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CREATE YOUR BRAND ESSENCE

MBA CAREER MANAGEMENT

FOSTER
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

Employers are seeking candidates who are passionate about their businesses, able to demonstrate initiative in ambiguous situations, and keenly aware of their professional identity. The new business model emphasizes getting things done fast, communicating with influence and being customer-centric. How can you best respond to employers' expectations and position yourself for long-term success in the job market today?



MBA students must ask themselves some critical questions: In what ways am I suited for an MBA level job? What makes me a successful candidate? What are my strengths? What traits have I shown that employers will find desirable? Which experiences – past, present and future – make me suitable for a given, desired position that will place me on a path for a successful career?

MBA candidates must effectively create a brand for themselves to project a clear and focused image in a prospective employer's mind, establishing a connection at an emotional level. Scott Bedbury, branding guru and former marketing executive at Starbucks and Nike, underscores the emotional dimension of branding in his book *A New Brand World*: *"A great brand taps into emotions. Emotions drive most, if not all, of our decisions. A brand reaches out with a powerful connecting experience. It's an emotional connecting point that transcends the product."*

You can benefit from applying branding tools successful companies use by focusing on their image and creating an emotional connection when approaching prospective employers.

Brand Essence is a step-by-step process that offers you a way to discover the most important points of a career and create statements that best describe your individual brand. You may also use this exercise to create stories for interviews and conversations.

Branding is Key to Any Business; Self-Branding is Critical for MBA Students

As an MBA student, you must create a transformative brand. Learning who you are, what you have to offer and how you can communicate that clearly are the key goals of the process. Warren Bennis described this awareness in his classic book *On Becoming a Leader*: *"(1) becoming self-expressive; (2) listening to the inner voice; (3) learning from the right mentors; and (4) giving oneself over to a guiding vision."*

Brand Essence allows an MBA candidate to make new discoveries of career-relevant skills, behaviors and traits which are captured through a template and discussion – which is then identified, discussed and analyzed.

The Brand Essence tool was created by MBA Career Management at the University of Washington Michael G. Foster School of Business. MBA students find their strengths and unique professional attributes, and package them in distinct brand essence statements and a tagline that reflect their unique value.



How to Start the Brand Essence Process

In the Brand Essence process, students engage in a rich dialogue prompted by a series of questions delivered by a facilitator. A review of words and phrases are drawn from an analysis of their résumé/CVs. A process of distillation follows in which a résumé/CV is first analyzed for highlights. Next, brand attributes are identified thoughtfully in discussion with the student, leading to the creation of brand essence statements – all of which are further refined into a concise tagline.

Step 1: Fill-in Résumé/CV highlights (5-10 minutes)

You will identify key skills, achievements and experience described in your résumé/CV. Next, particular attention is given to skills that appear repeatedly and/or represent distinctive personal qualities that contribute to your brand. Next, you will be prompted to include experiences that may not appear on your résumé/CV but are significant and related to your professional goals and endeavors. These can be volunteer experiences or extra-curricular programs.

Step 2: Identify Brand Attributes (5-10 Minutes)

Brand attributes represent your style and work behaviors. How do you get things done? What would people (i.e. colleagues, friends, family) say about how you work? What is important to you at work and in volunteer activities? Are you a leader, achiever, great connector and/or socially responsible? To complete the second column on the template, list nouns, adjectives and phrases that express what made them successful in these situations in the form of brief, empowering descriptors.

Step 3: Create Brand Essence Statements (10-15 minutes)

Now, you will review the first two columns and circle all experiences, adjectives and phrases that most resonate with you. Using the brand essence template analyze and synthesize dimensions of both professional experience and personality traits. Résumé/CV highlights in combination with brand attributes are transformed into brand essence statements. Through deeper self-awareness, brand essence statements provide you with greater clarity and confidence in your professional brand.

RÉSUMÉ/CV HIGHLIGHTS

MBA Consultant: MARKETING DIRECTOR:

- Entrepreneurial
 - Bootstrap marketing
 - Agile product development
 - Go to market strategy
 - Sort through ambiguity

Marketing Research: SR ANALYST:

- Project Management (100+)
 - Process improvements
 - Vendor selection and management
 - Execution under tight timelines
- Data Collection and Analytics
 - Strong communication skills
 - Qualitative and quantitative deduction
- Creative solutions to complex problems
 - Understand strategic implications and indirect consequences
- Highlights
 - Fortune 500 clients: tech & healthcare (MSFT, Intel)
 - Findings cited in 15+ research and PR publications
 - Supervised 2 junior analysts

ADDITIONAL LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE:

- Teachers Assistant, EMBA and TMMBA core marketing
- Soccer coach (15 years)

1

BRAND ATTRIBUTES

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS:

- Analytical and investigative
- Strong communication, interpretation and listening skills
- Strategic road-mapping and decision making
- Creative and open-minded
- Team oriented, 'teacher' mentality
- Efficient, timely and hard working

PREFERENCES/VALUES:

- B2C marketing management role
- Must be passionate about product/service
- Entrepreneurial and innovative company culture
- Collaborative, team-oriented environment

2

BRAND ESSENCE

- Chris is able to analyze, interpret, and synthesize complex data, providing insights and strategic decisions
- He enjoys exploratory thinking and the creative process
- He leverages the strengths of others to drive action and results

3

Step 4: Create Tagline (10-15 minutes)

Once the resume/CV highlights and brand attributes are transformed into one or more brand essence statements, refine the statement(s) into a single, concise tagline.

TAGLINE

Dedicated to create positive change through creative solutions

4

FOSTER

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BRAND
ESSENCE

TAGLINE

CAREER
HIGHLIGHTS

BRAND
ATTRIBUTES

"The exercise gave me a framework for how I want to present myself to employers. Whenever I get asked a question along the lines of "walk me through your résumé," I go through my experiences and focus on the three core ideas that I came up with in [this exercise]. Even when I get a more specific behavioral question, I try to convey at least one (if not more of the main qualities that I identified as being my brand essence. Also, it was helpful in preparing for interviews in that when I was coming up with stories/examples for behavioral questions, it allowed me to narrow down which examples exemplified the brand I was trying to instill in my interviewers."

–John Czerniak, UW FOSTER MBA 2015

"Coming from a consulting background where I worked on a wide variety of business projects, I initially struggled to identify my brand. [This] exercise helped me think through my most significant accomplishments and attributes, and form a clear picture of who I am as a professional. Not only did this exercise help me understand and communicate my brand to others, but it also served as a basis for identifying career opportunities that matched well with my professional profile."

–Zach Gretch, UW FOSTER MBA 2014

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