

Brand IR, Brand You – the perception and future of IR depends on you



Executive recruiter **Oskar Yasar** believes the continued success of IR and its credibility is dependent upon those within it.

The remarkable transformation of today's IR professional and the affirmative positioning, perception and credibility of IR as a profession is something we should all be proud.

However, the future of IR is now no longer dependent on the backgrounds of these entrants and incumbent IROs but how they see their future aspirations and most importantly, how they present this to their internal and external stakeholders. Much has been said, particularly in the US, about how senior business leaders now need to present themselves and their key messages in a consistent, coherent and forward thinking way. Gone are the days when senior managers just got on with their jobs – a successful business leader is one who understands the power of

communications and branding – not least their own branding.

A significant majority of today's business leaders, politicians and professional advisers now know their careers are dependent on how they present themselves to their respective markets. So, with the high level of competition and the higher demands on senior managers, those who are successful – and this is a thread which runs through all successful and modern senior managers – know what their own personal brand is. Individual and personal branding and what this means to stakeholders is as crucial as what you say and how you go about saying it.

Brand You

As Tom Peters, global brand expert points out in his recent article for *Fast Company* magazine, "Big companies understand the importance of brands. Today, in the age of the individual, you have to be your own brand and be the CEO (or CFO) of Me Inc." But I believe it's more prosaic than that. Having helped to place more than 340 senior IROs into a variety of roles globally, I can immediately see which of the considerable number of candidates we interview are innately aware of their own personal brand – and these are much easier to present to clients and much more likely to win those top jobs.

It's no longer just about that firm handshake. It's a simple equation but one which we spend a considerable amount of time assessing with our candidates to formulate and understand critically their own personal brand, how it should come across and how much they must believe in it. If you don't know what you are worth how can anyone else know your value?

Brand You and Brand Them – believing and communicating your brand

It can be an excruciating and terribly un-British way to behave, with a perception of being selfish and ego driven. Yet in a report

BRAND IR, BRAND YOU

- The future of IR depends on how IROs see their aspirations and how they present this to all stakeholders.
- Successful IROs, like business managers, must be aware of their own personal brand.
- You must continually develop and sharpen your narrative – develop a personal pitch presentation.

‘ If you don't know what you are worth how can anyone else know your value? ’

which the Broome Yasar Partnership is about to publish on the career trajectory of today's successful business leaders (CEOs, MDs, NEDs etc) who have come from an IR or a corporate communications background, the common thread which runs through nearly all of these is their ambition. This is coupled with a core career growth objective and an innate understanding and belief in their own brands – Brand Them in action.

Over the past 10 years we have also seen a high number of IROs move into senior management roles, including my first ever IR placement more than 12 years ago who is now a successful CFO of a recently listed FTSE 250 company. In my last article in *Informed*, I pointed out that these



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candidates always had a burning sense of knowing what they wanted. As one pointed out to me for our report: "You're every bit as much a brand as the company you work for."

Brand You – planning

You no longer have an outmoded CV. You've got a marketing brochure for Brand You. Instead of a list of titles held and positions occupied, your personal brand brochure brings to life the skills you've developed, the strategic projects you've delivered and the achievements you want to take credit for. And as with any brilliant marketing collateral, yours needs consistent and constant updating to reflect the breadth and depth of Brand You.

Ultimately, we believe you should focus on developing and sharpening your narrative – develop a mental pitch presentation if you have to. The market is much more competitive for roles than it has ever been. Gone are the days when it was very much a candidate-driven market, with four to five roles in the frame at any one time. Clients are more demanding and the excess supply issue means we all need to raise our professional game.

A colleague, Jo Moss, puts it more bluntly: "We all know the decision to buy is an emotional one and in the end if you are not clear about what you are offering the buyer might miss it."

IR as a brand – not just a profession

I have always believed that developing, nurturing, protecting and promoting the

TOP TIPS FOR CLIMBING THE IR CAREER LADDER

- Start by identifying the qualities or characteristics that have made you 'great' and distinctive from your peers.
- It is essential to be remembered for the right reasons – know what your talents, values and objectives are – define them and carry them through.
- Focus on your relationships with core stakeholders, both internally as well as externally, and have the confidence to be seen as an important and pivotal player in the corporate mix. Become more visible in your market; and increase your visibility, both internally and externally.
- Make the most of your networks – don't turn down networking events and dinners, particularly those involving the IR Society!
- Build your brand online using blogs, LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter – it still baffles me why some IROs refuse to appear on LinkedIn.
- Attract people who want what you do in the way that you do it.
- Build, not burn – don't burn any of those proverbial bridges – it still fascinates me that some people go to a lot of effort to dismantle a bridge, when it actually takes less effort to build and to expand a bridge – why waste the energy.
- Practise, practise and then practise again for that ultimate job interview. A number of senior candidates arrive at a juncture in their career where they forget what's made them great. They are brilliant at defining their company key messages but when it comes to defining their own messages they fall flat.
- AND GET SOME HELP! It's lonely at the top and those executives who take some time out to focus on their personal development are those who excel further in the long term. Speak to an executive coach – in most cases your company will pay for it – and speak to your headhunter, or those who know the trade and the market.

world of IR collectively will be better for all of our futures. The more we do, the more credibility we have and the more career aspirations will be realised.

Yet more selfishly, to succeed in today's competitive environment, you have to know yourself and be able to

communicate your core brand messages to the outside world. Just as you would define, agree and communicate your company key messages to the outside world you have to do it for you – blow that proverbial trumpet because if you don't blow it, no one will hear. ■

Time to move up? Need to find an IRO?

The best jobs can be found on the IR Society's
Job Zone www.irs.org.uk

Reach the best candidates for your IR vacancy – place your listing in The Investor Relations Society's Job Zone on the website – www.irs.org.uk – at a very modest cost for a month and you will instantly target the best qualified group of IR professionals in the UK and Europe. It works!



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