



Why high-growth CEOs and Founders are modernizing their leadership brands



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What are the people who are most important to your future saying about you when you are not in the room?

As a leader who is building toward or preparing for a value creation event, there are a small number of key decision makers who hold an inordinate amount of influence over your ambitions.

These influential people — key clients, investors, board members or partners — are usually battle-hardened, intelligent and see significant opportunities to invest, work or partner with elite business leaders and their companies every day.

So when these key decision makers are sitting around their boardrooms, debating amongst themselves as to whether they trust you enough to deliver on your vision, and are making that final decision as to whether they should join you on your journey...

What are they saying about you when you are not in the room?

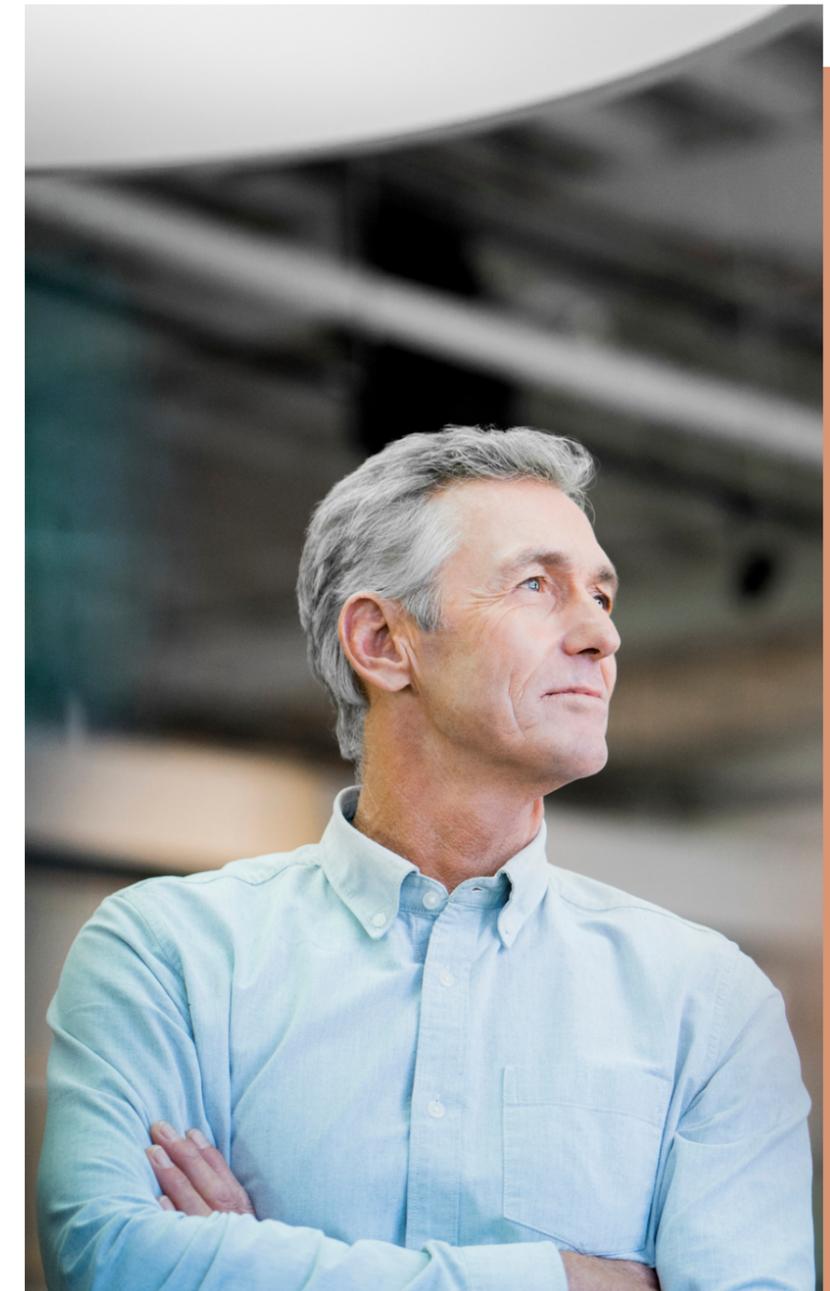
And how can you most effectively influence this conversation?

High-growth leaders are utilizing an innovative strategy to accelerate their value creation goals and gain an edge over traditional competitors amid the fastest-moving market conditions in memory.

> How?

By modernizing and optimizing their leadership brands as a value creation driver.

These leaders recognize that their value creation goals depend upon them influencing the top decision makers in their industries — the 30-100 clients or prospective clients, investors, board members and other key stakeholders who have the most control and influence over their professional destiny.



Your leadership brand

A barometer of trust in this fast changing world

The ways we communicate, do business and build valuable relationships are changing at an exponential rate, accelerated due to changes brought on by the pandemic.

A company brand, so often considered an intangible asset, now has a very public microcosm of 'people' brands within it.

'People' brands have become much more holistic within the hybrid online-offline world we live in — with self-promotion on channels like LinkedIn, appearances at online conferences and webinars and the capacity for a decision maker to research a leader through Google bringing much more visibility to a firm's leadership team.

But as a leader, your leadership brand goes far beyond your company story, your product and services and even your team.

It is the barometer the senior decision makers you are seeking to influence use when deciding whether they can trust you as a leader — enough to invest, partner or become your client — over your competitors.

Can these key decision makers trust you with their futures? Their hard-earned capital? Their precious time? Their credibility?

This is a big ask, particularly if, as a leader, you face the following challenges:

- ① **There is a lack of awareness in the market with key prospective clients.**
- ② **Your company is tied to servicing particular industry segments.**
- ③ **There is a lack of education around how your product solves market challenges.**
- ④ **You have credibility challenges versus establishment competitors.**
- ⑤ **Your industry views change as risky or complex.**
- ⑥ **Your industry has regulatory scrutiny that leads to referral challenges.**
- ⑦ **There is a strategic need to protect equity from too much dilution.**

Who are the leaders who are modernizing and optimizing their leadership brands?

The leaders who have already opted to modernize and optimize their leadership brands have different goals to suit their industries and situations. Still, they are usually united by one fact: they have significant value creation events in the now, on the horizon, or have ambitions for one.

These leaders include:

- A** The founder of a financial services startup who needed to raise his profile with the right investors so that when the company went public, the stock price could be supported, stabilized and hold its value because the 'right' funds understood the long-term vision and value proposition.
- B** The CEO of a technology company that is disrupting its industry — but who, in order to hit their growth targets, needed to build relationships with potential clients and win accounts from their main competitors, who have strong traditional brand equity and decades of established client relationships.
- C** A professional services CEO who is planning for a majority private equity investment, totalling hundreds of millions of dollars, and looking to remain in place after the funding is finalized.

These forward-thinking leaders are influencing their key stakeholders' decision-making processes by:



Being able to define and communicate their best leadership self in a way that finds their personal marginal gains and edges to differentiate them from their competitors.



Having an integrated online/offline reputation management and thought leadership strategy that communicates their value as a premium, differentiated asset in the market, and creates the optimal conditions for positioning them as industry leaders.



Implementing an outreach strategy that builds, develops and deepens the leader's relationships with the key decision makers who can drive their company's value.



Integrating a leader's online and offline brand as a value creation strategy

A leadership brand is a combination of how a leader's online profile, digital footprint and communication style can best create the conditions for influencing a senior decision maker.

The leadership brand is represented across a number of touchpoints, spanning written, verbal and non-verbal mediums, with the leader being able to subtly articulate their wisdom, insights and knowledge in a way that enables them to achieve or further their desired value creation goals.

Having an optimized and integrated leadership brand means taking a nuanced and integrated approach to this value creation strategy to find the marginal gains that will separate a CEO from their competitors; competitors who, as fellow leaders of the industry, will inherently have substantial career successes, great networks, strong client lists and organizational prestige.

> Part 1: Online Profile

Some leaders decide upon developing a highly visible online profile, sharing their thought leadership, appearing in industry publications and building an online sphere of influence.

Other leaders prefer a low-key online presence that aligns with their own macro value creation goals, often through nuanced bios across different touchpoints that best represent their story. This approach raises intrigue with the right key decision makers while keeping the leaders under the radar online.

Integrating a leader's online and offline brand as a value creation strategy

> Part 2: Offline Profile

What is critical to note is that a **leader's online profile is a means to an end, not the answer.**

It creates the conditions for influence — priming a key decision maker, often over time, to view the leader as a premium, differentiated asset that can bring value through investing, partnering with them as a client, or acquiring their firm.

For leaders pursuing either online approaches (or anything in between), what does not change is the laser focus on execution when it comes to building, developing and deepening relationships with the 30-100 key decision makers who can most affect the leader's value creation ambitions.



These leaders do not try to build a leadership brand for 'the market', which is intangible, overwhelming and dilutes messaging.

They decide on exactly who they need to influence, build strategies around each key decision maker, and are very clear in the knowledge that if these key decision makers understand their inherent value, all of their ambitions will be realized.





How do leaders who modernize and optimize their leadership brands gain an edge?

- › They apply critical thinking to their leadership brand as an asset and mine their past successes for value to find what differentiates them from other top-class leaders.
- › They can communicate how this value can best impact the current and future market dynamics in the industry they are operating within.
- › They build their online presence and digital leadership footprint bespoke to their value creation goals.
- › They focus on the 30-100 key decision makers rather than building a brand for 'the market'.
- › They view relationships through a long-term strategy lens.
- › They apply the same level of investment rigor to finding the marginal gains across in their leadership brand as they do across other parts of the business as part of a value creation strategy.

4 Pillars of An Optimized and Modern Leadership Brand:



**Defining your
leadership brand**



**Optimizing your
online profile**



**Developing and
implementing a thought
leadership strategy**



**Executing on an
aggressive and targeted
outreach strategy**

Leadership brand scenario No. 1: A challenger company staking its place

Challenger brands that service highly regulated industries will often have better products and services due to new thinking, ambition and a lack of legacy infrastructure and bureaucracy.

But while often well-capitalized, they can face the tough task of looking to win clients from legacy companies and institutions that often have decades or over a century of name recognition and trust.

Challenger brands — particularly in insular and close-knit industries such as finance, financial technology and real estate — can't compete on age or history. They need to focus on a factor that can move the needle within a time frame that enables their investors to realize their value.



A strong reputation amongst key prospective clients for a challenger CEO can sway their business's perception, give it legitimacy and appeal, and accelerate revenue generation in an environment where potential clients view change as risky and complex.



Leadership brand scenario No. 2:

A company on a going-public journey

When going public through an IPO or SPAC, each element of a company will be scrutinized and assessed on its success potential, with a positive outcome influenced by a CEO or founder's capacity to sell the vision — and their ability to execute on this vision — to investors at pipe and roadshow meetings.

So what can a leader do to best prime and influence these meetings so that they can shorten the time to value while realizing an optimal valuation, all in an arena where marginal gains or losses can result in significant upside or downside for pre-event shareholders?



With leadership branding, a CEO or founder can execute a strategy of warming up potential investors and other industry influencers before the IPO or SPAC process begins by taking a long-term strategic perspective on their value creation goals.

By building out their digital leadership footprint to position themselves as an industry leader with social capital and identifying the 30-100 key value drivers within their industry, they can subtly begin the process of developing relationships with potential investors who they will be pitching to at pipe or roadshow meetings.

Creating and executing these conditions for influence makes investors familiar with how the CEO or founder thinks and their core values.

It lessens the risk in investing in a relatively 'unknown' quantity through having a better understanding of the company's journey to date, the milestones they've hit, the unique value proposition of the company, why the leader is well placed to execute on the vision and why they are perfectly placed to enable the organization to operate successfully as a public company for years to come.

Leadership brand scenario No. 3:

A company preparing for an acquisition or private equity investment

Companies positioning themselves for an acquisition or related activity may anticipate significant changes, whether that involves the acceleration of their growth plans or making reductions to become leaner and more profitable.

CEOs and founders at these businesses often have two different goals: to realize an optimal value of the event and to ensure that after the event, they are seen as the natural leader to continue the growth journey within the company they have built beyond the transaction.

In this environment, a CEO or founder's role is to articulate the company's value to investors by selling the vision and journey of the company and creating an inescapable logic as to the 'Why'.



A CEO or founder who has an optimized and modernized leadership brand is more likely to be seen as an integral part of the company's success and identity, with strong industry, client and organizational capital.

The presence of such a leader can raise the firm's valuation, and when a CEO can communicate their unique value, investors will often put a greater emphasis on retaining them for the long term.

Why is now the time for forward-thinking leaders to consider optimizing and modernizing their leadership brand?

There are many key reasons that make this a particularly unique time for CEOs and founders to build a modernized and optimized leadership brand.

- › The rate of technological innovation and change is leading to product offerings that are superior to what traditional industry heavyweights can offer, notably those burdened with legacy infrastructure.
- › There is more capital than ever in the market to support fast-growing and innovative companies.
- › The pandemic has led to the acceleration of our hybrid online-offline world, changing how people communicate, do business and build relationships.
- › Company brands and people brands are becoming more intertwined in this new world, enabling people brands to become powerful assets in influencing key decision makers.
- › The capacity to build trust and relationships through a modernized and optimized leadership brand can shorten the time to value for fast-growing and innovative companies — particularly in industries where change is often viewed as risky and complex.
- › Most leaders are not applying investment level rigor to thinking through their leadership brand positioning or strategy. This gives those that do an edge from being an early mover, because brand building takes time.
- › Strong leadership brands can attract great talent, which is one of the biggest challenges facing CEOs who are looking to commit to value creation strategies.





The long-term whys of leadership brand modernization

While a lot of our focus has been on how leadership branding can influence a value creation event, its long tail effects make the investment a leader makes into getting an edge over their competitors through leadership branding such a compelling investment.

A value creation event is a moment in time.

And while it's a critical moment in a leader's career, the work begins after the event — whether it's to stabilize the stock price, ensure smooth continuity after a merger, hit early growth goals, or be a talent magnet to ensure the company's success for years to come.



*Critically, a leadership brand is an asset that is not static — its value, when managed correctly, **compounds** over time.*

An event or high-performing, fast-growth company will usually attract the attention of key industry players, and with that, a leader's sphere of influence can grow.

Developing and nurturing a powerful network aligned with your own long-term goals creates new and desirable opportunities and more value creation events.

In today's market conditions, forward-thinking leaders are taking a long-term view on how their leadership brands can give them an edge if they want to enact change, have a real impact and fulfil their career ambitions.

Founded in 1995, Communiqué International is a global leadership communications advisory that partners with leaders and investors on their value creation that are shaping the future.

The team's discrete advisory services have been used as a resource by political leaders while in government and in opposition; by corporate leaders in times of prosperity as well as in times of recession, and by high-net-worth individuals seeking to maximize their influence and reach.

We differ from internal and external marketing, public relations and investor relations firms as we do not work on the company brand — which traditionally has a lot of time, energy and resources already invested.

Instead, all of our focus is on building the leader's brand, enabling them to channel their wisdom, insights and knowledge as an asset that can be a key driver for the company's value creation ambitions.



[Click here for more in depth case studies as to how some of our clients used leadership branding as an edge to fulfill their value creation ambitions.](#)

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