

Personal branding



CAREER
STUDIO

What is personal branding?

Personal branding is all about how you appear to others in the professional world and, specifically, to your target audience which could be employers, further study providers, fellow professionals, clients, potential customers, etc. It's about how you give a consistent message, and image, about yourself, establish your reputation and credibility and create recognition as an expert in your field.

Why should I use personal branding?

To be successful. You have chosen to come to university and become a graduate professional in your field. At the end of your studies you will be looking for graduate level work, further study or even setting up your own business. But, so will lots of other graduates, and you need to stand out from these to be able to compete.


How do I create my brand?

You need to have a consistent brand message that you use on your CV, LinkedIn profile, website, blog, introduction and elevator pitch. You also need to think about your professional appearance and behaviour and who your target audience are and what they want. Then you can start to be proactive and build your reputation using social media.


1. Your brand message: the beginning

This is the easy bit! Answer these questions:

- What's your name?
- What are you studying at Staffordshire University? (use the full title, eg BA, BSc, MA, Hons etc)
- What level of study are you? (eg: are you a first year, finalist or postgraduate?)

 **Task:** The first line of your personal brand – fill in the blanks:

A (level of study) (full degree title) at/from Staffordshire University.

 **Task:** Have a go at using this to introduce yourself:

Hi, I'm (your name) and I'm a (level of study) (full degree title) at/from Staffordshire University.


Practice saying this out loud. It sounds good doesn't it? Behaving like a professional person starts with this simple thing, introducing yourself fully and in a confident manner and you can start doing this from the beginning of your studies at university.



For example: Hi, I'm Georgia and I'm a final year BA Hons Surface Pattern Design student at Staffordshire University.

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2. Your brand message: the bit in the middle

 **Task:** Think broadly about work, your studies, home, family, hobbies, interests, past experiences and successes when answering these questions. This is a brainstorm, so write down what comes into your head without any value judgements. Take your time with this part - you could even keep a daily journal for a few weeks and note down things as they occur to you. Answer the following questions and then create a sentence or two summarising the key points.

1. What do you stand for?
2. What excites/energises you?
3. What are you good at? It can be helpful to ask others who know you well to give their thoughts about this one.
4. What experience have you had?

For example: Georgia is studying surface pattern design at Staffs Uni.

- What do you stand for? I care about the environment – I hate fast fashion and I am passionate about recycling
- What excites you? I'm most energised when creating vintage inspired patterns for fabric and upcycling clothes
- What are you good at? Capturing the nostalgia of the 1940s and 50s
- What experience have you had? I've had a placement in the design department of a fashion house



Georgia's 'bit in the middle': I use my love of 1940s and 50s nostalgia to design printed fabrics and make unique, one off items of clothing. I am passionate about the environment and incorporate upcycled garments in my collections.

For example: Asif is in his second year studying law at Staffordshire University.

- What do you stand for? Equality of opportunities, family, community, justice.
- What excites you? Representing the disadvantaged. Getting results. Success!
- What are you good at? Writing legal arguments, debating/negotiating.
- What experience have you had? Advising community through SULAC and I am a volunteer advocate for the homeless.



Asif's 'bit in the middle': I am passionate about justice and equal opportunities and have used this to advocate for the disadvantaged as part of a student-led legal advice clinic.

3. Your brand message: the bit at the end

This final part of your brand statement is your conclusion which is your opportunity to let the listener/reader understand your ambition and what you are specifically looking for or what you can offer. So, for example, a second-year student might be looking for work experience, and a final year student might be looking for a graduate job. Once you have graduated and are established in your career, this 'bit at the end' would change to what you can offer the reader.



Task: What do you want? Jot down your thoughts and ideas about what you want and then summarise this in a sentence.



For example: Georgia's 'bit at the end': I plan to take part in a scheme for self-employed graduates to support me as I set up my fashion brand.



For example: Asif plans to become a solicitor and is currently looking for a vacation training placement during the next summer break. His 'bit at the end': I am currently sourcing a vacation training placement with a firm of solicitors, ideally specialising in family law, to build on my advocacy experience and support my application for Legal Practice Course.

4. Pulling it all together

It's now time to pull it all together to create a brand statement. You can do this as we suggest: the 'start', the 'bit in the middle' and the 'bit at the end', or you may have your own ideas – there are no hard and fast rules. Keep it short and succinct, though, as no one has time to read or listen to a paragraph of text. Remember to amend your brand statement regularly – you, and what you want, will change throughout your studies, and into your working life. There are some examples at the end of the leaflet for inspiration.

5. Your target audience and competitors

When thinking about your brand it is helpful to consider what your customers want and who your competitors are. Who are you directing your brand message to? Do you meet their criteria/share their views, outlook or ambition? Research the organisations you want to work for, or the study providers you want to study with and make sure you match their requirements. Use their language and terminology. This way you will have the right tags in your profile and will appear in LinkedIn searches.

Consider your competitors. Who will they be? What will you have in common? How can you be different and stand out from them?

6. Your professional, physical image

How do other people in your line of work look and behave? In some professions it's OK to stand out, but others are more conservative. Don't stand out for the wrong reasons. So, if we go back to Georgia who wants to be a self-employed designer – she can reflect her brand in the way she looks by wearing her own fashion. Asif, however, who wants to be a solicitor needs to dress as smartly, and conservatively, as possible. His look needs to give a professional and trustworthy vibe.

7. Build your online presence

- Take a professional headshot when you are dressed appropriately – best done standing in

front of a plain background. Use them in LinkedIn, and your other professional social media, etc.

- Create a LinkedIn profile using your professional headshot and your brand statement. Keep it working for you by joining groups, connecting with fellow professionals and networking. Regularly post items.
- Lock down your private social media, like Facebook, so that employers can't see it.
- Create a blog or use Instagram as a blog.
- Create a professional email address just for your career activities. Try and get one as close to your name as possible – for example Jane.Doe@gmail.com. Create an email signature that's unique to you. Include all of your contact information, your professional social media, online portfolio, website or blog.
- Get on twitter – brand it up – follow employers and influencers and make posts.
- Make sure your online portfolio is on brand and uses the same messaging.

8. What can I post about?

- Share articles and comments and posts of others.
- Creatives can talk about the work of artists/designers they admire.
- Write articles about current trends to demonstrate you are up to date.
- Link your blog to LinkedIn and include it on your CV and email signature.

9. Behaving like a professional

Start to behave like a professional. You have come to university to undertake higher level study with a view to continuing into the world of work at a graduate level. Professional people turn up on time for meetings, are polite, don't get distracted by their phones or social media, pay attention and get involved . . . so do the same as a student. It's all good practice for when you graduate.

10. Some example brand messages:



For example: Hi, I'm Georgia and I'm a final year BA Hons Surface Pattern Design student at Staffordshire University. I use my love of 1940s and 50s nostalgia to design printed fabrics and make unique, one off items of clothing. I am passionate about the environment and incorporate upcycled garments in my collections. I plan to take

part in a scheme for self-employed graduates to support me as I set up my fashion brand.



For example: Hi, I'm Asif and I'm a second year LLB Hons student at Staffordshire University. I am passionate about justice and equality of opportunities and have used this to advocate for the disadvantaged in my local community. I am currently sourcing a vacation training placement with a firm of solicitors to build on my advocacy experience and support my application for Legal Practice Course.

How can I get further support?

You can receive peer to peer career support from our Career Coaches who can be found in our Career Studio in the Student Hub, Science Centre on Leek Road. The Career Studio is open Monday-Thursday 10am-6pm and Friday 10am-4.30pm. You can also receive career support via email at careers@staffs.ac.uk.

Other leaflets in this series:

Networking

Work experience

Graduate job hunting

Available online at www.staffs.ac.uk
or from the Career Studio