Between the Suit and the Selfie: Executives' Lessons on the Social "Micro-Celebrity"

Personal branding is not the exclusive domain of megaphone-wielding consumers like our fashion bloggers. Professionals of every shape and size deploy social media platforms to promote their brand image. What can the modern executive learn from this personal branding movement over the past five years? The fact is that social branding has been creating grassroots "micro-celebrities" with increasing frequency. Take Bethany Mota, for example: A young girl with a well-targeted YouTube video blog turned her social media fame into a successful line of clothing for Aeropostale.

We believe, however, that social media has a "celebrity threshold" – a finite level of popular attention. Beneath this threshold, a personal brand can maintain a professional voice. Aspirational lifestyles can then become the coin of the realm. However, once that limit has been breached, content becomes more oriented toward a dreamy and utopian mindscape, almost a fantasy with the personal brand playing an archetypal role.

Why does this limit exist? The answer relates to a basic branding principle, discovered by brand scientists like Sidney Levy and Grant McCracken: Brands must move from the functional to the symbolic to the cultural. For personal branders, being storytellers who are capable, yet fascinating and even fantastic is a sound strategy.

The average LinkedIn profile is insufficient to build a personal brand. It generally lacks a coherent content strategy and fails to show aspirations or to inspire. Without strategy, content providers are often flying blind, providing mere information when consumers hunger instead for intelligent insight and inspiration.

How is your profile serving your personal brand?

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FIGURE 1:
Layers of threshold in the process of personal brand evolution

