, #analytics, #stats, or #dataviz. Want to find other #SASUsers – check the hashtag.

What do you tweet? Unlike LinkedIn, you have to consider if you want two accounts, one for professional contacts and one for personal contacts. Twitter is a little more relaxed and fun but you may want to avoid posting political or religious content on a professional profile. While these topics are a part of your life and who you are, you should manage the content the same way you manage your professional life.

So, what is shareable content for this social network? Industry news, personal achievements or recognition, pictures of your pet, kids, and favorite vacation spot. Consider noting when you attend events or hear a favorite song. Also, consider sharing a #SASTip – maybe you find a quick way to do a SAS task – share it. Find a way to share your personal life without supplying information that might make others uncomfortable.

For more thoughts about using Twitter, read Mark Schaefer's [The Tao of Twitter](#). It contains a lot of thinking about how to best use Twitter for marketing. He has many other books about social media that you might find useful.

Using LinkedIn

For whatever reason, people think of this site as only a place to find a job. It's so much more than that. Yes, keep your professional profile here – but also connect with other professionals. When you start a new project, connect to others on the project. When you go to a conference, connect to those you met there. Try to stay in touch with those contacts by commenting on their posts or saying Hello.

So, what is shareable content for this network? Industry news, personal achievements or recognition, or professional questions. Anything you might talk about at work is probably suitable for this professional site. Just keep your content professional - this is not a place to share photos of pets or get overly familiar.

There are multiple books and blog posts that provide information about how to create your profile to how to use LinkedIn effectively. Since Microsoft purchased LinkedIn, the interface has changed so I don't have a specific recommendation.

MANAGE YOUR BRAND

Here's some thoughts for how to keep your brand fresh and interesting to an ever-fickle customer.

BUILD YOUR REPUTATION

You want to be thought of by your peers as someone with whom they enjoy working. This can mean different things to different people but in general it means you do what you say, you are honest, and you are knowledgeable.

When others speak of you, you want it to be positive. Studies have shown that being liked makes your professional life go easier. [Here's [some tips on being likeable](#).] While not everyone is going to like you – you at least need their professional respect. Perhaps they don't enjoy your company at lunch, but they do recognize you are very good at your job.

On LinkedIn, I asked for others thoughts on this topic and here's some of the comments:

- Remember that online content lives forever – think before you post. A tasteless photo or off-cuff comment can have long-term consequences.
- For any final work product, double check for any errors. It's hard to regain creditability once lost.
- When working with others, be transparent and dependable. It builds trust with colleagues.

Just a quick survey on LinkedIn to get some helpful information from helpful peers.

CONTINUALLY IMPROVE YOUR SKILLS

You should strive to stay abreast of industry trends and product updates. You can subscribe to trade magazine, review social media sites, or even visit websites where this information is shared. Perhaps you devote an hour each week or a few moments each day. The point is to know what's going on around you.

If you are lucky enough to attend conferences, you have an excellent way to get a lot of information in a few days.

JOB RESPONSIBILITY VERSUS CAREER DEVELOPMENT

The mistake I see many people make in their career is expecting their employer to manage it for them. It's not your employer's responsibility – it's your responsibility. You are the captain of your ship so to speak. It's ok if you only plan five years at a time – just understand that you need to be thinking about what you want to accomplish and determine the best way to achieve those goals.

CONCLUSION

By establishing and managing your brand, you'll have a more successful and satisfying career. Learn to use the many ways to build a large network so you have choices in your career. The most important thing is to ensure you are building solid relationships with colleagues. Some of these relationships last your entire career.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Your comments and questions are valued and encouraged. Contact the author at:

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