

You are either extinct or distinct

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Reported recently on Reuters: "The order of nuns founded by Mother Theresa seeks to copyright her name in a bid to stop other organisations – from banks to business schools – trying to cash in on the Nobel peace laureate's image worldwide."

Mother Theresa, like Nelson Mandela, is recognized among the top brands globally, along with Coca-Cola and McDonald's.

Mother Theresa's order, like the estates of Elvis Presley and Princess Diana, saw the light posthumously in an age where everything can be sold and, therefore, has brand potential. And it is just a matter of time before individuals start flocking to the Companies and Intellectual Property Registration Office, enroute from Home Affairs, to register their names, gestures, style and unique DNA.

The practice of people branding themselves and reaping the benefits will become common place. But why would anybody brand themselves?

A brand is a means of differentiation. More than just the name you have, it is the overall impression made by your name, style, gestures and skills.

In addition to the distinction of singular identity and association, branding affords you the opportunity to charge a premium for a set of attributes that cumulatively makes you who you are. That's why Hollywood pays a different fee to different stars to act in the movies.

Even locally, a newspaper recently published the fees paid to different celebrities such as Mark Pilgrim of *Big Brother Africa* and Vuyo Mbuli of SABC 2 to grace their functions.

Then consider the viewpoint that the price Barcelona paid for David Beckham is, in real terms, a bargain. Becks brought not only his skills to the team but also an ability to sell merchandise, to fill stadiums and to distinguish his team as either rather than just good.

As the idea of branding takes off, folk will approach branding agencies and consultants to establish a brand value or the net present value of their brand.

In other words, we can determine what people are worth if we estimate the number of years they should live and remain distinctively valued as speakers or personalities, in order to establish, scientifically, how much they should charge for appearances. But for many ordinary people, branding themselves would simply be an exercise in standing out from the crowd, whether it's among your friends or for a job.

The hallmark of great brands, including personal brands, are:

- A clarity of who and what the person stands for;
- A consistent projection of a chosen position; and
- Leadership in a specific field.

Take Nelson Mandela as an example. There is no question that the world knows what he fought for and what he stands for.

Hence, even after his retirement from South African politics, he continues to be a respected global mediator. As a brand, he's without equal.

A similar sense of global recognition applies to the likes of Coca-Cola, Nike and McDonald's. Building a personal brand requires a conscious effort to create awareness and build associations between who you are and your unique selling points.

Brands, including personal brands, are no longer judged purely on aesthetics and functional contributions. Personal brands have to meet the challenge of protecting their names and reputations, but must also visibly contribute to the communities they come from or serve – or else their days will be numbered.

As *No Logo* author Naomi Klein aptly observed: “Sceptical consumers are bringing down the long-accepted monuments of business, government, celebrity and society”.

Interbrand, a brand strategy and design firm, estimates that by 2010 the brand will represent about 50% of the value of any public company. Apply that to you and me, and it means we’ll be half substance and half perception.

In today’s world, this may not be so much choice as necessity. As leadership coach Tom Peters put it: “In today’s world, you are either distinct or extinct.” So the days of personal branding are here to stay. And you are likely to need the services of an intellectual property lawyer, brand consultant and image consultant to build your brand.

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