

# Personal Branding: A Primer for Radiology Trainees and Radiologists

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## Abstract

A radiologist's personal brand is a composite of many parts in one's professional life. In an age where work quality and digital footprints are tracked and measured more than ever before, it behooves radiologists to develop and curate their own individual brands in effective ways. Personal branding consists of the decisions we make, both consciously and unconsciously, which affect our reputation and the likelihood of seeking our services in the future for both patients and referring providers. As hospital systems are increasingly adjusting their systems to cater to better patient experiences, it is imperative that radiologists similarly adjust our practice patterns to accommodate the needs of the new paradigm of value-based care. It is no longer sufficient to only practice excellent clinical radiology; one's service experience to clinical providers, report quality, and digital presence must all be robust and compelling. Defining your brand and promoting your vision and quality standards have become as important to radiologists' future as keeping up with advancements in radiologic technology. One must select the proper platforms and types of interactions in which to engage from available social media options. Developing a consistent brand and presence in the work setting, on social media accounts, and in professional organizations at the local, national, and international levels is the ultimate goal. At present, very little, if any, formal training is provided on personal branding skills such as these in current residency curricula, and it is critical for radiologists to fill their gaps in knowledge through additional means.

**Key Words:** Branding, social media, leadership, value-based care

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent times, the term “personal branding” has achieved a sort of ubiquity in the lay press and in the business space, though a clear definition of what it is and how it is carried out often escapes us. Yet, it has never been more important to cultivate a strong and positive personal brand, especially in one's professional sphere. In an age of growing social media presence among physicians [1] and the existence of

ever-expanding patient portals allowing access to radiologists' reports, we are present even where we may not know it. Our work quality and digital footprints are being tracked and measured more than ever before—why not take charge of the message?

A personal brand is, simply put, the things we are associated with—for example, the quality of our work, the messages we convey, the principles we espouse and those we stand against, the actions we take in particular circumstances, and more. It is our image, what we become known for. Personal branding, then, is the collection of experiences and actions that help define one's personal brand. Just as in the business world an unambiguous position on key issues and an emphasis on quality differentiates brands in a crowded marketplace, an unambiguous and strong *personal* brand often pays huge dividends for physicians and institutions. The overarching goal of personal branding in radiology is often to be known for two things: quality and reliability.

Personal branding differs in important ways from *institutional branding*, and the two may not always align.

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Prominent institutional brands conjure up consistent and particular ideals and notions in most people's minds (i.e. they are pervasive and powerful in their messages). Institutional branding is perhaps best exemplified by strong brands in the corporate world such as Apple, Inc, which made a strategic decision to focus its brand on usability and the human connection to technology. This allowed the company to connect with customers on a deeper level and build an individual connection to the products exemplified by iconic ads in the "I'm a Mac" campaign [2].

There are intentional and unintentional components to one's personal brand. Individual *marketing* is considered an intentional component of branding, such as when you deliver a polished "elevator pitch" when someone asks what you do. Such a delivery, if executed well, leaves a powerful and lasting impression of confidence and proficiency. Another example of an intentional component of personal brand is the manner of conversation you have with referring providers - how pleasant and helpful they find an experience with you. In radiology, referring physicians who receive personalized attention and a prompt and accurate answer to question(s) have a positive encounter because of the perceived importance placed on that relationship. Such a radiologist often becomes a "preferred" consultant, enhancing other clinicians' experience and ultimately helping to expedite and optimize patient care. To use the term "branding" as it originated in marketing discussions, the radiologist in this case "differentiated a product, service (or behaviors) from competitors" [3].

Examples of unintentional or unconscious components of one's personal brand include the quality of work one becomes known for over time and the degree of confidence a person inspires in others that s/he will get a job done when committed to do so. In the specialty of radiology, one's reputation of service and quality certainly precedes oneself. That is the essence of the personal brand. Whereas *reputation* is based on past deeds, *brand* is more forward-looking and determines how well one will perform and compete in a marketplace of options and how likely one's services will be sought again in the future.

Personal branding in radiology is critical for professional success and the ability to thrive in the new practice paradigm of value-based care. Strong brands build momentum, which helps to open ever further doors of opportunity. Indeed, it is in the interest of all radiologists to make conscientious, deliberate decisions to influence our brands in the eyes of our patients and referring providers. Actively crafting our personal brands allows us

to influence the opinions of others; by "not making a decision," others will make those decisions for you. We must work to create a valuable and pleasurable experience for patients and providers alike as they seek our services and expertise. Such efforts can distinguish one radiology provider from another and contribute to the ongoing success of that entity, from both a patient care and a financial standpoint. Indeed, "branding can outweigh and counteract efforts by the competition to supplant a practice or erode a practice's market share" [4].

## BRANDING SUCCESS STORIES

Examples of successful personal branding among radiologists abound.

Dr Cheri Canon, Chair of the Diagnostic Radiology Department at The University of Alabama at Birmingham, shared her individual branding at the 2016 RLI Summit. As with many leaders further along in their careers, Dr Canon did not start out to intentionally develop a brand. Rather, it arose organically from her passions and eventual expertise. Education has been the cornerstone of her academic pursuits, which has allowed for leadership opportunities locally as well as nationally. With national exposure and influence, her brand as educator was solidified. Dr Canon reported becoming more deliberate with personal leadership development, as she quickly recognized that on-the-job learning is not always ideal. Namely, when observing successful leaders, she saw that emotional intelligence (EQ) seemed to differentiate top performers from others. Unlike intelligence quotient (IQ), EQ can be developed and continually improved. Emotional intelligence has been described in the literature as "the ability to understand and respond to emotions in daily life" [5] At higher levels of leadership, those who seem the most successful are those who have developed empathy, the foundational element of EQ. Leaders who are able to see others' perspectives have a better ability to make global decisions that benefit the organization as a whole, not just an individual or small group. As leaders evolve and progress in their emotional intelligence, their brand progresses in concert.

Dr Amy Kotsenas, Neuroradiologist at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN, also spoke at the 2016 RLI Summit regarding the power of social media in transforming one's personal brand. She emphasized the importance of taking charge of one's online identity rather than allowing online ratings portals such as [Vitals.com](#) and [Healthgrades](#) to determine it. She was in favor of promoting your own specific ideas, research, and

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