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How did you become 'thewikiman'?

In 2009 I presented a paper at CILIP's New Professionals Conference. Jo Alcock (Joeyanne Libraryanne) also presented that day, on marketing yourself using online tools, and it made a big impression on me - both Jo's presentation, and the event itself. I wanted to stay connected with all these interesting library professionals I'd just met, so I thought I'd better create an online presence sharpish!

As There are two Ned Potters who already figure prominently online I wanted a nom-de-2.0 than was unique to me. I was just about to create a wiki for the Digitisation community, and I could see the possibilities of having a wicker man logo - so thewikiman was born.

Why did you decide to create your own brand?

I'm not sure that I did. To paraphrase Bohyun Kim (www.bohyunkim.net/blog/archives/1048), building a brand was largely a byproduct of my pursuing my interests in librarianship, and doing so publically and in as networked a fashion as possible.

It's important to remember that when you talk about a product or a company, the brand is the sum total of everything that is thought about them, said about them, written about them and so on. It exists independent of the company - in effect the brand is the world's collective experience of that company.

I don't think it's quite like that for an Information Professional's brand as the demographic for the brand is much, much smaller and far more concentrated / targeted than it is for a commercial consumer product. But you don't control the brand completely - you just try and influence it as positively as you can. Just as people are Googling you whether or not you try and shape your online presence, your brand is out there whether or not you are branding yourself.

How have you promoted it?

I have a logo/avatar which is a picture of a wicker man I found on Flickr; I approached the photographer for permission to use it, and it's useful to have something distinctive like that to use in multiple ways. It's on my website, on my social media presences, it shows up when I comment on other people's blogs, I put it into presentations, and it's on my business cards.

Everything else I do links back to the blog - and that includes publications, my twitter account, my YouTube account, my SlideShare account, my NetVibes account, and my LISNPN account. I try to only use a new platform of social media if I really see a need for it so I don't spread myself too thinly - if you're going to take part in a conversation, you need time enough to say something interesting.

What effect has it had on your personal and professional development?

It has had EVERY effect on my professional development. It has given me a voice, and a platform to allow people get to know my views and your expertise, and from that comes amazing opportunities I wouldn't have dreamed of two years ago. Nearly all of the interesting things I've been asked to do, from writing a book to speaking at some really amazing events, can be traced back to my online identity.

What advice do you have for other new info pros about branding themselves?

1. Be yourself from the beginning. While part of branding is to put the best of yourself forward, if you're successful then you're going to end up being yourself in the end anyway. It's more important to find the demographic that is happy to accept your professional activities as they are than to modify the way you behave to suit a demographic that isn't for you. But be careful! If being yourself involves being massively controversial, remember that there's little point in building a great brand that gets you speaking gigs and earns you respect as a maverick if it also alienates you from the kind of organisations that will actually pay your wages.

2. Building a brand and marketing yourself as an information professional is NOT a one-way-street. In fact, it's all about multi-way communication. You're not just telling people about yourself, you're positioning yourself as part of a dialogue about librarianship, and trying to offer something meaningful to the conversation. This means giving advice, but also taking advice. It means passing others' expertise on as well as your own. It means being open. This is what stops brand-building from being an empty exercise in self-promotion. You should aim to be a resource, not to be a hero.

3. Find something distinct about you on which to build your brand (an interest in emerging technologies, for example, or expertise in ancient manuscripts) which can provide a focal point with which people can find and engage with you. If you don't have one particular area that defines you, you can still engage, but you might find it takes a little longer to establish yourself in an already crowded market.

4. Collaborate with people. It's a great experience and helps expose you to new things, new views, and new audiences. Just ask people if they'd like to work with you, it's surprising how often they'll say yes!

5. Attribute EVERYTHING you do that is remotely inspired by or related to someone else's work. It's important to give credit, and it opens up the channels of communication.

6. Don't write cheques with your online brand that your face-to-face brand can't cash. If you portray yourself as an expert in something then eventually you'll get asked to talk about it in person. Whenever you're doing something online, imagine saying it to the same audience in the flesh. Can you back it up?

7. Everything you do should link to everything else. Every online presence should link back to every other – every slide-deck should link to your blog, every blog homepage should have links to

your YouTube channel, and so on. The idea is that anyone who has even the slightest bit of curiosity about finding out more about you, should be able to do so without any barriers at all.

8. As the great Phil Bradley says, give as much of yourself away for free as you can, because reputation is everything. Get out there, try and add something of value to the conversation, and make yourself and your output available to all.