

Chapter 3 Your Business Identity

“Who am I - to them?” - is the question you must ask, and once you have the answer, the task is to decide how you are going to present yourself and your business to the larger market.

Who you are to them needs to be your decision, not theirs. How you present yourself and your business is critical because people out there cannot resist, within the first 7 seconds, attaching a ‘label’ to you and your business.

It’s how we’ve all been trained - to recognise and categorise stuff quickly - usually into one of three ‘boxes’.

- 1 Not interested, bin, ignore
- 2 Interested, will look at it ‘later’ - when I get round to it
- 3 Very interested, just what I’m looking for. Act now or put on priority ‘do list’

It’s not as simple as that obviously, but that’s how you, as a new business owner, need to be thinking -

“What will cause ‘them’ to put ‘you’ in the bin, in the file, or on the ‘do list’?”

Branding

Let’s start with your ‘brand’ - and what actually **is** your brand?

Your brand is made up of a number of things

- Your Business Name
- Your ‘logo’ or any specific graphic associated with your business

- Your domain name
- Your e-mail address
- Your phone number
- **You** - and your photo - which could form a major part of your brand because people are going to do business with **you!**

These are the mistakes that people and businesses make with branding:

- Saying too much in the brand as a whole about what the business offers *unless* the offering is in reality very, very specific and you are targeting a very specific niche market.

It's very easy to turn people off with a brand that's too specific, or too generic. The reaction will be "I don't want that" as assumptions are made about what your business does and doesn't do.

Unless of course, 'turning people off', disqualifying them, is what you want to do.

- Using a domain name that is too long and too descriptive. As a rule of thumb, the main part of the name (before the .com etc.) should not be more than 20 characters. Sometimes people will need or want to type it in, so don't put them off.

The name should not include underscores as often they are not seen, but it can include hyphens.

- Using an email address that is **not** in the form `yourname@yourdomainname.[ext]`.

Email

Using gmail, hotmail, btconnect, me, aol, outlook, or any other generic or ‘free’ email totally destroys your credibility and may in any case often go straight to a junk mail folder!

Also, using an email address that starts with ‘sales@’! Really! How crazy can you get? Also avoid all the other ‘generic’ addresses like info@, enquiries@, hello@ and so on.

Always use a personal name, preferably your own, or, if you don’t want to do that (and I can’t think of a reason why you’d want to ‘hide’ in that way) you can use any first name.

Your enquirer is unaware that their email to angela@yourbiz.com is actually going to the sales team!

This is easy to set up. When you register a domain name you simply set up email addresses @ that domain name and redirect them to whatever email account such as a gmail or outlook address that you already have and then set the outbound mails to look as if they come from your business email address.

Of course, you can also take the little extra trouble needed to do it ‘properly’.

How to set this all up is dealt with step by step in the PBCS

Image & Name

The actual design of your brand and logo is extremely important, including the colours that are used, and the ‘shape’ of the design. A good designer will understand the psychology of colour and not just use colours that happen to be ‘fashionable’ at the time.

Along with this goes the business name and for a personal business I would very strongly recommend that you incorporate your own name or use something ‘meaningless’ (like Apple, Blackberry, Wildshark, Google, Virgin, Pink Spaghetti, Clever Jellyfish,

Yellow Jigsaw, etc). These are all real brand names, some of which you will recognise.

The thing is that they all started out as personal businesses with one or two 'founders', and you cannot dismiss them until you know what they offer.

Examples of 'owner name' brands include Ford, Ferrari, Amstrad (A M Sugar Trading), Dyson, Hoover, Sainsbury's, Morrison's, Eddie Stobart, Rolls Royce, Marks & Spencer, and so on - you'll be surprised.

It's so important to put *your own name* to the business, it shows belief and commitment.

Having decided on the name the next thing to consider is how it appears and the image it creates - and that rather depends on the target market.

You'll need a different image if you're an accountant than you would if you were a hairdresser, a different image as a life coach than as a plasterer - and so on.

Your image needs to be one that both attracts your target market and that they relate to and are comfortable with.

But then there is an accountant I know who has a totally outrageous image (for an accountant) but one that does relate to *his* target market.

Depending on what it is that your business offers (and your target market), you may wish to reflect this in what you wear - branded clothing or a uniform of some sort, sports wear if that's your niche. Male or female, just because you own a 'business' doesn't mean you have to wear a 'suit'.

Business and personal branding also carries over to vehicles in some cases, although I'm never sure if anyone takes much notice

of what's written on the back of your van or car, and when they do it's usually someone who wants to sell *you* something! It's best just to focus on your brand.

Cards

The next thing to consider is your 'presence and credibility' and this starts with your business card.

Yes – You still need a physical Business Card. It's a tangible and much more memorable representation of YOU than any electronic or 'virtual' card

Rule No. 1 - **always** carry a few business cards with you wherever and whatever, you never know when you might need one and have to admit that you don't have a card - which means that your business isn't *that* important to you - credibility score falls by several points!

Rule No. 2 - your business card is NOT an advertising flyer. Keep it simple. All they want is your contact details, not a sales pitch on the card, and if you give them too much 'information;' they may decide that you're not a 'fit' for them anyway.

I'm not convinced that 'shaped' cards or small, or square cards are any better than a regular A7 card. They tend to be perceived as a bit 'cute' and maybe not 'serious'. Again - keep it simple.

Web Presence

As a business owner you must, yes must, have a website, more of which later, and you must have a profile on LinkedIn, and, if you are in the consumer market on Facebook as well. Some types of business, especially those involved with graphics, photography or video may also want to be on Instagram.

The PBCS goes into this in more detail and helps you set it all up, but here are just a few priorities.

Your social media profile and website **must** have a professionally produced ‘headshot’ of YOU. Regardless of what it offers this is **your** business and your clients and customers want to know about **you**.

Good as your smartphone might be, it’s not good enough for this, and you should invest in a professional photo session early in the process.

And on these business social media profiles, please - no dogs, cats, ‘other halves’ (unless you are operating the business together), no casual ‘party’ pictures, no cartoons and definitely no company logos in place of your ‘headshot’.

My immediate reaction to not seeing someone’s picture on LinkedIn or a Facebook business page is “Why are they hiding, what/who are they hiding from?” Be open and honest. **Show your face** - it shows your confidence and belief in yourself and your business.

No face - no confidence - next!

If you have academic or other qualifications only show them in the headline if they are *relevant* to what you do and keep it simple. I’m sorry but nobody really cares if you got a 1st or 2nd class honours degree or a distinction or whatever. Also, if you have a national honour such as the OBE, only show it in your headline if it’s *relevant*.

All your hard-earned qualifications and honours have little relevance in the eyes of a potential purchaser. What they want is evidence that you can provide them with the benefits they want, and this comes from elsewhere.

It’s not about *you* – it’s about **them**!

Location

So much for you, this is explored more deeply in the PBCS; but what about your location, where you are and where you operate from?

Once again it depends.

What benefit are you delivering? Does it depend on where you are geographically? If so you have to provide different information and a different marketing message to something that is not geographically constrained. This is covered later in this book.

However.

People will check on your business address - because they can.

When they search for you on Google a picture of where you are, or somewhere close by may come up and people can see on Google Maps and Streetview exactly what you 'look like'.

There's not a lot you can do about this if you work from home, but if you have business premises, make sure that they 'look good' from the outside.

Don't use a PO Box address as people find these 'suspicious' and avoid using a stock registered office address, or the address of your accountant, which is not where you actually operate from.

Potential purchases will think you are trying to hide something, and these sorts of addresses are often sold on the basis of keeping your real address private or even 'secret'. What type of image is that?

Hey, you're running a business - you want people to engage with **you** - to find you - so why hide?

It also affects your Google search ranking when the addresses given in the domain name register are not consistent with those on the site.

There is no real advantage in renting ‘prestigious’ office space unless you are perhaps a lawyer or in certain high-end markets dealing with seriously high net worth clients, though if you were, you’d probably go to see them anyway.

Which brings me to the vehicle you drive. Sometimes this will be a van, sometimes a car. There is really only one rule. It doesn’t matter what make it is or how old it is as long as it is regularly serviced and reliable.

All you need to do is to **keep it clean**, and if for some reason you can’t do that just park it out of sight!

Communication

Part of your ‘presence’ is to do with how easy (or difficult) you make it for people to contact you - because that’s what you want. You don’t want to be cold calling - **you want people to call you** as a result of your marketing efforts.

Nowadays you can forget about ‘non-geographic numbers’. People don’t trust them and hate to be paying a premium rate to call you. Most people have unlimited free calls on their mobile phone anyway - to mobiles as well as landlines.

You can though, if you wish, use freephone numbers where **you** pay for the call and this does give people the message that you value them.

Mobile or landline for people to call you?

If you have premises or an office which is ‘manned’ it should be a landline, if you don’t, and are often ‘on the move’, show a mobile number.

Unlike a few years ago, people are more comfortable about calling a mobile number - but they **do** expect you to be at the other end of it!

Your contact details as a personal business owner should be personal, at least at the start.

Phone calls come to **you**, emails come to **you**, post comes to **you**, and all these details should be shown on your business card and must be shown (this is a legal requirement for any company) on your business stationery (letterheads, invoices etc.) AND on your website.

If you see other companies or businesses not showing their company details and are just using a 'contact form' then it's not OK for you to follow suit. They are breaking the law.

Be aware that once you become a 'business' then the business does not carry the same protection under the GDPR as does an individual.

Intellectual Property

This brings me to the topic of Intellectual Property, Copyright, and Trademarks and how what you do and what is unique to you, can be protected.

Nothing is *completely* protected, especially outside the UK and EU, and the USA has slightly different rules and terminology which is sometimes confusing.

Intellectual Property (IP) is anything that you have personally created - this book is my intellectual property and subject to copyright.

In most cases proving that you have the right to IP and 'Copyright' is simple - just prove that you did it first and make a statement like the one at the front of this book to say so. There are formal ways of doing this which are included in the PBCS, but usually it is very simple.

Problems arise however when what you have written or created is very similar to what someone else has also done. There are many cases of two or more people having the ‘same idea’ at the same time and creating something very similar.

This is where the IP lawyers make their money, especially at the next level which concerns trademarks and patents.

A trademark ® or ™ is simply a formal recognition by a government agency that you own and have exclusive right to a specific brand which may be a word or words with or without an associated image (which may be a moving image).

The way it works is simple - you submit it, it’s checked for ‘originality’ and then published to allow people to object to it. If there are no objections during the next two months you receive a certificate of registration and in the UK are allowed to use the symbol ® after you ‘mark’ or brand.

What they look for when scrutinising an application is that it is not ‘generic’ and does not consist of common words. It has to be unique and specific.

The Personal Business Creation System will take you through this process in detail.

Patents are more complex and are applied to a product or a process. There are several companies around who will take you through the somewhat arduous process of getting a patent if this is applicable to you. It is quite expensive.

Finally, one of the things that you may want to do, as part of your identity, is look at some form of ongoing education, personal development, or if you are an accredited professional, CPD (continuing professional development) to keep your image, identity, and credibility up to date.