

Self-marketing

can help you get
the project or position
you want.

building your

brand

BY SIMON KENT * PHOTO BY SCOTT GRIES

Project managers may at times experience high demand for their skills, but they need not leave their popularity to the ebb and flow of market demand. Successful companies such as Apple, Nike and Ikea transcend the vagaries of consumer trends by creating a brand image that connects with their customers in a way that can override any economic woes. Just as high-end customers want to be associated with luxury brands, companies and organizations want to be linked with excellent project managers. Self-marketing offers a way for project managers to effectively brand themselves and take control of their careers.



Catherine
Kaputa,
SelfBrand,
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“The main positive outcome of self-marketing is raising other people’s awareness of your abilities,” says Dino Butorac, PMP, project manager at IBM, Zagreb, Croatia. “Waiting for someone else to recognize your potential can lead to not making the most of that potential, and that can be detrimental not only for the project manager in question, but also for [his or] her company, country or maybe a whole region.”

When it comes to self-marketing, the main challenge for project managers appears to be that they are only human. And like many other humans, they may find it difficult to promote themselves.

“The most common thing I tell people is, ‘Be yourself,’” says Pete Cohen, a human behaviorist, business consultant and life coach based in London, U.K. “The problem is: People don’t always feel particularly good about themselves—they think something’s wrong with them or that they’re not good enough.”

The starting point for any self-marketing campaign is to get to know and feel positive about yourself. “The things that stop us from maximizing our potential are our worries, fears, anxieties and the thought of what other people might think of us,” he says. “That’s not who we are—that’s what we’ve taken on board and created for ourselves throughout our lives. It’s learned behavior.”

Getting the Word Out

Identifying and believing in your abilities is, however, only part of

the answer. There’s no point in having such beliefs if they’re not shared with current and future employers.

“Self-marketing is nothing but grabbing the right opportunities at the right time, outperforming the tasks and communicating the success stories to different stakeholders at the appropriate time,” says Vegendla Srinivasa Rao, PMP, general manager and head of vertical solutions, enterprise applications at Satyam Computer Services Ltd., Hyderabad, India.

Even failure can be a marketing opportunity. “Communicating unpleasant news with stakeholders

Hot Spots

Identifying global employment trends in project management is a tough task, but here’s a market assessment from three industry insiders.

1 Organizations are showing a growing awareness of what they need from project managers.

“More clients are asking about the certification of our project managers—that’s the base-level qualification,” says Andrew Ward, a senior consultant in health at PA Consulting Group, London U.K. “If you’re starting out, getting that capability might get you through the door, but to be really successful you need to have skills beyond that—for example, demonstrating an ability to think strategically.”

He adds that clients are seeking consultancy-style project management focused on putting strategy into action. Mr. Ward recently spent a year working in Australia and reports the need is strong in that market. There’s a similar demand in the Middle East, he says.

2 IT dominates, according to Corinne Dauncey, marketing manager at web recruitment site tiptopjob.com, Slough, U.K. IT represents 29.4 percent of project manager jobs, followed by engineering (17.9 percent) and construction (10.4 percent).

3 Project managers must move beyond technical skills.

Vegendla Srinivasa Rao, PMP, Satyam Computer Services Ltd., says they should add cultural awareness, leadership and people skills to their repertoires.



Project managers should **take their cues** from the rest of the brands trying to gain a foothold among a host of alternatives.

—Catherine Kaputa

Project managers should take their cues from the rest of the brands trying to gain a foothold among a host of alternatives, says Catherine Kaputa, president of brand strategy consultancy SelfBrand, New York, N.Y., USA, and author of the book *U R a Brand* [Davies-Black Publishing, 2006].

“It’s a competitive world,” she says, “You need to look at yourself in a dynamic marketplace and take ideas from the world of brands such as visual identity, verbal identity, creating a marketing strategy and setting goals that take you from where you are now to where you want to be.”

Ms. Kaputa’s book proposes brand positions that people can adopt so prospective customers—or employers—can easily relate to them:

- **The Maverick** takes a different, unorthodox and innovative approach to get the job done.
- **The Leader** naturally takes charge of people and projects by inspiring the team with a vision and *esprit de corps*.
- **The First** achieves targets and results not seen before.

Visual Aids

A person’s visual appearance also can help creating a brand image. Avon CEO Andrea Jung’s trademark accessory is a double-strand pearl choker that she wears with her power suits, for example. Meg Whitman,

very proactively and managing the same creates a tremendous branding,” he says.

As part of the communication process, Mr. Rao advocates gaining industry-recognized qualifications and setting up a personal website and even a blog. Printed material such as brochures, references and case studies can also help you sell yourself, while conferences and seminars offer opportunities to demonstrate your skills and knowledge to potential employers or clients.

All of this contributes to the creation of an individual identity. Indeed, Mr. Rao refers to himself by his own brand: VSR, PMP.

CEO of eBay, eschews suits for a shirt with the company logo and pants to underscore the egalitarian culture of her company and leadership style. And the fact that she has a cubicle instead of a corner office reinforces that brand positioning.

These visual techniques can seem contrived, but Ms. Kaputa emphasizes the need to find something that's natural to each individual and occasion. "You need to think about the context in which you are appearing," she says. "You need to find your own style and find something that's different and emphasizes the difference about you."

Project managers also should capitalize on presentations and conferences to make a mark. Dump the text-heavy PowerPoint presentations in favor of sparingly used pictorial slides. Project managers should seek to get their point across through memorable,

concise stories and analogies rather than quoting endless facts, figures and case studies.

"Think about how soundbites work or taglines for television commercials," Ms. Kaputa says. "Find a short and interesting way to make your point using five words rather than 50."

Beware of the Oversell

Project managers mustn't let their marketing techniques run too far ahead of their abilities, however. "It is possible to oversell yourself and end up in a job that you are not prepared to fill," says Dale Shaw Ferguson, author of *Marketing Yourself to Employers*. "If you become a powerful marketer, you must accept the responsibility to know enough about the position, the company and its needs to avoid that trap."

An outplacement and recruitment consultant in Perth, Australia, Mr. Ferguson has facilitated many new employment relationships and recommends a definite change in communication strategy as the offer approaches closure. "The closer you are to receiving an offer, the more direct your language should be," he says.

This move from communicating general personal attributes to specific work-related skills should be reflected in the project manager's arsenal of marketing materials. "When asked to submit a résumé, use a detailed one from your toolkit and trim down the unrelated parts mercilessly," he says. "Follow that up with brochures, case studies and a catalog of personal and career highlights—but do that later. Hint at everything that might be important but don't try and prove it during the first contact. Keep feeding information in bite-sized portions and serve them on an as-needed basis."

All these employer-impressing self-marketing techniques should be used sensibly within the context of each new job, project or employee. And that means getting the right balance between communicating tangible results and resorting to attention-seeking hype.

"Telling employers about my strengths and why they should employ me is a great marketing tactic," Mr. Butorac says. "Just bragging about my successes is a poor one. Selling yourself should be about bringing value to your employer or customer and not about telling them how great you are."

Project managers should also ensure the career-improving techniques they use are tailored carefully to their own circumstances. Career management has become such big business that the person you're trying to impress may have read the same self-marketing book as you—and know if your responses are coming from the page rather than the heart.

"Personal marketing techniques are widely known, so you can be sure that your competition will be using them," Mr. Ferguson says. "If you hope to present yourself as a competent manager and serious contender, it will be necessary to carry out a professional job search. Hoping that some stroke of serendipity will put you in the right place at the right time is the amateur's approach." **PM**

Simon Kent is a U.K.-based freelance writer who specializes in human resources, IT and training.

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