



Ask Me About...Career Advancement Through Personal Branding

Jack Molisani

President, ProSpring Staffing
Executive Director, LavaCon

A wide-angle photograph of a city skyline at dusk or dawn. The sky is a mix of deep blue and purple, with some light from the setting or rising sun visible on the horizon. Numerous skyscrapers and buildings are visible, some with lights on, creating a dense urban landscape. The text 'About the Speaker' is overlaid in white on the left side of the image.

About the Speaker

- **STC Fellow, Kinetic Information Council**
- **President, ProSpring Technical Staffing**
- **Executive Director, LavaCon Conference on Content Strategy**
- **Author of *Be The Captain of Your Career***

A wide-angle photograph of a city skyline at dusk or dawn. The sky is a mix of deep blue and purple, with some light clouds. Numerous skyscrapers and buildings are visible, some with lights on, reflecting the ambient light. The foreground shows a dense urban landscape with various building types.

Ground Rules and Warnings

- **These are just my opinions, YMMV**
- **Try it and see if it works for *you***
- **Group participation**
- **Chinese artists**

A wide-angle photograph of a city skyline at dusk or dawn. The sky is a mix of deep blue and purple, with some light clouds. Numerous skyscrapers and buildings are visible, some with lights on, reflecting the ambient light. The foreground shows a dense urban landscape with various building types.

Introduction

I recently attended a conference where our name tags included the phrase, “Ask me about _____ [then an answer we provided when registering].”

A wide-angle photograph of a city skyline at dusk or dawn. The sky is a mix of deep blue and purple, with some light clouds. Numerous skyscrapers and buildings are visible, some with lights on, reflecting the ambient light. The foreground shows a dense urban landscape with various building types.

Introduction

I recently attended a conference where our name tags included the phrase, “Ask me about _____ [then an answer we provided when registering].”

From this came a major career realization:

A wide-angle photograph of a city skyline at dusk or dawn. The sky is a mix of deep blue and purple, with some clouds. The city is filled with numerous skyscrapers and buildings, many of which are illuminated with lights. The foreground shows a dense urban landscape with various building types.

Introduction

The whole concept of personal branding can be summarized by that simple phrase, “Ask me about ____.”

A wide-angle photograph of a city skyline at dusk or dawn. The sky is a deep blue with some light clouds. The city is filled with numerous skyscrapers and buildings, many of which are illuminated with blue and white lights. The foreground shows a dense urban landscape with various building types and structures.

Introduction

**Before we look at some examples,
let's define some terms.**

Branding vs. Positioning

A *brand* is a unique design, sign, symbol, words, or a combination of these, employed in creating an image that identifies a product and differentiates it from its competitors.

BusinessDictionary.com



A wide-angle photograph of a city skyline at dusk or dawn. The sky is a mix of deep blue and purple, with some light clouds. Numerous skyscrapers and buildings are visible, some with lights on, creating a vibrant urban scene. The text 'Branding vs. Positioning' is overlaid in white on the left side of the image.

Branding vs. Positioning

Companies spend *billions* of dollars building brand recognition.

Why?

So people will remember and buy their products!

Branding vs. Positioning

Often a name-brand product and a no-name (or store brand) generic product are the same product produced by the same manufacture



Branding vs. Positioning

What matters is that consumers *perceive* that a brand is better and therefore buy it (usually at a higher price than a non-branded generic equivalent).



A panoramic view of a city skyline at dusk or dawn, with numerous skyscrapers and buildings illuminated by the low light of the sky. The colors are a mix of deep blues, purples, and oranges.

Positioning

***Positioning:* to communicate about a product or service by comparing it to a better-known product or service**

**“Stronger than steel,” “Faster than FedEx,”
“Cheaper than Walmart”**

Each phase above identifies what makes the product different (quality, speed, price) and then a better-known product (or company) against which the item is positioned



The Power of Branding and Positioning

Philip Morris originally launched the Marlboro brand in 1924 as a woman's cigarette, and advertising was based around how ladylike the cigarette was.

When smoking was linked to lung cancer in the 1950s, Philip Morris repositioned Marlboro as a man's cigarette.

The Power of Branding and Positioning

Men at the time indicated that while they would consider switching to a filtered cigarette, they were concerned about being seen smoking a cigarette marketed to women.



The Power of Branding and Positioning

So Philip Morris' advertising agency decided to use a series of manly figures in the ads, starting with a cowboy.



The Power of Branding and Positioning

Within a year, Marlboro's market share rose from less than one percent to the fourth best-selling brand



A wide-angle photograph of a city skyline at dusk or dawn. The sky is a mix of deep blue and purple, with some light from the setting or rising sun visible on the horizon. Numerous skyscrapers and buildings are visible, some with lights on, creating a dense urban landscape. The text 'Personal Branding' is overlaid in white on the left side of the image.

Personal Branding

Branding and positioning obviously apply to selling shoes or laundry soap, but what do they have to do with you, a content professional?

This is where *personal* branding comes in.

A wide-angle photograph of a city skyline at dusk or dawn. The sky is a mix of deep blue and purple, with some light from the setting or rising sun visible on the horizon. Numerous skyscrapers and buildings are visible, some with lights on, reflecting the ambient light. The overall scene is a dense urban landscape.

Personal Branding

Just as a company creates a brand and promotes why people should buy that product or service, so should you create a personal brand and promote why people should buy your product or service.



Personal Branding

In Tech Comm 2.0: Reinventing Our Relevance in the 2000s (Intercom, Feb 2012)
Scott Abel and I asserted that technical communicators are in danger of becoming a commodity, a product or service to be acquired for the lowest possible price given an acceptable level of quality.

A wide-angle photograph of a city skyline at dusk or dawn. The sky is a mix of deep blue and purple, with some light clouds. Numerous skyscrapers and buildings are visible, some with lights on, reflecting the ambient light. The foreground shows a dense urban landscape with various building types.

Personal Branding

Why?

Because many companies do not perceive the value that individual technical communicators bring to their organizations

And why not?

Lack of personal branding!

A wide-angle photograph of a city skyline at dusk or dawn. The sky is a mix of deep blue and purple, with some light clouds. The city is filled with numerous skyscrapers and buildings, many of which are illuminated with lights. The foreground shows a dense cluster of buildings, while the background features more distant structures and a hazy horizon.

Personal Branding

Personal branding and proper positioning communicate why companies should buy your services *and* pay the rate or salary you want to be paid.

A wide-angle photograph of a city skyline at dusk or dawn. The sky is a mix of deep blue and purple, with some light from the setting or rising sun visible on the horizon. Numerous skyscrapers and buildings are visible, some with lights on, creating a dense urban landscape. The overall tone is professional and modern.

Personal Branding

Example:

STC fellow Andrea Ames, when asked what she does for a living, answers, “I solve business problems.”

Not, “I’m a technical writer.”

Not, “I write release notes.”

A wide-angle photograph of a city skyline at dusk or dawn. The sky is a mix of deep blue and purple, with some light from the setting or rising sun visible on the horizon. Numerous skyscrapers and buildings are visible, some with lights on, reflecting the ambient light. The overall scene is a dense urban landscape.

Personal Branding

While she may actually do those things as part of her job, they're not the way she approaches her job, and they're *certainly* not how she defines her corporate mission.

“I solve business problems.”

What a great personal brand! It instantly communicates what she does and why she is valuable!



Responding to Market Changes

In their book *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, James Collins and Jerry Porras state that of the visionary companies they studied, all had a history of responding to market changes while staying true to their core values.

Sharon Burton's rebranding story illustrates this beautifully.



Responding to Market Changes

“The whole reason I got into tech comm was not because I loved to write, it was because I loved being at the crossroads of people and technology and I could make a difference. *That’s* why I do what I do.



Responding to Market Changes

When the recession hit in 2008 and I got laid off, it forced me to reexamine what drives me in this field, what excites me.

I realized what was true when I started what just a true now: I *love* being at the intersection of people and technology.



Responding to Market Changes

Unfortunately, writing online help topics just doesn't excite me anymore. But helping companies adopt a content strategy that gives people the information they need so they can go out and change the world?

That excites me!

A wide-angle photograph of a city skyline at dusk or dawn. The sky is a mix of deep blue and purple, with some light from the setting or rising sun visible on the horizon. Numerous skyscrapers and buildings are visible, some with lights on, creating a dense urban landscape. The image serves as a background for the title.

Responding to Market Changes

Our industry is changing. We're in a content development revolution. Companies don't need just user manuals anymore, they need social media and webinars, YouTube videos and multi-channel publishing.

These are the areas on which companies are spending money, and they need help to do it right.



Responding to Market Changes

So the process of rebranding wasn't just *calling* myself a Content Strategist, it included reeducating myself and repositioning myself so I could effectively offer the services that companies need as the very ground beneath them changes."



Responding to Market Changes

Alvin Toffler, an American writer known for his works discussing the digital revolution, takes the concept of reeducation a step further:

“The illiterate of the twenty-first century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.”



Ask Me About...

How can you respond to market changes while staying true to your core values?

What can you do well that you can promote as a specialized service for which you should be handsomely paid?



Ask Me About...

Are you expert in content management systems? Learning management systems? Multichannel publishing?

Or perhaps you make software easier to use through embedded user assistance, or increase sales through better marketing content?



Ask Me About...

Let's talk about AI!

Are you someone who uses AI to streamline content production?

Who reduces costs and generates revenue?

**Or perhaps decreases time to market?
(which does both)**

A wide-angle photograph of a city skyline at dusk or dawn. The sky is a mix of deep blue and purple, with some light clouds. The city is filled with numerous skyscrapers and buildings, many of which are illuminated with lights. The foreground shows a dense cluster of buildings, while the background features more distant structures and a hazy horizon.

Ask Me About...

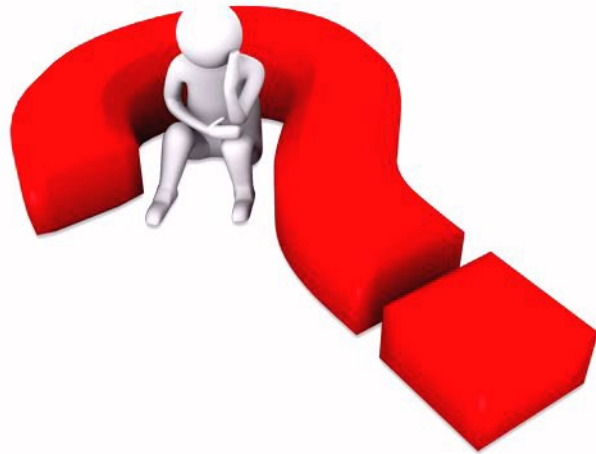
What should companies ask *you* about?

A wide-angle photograph of a city skyline at dusk or dawn. The sky is a mix of deep blue and purple, with some light clouds. The city is filled with numerous skyscrapers and buildings, many of which are illuminated with lights. The foreground shows a dense urban landscape with various building types, including some with flat roofs and others with more ornate architecture. The overall scene is a vibrant and detailed representation of a modern city.

Ask Me About...

- **Exercises**
 - Ask me about...
 - What do you do for a living?

Q&A



A wide-angle photograph of a city skyline at dusk or dawn. The sky is a mix of deep blue and purple, with some clouds. The city is filled with numerous skyscrapers and buildings, many of which are illuminated with lights. The foreground shows a dense urban landscape with various building types.

Reach the Speaker

Jack@ProspringStaffing.com

Jack@LavaCon.org

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/jackmolisani/>

Reach the Speaker

The LavaCon Conference: www.lavacon.org

**Register for LavaCon using the referral code
#CSSeattle for \$400 off in-person or virtual
registration!**

