



Raymond A. Mason School of Business

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LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS PODCAST

EPISODE 138: DAWN EDMISTON – PERSONAL BRANDING IN THE COVID-19 ERA

Ken White

From William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, this is Leadership & Business. The podcast that brings you the latest and best thinking from today's business leaders from across the world. We share the strategies, tactics, and information that help make you a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host, Ken White. Thanks for listening. You have control regarding the way you're perceived and positioned by others. Your personal brand tells people what you offer and how you're different from and better than your competition. In recent years, thanks in part to the continuously growing world of social and digital media, building and especially promoting your personal brand has become easier than ever before. But with COVID-19, the personal branding landscape has changed somewhat. Our guest says the changes bring new opportunities to build your brand. Dawn Edmiston is a Professor of Marketing at William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. She helps professionals and students create and promote their personal brands. She joins us on the podcast today to talk about personal branding. Your value proposition and how social media can help you build your brand in the era of COVID-19. Here's our conversation with Dr. Dawn Edmiston.

Ken White

Well, Dawn, thank you, it's great to see you. We're face to face. Isn't that nice?

Dawn Edmiston

Yes, that is lovely. Socially distanced. Yes, of course.

Ken White

I did pick the long rectangular table here in the studio so that the interview is being held appropriately. But thanks. It's really great to see you. And I hope you're well.

Dawn Edmiston

Thank you. Thank you. It's wonderful to be here.

Ken White

When I think personal branding, you're the first person I think of, and I know a lot of people in the business school here at William & Mary think the same, and others do too. When you hear the term personal branding, how do you define that? How do you describe that?

Dawn Edmiston

First, there is no greater compliment that you have given me than to have said that when you think of personal branding, you think of my brand. So thank you. I define personal branding as a systematic and intentional process of defining your value proposition and determining how you will share your value with others. So I like to think that my personal brand promise is that I teach people how to pursue and promote their passions. And so hopefully I'm doing that in this very moment with this podcast.

Ken White

Is it easy for people to identify their passions?

Dawn Edmiston

Great question. And I am often asked that when I am delivering guest lectures on the concepts if I do not have a passion, do I not have a personal brand? And that's not true. And personal brands. And that can evolve with you. But you do need a direction. And if you do not determine your direction, it will be interpreted by others. There's a statement that in this digital environment, that information online implicitly brands people, whether or not they choose to explicitly brand themselves. So even if you do not have a passion, consider a direction, and that will be one step further in developing that personal brand.

Ken White

And it sounds like you're also saying if you don't tell your story, maybe someone else will.

Dawn Edmiston

That's the truth. Yes, that that is. And you need to think about your personal brand as a value proposition as I had said. And if you're not able to define it, typically, personal brands need to include both an internal perspective and an external perspective. So if you're not yet ready to give that internal perspective, if you're not ready yet to determine this is the passion that I need to pursue, then start with the external perspective. Meet with family and friends, colleagues that know you and ask them to give you three words that describe you and then ask them to give you three statements of what they believe is how you have contributed value in their lives, either in personal or professional lives. And that will help move you towards understanding. This is how I'm perceived. Now, how you are perceived and how you want to be perceived may be two very different things, but you

always need to have that customer-centric focus. And so by getting that external perspective, that might help you define from an internal perspective, how it is you want to position yourself in the marketplace.

Ken White

So you create that brand, and then you deliver on that promise. Right.

Dawn Edmiston

Yes, yes.

Ken White

That's pretty important.

Dawn Edmiston

Yes. Yes. And I often get asked the first questions are about social media and the promotion element. But as you and I have discussed before, do not think about the promotion until you've actually thought about the development of your brand and be intentional about it. And then we can start discussing once you have that personal brand promise. How do we execute it? Who are the individuals that may gain value from what I have to share? And then how do we ensure that we promote it, that we communicate our value to reach those that may need our products and services?

Ken White

COVID-19 is everything seems to be upside down. Life is just so, so different now. It seems like some personal branding opportunities are lost right now, especially face to face interaction. How is this current arena affected personal branding?

Dawn Edmiston

I mean, COVID-19, has changed our entire lives. And from both a personal and professional perspective. But change can be good. And for a marketing professor who has taught digital marketing for the past decade or so. It has been very good because if you were not focused upon digital marketing in the past, it becomes an imperative now. And fortunately for us. There are plenty of social media platforms and digital marketing opportunities, where we can continue personal branding. So as much as I value and I appreciate being able to see you face to face today, I could also see you face to face through technologies.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm

Dawn Edmiston

And I could also ensure that I'm sharing and communicating my value through digital channels. And in most respects, I can meet, reach far greater number of individuals through digital channels than I ever could through Face-To-Face channels. So once we get past the anxieties that are associated with change, then perhaps we will soon be on the other side.

Ken White

Yeah.

Dawn Edmiston

And we will be excited about the opportunities that exist within this change, especially relative to personal branding and digital marketing channels.

Ken White

I don't know that that newcomers to personal branding, realize how powerful the digital side is until they see someone post maybe something really small in LinkedIn and just see it take off. Thousands and thousands of years.

Dawn Edmiston

Yes, yes.

Ken White

Amazing, isn't it.

Dawn Edmiston

Yes, it is. And people seek those personal connections. And. And again, you and I. I've had the privilege of doing podcasts with you in the past around the power of LinkedIn and personal branding. But when you think of LinkedIn, it's not just a job networking platform. In fact, a few years ago, a very powerful organization named Microsoft purchased LinkedIn because they really wanted access to the individuals that used LinkedIn to understand, gain data insights about these individuals. And so, they worked to create LinkedIn as a professional development platform.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm

Dawn Edmiston

So it's not just focused upon connecting individuals relative to jobs, although that's a very important function, especially in the current environment. But it's also where you can build

relationships and powerful relationships. And in fact, I'm often surprised at LinkedIn posts that I make that tend to be more personal, that literally have achieved hundreds of thousands of views.

Ken White

Yeah.

Dawn Edmiston

People are cheering for you. People want you to do well. People want to recognize professional excellence and want to recognize the grit and the grace that we need to work through this world. And LinkedIn is a good place to be able to share those experiences.

Ken White

Yeah, it's not hard to hit a thumbs up, is it?

Dawn Edmiston

No, it is not. Yes. Yes.

Ken White

So you create the value proposition. You get the information that people help you create your brand. You're delivering on that brand promise. And you do want to branch out, as you say and you say digital and social channels is LinkedIn the first place that people should consider.

Dawn Edmiston

It is the first place perhaps people should consider. But it's not the only place.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm

Dawn Edmiston

I do typically use LinkedIn as a starting point. And with Microsoft's acquisition, LinkedIn has become far more robust than it had been. In fact, you're now able to embed videos and projects. And, you know, a decade ago, we might have been encouraging individual students to develop blogs and blog posts.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm

Dawn Edmiston

You can now do that on LinkedIn and have a far greater audience than you might have in the past. So LinkedIn has become a very powerful community. And I find as a professor; it's the way I stay connected with students and alumni as well as individuals with whom I've worked. And I just never underestimate the power of those connections. At this point now, I've been in higher education for more than two decades. There is not a single day that passes that I do not hear from a former student or a professional colleague that LinkedIn has had a positive impact in their lives.

Ken White

Yeah, no doubt.

Dawn Edmiston

And so that that feels good. And I want to be able to share that with others. But again, it's not the only platform.

Ken White

Right.

Dawn Edmiston

And for certain individuals, for example, if you're creative, you might want to have a creative portfolio, although you can embed a link to that creative portfolio on LinkedIn.

Ken White

Yeah.

Dawn Edmiston

You should have an Instagram account. You know, those accounts of social media platforms that are more creative, visual, compelling, or perhaps where you want to focus your efforts. But then LinkedIn can complement those efforts.

Ken White

We'll continue our discussion with Professor Dawn Edmiston in just a minute. Our podcast is brought to you by the William & Mary School of Business. If you're thinking about pursuing an MBA, consider William & Mary. Whatever your stage of life, whether you're completing your bachelor's degree or you have 30 years of work experience, the William & Mary MBA will transform you. Four different formats, including the full time, the evening, the online, and the executive. The William & Mary MBA will change and improve the way you think, the way you lead, and the way you live. Just ask any of our alumni. Now back to

our conversation on personal branding in the COVID-19 era with Professor Dawn Edmiston.

Ken White

In our gig economy, I've run into so many people that have their job, their career, their vice president of whatever. They're the director of this, but boy, they would love to branch out over here and do something different. How do you do that with your brand and the promotion of your brand when you're more than one thing, and most of us seem to be more than one thing today?

Dawn Edmiston

That is a great question. I just recently contributed to a new book called Go to Market Strategies for Women Entrepreneurs, and women tend to be very active in the gig economy.

Ken White

Yeah.

Dawn Edmiston

So they may have a full-time job. They may care for their families, and then they may have an additional job to help supplement the income to support the family. And in most, if not all instances, your personal brand, to a certain extent, does need to be consistent. You can be a renaissance man or woman, but that brand should still be consistent across those various ventures. So, for example, I would never encourage you to have two LinkedIn profiles. For example, have one LinkedIn profile that captures the essence of who are, your diverse interests, the various organizations in which you are involved. But then you can have multiple company pages that are connected. So you can have a company page for your gig, as well as being connected to the company in which you have your full-time role. And of course, you could have and should have websites and social media platforms that serve different target markets depending on the different gigs you might have.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm

Dawn Edmiston

But relative to your personal brand, it is important to be authentic and do not confuse your personal brand with the products and services that you deliver.

Ken White

That's great advice. I mean, if someone is other audience-centric, their audience-centric, no matter what they do.

Dawn Edmiston

Yes.

Ken White

Right. Yeah, that's interesting because I have people have asked me, what do you think about if I have these two identities out there and what an interesting answer. Yeah. Wow.

Dawn Edmiston

To your point, you have coined the phrase around here, which I love, which is own it, and individuals need to own it. They need to own their personal brand no matter what other brands. That may encompass. But they do need to own their personal brand and then focus on the products and services and the target markets where you want to deliver those products and services. But do those in through channels and through media that are specific to those target markets, but retain that personal brand that continues to provide that authenticity to what you do.

Ken White

You mentioned a little while ago video, and I know you often encourage your students and people you counsel. Try some video and put some real I mean, boy, some of these student projects I've seen, you know, from the MBA students they're putting themselves out there. Can you tell us about some of these video projects you've seen?

Dawn Edmiston

Yes, it is one of the greatest rewards they have for teaching. And for those of you that are listening, you can access the perfect pitch videos that we have created by simply doing a quick search on my name on YouTube. And I have all of the perfect pitch videos there under my channel. And as you said, they are just brilliant.

Ken White

They are.

Dawn Edmiston

And in this current market environment, video is often how we're connecting with one another. We, as humans, are very visual, and we need that. We need those cues and being able to use video to share our emotions, and our experiences are far more relevant and persuasive than simply having that traditional piece of paper that we know as a resumé,

Ken White
Hmm-mmm

Dawn Edmiston

Important tool, but being able to have this perfect pitch video that explains the value of that resumé is as good as it gets. And so now I encourage my students as well. Not only do they have the perfect pitch videos on YouTube, but embed it into your LinkedIn profile.

Ken White

I've seen them. They've sent them to me.

Dawn Edmiston

Yes.

Ken White

It's incredible.

Dawn Edmiston

Yes.

Ken White

And some of these you think I not I'm not a production expert. Some of these are shot on iPhones. They're edited on iPhones. You'd never know.

Dawn Edmiston

Yes, you do not need to be a professional and to your point. Yes. We have these mobile devices that allow us to do productions that we could have never potentially even considered a decade ago. And people just want to be able to connect with you.

Ken White

Yeah.

Dawn Edmiston

People want to be able to understand your character, your drive. In fact, during the pandemic, I actually cannot count the number of times that I have been contacted by an employer asking for an intern or a new hire. And I've simply sent them LinkedIn profiles of students with the video embedded, encouraging them to watch them. And every single time, those students are hired.

Ken White

Yeah.

Dawn Edmiston

and I get comments back from the employer stating how much they enjoyed getting that perspective,

Ken White

Yeah.

Dawn Edmiston

getting that insight, and they're 60 seconds. I think the perfect pitch video is a 60-second video. You need to be clear and concise about your value proposition. And the video allows you to control your message and control the media environment and be able to share that value proposition very effectively.

Ken White

It is such a cool project in watching them to me. I walk away saying, oh, that's what makes that individual tick.

Dawn Edmiston

Yes.

Ken White

That's what makes them differentiated and a little better than maybe another person in that field. It's not even so specific into what they do. Like you said, if you want to have multiple projects, it's that consistency of what you offer. Those come across in the videos. They're so fun and so creative.

Dawn Edmiston

Yes.

Ken White

So, yeah, and once you see someone else do it, you think, well, okay, maybe maybe I could, right.

Dawn Edmiston

And you definitely could. And again, I mean, being able in this environment, you had asked an earlier question about how COVID-19 has changed our lives. And more than ever, we want that connectedness, and we want to be able to share our stories. And video allows us to do just that. So perhaps in addition to LinkedIn, I might also recommend you to have a YouTube channel.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm

Dawn Edmiston

and that would allow you to share experiences that you have in a visual manner that you would not be able to do as well through the LinkedIn platform.

Ken White

Well, that leads me to my next question. We have a few minutes left. What I'd like to do is mention an outlet. And if you would, give us a few words on why that's a good outlet or who that outlet might be good for. And we already talked about LinkedIn. So that's sort of a basic Instagram. Who should consider that? Which professionals?

Dawn Edmiston

Instagram, if you are creative, professional of your visual, professional. If you are an individual that has a very strong brand focus. So if you're not perhaps selling consumer packaged goods, but if you're selling services. Definitely, Instagram is a good visual tool, although I will tell you that there are certain consumer packaged goods like Oreos.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm

Dawn Edmiston

that have done wonders in social media. So, again, very visual tool capture the moment and be able to share it.

Ken White

Twitter.

Dawn Edmiston

Twitter is good for quick conversations. I find Twitter especially effective when you are discussing particular topics or at particular events. I tend to use Twitter more often when I'm even when I'm in virtual events these days. This is how we communicate. This is how

we chat. This is how we remain connected. Quick, quick communication tool does not have the staying power relative to messages that LinkedIn does. So that is, but quick connection used whether to drive to other platforms.

Ken White

Blogging.

Dawn Edmiston

Blogging still very powerful, no longer perhaps as necessary to have your own personal blog. But blogs now we have a feature on LinkedIn where you can create and post articles just as you with a blog, embed videos and links and content. And very powerful to be able to share through LinkedIn. But you can also do video blogs. And those have become very compelling as well. And I would encourage individuals. Yes, relative to blogs. And again, in this current market environment, if you're not working, blogs can be a great way to capture what you've been learning or what you'd like to learn more about and share your knowledge with others.

Ken White

For professionals YouTube or Tick-Tock.

Dawn Edmiston

YouTube.

Ken White

Why?

Dawn Edmiston

YouTube because it just happens to be owned by Google, and it's considered by many to be the second-largest search engine in the world. So in marketing, it's all about language. It's all about understanding who you want to reach and speaking their language and using the words that they would use to describe your value proposition. So when you look at a tool like YouTube that has such great searchability, it's important to be there from not only a visual perspective but also from the perspective that you can be searched and found.

Ken White

Right. Is Facebook appropriate for professional?

Dawn Edmiston

It depends. In many entrepreneurial organizations, Facebook is a great place to create more of a close community.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm

Dawn Edmiston

Facebook Live has truly been powerful during the pandemic as well as YouTube. So again, those are two media channels that have certainly served a purpose during this current market environment. And yes, I, I personally, I only use Facebook for personal purposes.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm

Dawn Edmiston

Now, once students graduate, they often connect with me as alumni. And so I have more of a community. You're going to see my dogs, you know, post my animals posted in my Facebook world. You will not have that in LinkedIn. Again, you don't necessarily ever want to post and share in social media images that or words that would be inconsistent with your brand. But I tend to use Facebook for personal purposes. But it can be very effective for building communities and especially for organizations that might be smaller startup organizations. So I would encourage you to have both a Facebook site as well as a LinkedIn profile and a YouTube channel.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm. As we move into, continue to deal with COVID-19 if we if the listener hasn't been doing a whole lot with a personal brand, what's the final message you'd like to share with them as we're moving into the future?

Dawn Edmiston

Now's the time. And when you are thinking about developing your personal brand, you need to be thinking about the value proposition that you can share with others. Very often, when we start to use language, you we start to define ourselves by the positions we've held or the titles that we've been called. And honestly, that's not that important. So if you happen not to be working at the moment and you had to find your personal brand by where you had worked, you know, now is your chance to create your own personal brand and understand what it is that you really want to do and develop language around that and be able to share that with others so that you can start living the life that you had wanted to, perhaps that you might not have even known that you wanted to prior to the pandemic. But this is a really wonderful chance for many of us to hit the reset button and to move forward in a way that we know cannot even imagine before.

Ken White

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