Stanford eCorner

Owning Your Personal Brand

Tristan Walker, *Walker and Company*

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Tristan Walker, founder and CEO of Walker and Company Brands, stresses the importance of understanding that your own brand isn't dictated by you, but is defined by what others say it is. In conversation with Stanford Prof. Tina Seelig, Walker also urges young people to manage their brand in the largely public online world.

Transcript

I know you're also very interested in developing a personal brand, your personal brand, the brand of your company, what are the things you've learned about the importance of each individual creating their own brand? How do you do that? Yes. There is one rule on this which is really, really important. I think a lot of people lose sight of it. I got some advice a couple of years ago from a marketing executive and it stuck with me for a long time. And this kind of relates to personal brand or your company whatever, he said Tristan, brand is not what you say it is, it's what they say it is. And the minute you realize that you start to really understand the importance of the thing that you're trying to build. When it comes to like personal brand like whether it be the Twitter, Facebook, all that stuff like I'm pretty ridiculous, if you're following me on all these services like I apologize, because I'm pretty heavy on every single one of them, but it's only because I care so much about my own personal story and no one else should be telling my story. And the thing that a lot of folks really don't get about brand is that sometimes it's okay for people to be a jerk. If you're consistently a jerk, that's cool. If you're consistently nice, that's cool.

Where the problems happen is when you kind of break from that consistency. So as long as you understand that like brand is what you - like what other people say it is, that allows you to kind of manage your own. And like that has stuck with me for a really, really long time and I think has benefited not only just me, but my company and every company that I kind of create from here on. I'd love to drill down on that. I think that's really interesting, especially we've got a room full of lots of young people who probably have a primordial brand at this point. At what age should people start thinking about their brand? Is this something you know when you're a little kid you start thinking about this, is it when you get into the professional world? At what point and how do you really start crafting it? Well, I mean it's become different for me because things like Twitter didn't exist 10 years ago. Now your brand is public. Everyone is talking about it and might think that people aren't talking about you, but they probably are, like there are haters everywhere. People will care enough about other people to be able to like try and bring them down. So as long as - and maybe that's an inherent cynicism about everyone - but I believe it to be true.

So now we're in a world where kind of your life is public, you better take control of it before someone else does. So as early as you have the ability to control your own personal brand publicly online, I think you should be doing it.