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## Developing a personal brand that sells

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When you think of branding, do you assume it's something that only major corporations, sports teams, and entertainers need to focus on? In actuality, branding is necessary for the success of every business - from large real estate chains to sole proprietorships. Individual agents and brokers must consciously design and develop a personal brand in order to build a positive reputation and gain market share.

Most likely, you already have the basis of a personal brand in place. From your logo, business card, and email signature, to your sales results, networking skills, and interpersonal communication style, your brand's foundation exists because of your reputation within your target market. However, it is critical to deliberately grow your brand to use it to its full advantage.

Take the time to analyze your brand to identify what you do best, and conduct some primary market research by asking former and existing clients about their experiences with you. Also, research your competitors to find out how they position themselves. What aspect of your personal style sets you apart? Use all of your collected data as part of your unique selling proposition (USP), a persuasive message that communicates how your services stand out from other agents.

The key to developing a solid brand is consistency. Once you've determined what personal strength(s) to brand, ensure that your USP and/or slogan is included on all client-facing documents and forums - including your web site, stationery, voicemail message, web directories, marketing materials, and social media accounts.

In addition, be cognizant of the fact that every meeting and interaction you have with prospects, clients, and colleagues is part of the personal brand and reputation you are creating. As noted in Realtor Magazine's September 2010 issue, "Your brand image isn't just what you market, it's also every experience a client or prospect has with you. Once you settle on a brand image that really reflects who you are, make sure that your client experience always reflects that" ('Building a Personal Brand,' Kelle Sparta).

Remember that you are your business. When carefully planned and developed, your personal brand will amplify your strengths and start working for you - opening doors, attracting clients, and closing sales. If you find you need assistance in jumpstarting your brand strategy, contact an integrated marketing firm.

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