



Developing the Perfect Pitch: Creating a Positive First Impression Through Social Media

Dawn Edmiston

To cite this article: Dawn Edmiston (2016) Developing the Perfect Pitch: Creating a Positive First Impression Through Social Media, Marketing Education Review, 26:1, 3-7

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10528008.2015.1091660>



Published online: 07 Dec 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

DEVELOPING THE PERFECT PITCH: CREATING A POSITIVE FIRST IMPRESSION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Dawn Edmiston

Too often we take for granted first impressions and how others perceive us, but such perceptions frequently form the basis for personal and professional success. Today, many first impressions are made online through search engine results and social networks. To ensure that students make a positive first impression, this teaching innovation outlines how to develop the “perfect pitch,” a 60-second video that highlights a student’s personal brand promise and the value a student can contribute to potential employers. This innovation teaches students an effective marketing tactic that can be applied to advance their personal brands as well as professional careers.

RATIONALE FOR THE INNOVATION

In 2009, the *Wall Street Journal* declared what most of us in higher education already knew; it was the toughest labor market in 25 years for graduating college seniors (Murray, 2009). Unfortunately, the situation has not improved, as the Economic Policy Institute announced the college graduation class of 2014 would be the sixth consecutive class to “enter the labor market during a period of profound weakness” (Malcolm, 2014, para. 7). In response to these conditions, I have been motivated to develop tools in my marketing courses that not only empower students to effectively market conventional products and services, but also to market themselves to achieve a distinct competitive advantage in their career search. “The reality is that the most important ‘product’ a student will market is him- or herself” (Stanton & Stanton, 2013, p. 81).

In my Principles of Marketing course, students complete a project that emphasizes “Marketing YOU!” This assignment requires freshmen to apply the traditional factors of the marketing mix—product, price, place, and promotion—to their own selected career path. In my Essentials of Selling course, students are required to establish a portfolio that emphasizes the importance of developing a professional online presence (Edmiston, 2014). The perfect pitch exercise is a critical element of a student’s professional online presence and creatively positions the student in the minds of others.

Dawn Edmiston (D.M., University of Maryland University College), Clinical Associate Professor of Marketing, College of William & Mary, Raymond A. Mason School of Business, Williamsburg, VA, dawn.edmiston@mason.wm.edu

As the job recruitment process is evolving, students are finding that traditional tactics such as the standard cover letter and resume are no longer as effective. In addition, students can no longer simply rely on the efforts of the campus career center; they need to be proactive with the job search process. LinkedIn’s 2015 Global Recruiting Trends Report revealed that the leading sources for career opportunities are now “job boards and social professional networks—highly digital and targeted sources” (Cruz, 2014, para. 9). Creating the perfect pitch video is an ideal response to these dynamic changes in recruiting, and results in a powerful and shareable digital marketing tactic that makes a positive first impression on potential employers.

“PITCHING” AND POSITIONING PERSONAL BRANDS IN A DIGITAL MARKET ENVIRONMENT

More than a decade ago, Elsbach (2003) conducted seminal research on the art and science of the Hollywood pitch process, where screenwriters pitch film concepts to producers. The central finding of this award-winning research published in the *Academy of Management Journal* and *Harvard Business Review* revealed that the success of a pitch depends as much on the catcher as on the pitcher. If the screenwriter (as the pitcher) was not able to engage with the producer (as the catcher) in the first few minutes, the meeting essentially ended with the screenwriter failing to capitalize on the opportunity. This is a critical concept for students to understand, for if a student (as the pitcher) fails to quickly establish a compelling connection with an employer (as the catcher), he or she will suffer a

similar fate of failure. Once students have an appreciation of this pitch process, it is important for them to understand the fundamentals of positioning people as brands and how such brands can be promoted in a digital market environment.

Parmentier, Fischer, and Reuber (2013) traced the concept of applying traditional product branding on personal brands to Kotler and Levy (1969), who argued, “Personal marketing is an endemic human activity, from the employee trying to impress his boss to the statesman trying to win the support of the public” (p. 12). Today, a quick Google search on “personal branding” (limited to .edu domain names) reveals dozens of colleges and universities offering programs related to this concept, including Stanford University, the University of Michigan, and MIT.

The positioning of people as brands is typically viewed as commonplace for celebrities. However, CEOs and senior business leaders are starting to be viewed as brands as well. Bendisch, Larsen, and Trueman (2013) found that “successful CEO branding enhances perceived brand value and creates value for organisations” (p. 596). Yet, “when applied to a person, [a brand] is also reductive and potentially limiting” (Yale School of Management, 2014, para. 3). Thus, people branding, similar to product branding, needs to be thoughtfully developed and managed to ensure success.

In the past, the concept of “pitching” was typically done face-to-face during personal meetings. However, technological advances now allow individuals to pitch products and services across a broad range of digital channels, including social media networks. Dutta (2010) asserts that finding the right online presence relative to “social media activity—personal and professional—against the target audience—private and public” is critical when developing a personal brand. If individuals are seeking to achieve a professional social media presence across a public audience, Dutta (2010) suggests that the goals be:

- (1) *Brand*: Build peer recognition.
- (2) *Engage*: Find new opportunities; show commitment.
- (3) *Learn*: Boost industry knowledge; develop yourself. (p. 129)

Social media tools that can assist with achieving these goals include LinkedIn and Twitter, two of the 15 most popular Web sites in the United States (EBizMBA, 2015).

The digital market environment has made it simpler to network with peers. In addition, the “labor market fluidity enabled by online talent platforms is a positive dynamic for individuals and the broader economy” (Manyika, Lund, Robinson, Valentino, & Dobbs, 2015, p. 12). The majority of recruiters in the United States review social media activities of potential hires and 92 percent of recruiters search LinkedIn (Morrison, 2015). Such market factors make it imperative that students develop a powerful online presence to achieve a distinct competitive advantage in their career search.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INNOVATION

The “perfect pitch” exercise requires students to create a compelling 60-second video that highlights their individuality and their potential contributions to employers. Prior to producing the video, students are challenged to develop a personal brand promise and complementary brand points that serve as the foundation for the message of the video. By articulating brand points that have value to prospective employers and developing a compelling personal pitch video, students are able to tell a powerful brand story that is more engaging than a traditional resume.

To assess the learning impact of this exercise, it is helpful to administer a pre- and post-test survey. Specific learning objectives for students could include (1) understanding the definition of branding, (2) understanding the concept of personal branding, (3) understanding how to develop a personal brand promise, and (4) understanding how to use social media to develop a positive impression in the minds of others.

The perfect pitch exercise is typically introduced during the first week of the course so that students can begin thoughtful reflection on their own brand promise. When introducing this concept to the class, I share the research of Elsbach (2003) and I caution students, “The job search process is really not about you; it is about the employer finding the right person for the job. And the pitch process is really not about you either; the focus of the pitch should always be upon the ‘catcher’ who is the prospective employer.” After this introduction to the exercise, we begin to discuss students’ development of their personal brand promise and brand points. The brand promise needs to reflect what prospective employers should expect from the student’s services. As an example, I share that my personal brand promise is, “Teaching people how to

pursue and promote their passions.” Perhaps Steve Jobs personal brand promise was “Changing the world through innovation.”

Once students have developed the foundation for their respective brands (i.e., their brand promise), they need to reflect on specific characteristics that define and reinforce their personal brand. These brand points can revolve around leadership experiences, academic achievements, or professional contributions. The challenge with developing effective brand points is to not simply list titles or credentials (e.g., a marketing internship) but rather to communicate the value of the brand points to a potential employer (i.e., what a student actually learned about marketing during the internship). This can be a very difficult process for students, and I often encourage them to discuss their perceived brand promise and brand points with family and friends prior to our class discussions.

During the second and third weeks of the course, we refine the personal brand points and begin development of video scripts. The lecture content for these class sessions is focused on the power of storytelling and examples such as Chipotle’s “Back to the Start” campaign are discussed. Students are organized in small peer review groups to share their concepts and gain peer feedback on their proposed scripts. It is helpful if more than one class session is dedicated to the peer review process so students can change groups and gain different perspectives.

Students are encouraged to be creative in this process, and many students choose to develop their perfect pitch videos around a personal talent. For example, one student developed a video as a 60-second student musical, a student athlete described their personal brand as it relates to the game of golf, and another student featured skills as a magician. The [Appendix](#) includes two video scripts to demonstrate how students might choose to position their brands; Student A was a junior student who was seeking a media internship, and Student B was a graduating senior, who had been recently hired by Google.

Students are given the flexibility to select their own video creation tool, but the final video must be published on YouTube. The videos are typically produced on smart phones or with cameras borrowed from technology services at the college. I have found students to be very comfortable with video technologies and to my surprise, have not encountered any issues related to access to such technologies. Students are also

encouraged to enlist the assistance of their peers as needed when developing the videos, which results in a positive peer learning experience.

Once the videos have been uploaded to YouTube, students are required to use best practices of social media marketing to enhance the visibility of the videos, to include featuring keywords in the descriptive text of the YouTube videos, and embedding the videos on their professional LinkedIn profiles. Since YouTube is considered the world’s second largest search engine (Rosner, 2015) and the second most popular site in the United States (EBizMBA, 2015), the perfect pitch video also becomes a positive contribution to the student’s professional online presence. Examples of student pitches can be accessed through a search on YouTube with the terms “Dawn Edmiston perfect pitch.”

During the fourth week of the course, the final videos are published and shared with the class. For assessment purposes, students are evaluated on content (brand promise and brand points), structure (how content is organized to reinforce brand promise), delivery (effective use of voice and visuals), and execution (promotion on social media channels to include use of descriptive keywords). Ultimately, the videos will differ in quality and the importance of content and structure should be stressed during the assessment. Often, the simplest delivery of the message is the most compelling; I therefore emphasize to students that although production quality is valued, it is ultimately the message that matters. However, it is typical for a few students to far exceed expectations for this assignment. Hence, I ask the students to vote (by blind ballot) for the peer videos they feel are “best in class” and these videos are given a small token of recognition (in the past, such videos have been featured on our college Web site) or extra credit.

LESSONS LEARNED

I first introduced this innovation to an Internet Marketing class in Fall 2013. Most recently, I shared this innovation with a Strategic Digital Media class in Spring 2015; this was the first time that students were required to post their videos on YouTube and embed their videos on LinkedIn. One of the personal lessons I have learned is to require students to include a standardized statement in the description of the YouTube video that notes, “This video was prepared for the digital marketing course taught by Dawn

Edmiston at the Raymond A. Mason School of Business, College of William & Mary.” This text makes it simpler for me to search the videos on YouTube and develop a playlist for all of the videos in the class so I can track how often the videos have been viewed. Within the first week of publishing the Spring 2015 videos on YouTube, the 27 student videos garnered more than 2,000 views.

Several students have shared these pitch videos with potential employers, who were very impressed with their efforts. In addition to this tangible feedback, students have gained intangible rewards, including a greater understanding of their professional value and an increased level of confidence. One student took the time to develop a personal blog post about this experience (<http://www.harperhoney.com/2015/02/5-lessons-learned-while-creating.html>) and noted, “This assignment was very much an exercise in negotiating with myself and figuring out where my boundaries lay, which risks were worth taking, and which challenges were worth investing time in.”

I have also found that the importance of personal branding, as emphasized in this exercise, transcends national boundaries. In October 2013, I shared the perfect pitch concept with international students when I traveled to China. During my visit there, I delivered guest lectures to audiences composed of undergraduate and graduate students, as well as professors and marketing practitioners. Chinese culture tends to value a collective approach to living rather than the individualistic approach often evident in the United States. Thus, my presentation emphasized how being able to effectively express one’s personal brand would allow students to make greater contributions to their respective communities and employers. Although we were not able to actually produce the videos during these guest lectures, the feedback on developing the perfect pitch to communicate one’s personal brand was overwhelmingly positive. A blog post about this experience can be accessed on my Web site at www.themarketingprof.com.

I believe the primary reason this innovative teaching approach has been successful is that it demands higher level thinking and student engagement in the learning process. The process of marketing a product (in this case, one’s self) can often be perceived as a complex and intimidating endeavor. However, the perfect pitch exercise encourages students to think deeply about the value of their own brand promise and provides them with an opportunity to creatively

share that value with others through an innovative approach to marketing.

REFERENCES

- Bendisch, F., Larsen, G., & Trueman, M. (2013). Fame and fortune: A conceptual model of CEO brands. *European Journal of Marketing*, 47(3/4), 596–614. doi:10.1108/03090561311297472
- Cruz, E. (2014, November 13). *The global trends that will shape recruiting in 2015*. Retrieved from <http://talent.linkedin.com/blog/index.php/2014/11/the-global-trends-that-will-shape-recruiting-in-2015>
- Dutta, S. (2010). What’s your personal social media strategy? *Harvard Business Review*, 88(11), 127–130.
- EBizMBA. (2015). Top 15 most popular websites, July 2015. *EBizMBA Guide*. Retrieved from <http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/most-popular-websites>
- Edmiston, D. (2014). Creating a personal competitive advantage by developing a professional online presence. *Marketing Education Review*, 24(1), 21–24. doi:10.2753/MER1052-8008240103
- Elsbach, K. D. (2003) How to pitch a brilliant idea. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2003/09/how-to-pitch-a-brilliant-idea>
- Kotler, P., & Levy, S. (1969). Broadening the concept of marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 33(1), 10–15. doi:10.2307/1248740
- Malcolm, H. (2014, May 19). Job outlook for 2014 college grads puzzling. *USA Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/personalfinance/2014/05/18/job-outlook-2014-graduates/8809801/>
- Manyika, J., Lund, S., Robinson, K., Valentino, J., & Dobbs, R. (2015). *A labor market that works: Connecting talent with opportunity in the digital age*. Retrieved from http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/employment_and_growth/connecting_talent_with_opportunity_in_the_digital_age
- Morrison, K. (2015, March 24). *52% of recruiters check social media during the hiring process*. Retrieved from <http://www.adweek.com/socialtimes/52-of-recruiters-check-social-media-during-the-hiring-process-infographic/617525>
- Murray, S. (2009). The curse of the Class of 2009. *Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124181970915002009.html?mod=WSJ_Careers_CareerJournal_5
- Parmentier, M. A., Fischer, E., & Reuber, A. R. (2013). Positioning person brands in established organizational fields. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 41, 373–387. doi:10.1007/s11747-012-0309-2
- Rosner, D. (2015). Three strategies to unlock YouTube’s potential in 2015. *Entrepreneur*. Retrieved from <http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/241453>
- Stanton, A. D., & Stanton, W. W. (2013). Building “Brand Me”: Creating a personal brand statement. *Marketing Education Review*, 23(1), 81–86. doi:10.2753/MER1052-8008230113
- Yale School of Management. (2014). Are CEOs brands? *Yale Insights*. Retrieved from <http://insights.som.yale.edu/insights/are-ceos-brands>

APPENDIX

Video Script: Student A

I've always loved words, I've always written stories. And at William & Mary I have been inspired to share these talents and my passion for storytelling with others.

I serve as the founding editor of *ROCKET Magazine*, a completely unique fashion and arts publication. It has fashion and it is art, but when I describe it to people I call it a storybook.

I conceptualize the central theme for each issue. Then [I] brainstorm every facet of what can be expressed. What has not been said before? What can we address in a new way?

I stage our photo shoots and detail our production so that our final images represent an interpretation of themes and issues in culture, literature, art, and William & Mary. Each composition pushes perception beyond what is familiar.

Our vision for *ROCKET* is to use our resources to be imaginative, whimsical, and emotionally intelligent. I want to ignite responses and spark a relationship with our readers through words and images and ideas.

Everybody, and every organization, has a story to tell, and I am always seeking opportunities to create and share those stories.

Video Script: Student B

I'm a marketing student studying the intersection between media, technology, and entertainment. I'm looking at three different areas.

The first of these areas is digital marketing. I have made it my mission to learn the ins and outs of this field. This summer I will be starting my career as a Google business associate, where I will hone my skills with Google's online advertising service, Ad Words.

The second of these three fields is TV. Tech companies such as Google are colliding with entertainment companies at a lightning rate. Having recently completed an internship with the Discovery Channel, I am now ready to position myself at the forefront of these fields.

The third and final area is the power of social media. Recently, I created a parody Twitter account during the Golden Globe awards and it gained traction in outlets such as *People* magazine and Yahoo. From that moment, I knew that social media was the missing puzzle piece between digital advertising and entertainment.

The integration of these passions of mine is exciting and dynamic, and I can't wait to see what the future holds.