



Now is the Time to Build Your Own Brand

WHY THE COMPLIANCE ENGINEER NEEDS BRANDING IN A COVID-19 WORLD

Story by Jim Nowakowski

Most of the time, professionals like compliance engineers stay in the background. Rarely are they brought front and center in marketing a company or its products.

Why is that?

More importantly, in the COVID-19 world we all now inhabit, staying in the background is something that has to change. Only the compliance engineer can change it. To change

it, the compliance engineer must build their brand.

Typically, the product takes center stage when you think of a brand, or the company itself. Aesthetics, durability, reliability, availability — all of these “ability” words somehow get in front of the central reason for the product specification, which is always compliance. You can have the most durable product in the world, but if it doesn’t meet the code, it will never see installation.

COVID-19 has changed all that. Frankly, who cares about any of the “ability” words when

safety is the central issue. And who, except the compliance engineer, knows more about that topic?

Instead of working quietly in the background, the compliance engineer has to boldly move upfront to confront the central issue of all specifications in a COVID-19 world: safety compliance. To do that, you need a personal brand. Unfortunately, the compliance engineer has done little to develop their personal brand, either as a category or an individual.

But, COVID-19 has provided the opportunity to develop both.

A brand can transcend a crisis and position the compliance engineer — and subsequently the company — in one of the strongest positions in terms of specification success. (If you doubt that, look at how Anthony Fauci — regardless of how you feel about him — has built his personal brand since the virus hit.) Plumbing compliance engineers need to do the same.

How Brands are Built

Building a personal brand takes three components: Effort, knowledge and exposure. Compliance engineers have the first two covered, however, the most important component — and the one most neglected in building a personal brand — is exposure.

Aristotle said to define your terms, otherwise no one will understand. If you are going to build your personal brand as a compliance engineer, you have to understand what a brand is and why exposure is more important these days.

Brand Defined

A brand is intangible, just like your essence (who you are) is intangible. Sure, you have a body that does things. But you, your essence, where is that? Is it in the knowledge you have about plumbing? On the committees with which you participate?

Who are YOU? Are you your work? Are you what you eat? Are you what you do? Are you the love you feel for your family?

Just as the definition of “you” includes all of these things, your professional brand is everything around the company for which you work and your work for that company.

I have always used the American West as a good example to understand the concept of brand — personal, product or company.

Howdy Partner

A rancher branded his cattle with his mark (brand image). Along with being a means of finding cattle that strayed from the herd, that mark was assurance to people who bought his cattle of a specific degree of quality. Some buyers paid more money for specific brands of cattle.

While all cattle ranchers sold cattle, some ranchers obtained a premium for their beef. It was the brand that identified one head of cattle from another. The “Lazy Y” might bring a better price per head than the “Circle W.” In other words, “cattle” was a commodity product. A “brand” differentiated one group of cattle from another.

All the buyer knew is that it wasn’t just beef anymore if he bought the “Lazy Y” — it was “the Lazy Y cattle” — confidence in the quality of the beef, assured delivery, and the commitment of the rancher of that quality. The cattle became more than cattle: they became an extension of the rancher. They became a brand.

For example, immunologists are a commodity. Some are more known than others (it’s like that in any category). Anthony Fauci, an immunologist, is now a brand. Through exposure (he had knowledge and effort), he has transformed into a personal brand. (Again, ignore your personal feelings for his brand, but remember, people will have feelings about your brand as you develop it, just as they do any brand, including Fauci.)

Exposure is the key to building a brand, to separate yourself from your category of compliance engineers.

Exposure

Most companies overlook how the real value of an individual’s brand is gained through exposure. For example, our organization has a LEED® AP on staff. When LEED first was introduced in 1998, we, as a marketing organization, recognized its inherent value to our B2B clients: energy and sustainability. We selected an electrical engineer on our staff to go through the training and attain that accreditation. To this day, that move has



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served us in building our brand image — and the engineer's brand image. Often, we put our LEED AP front and center in our presentations, just as important to our other strengths.

Our LEED AP becomes an expert adviser to our clients about LEED and all the variations that document has gone through. This all requires ongoing study on the individual's part, but it pays dividends in how our clients perceive us, especially since most marketing companies our size don't offer such a service with an actual staff member as "value added."

Therefore, it's up to each compliance engineer — and the companies that support them — to develop and utilize their expertise in the development of an individual brand image. In other words, by building your brand image, you are also building the brand image of the company for which you work.

Four Things You Can Do To Build Your Own Brand

SPREAD THE WORD

A brand is the emotional source of an organization — its very soul. People are guided and inspired by it. That makes defining it extremely difficult, if not impossible. The only rule in figuring out brand is this: Beware of concise definitions. There are none because

brands, like people, are complex. The compliance engineer should spread the word about knowledge.

This can be done by writing papers, making presentations, putting a personal imprint on what you do and how you do it.

For example, do you communicate internally in your company about code developments? Doing an e-mail summary of your latest meeting and how it helps a sales engineer sell more product is the perfect way to build your personal brand. It is almost a guarantee of success if you start writing these memos. People will change their perception of you as "not just the compliance person." In other words, start tooting your own horn.

NETWORK OUTSIDE YOUR COMFORT ZONE

In your company, a brand is formed through all company actions — answering the phones, fulfilling orders, communications, customer service calls, operations practices and employee interactions. These help define that company's brand.

Your brand is all that you do and do not do. You help define your brand by "opting out" of specific behaviors or "opting in" to others.

Stepping out of your comfort zone (or your lane as they say these days) is always a risk, but COVID-19 has thrown us all out of our zones. So, visit other departments. See how these departments work to understand how your knowledge of compliance might work to their advantage. Respectfully, also go outside of plumbing and see what others are doing.

In almost every case, you will see things that only you can see from your compliance point of view. In one case, the compliance engineer, visiting the production line, saw a procedure being done and asked, why it was being done at the particular time in the process? No one had an answer. The compliance engineer suggested shifting the particular process to a different step in the assembly. That led to questions about the need for the process itself. That, in turn, led to a new product development that gave the company a strategic advantage for a period of time.

In another instance, a plumbing compliance engineer stepped into the security world,

opening a whole new point pertaining to the needs of security and plumbing, which led to internal discussions about product development. The Internet of Things (IoT), by the way, is impacting compliance in ways yet to be determined. Who better than the compliance engineer to help the determination?

KNOW YOUR CUSTOMER'S CUSTOMER

Codes are developed for reasons, but in the field, you already know that the reasons can and do change. "The road to hell is paved with good intentions" was a saying that emerged for good reason. That is, reality often has a way of creeping into the best of intentions; just ask any manufacturer.

One of the best ways to differentiate yourself from other compliance engineers is to develop market knowledge of the people who use the products that comply with the codes. Real-world applications often suggest additional areas about which you should be concerned and may even know about to give your company a strategic advantage.

The anticipation of what can happen — and what does happen — is often the key to a lasting code. (Just think about the number of revisions that are involved in any code and imagine if you could have anticipated the reality that caused that revision to begin with!) Visiting "the field" is the only way to deepen your knowledge of your work.

LEARN TO BE A 100% LISTENER

Listening carefully to how people perceive you gives you information on shaping your brand.

For example, in a meeting pre-COVID with executives, the presenter, John Asher, asked: "Can you be a 100% listener?" Everyone except me said no. Asher, looked around the room and asked, "Why is Jim right?"

Asher stated that you not only can be a 100% listener (meaning you hear exactly what is being said); you have to be a 100% listener if you are going to be in sales.

You see, Asher has a successful company where he teaches people to be top performing sales people. What is the skill you need most in sales? Listening. It's the same skill you need in building your brand.

Listening, more than anything, will help you build your brand. Remember, it is not how you perceive yourself, but how others perceive you. Only you can shape those perceptions — or be shaped by them. However, you have to start with how people perceive you now.

And Now, the Rest of the Story

One of the consistent findings in the on-going research we do in markets is the relevance of the gap that exists between what manufacturers think about their products and what the marketplace thinks about those same products. The same is true for people. There is rarely a one-to-one match in perceptions because it is not about the products or the person: it's about the brand or feeling the brand ultimately creates.

The dirty little secret about a brand is that the audience creates the brand, not the brand the audience. It has always been about the audience, about how people perceive you. Until you determine that and then start shaping it or reshaping it, you're a compliance engineer without a brand.

Just as people gave the "Lazy Y" more meaning as a preferred brand by buying it, audiences create a brand of a compliance engineer by "buying" your interpretations of the code.

Or not.

You can believe anything you want about you, your company, but unless your customers believe it, it is simply not true. So, what are you waiting for? Get busy and start branding yourself! 📧

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