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PERSONAL BRANDING SERIES • VOLUME 09

Developing Your Brand Message

Create clear, honest language that explains your value the same way everywhere you show up.

09

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A note before you dig in

Ever read someone's bio three times and still not know what they do? "Driving innovative solutions for transformational growth." Okay... but what do you actually do on a Wednesday?

Your brand message is the words you use to explain who you help, what you do and why it matters. When it's clear, people get it right away and can repeat it to someone else. When it's fuzzy, people nod politely and forget you before they get to their car.

This guide helps you find the words your audience actually uses, build a simple structure for your message and turn it into introductions and bios that sound like you.

CC

YOU'LL WALK AWAY WITH

- A clear understanding of identity, positioning and messaging
- Real language from your audience to build on
- A message structure with a core statement, themes and proof
- A spoken introduction plus short and long bios
- A message audit across the places people find you

WHAT'S INSIDE

01 **Understand message, identity and positioning**

02 **Learn your audience's language**

03 **Build your message structure**

04 **Write introductions and bios**

05 **Test for clarity and consistency**

Time: 60 to 90 minutes, then a month of small steps

Best for: working professionals, business owners, career changers and anyone figuring out what is next

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Read a lesson, look at the example, then answer the questions in your own words. Pencil is fine. Messy is fine. Treat your first answers like a rough draft and check them against real conversations and real evidence before you put serious time or money behind them. Then come back to the 30 day plan and actually do it. That part is where the change happens.

LESSON 01

Understand message, identity and positioning

Clear beats clever every time.

Three connected ideas

Brand identity is what you stand for. Positioning is how your offer compares to the alternatives in your audience's mind. Messaging turns your identity and positioning into words people understand.

Start with their situation

Begin with the audience's situation, not a list of adjectives about yourself. Then separate three things: features (what you provide), benefits (why it matters to them) and evidence (why they should believe you). A message can be completely clear without being clever.

WORTH KNOWING

Brand identity	What you represent and stand for.
Positioning	How your offer compares to alternatives in your audience's mind.
Messaging	The words that explain your identity and positioning.
Proof	The evidence that makes your message believable.

EXAMPLE (fictional)

A caterer delivers individually packaged lunches to offices by a scheduled time. The feature is the packaging and the on time delivery. The benefit is that meetings are easier to plan. The proof could be delivery records showing she's on time. Three plain sentences, and you know exactly why someone would hire her.

WATCH OUT FOR

- Leading with adjectives about yourself
- Mixing up features and benefits
- Trying so hard to be clever that people miss the point

YOUR TURN

Choose one service or skill.

Write its feature, benefit and supporting evidence as three separate sentences.

Which of the three is weakest right now?

LESSON 02

Learn your audience's language

Use their words, not your industry's.

Listen first

Audience research helps you learn the words people use, the questions they ask and what stops them from moving forward. A message that sounds impressive to people in your industry can completely confuse a customer.

Ask about real experiences

Review customer questions, interview potential clients and look at how competitors describe themselves. Ask open questions about recent experiences, not whether someone likes your new tagline. Write down words that keep coming up, but don't assume every customer cares about the same things.

> **EXAMPLE** (fictional)
>
> A designer learns that local restaurant owners keep asking whether menus can be updated quickly. So she talks about easy menu updates and clear pricing instead of leading with design terms they don't use.

WATCH OUT FOR

- Writing for people in your industry instead of your customers
- Asking people if they like your slogan
- Assuming one customer's priorities apply to everyone

YOUR TURN

Talk to or review feedback from three people.

Write down their actual questions, word for word.

For each question, note the need behind it and a plain language response.

LESSON 03

Build your message structure

One core idea, a few supporting themes and proof for each.

The structure

A message structure is a simple hierarchy of ideas you use consistently everywhere. It includes a core statement, supporting themes and proof. Different formats can highlight different themes without changing the core message.

Write it down

Write a core statement that names your audience, their need and your approach. Choose three supporting themes and attach evidence to each. Only include promises you can deliver. Be clear about scope when results depend on things you don't control.

WORTH KNOWING

Core statement	One sentence naming your audience, their need and your approach.
Supporting theme	A key idea that backs up your core statement.
Message architecture	The full structure of core statement, themes and proof.

EXAMPLE (fictional)

A project coordinator's core statement: she helps small teams organize deadlines and responsibilities. Her three themes are planning, communication and follow through. Each one has a sample document or a verified result behind it. Whether she's writing a bio or a proposal, she pulls from the same structure.

WATCH OUT FOR

- Too many themes, which means no clear message
- Themes with nothing to back them up
- Promising results that depend on things you can't control

YOUR TURN

Draft your core statement.

List three supporting themes and the proof for each.

What is one claim you should avoid making?

LESSON 04

Write introductions and bios

If you'd never say it out loud, cut it.

Answer three questions

A professional introduction answers who you are, what you do and why it matters. A bio adds relevant experience and context. The right length depends on where it's being used, not a universal rule.

Write a few versions

Create a short spoken introduction, a 50 word bio and a longer bio. Use first person in conversation and third person when event organizers need it. Lead with relevant accomplishments and skip claims nobody could verify, like "world class" or "the best."

EXAMPLE (fictional)

Short introduction: "I help neighborhood businesses organize their marketing so customers can find accurate information and understand what they offer."

The longer bio keeps that same core and adds specific experience, examples and the industries served.

WATCH OUT FOR

- Bios full of words you'd never actually say
- Superlatives you can't back up
- A short intro and a long bio that sound like two different people

YOUR TURN

Draft a 20 second introduction.

Write a 50 word bio and a 150 word bio.

Read each one out loud and cut anything you'd never naturally say.

LESSON 05

Test for clarity and consistency

Ask people what you do. Their answer is your report card.

Test understanding, not taste

Message testing checks whether your audience understands what you mean, why it's relevant and what to do next. That's different from asking whether it sounds nice.

How to test

Show your message to five relevant people without explaining it first. Ask what you offer, who it's for and what they'd do next. Compare their answers to what you meant. Then check your website, profiles, proposals and email signature for anything that contradicts it.

EXAMPLE (fictional)

A consultant discovers that people read "business strategy" and assume she's a financial advisor. She revises her message to say marketing planning and customer research. The confusion stops, and so do the calls she wasn't qualified to take.

WATCH OUT FOR

- Explaining your message before people read it
- Asking "Do you like it?" instead of "What do I do?"
- Fixing your website and forgetting your email signature

YOUR TURN

Show your message to five people. What did they say you do?

Where did their answers differ from what you meant?

Which channels still have old or conflicting wording?

WORKSHEET

Message audit

Check every place your message lives. Fix the biggest gaps first.

CHANNEL	WHAT IT SAYS NOW	WHAT IT SHOULD SAY	PROOF TO ADD

QUICK REFERENCE

The short version

Tear this page out, screenshot it, tape it by your desk. This is the whole guide on one page.

01 Identity is what you stand for. Positioning is how you compare. Messaging is the words.

02 Start with the audience's situation, not your adjectives.

03 Separate features, benefits and proof.

04 Use the words your audience uses.

05 Build one core statement, three themes and proof for each.

06 Write intros and bios you'd actually say out loud.

07 Test by asking people what you do, without explaining first.

08 Keep every channel saying the same core thing.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your 30 day plan

Small, real steps. Pick the dates now so this does not turn into one more thing you meant to do.

WEEK 1

Listen

Collect real customer language and audit your current message.

Date: _____ Done when: _____

WEEK 2

Build

Draft your core statement, three supporting themes and proof for each.

Date: _____ Done when: _____

WEEK 3

Write and test

Write your introductions and bios and test them with relevant readers.

Date: _____ Done when: _____

WEEK 4

Update

Update your priority channels and schedule a quarterly message review.

Date: _____ Done when: _____

My very first action, the date I will do it and how I will know it is done:

What support, time or resources do I need to line up?

THIRTY DAYS LATER

Look back, then keep going

Come back to this page a month from now. Compare what you planned with what actually happened. No judgment. You are collecting information, not grading yourself.

How did people describe what I do before and after?

Which words from my audience made it into my message?

What will I review next quarter?

SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

- Personal Branding Expertise Guide, value proposition and brand voice sections. Supplied reference.
- U.S. Small Business Administration, Plan your business.sba.gov

Examples in this guide are made up to teach a point. They are not real clients or documented results. This guide is educational and does not guarantee any professional, business or income outcome. Rules change, so double check anything legal, tax or regulatory before you act on it.