

Personal Brand Guide

— GUIDE —

A step by step guide to build an
authoritative personal brand that inspires trust
and helps you to get featured in the media.

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COMMUNITY



SPARTAN MEDIA

A personal brand is no longer a luxury reserved for high profile celebrities, influencers, and entrepreneurs.

Today, *everyone* needs a powerful personal brand, both to attract clients and to convince journalists that you're an expert they should cite. People want to know who you are and what you stand for before collaborating, and that's true whether they're potential clients or journalists.

This checklist will give you a detailed blueprint to follow so you can build an authoritative personal brand that inspires trust and helps you to get featured in the media easier, faster, and more often.

It's important to remember that this is just the starting point though. An effective personal brand requires first getting the fundamentals in place, and then consistently building exposure and authority for that brand over time, making this a long game.

So if you want to build a powerful personal brand that helps you to get featured in the media easier, faster, and more often, follow my checklist and execute on the tasks outlined consistently.

Secure your name on all major social media platforms

Ideally, you should secure a profile on every major social media platform, even if you don't plan on using it right now, and your handle should be your first and last name if possible. Unfortunately, with so many people on social media today, your name may not be available, so you may have to add some kind of modifier. Some ideas for that include:

- *MrFirstNameLastName*
- *MrsFirstNameLastName*
- *DrFirstNameLastName*
- *FirstNameLastNameInvestor*
- *FirstNameLastNameRealEstate*
- *FirstNameLastNameDentist*
- *HeyFirstNameLastName*
- *FirstNameLastNameOfficial*
- *TheFirstNameLastName*

You get the idea. It's important to use the same handle for each profile, so check its availability on each platform before committing to anything. It's also important to make sure a domain that matches your social media

handles is available, and that you secure it as soon as you secure the social media handles. I'll talk more about that later in this checklist.

Get professional head shots

That selfie you took in the nightclub bathroom might look great as an Instagram post, but it's not suitable for a personal brand. Instead, hire an experienced photographer who understands how to use framing, poses, lighting, and facial expressions to get the subtle, often subconscious details right to present you as professional and authoritative. Remember—your profile photo is the first thing most people notice, so you need to make a powerful first impression.

Ensure a consistent brand image across all platforms

Your profiles on every platform should have a consistent brand appearance. This means that you need to use the same head shot on each, and that you upload a cover photo that's laid out with the same general design across platforms. Obviously, you'll need to adjust the design of your cover photos slightly for each platform due to how their interfaces work, and you also need to make sure they display properly on both desktop and mobile devices.

Craft a powerful and concise bio

Your bio, which is displayed on your social media profiles, your personal brand website, and columns at any media outlets you write for, should be a concise message that conveys who you are, what you do, who you do it for, and why you do it. Ideally, you'll want to keep this between 2-5 sentences, and under 75 words.

It's worth noting that you'll probably have to edit it slightly for some social media platforms in order to stay under the character limit. TikTok, for example, only allows a meager 80 characters—a far cry from 80 words.

The thing you need to remember about your bio is that it needs to clearly convey the value you bring from your prospect's perspective.

If you're able to, make sure to include a link in your bio wherever possible as well.

Register your personal name as a domain

You absolutely need to own your name as a domain, even if you can't put a website up yet.

This protects you from domain squatters who might buy it to later sell it to you at a significant mark up, but more importantly, it helps protect you from your enemies who want to make you look bad. Imagine what it would do to your reputation if a competitor bought

your name as a domain and published negative information about you? It would be likely to rank on the first page of the search results with little effort, and anyone who searched your name would see it. And there wouldn't be a damn thing you could do about it unless you already had your name trademarked.

We advise all of our clients to purchase their name as a domain name for this exact reason. If you have the budget for it, it's also smart to hire a trademark attorney who is experienced with personal brands to secure a defensible trademark on your personal name. This will prevent other people from buying your name as a domain or creating social media profiles using your name as a handle unless they happen to have the same name.

Purchase *FirstNameLastName.com* as a domain if it's available. If *FirstNameLastName.com* wasn't available, identify a modified domain and social media handles that can be secured.

You should also hire an IP attorney to secure a trademark for your personal name domain. I highly recommend Angela Langlotz, at TrademarkDoctor.net. I've known her for several years, have worked with her several times, and can confidently say she's one of the absolute best.

It's worth noting that you should always try to get the .com version of your name, but if you can't find one that works, even with a modifier, you can try to find

a non-traditional TLD. For context, a TLD, or Top-Level Domain, is the last part of a domain name after the final dot, and a non-traditional TLD is something other than a .com, .net, or .org. Technically, it also includes .gov, .edu, and .mil, but you can't register those anyway, so it's a moot point.

Some examples of non-traditional TLDs include, .me, .realty, .io, .pro, .name, to name a few, but there are literally hundreds of options. And a benefit of these types of domains is that they tend to rank more easily in organic search, so they can be incredibly useful.

Build a personal brand website

It seems kind of silly to have your name as a domain and not do something cool with it, don't you think?

A personal brand website gives you an opportunity to showcase what makes you awesome while also taking up a spot in the search results. This means you'll have complete control over one of the first things people find when they search your name.

And of course, your website should be designed in line with your social media profiles. People should recognize that it's your brand, regardless of where they're seeing it. Website, social media, videos—everything should all follow the same brand guidelines.

Think of your personal brand website as the place you can sort of make it all about you. This is where

you can go deep on what matters to you, your accomplishments, future goals, and anything else that demonstrates who you really are. You can also publish your thoughts here in article or video format, photos of you on stage or with prominent people, and your media features. Your website should also link to your social media profiles, podcasts, livestreams, YouTube, and any books you have available on Amazon, and you should also give people the ability to sign up for your email list as well.

Launch an email list

Your email list is a valuable asset that helps you to build an engaged community, which helps build authority status. Think about it like this—imagine that you posted something to social media, and instead of just hoping for the best, you send a link to your subscribers asking them to comment with their thoughts, driving engagement and social proof.

Plus, by staying at the top of their mind, you build greater brand recognition and authority as well as greater overall engagement, which further boosts your authority status—especially when it happens consistently over time.

This is a powerful but often underutilized tactic to build a stronger personal brand, which makes it easier to get featured in the media.

Earn positive reviews on third-party platforms

Entrepreneurs are familiar with the importance of reviews when it comes to earning new clients, but what most people don't realize is that reviews also play a huge role in public relations.

Think about it like this—when a journalist looks you up online and sees your reviews, whether that's on your Google Business Profile, Facebook page, Yelp, or any other third-party platform, they're going to make a judgment about you. If they see lots of glowing reviews, that will create a powerful first impression that cements your authority status in their mind, making it more likely that you'll get featured. On the other hand, if they don't see many reviews, or worse yet, they see lots of negative reviews, they will have the opposite impression of you and you'll be less likely to get featured.

That's why reviews are so critical in public relations.

And it's also why you need to make it a priority to constantly earn new reviews.

Each time you create a major win for a client, make sure to ask them to post a review somewhere. This might include:

- Google Business Profile
- Company & personal brand Facebook pages
(Not profiles)

- Yelp
- Realtor.com
- Trustpilot
- Angi
- Foursquare
- Glassdoor
- Better Business Bureau

It's important that they post a text review—not just a star review. This creates a more authentic impression, and gives people vital context about what you do, how you do it, and what makes you unique—a critical component of authority status.

Launch a podcast or livestream

You won't find many opportunities to speak on your areas of expertise for 30-90 minutes at a time, but podcasting and livestreaming are examples where you absolutely can, and you can do it consistently.

I'll sometimes use the term podcast and livestream interchangeably, and for the purpose of simplicity, I'll do that here. Podcasting gives you a unique opportunity to go deep into topics because while it's impossible to unpack a complex concept in a three minute TV segment or a quote in an article, you certainly can during a long form podcast. This helps

to demonstrate your unique expertise, positioning you as an authority in your industry. It also gives you a chance to demonstrate your personality and confidence, which further boosts your authority status.

Don't get me wrong—this is a lot of work, so make sure you know exactly what you're getting into. But this is well worth the effort and definitely something you should leverage.

The key to success here is to stick with it. It's going to take time to build an audience, and even longer to get them actively engaged. When I first started my livestream, I would only get a few viewers at any given time, but today, less than a year later, I routinely have a live audience in the low hundreds, and that doesn't even account for what happens afterwards when views and comments continue to stack up long after the livestream.

Something you need to remember is that you need to bring real value in each episode. No one is going to watch or listen to a thinly veiled sales pitch, so you need to consistently share useful and actionable advice that people can benefit from even if they never hire you or buy anything from you. Yes, some people will use this information to DIY whatever it is that you do for your clients, but journalists will look at it as evidence either that you do or don't know what you're talking about. So go deep.

Launch a YouTube channel

As much as I hate Google, it unfortunately dominates the internet by including its own properties in its search results. Because of this, it's critical to have a strong presence on YouTube if you want to be seen as an authority in your industry.

When you launch a YouTube channel under your personal name and consistently upload useful and engaging content, the Google search results will likely be filled with videos from your channel.

And of course, your channels will also take a spot in the search results for your name. On top of that, your content will also provide valuable information that Google's AI can use to provide additional information to users.

For example, if you search the name of my livestream, *Public Relations Declassified*, Google search displays an AI Overview, or an AIO, about it which contains a robust summary as well as links to specific episodes. As these AI Overviews are triggered algorithmically based on relative importance, they convey authority status of the host, similar to a Knowledge Panel.

At a bare minimum, you should upload every podcast episode to YouTube under a playlist named specifically for your podcast title, but ideally, you should also upload a variety of long and short form video content as well

to get the most impact from YouTube. Remember, this is another opportunity to go deep and show both prospects and journalists that you're a true expert.

Consistently post original, useful, and engaging content that demonstrates your expertise

Whether prospects or journalists, people are going to judge you based on your content, so you need to consistently publish content that demonstrates your unique expertise and personality.

The more comprehensive and prolific you can be, the more authoritative you will be perceived as. It's important to remember that not every post needs to be a viral banger—the idea is to provide useful information that someone can use to achieve a specific goal or avoid a specific problem. It's also important to remember that you'll probably never have the level of engagement, in the form of likes, views, shares, and comments, as you'd like, but that's not necessarily a sign that your content isn't useful, or that it's not resonating with your audience. Especially in the beginning. It takes time to build a highly engaged audience.

That's not necessarily the goal here though. The real goal is to demonstrate your expertise, and the only way to do that is to share information others can benefit from and execute on even if they never hire you or buy anything from you.

When creating your content, keep in mind a strategy that I teach called the 5 Pillars. Essentially, what you'll do is select five key topics that all of your content will be about. Your industry will be the most important pillar, but you should also select a few other topics unrelated to your business that reflect who you are, what you know, and most importantly, what you stand for. This enables you to keep things interesting and showcase your personality while still keeping you dialed in on a focused range of topics. That's a critical part of demonstrating your expertise in a way that builds a strong personal brand.

For example, my 5 Pillars include:

1. Public relations (60%)
2. Entrepreneurship (10%)
3. Veterans issues (10%)
4. Overcoming adversity (10%)
5. Personal freedom (10%)

Publish a free resource that demonstrates your unique expertise by providing valuable information

I think most everyone today understands the importance of having some kind of free and comprehensive resource that your audience would be willing to exchange their email address to receive.

This resource, which could be a guide, workbook, or checklist, is more comprehensive than a typical social media post or even a blog post, demonstrates authority status because it shows both that you have a deeper understanding of the topic than your competitors and that you have the discipline and expertise to create a resource on the topic for others to use. That makes this a powerful lead generation tool, and it also goes a long way in showing journalists that you're of a higher caliber, so it helps you to get featured in the media more easily and frequently.

The key here is that it needs to truly be useful. It's not enough to simply stuff it full of a bunch of surface level information. The strategy here is the same as with your social media content—original, useful, and engaging. If you try to hold key information back because you think having that information means people will be able to cut you out of the equation, you're doing it wrong and damaging your credibility in the process.

Publish a comprehensive book that demonstrates your unique expertise by providing valuable information

Publishing a book is a more comprehensive extension of the concept of publishing a free resource.

A typical book today is about 25,000-50,000 words. It's a substantial undertaking to plan, write, and edit a project of this magnitude, and on top of that, it's incredibly

difficult to create something that people actually want to buy, read, and talk about. That's why most people never do it, and it's also why those who do stand out from the crowd.

If you're going to embark on creating this critical element of authority status, it's critical that you put everything you have into it. A book that no one reads and has few, or even no reviews can actually hurt your personal brand because it creates the impression that no one cares about what you have to say. That doesn't exactly create the impression of a recognized and respected authority on a topic.

So it's critical that your book provides tremendous value, giving your readers valuable information, actionable advice, and unique insight. They need to be able to execute on the information provided even if they never invest in your products or services. It's also critical that your unique personality shines through because that's what transforms it from a dry and boring textbook into something people actually enjoy reading. Like I mentioned earlier, if people don't read, post a review, and talk about your book, it won't do you any good.

Speak on stage

There's a high barrier to entry for public speaking opportunities, like prominent industry events and TED talks.

That's because hosting an in-person event is expensive and there are a limited number of speaking opportunities, so typically, only the best of the best get a chance. And those speakers are typically vetted by their peers—other professionals in their industry who are also highly qualified. Their bullshit detectors are pretty finely tuned, so if someone has an opportunity to speak on stage, the consensus is that they've been carefully vetted by the people who should know best.

But it's not enough to just get on stage, no matter how bad ass the photos may be. It's also essential to deliver an absolutely killer presentation as well. Remember—authority status requires both unique experience as well as the ability to effectively communicate that experience to non experts.

This is a skill that frankly, most people simply do not have. That's the bad news. The good news is that it's a skill anyone can improve on if they're willing to put in the work. The mistake most people make is being boring. You need to let your personality shine and leverage humor, anticipation, and surprise in order to craft an engaging presentation that people want to listen to. So be yourself, provide deeply useful information, and

don't be afraid to ruffle some feathers.

But don't just speak and then call it a day. Make sure to also leverage the photos and videos from your speaking opportunities to further boost your authority status. Use the photos and videos in all of your marketing. Upload the videos to YouTube and social media. Use your past speaking opportunities as a springboard to land new speaking opportunities.

Then, create a library of your stage photos to use in social media, email, and ads, publish high resolution stage photos to your website, IMDB, and WikiMedia, upload videos of your stage presentations to YouTube and social media both in full, and as shorts, and create a sizzle reel from various stage presentations.

Build a community

You don't need a giant tribe of rabid followers, although that would be pretty cool. Just make sure to skip the Kool-Aid—we don't want you to get famous by hosting the next Jonestown.

But having an engaged community of people who respect you and follow you for your expertise, principles, and personality puts you in a different class than most, and it's like putting your authority status on steroids. This is a concept known as social proof and it originated in early human evolution, so it's hardwired into our

brains. (Sorry, but we're not as logical as most of us would like to believe.)

You don't necessarily need a special portal or platform to do this. In fact, it's probably better if you don't because frankly, it's pretty damn hard to get people to migrate over to yet another platform. Instead, you're better off just building your community on an existing social media platform. This could be as simple as regularly and enthusiastically engaging with your audience in the comments, or you could create a specific space for it, like a Facebook group or an X community.

The idea is to nurture relationships with your audience so that they'll engage on your content more frequently, and as a result, help to grow your authority status.

Secure a recurring column at a prominent industry publication

If you're new to my content, you may not have heard about my own journey when a health crisis put me on my deathbed for two years while my business withered away to nothing.

One of the key strategies I used to rebuild my own authority status was to land a recurring column at the top publication in my industry, where I then had the opportunity to share my knowledge at a much deeper level than simply being quoted with a few sentences in an occasional article.

When you're cited in an article, you'll typically have a chance to share a few sentences in most cases, which is great, but it doesn't allow you to really shine because you can only cover the basics, but when you have a chance to write an entire article, it allows you to go deep, providing far more nuance and demonstrating your unique expertise more effectively. Plus, once you've published a few articles at the same media outlet, both your articles and your author page become more likely to show up in the search results, further boosting your authority status.

The beauty of this strategy is that industry publications face the same challenge that every media outlet does—they need tons of great content, but they have a finite budget to produce that content. That's where you, as an industry expert, come in with a win/win scenario.

In exchange for writing great content that benefits their audience, you'll receive free exposure and authority status. Now, it's worth noting that you likely won't be paid for writing these articles. Think of this more like a barter scenario where you're providing free content in exchange for exposure to their audience. This is exactly the path I followed when I had to rebuild my own brand after disappearing from public view for two years, starting with a column at Search Engine Journal, followed by Search Engine Land,

and several more after that. This created a powerful compounding effect that led to dozens of columns and hundreds of media features.

First, you'll want to identify, connect with, and pitch the editors at the top publications in your industry. Then optimize your author page with a professional head shot, powerful bio, and if possible, a link to your website and consistently publish original, useful, and engaging content at these publications.

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