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PERSONAL BRANDING FOR LIBRARIANS: THE WAY FORWARD

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Transformasi Perpustakaan Melalui Teknologi Maklumat

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Abstract:

Librarians have always been labelled as knowledge gatekeepers and persons who 'shusshhh' people around. However that may be true years and decades ago. Going forward, do we librarians want to be labelled as such? A brand is a promise delivered. It is our reputation and legacy. Branding is a practice of producing trust which when we market our services, we do so with a promise to meet or exit the expectation of the customer.
Academicians talk and discuss the importance of personal branding with fellow students all the time. However some students are just too sceptical to agree and follow the path and information which have been identified for them. Many students are unaware that personal branding does not happen overnight. It takes quite a while for a person to have a personal brand which would suit a person and does not look fake on him or her. This paper discusses the importance of personal branding for all future librarians and how it would assist them to succeed in the challenging working world. It also discusses on how UiTM would create and mould its outstanding future librarians.

Keywords: Personal Branding; Future librarians; Reputation; Legacy

Preamble

What comes to your mind, when you hear the word librarian?

The first few things which cross our mind would be individuals with thick glasses, hair tight in a bun and a person who 'shusshhh' people around. However this may be true years and decades ago. This is the perception which people have towards us, librarians. Going forward, we are going to change these perceptions and this is what this paper is all about.

Whether we like it or not, personal branding is important. If we do not brand our self first, someone else will. Should this happen, people may give a wrong perception and this would affect our brand and our credibility.

A strong personal brand is an important asset in today's online, virtual, and individual age. As a librarian, we should take control of our brand and the message which we send through the way we bring and portray our self to public.

Personal branding is not new. It has always been with us. However most of us just ignore the importance due to ignorance and little knowledge on the- know- how. Most of us believe that branding is only associated with products and items and therefore we tend to forget that we may be a 'product' to an organization. We only associate 'brands' as a corporate identity but we rarely consider ourselves a brand. Many of us are not used to this concept and we don't brand ourselves. We just live our life according to the needs and desire and allow others to make impressions and judge us as they may.

Personal branding does matter to everyone including us librarian as it allows everyone to stand out and be different from other people. A great personal brand is very much needed for us librarians as the image of what the public have on us is very much 'academic' and cruel on us. Having a positive personal brand would allow us to portray the level of knowledge and professionalism which we have.

What is Personal branding?

Personal Branding is the art of attracting and keeping more opportunities by actively shaping public perception. You can control the way you're perceived by the community you serve. (Montoya, P. 2002)

Personal branding is basically the way you market yourself to the world. Your personal brand is what other people think of you. In some ways it's outside your control, but you obviously have some influence over it. (Pavlina, S. 2008)

The term personal branding is relatively young but the concept is nothing new. Everyone has already got a brand. The brand is our reputation and identity and we, the product need to ensure that the reputation is a respectable and a positive reputation. The combination when polished and accentuated can bring tremendous results

The term personal brand was first introduced in 1997 by management guru and author Tom Peters who wrote, "We are CEO's of our own companies: ME Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You'

Personal branding, by definition, is the process by which we market ourselves to others. It describes the process by which individuals and entrepreneurs differentiate themselves and stand out from the crowd by identifying their unique value proposition.

A strong personal brand will help you succeed because it means that you are communicating the sense of purpose, vision and values that reflects and embodies you to other people. (McNally, 1946)

Personal branding - Characteristics for a Librarian

In order to be known as or to be a librarian, a person needs to have certain characteristics. Among the many things which a person need would be education (A bachelor's degree is required, and a master's in library science is a plus) and communication skills. For the purpose of this article, we are to discuss on these issues at length.

Education in the largest sense is any act or experience that has a formative effect on the [mind](), [character]() or physical ability of an individual. In its technical sense, education is the process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated [knowledge](), [skills]() and [values]() from one generation to another. (wikipedia.org/wiki/Education)

Education accumulation affects human well-being in two distinct ways ([Sen, 1997]()). On one hand, it directly increases human qualities and skills for economic production (and re-production) and market exchange. On the other hand, it indirectly enlarges individual opportunity sets by giving people new possibilities to enrich their lives.

By having a good education, it allows a person to be a level higher as compared to those who do not have such knowledge. It also helps librarians to complete a task professionally. This would lead to boost off the confidence and the confidence level gained which would definitely be portrayed in the way on how we bring our self. This is the brand which we want people to have in mind on what librarians are.

[The next one is communication skills]() include lip reading, finger-spelling, sign language and the ability to use language and express information. It is the set of skills that enables a person to convey information so that it is received and understood.

Personal communication is very important as prior to this, people have different and negative perception on librarians but now with a good personal communication skills and approach, this incorrect perception can be change. The good interpersonal skills are knowing the right things to say and they make communication in general, an easy process. Besides knowing what to say, one also needs to be creative and tactful in dealing with customers and users. How we deal with others can greatly influence our professionalism and improving these skills can build confidence to our job.

With good communication skill, we would also be able to remove all barriers which stand in the way towards achieving the personal brand for us, librarians.

How UiTM creates branded librarians

Building personal brand is not a weekend job. It is not only about first impression and looks. Personal branding begins with establishing a list of core competencies, expertise and all recognition received from others. It also should include our uniqueness and skills which we are proud of.

In creating librarians who are professional and with an excellent personal brand, Faculty of Information Management, UiTM with the latest syllabus in this field supplemented by industry attachments, equip students with knowledge and skills to take on the challenging demands to be a professional librarian with an excellent personal brand. We offer professional knowledge through degree studies which consists Information Technologies, Technical Aspects of Information and Public Relations, and Users' Needs and Services.

Faculty of Information Management realize that professional librarians need to do so much online these days, way beyond basic catalogue and database searching, so we provide our students with this technical expertise. Our students are taught to use search engines and use them well so they can find quality online resources. We also teach them on how to troubleshoot problems regarding accessing online library resources.

Having public relation skills is one of the ways to promote ideas and library services. Library services need to be marketed and made known to users. Professional librarians need public relation skills in order to market these services. We teach our students on how to promote library services and new ideas to different stakeholders

Basic knowledge of a personal computer and hardware knowledge are also important for professional librarians. Knowledge on how to save, organize and retrieve documents is vital for professional librarians. Familiarity with hardware will also brand us as an outstanding librarian. In Faculty of Information Management, we teach our students to be familiar with all those things theoretically and practically.

Industrial attachment or Practicum is a real-world library experience before graduating. Our students are made compulsory to undergo industrial training for two months in order to expose them with the professional task in the library. Upon graduation, these students are ready to go to venture into the working world with confidence as they have the theoretical knowledge as well as the hands-on practice.

The combination of all four aspects which are the education through Degree or Masters in Library Science, an outstanding Public Relation skills, some knowledge in IT and some experience in the working world during industrial attachment, a brand for professional librarian is now being created.

How Professional Librarians and its brand help organizations?

Every organization has its mission and vision which it has to be achieved. Each one and every mission is getting done through its employee with the guide from managers. Objective, mission and vision can be achieved successfully if the working atmosphere, relationship, culture, values are the same and shared by all parties involved. This can be done at the entry or selection stage. The same basis goes to the environment in the library.

At the entry level is a situation where employers would try to select and fit the values or brand which the candidates have, to what the organization wants. Perfect match of brand between the future librarian and the organization have to be made in heaven. It has to match both parties brand as this would lead to a great working relationship. Future librarians who are in consensus with an organization's brand are more likely to act consistently in ways supporting how the organization hopes that external constituencies perceive it and its products/services. Researches have also been done to show the correlation between good working relationship do contribute to high performance and job satisfaction among employees and employer.

Conclusion

Building a professional brand for us librarian is too important to ignore. This brand is a must-have business tool for today's librarians. One needs to understand that, should you are not able to create a brand of its own, it is just another way of saying that I as a person is a person who could not care less about what is happening around us. By having a brand, it shows that you are serious about what you are venturing and this creates confidence in the employer. Many will understand and realize that personal branding is never stagnant. One has to be very open and ready for dramatic changes.

Personal Brand keeps on changing with the current environment, one's career directions and also as one mature in their position in an organization and situation. We librarians need not be an expert in IT and other library tools, but now we need to be on the move with the current and up to date changes as demand needed by the industry. We can never rely on the old method of doing things, catalog cards and library cards alone as to be acknowledge as professional librarians.

A professional librarian brand would attract the vibration to an environment and shelve away the negative perception which the public have on us.

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