

Brand Power â€“ Itâ€™s How You Stand Out in the World

Greg Rinckey is an attorney the same way the Nike swoosh is running shoes or the Big Mac is fast food.

"The Rinckey brand means federal employment and military law. I want to be known as the go-to firm for those things," said the former JAG, now a partner of Military Times legal columnist Mathew Tully in the law firm Tully Rinckey PLLC.

On Facebook, Rinckey blogs about legislation that will help protect service members from hostile work environments. His LinkedIn profile cuts right to the chase, emphasizing his areas of expertise. His profile in the national Martingale.com listing of lawyers opens with a rundown of his experience defending hundreds of cases involving service members.

Rinckey's image is consistent everywhere you look. It's his personal brand, and experts say it's a powerful tool in seeking out potential employment.

"You don't get hired just because you are looking for a job," said Kevin Kermes, a former Army first lieutenant who heads up career coaching firm Kermes Consulting in Washington, D.C. "You get hired because of the value that you bring. You get hired because of those things that you do exceptionally well, and that's what your brand conveys."

Personal Brands

A personal brand doesn't start with a Facebook blurb or a tweet. Rather, branding begins with a careful personal assessment. Understanding who you are and how you want to be perceived is nine-tenths of the game.

"I started by asking myself what I enjoyed about my last job," Kermes said. "Did I like to steer the ship in calm seas? Did I like being in there fixing things?"

He talked with former bosses and colleagues, asking what they valued in his work. Slowly a picture of himself emerged: something partly professional, partly personal - a base upon which to build. Try this: Find five words that best describe you. List three unique skills you bring to the table. Write down a handful of experiences that show what you can do. At the end of the day, your branding effort will fizzle if the image you've built is not true to who you are, so keep it real.

Online Brands

Your online brand is all about purposeful packaging - "packaging with intention," said Jessi Lacosta, a career strategist and branding guru for BluRio Strategies in San Diego. Every place your brand identity hasn't been claimed, grab it, even if you don't expect to use it right

away. No matter what tools you choose, be consistent.

Some starting points:

User name:

In most online forums, you'll have a user name visible to the public. BillSmith123 could be anyone. A name such as BestChef makes a statement.

Facebook:

Post articles and quotes that consistently reflect your chosen image. Photos, too, can speak volumes about a person's self-definition.

LinkedIn:

As a professional network, it's a straightforward branding platform. The profile page lets you lay it out in the most direct terms: "Strategic problem solver with background in IT." Just seven words, and your brand is fixed in people's minds.

Email customization:

Something as simple as the font in your email auto-signature can reinforce brand identity. Choose one that aligns with your overall image. That autosignature is also a great place for a tagline or quote that further defines you in the recipient's eyes.

Make your brand public

We're all perceived in a certain way based on what we wear, how we speak and what we have to say. Those who have personal brands bring those brands to bear in all their social interactions.

Take dress, for example. An artsy brand will dress the part (flouncy skirt), just as an outdoors professional will want to make a certain statement (sturdy boots). If nothing else, clothes can help to make a memorable impression. Wear red everywhere you go, and people will begin to recognize you automatically.

Defining your brand in public also means paying close attention to what you say.

Lacosta recommends having a series of talking points in your head at all times to demonstrate your special area of understanding.

Don't let up

Beyond the initial work of defining who "you" are, staying on message is an ongoing task. "I don't get on the news and talk about matrimonial law, because that's not who I am," Rinckey says.

It also requires the daily effort of managing email, monitoring social media and staying on message in public.

"I've had to invest a lot of nonbillable time," Rinckey says.

That constant drumbeat has paid off. When people get into issues of ROTC disenrollments, for example, his name is always top of mind.

"By the time people have set up a consult with me, they already know all about my background," he says. "Before they even consult with me, they understand that I know their

specific issues. That makes it a lot easier for me from a selling point of view."