

Chapter 1

Marketing Yourself (without Being a Celebrity)

This is a free chapter of [the Coding Career Handbook](#)! It is part of the **Tactics** section of the book, and it's yours to keep. Enjoy!

1.1 When to Use This Tactic

Ideally you are constantly marketing yourself, but it's understandable if you don't want it to take over your whole life. So: pull up this tactic when:

- You have done something significant that you are proud of or enjoyed
- Just before some major professional move or project launch (jobhunting or getting a promotion or even when trying to pitch an idea)

For the rest of this essay I will primarily talk in terms of marketing yourself, but the tactics here also work for marketing your *ideas* and your *projects*.

1.2 Introduction

Marketing is important for your career. This isn't earth-shattering news: according to [a recent survey](#), 91% of you already agree.

But people tend to doubt their *ability* to market themselves well. They see “tech celebrities,” and then they look at themselves, and they say: “I’m not like that; when I put out a blogpost I don’t get a billion likes,” or “I don’t want to be like them — that seems hard.”

The mistake here is equating marketing with celebrity. It’s like saying your favorite restaurant shouldn’t bother trying because McDonald’s exists. They’re two different (but related) things!

You are a product. You work really hard on making yourself a great product. You owe it to yourself to spend some time on your marketing even if you don’t want to be a “celebrity”. Like it or not, **people want to put you in a box**. Help them put you in an expensive, high-sentimental-value, glittering, easy to reach box. Preferably at eye level, near check-out, next to other nice looking boxes.

It’s [not that hard to be better than 95%](#) of devs at marketing. The simple fact is that most devs don’t do the basic things that people tell them to do. I think this has two causes:

- It’s not code. Code is black and white. Marketing is shades of gray.
- A lot of advice is very generic. “Blog more”. Devs often need more help transpiling this to actionable instructions.

Let me try.

1.3 You Already Know What Good Personal Marketing Is

You may not feel confident in *practicing* good marketing, but you should realize you are being marketed *at ALL. THE. TIME.* Therefore you can be a world class expert in marketing *that resonates with you.* That's the kind of personal marketing that you can practice - not that other scammy, sleazy, invasive, privacy destroying kind.

You've almost certainly already benefited from *good* marketing — by finding out about something from someone somewhere, that registered a hook in your mind, that eventually drove you to check it out, and now you cannot function without it.

And you certainly want to benefit in the other direction: you *want* to be that thing that others find out about from someone somewhere. You *want* to register hooks in people's minds. You *want* to drive people to check you out. And you *want* people to prioritize working with you.

One constraint you have (one that other marketers wish they had) is that **you don't have to market to the whole world.** You can target the specific audiences you want to work for, and no more than that. As long as you are well-known in those circles, you don't need a public presence at all. Your conversion rate will be higher, and your stress probably lower (as will be your [luck surface area](#)).

1.4 Personal Branding

The topic of marketing yourself is pretty tightly intertwined with personal branding. If you're like me, you've never really thought about the difference until right now.

Think of yourself as a plain, unmarked can of soda. You've got awesome fizz inside. Branding would slap a distinctive logo and colors on the can. Marketing would then be responsible for getting you, the freshly minted can of Coca Cola, at the top of people's minds.

Branding is the stuff that uniquely identifies you. Marketing gets your awesome in front of people.

Of course, it helps marketing to have strong branding. This is why they are correlated. In fact, the strongest branding *creates its own market*. You don't want a laptop, you want a Macbook. You don't want an electric vehicle, you want a Tesla. You don't want sneakers, you want Air Jordans. You can probably come up with more examples.

It's *really easy* to sell to a market in which you are the only seller. Shooting fish in a barrel you made. [Nobody can compete with you at being you.](#)

The other wonderful feature of personal branding is that it is entirely up to you to create stuff that uniquely identifies you. There's no store somewhere where you can pick a brand off the shelf and put it on like a new coat. You create it *from thin air*, with the full dimensionality of all that human diversity has to offer. Seven billion humans on Earth doesn't even come close to exhausting the possible space of unique selling points you can pick.

1.4.1 Picking a Personal Brand

Your personal brand is how people talk about you when you're not in the room.

So naturally, one way to *start* picking a brand is to listen to what people have naturally chosen for you.

Caution: you may not like what you hear! That's OK! That's what we're trying to fix.

1.4.2 Personal Anecdote Time!

If you can get a friend to tell it to you straight, good. If you can get some people on a podcast talking about you without you there, good.

Or, like me, you can *accidentally* eavesdrop on a conversation. I swear I did this unintentionally!

The first time I found out I had established an incredibly strong personal brand was when I was at a house party with 20 friends and friends of friends. While in a small group, I overheard someone behind me talking about me. They introduced me as "that guy that preaches Learn in Public". Then, at a later hour, I heard another person introduce me without me there. Then, again, when joining a new group, a third person introduced me *the exact same way*.

I don't consider myself a personal branding expert. But I understood instantly that I had pulled off a very important feat. I had written so much about a topic that multiple people instantly associated me with

that topic. It's not *critical* that they say it in the exact same way (actually that can be a bit creepy/culty) but it's good enough if they use the same terms.

1.4.3 Anything But Average

There are other aspects of my personal brand that don't get as much attention, but I bring them up front and center when relevant. I changed careers at 30. I used to be in finance. I served as a combat engineer in the Army. I am from Singapore. I speak Mandarin. I've written production Haskell code. I sing a capella. I am a humongous Terry Pratchett fan (GNU Terry Pratchett). I love Svelte and React and TypeScript. I am passionate about Frontend/CLI tooling and developer experience. I listen to way too many podcasts. The list goes on.

But I have this list down *cold*. I know *exactly* which parts of me spark interest and conversation without going too off track. Therefore I can sustain interest and conversation longer, and in exchange, people know when to call on me. You should keep a list too — know your strengths and unfair advantages.

What I do NOT consider my personal brand is the stuff that doesn't differentiate me at all. For example, when asked about my hobbies, I deflect extremely quickly. I identify as a "Basic Bro": I have my PS4, and Nintendo Switch, I like Marvel movies and watch the same Netflix shows you watch. Just like the million other Basic Bros like me.

Totally basic. Totally boring. NOT a personal brand.

In fact anything not "average" is a good candidate for inclusion. In

particular: Diversity is strength. Adversity is strength. Weakness is strength. Nothing is off limits - the only requirements are that you be comfortable self identifying with your personal brand, AND that it evokes **positive emotions** as a result.

I'm serious about that second part - You don't want trolling or outrage or cruel sarcasm to be your brand, nor do you want to bum people out all the time. Instead, **entertain, educate, inspire, motivate.**

1.4.4 Brand Templates

What I did accidentally, you can do intentionally.

A nice formula for a personal brand is **Identity + Opinions**. A personal brand based solely on who you are, doesn't really communicate what you're about. A personal brand based solely on what you do is quite... impersonal. People like knowing a bit of *both*, and you can give it to them in a few short words. Some ideas:

- “I’m a former public school teacher and I think the way we teach people to code can be greatly improved.”
- “I was an actual architect and we’re doing software architecture all wrong.”
- “I did my graduate thesis on static analysis and I see a new generation of tools that make developers faster and less frustrated.”

I really want to give you more hints on this, but I'm afraid if I gave more examples I might limit your imagination. Don't even take this

formula as a given. It's just one template – Another template is “X for Y”: “<what you do> for <who you do it for>”. “I create gorgeous, accessible frontends for DTC ecommerce brands” is a highly marketable oneliner pitch. “I create backends that scale to millions of peak concurrent users for live streaming apps.” And so on. This is a more business oriented template that puts the target audience/customer squarely in focus.

The point is, being able to pitch yourself (and why people should care) in a short, consistent way is a *powerful* weapon in your marketing arsenal. You can choose to think about this rather than improvise.

1.4.5 Brand Manifestation

Once you know what you're about and have nailed down your brand, it's time to plaster it all over. You know how Nike pays athletes millions of dollars just to wear stuff with their logo on it? That's what you're going to do with everything you touch. Top brand consultants ask: “What are the best ways to connect your values and unique value proposition to your site?” You should do that with your portfolio, blog, Twitter, resume, and work output.

Manifest your brand. You don't have to stay digital. In fact, in a digital-first world, going physical sticks out. If your product gives people peace of mind, you might fill your office with aromatic candles and hand them out as gifts (this is *not* hypothetical; [this has been done](#)). Shirley Wu is a data visualization consultant; she [printed out her data visualizations as her business cards](#) and hands them out at conferences. You *BET* they return 1000x their marketing expense in memorability and virality.

Be remarkable. Seth Godin (you're going to hear his name a lot in marketing, think about why) calls this having a [Purple Cow](#). Design Pickle, a design agency, picked a unique name, and literally **dress up in pickle suits** and **hand out pickles** at conferences, which gets them notoriety and business. To manifest their brand, they lean *hard* into it, and see great success while having a lot of fun, because their brand is **authentic and consistent** all the way through from their name down to their swag.

1.4.6 Consistency

Humans love consistency. Developers *REALLLY* love consistency.

Here's an idea of how much humans love consistency. We often want people who are famous for doing a thing, to come on to OUR stage, and do the thing. Then they do the thing, and we cheer! Simple as that. There's so much chaos in the world and having some cultural touchstones that never change is comfort and nostalgia and joy bundled up into one. Here's [Seth McFarlane being prodded to do the voice of Kermit the Frog and Stewie from Family Guy](#) - something he's done a billion times on a billion talk shows - but he does it anyway and we love it anyway. We LOVE when people Do the Thing!

Similarly, when we market ourselves, we should be consistent. People love seeing the same names and faces pop up again (caveat: you should mainly be associated with positive vibes when you do this).

I recommend taking consistency to an extreme level. We used to do this offline with business cards. Online, our profiles have become not only our business cards, but also our faces. The majority of people who

see you online will never see you in person. In most platforms, your profile photo is “read” before your username. Your username is in turn read before your message. Your message is read more than any link you drop. And so on. Therefore I strongly recommend:

- **Photo.** Take a good photo and use the same photo *everywhere*. A professional photographer is worth it, but even better can be something with a good story, or an impressive venue. If possible, try to show your real face, and try to smile. This already puts you ahead of ~50% of users who don’t understand the value of this.

Photos are seen before usernames. Examples [here](#) and [here](#).

Companies spend millions on their logos. So why shouldn’t you spend some time on yours? We are irrationally focused on faces, and we really like it when people smile at us. Thankfully, because it’s just a photo, it costs us *nothing* to smile at everybody all the time. It’s a really easy way to associate your face with positive emotions. And when we see you pop up on multiple different platforms with the same smiling face, we light up! The emotion completely transfers, and the branding is nonverbal but immediate.

- **Real Name.** Show your real, professional name if possible, unless your username is your working name. This works especially well in anonymous platforms like Reddit and Hacker News, because you are taking an additional step of de-anonymizing yourself. People respect this.
- **Username.** Your username should be your name if possible (so people can guess it), or failing which, something you intimately identify with. You should probably have the same one on most platforms, so

that people can find you/tag you easily. Some, like myself, will simply use their usernames as their working names for ever. This can be a branding opportunity as well, similar to the way musicians adopt mononyms and fighter pilots adopt callsigns.

- **Words.** You should consistently associate yourself with a small set of words. Where a bio is allowed, you should have those words prominently displayed. For example, it doesn't take a lot to show up whenever SVG Animation or React and TypeScript are mentioned. You can set Google Alerts or Tweetdeck filters for this, and before long you'll just get associated with those terms. When you *have* your own words, like a catchphrase or motto, and it catches on, that is yet another level of personal branding.

You will have made it when people start making fun of you. I'm not 100% serious, but I'm at least a little bit serious: Can people make memes of you, and others instantly get it? If so, you've got a personal brand.

All this personal branding will be 10x more effective when you have a Domain.

1.5 You Need a Domain

You need a domain.

I mean this in both senses of the word:

1. Set up a site at **yourname.com** that has all your best work

2. Pick a field that you are About.

The first just makes sense - instead of putting all your work on a platform somebody else owns, like Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, or another industry blog, have it primarily discoverable on your own site/blog. This builds your site as a destination and lets you fully control your presentation and narrative — even off-site, on Google.

Having a distinctive site design is yet another point of personal branding that, because you are a dev, costs basically nothing. People come to my site and they [remember my scrollbars](#).

Just understand that your domain and your website are the center of your identity, so ideally you'd have a good domain that will last a literal lifetime. - [Daniel Miessler](#)

But the second meaning deserves more introspection: I am asking you to [plant your flag](#). Put up your [personal bat signal](#).

1.5.1 Planting Your Flag

I used to have a very crude, kinda sexist name for this idea: “Be the Guy.” This is because I noticed how many people were doing this:

- [The Points Guy](#) is the Internet’s pre-eminent authority on travel perks (now a 9-figure business)
- [The RideShare Guy](#) blogged about Ride Sharing for 4 years, and became the guy Wall Street called upon when Uber and Lyft IPO’d

- Science communicators have definitely caught on to this. Neil de-Grasse Tyson *always* introduces himself as your Personal Astrophysicist. But he's completely owned by Bill Nye, the **Science Guy**!

If you skim over “the guy” as a gender-neutral shorthand, the actual important thing about having “a guy” is that you look better just by “knowing a guy”. [Listen to Barney Stinson brag in “How I Met Your Mother”](#):

You know how I got a guy for everything?... My suit guy, my shoe guy, my ticket guy, my club guy, and if I don't have a guy for something I have a guy guy to get me a guy!

This effect is real and it is **extraordinarily powerful**.

Just by “having a guy” for something, you suddenly feel no desire to overlap with that person's domain. You can now focus on something else. And, to the extent you do that, you are now *utterly dependent* on “having a guy”. You're also extremely invested in your “guy” (aka go-to person – the gender is not important) being as successful and prominent as possible, so that you look better by association.

It should strike you now that being someone's go-to person is very valuable, and that this also scales pretty much infinitely (you can be as many people's go-to person as you want, so long as they rarely actually call on you).

You get there by **planting a flag** on your domain, and saying, “this is what I do” (a framing I stole from an [excellent Patrick McKenzie keynote](#)). People *want* expertise. People *want* to defer to authority. People don't actually *need* it all the time, they just want the option just in case. People love hoarding options. You can satiate that latent insecurity indefi-

nately. Most people also define “expertise” simply as “someone who has spent more time on a thing than I have” (The bar is depressingly low, to be honest. People should have higher standards, but they just don’t. This is a systematic weakness you can – responsibly – exploit.)

1.5.2 Picking A Domain

BTW, are you chafing for career advancement, or want to be seen as a leader by your peers? My stock advice is, find an area that is important but under-owned and become everyone’s go-to expert on that topic. - [Charity Majors](#)

You don’t need to get too creative with this one. You want to connect yourself to something important:

- Maybe something people deal with daily but don’t really think about too much (especially if they know they are leaving something on the table, like airline points — it’s easy to make money by helping people unlock free money).
- Maybe something people only deal with once in a blue moon, but when they do it REALLY hurts (so you gain unfair expertise by specializing in having repeated exposure to rare events across multiple customers).

There are a bunch of these, so to narrow them down even more, look out for something you disproportionately love. Look for your own revealed

preferences: Search a topic in Slack or Twitter and see how often you talk about it. Look up your own YouTube watch history. An ideal domain for you is something that seems like work to others but is fun to you.

With everything you love, there are things to hate. Find something within what you love, that you are ABSURDLY unsatisfied with. That love-hate tension can fuel you for years.

For any important enough problem, there are plenty of experts. Do you feel like you haven't narrowed enough? Shrink your world. Be an internal expert at your company for your domain. This also helps you focus on things that bring value to a company, and therefore your career. It's also a very natural onramp to being an external expert when you leave.

1.5.3 Claiming Your Domain

Picking your domain is 90% of the journey. Most people don't even get that far. To *really* clean up, be prolific around that domain. Show up. To every conversation. I call this "High Availability for Humans". In the same way we architect our systems for "High Availability", meaning we can send everything their way because they are very reliable and responsive, we can make ourselves Highly Available around our chosen domain, meaning everyone can send questions our way, because we are very reliable and responsive.

By showing up consistently, you become part of the consideration set. Humans don't have room for a very wide consideration set. It's usually two or three. If we make lists and try really hard, we can get up to 10 (see the Oscars), but even then there's really only two or three that have a real shot.

Think about the last time you purchased soap. You probably buy one of two brands of soap. But there are 100 on the shelves. They just weren't in your consideration set, so they never had a chance.

Your goal, as a brand, is to make it into everyone's consideration set. You do that by being Highly Available.

By the way, we also have huge [Availability Bias](#) when it comes to recall. We conflate "top of mind" with "being the best".

It's your job to be the best at what you do (and to define what that means), but don't stop there. It's also entirely within your control to be *considered* the best, which is what claiming your domain is all about.

1.5.4 Give Up Freedom — For Now

The flip side of planting your flag is that you shouldn't plant it anywhere else. People like to see commitment. It implies, and usually does mean, that you have no choice but to be a domain expert. You signal commitment by giving up optionality. This is 100% OK - what you lose in degrees of freedom you gain 10x in marketing ability.

Author's note: 10x may be an understatement. [Cory House saw a 15x increase in enquiries](#) when he went from "general dev consulting" to "helping teams transition to React". Same dev, different pitch, 15x opportunities.

The secret is — and don't tell anyone — that if you pick a domain and it doesn't work out, *you can still pivot if you need to*. Nobody's going to

hold it against you, as long as you don't pivot too often.

If you really aspire toward more general prominence, you will find a much easier time of it if you first prove yourself in a single domain.

1.5.5 Blogging

Blogging is usually mentioned prominently in the “Marketing for Developers” space — so I feel I must address it here, despite it being only one part of the general mindset I want you to have.

I will always encourage you to blog — but don't fool yourself that merely pushing a new post every month will do anything for you by itself. That's just motivational shit people say to get you started. There's a lot of generic, scattershot advice about how [you should blog more](#). These are usually people trying to sell you a course on blogging. (Except [Steve Yegge](#)!)

The fact is blogs gain extra power when they are focused on a domain. [CSS Tricks](#) is a well-known blog in the frontend dev space, and, as you might guess, for a long time it's domain was entirely CSS tricks. (It's expanded since then). Like everything else you follow, it's all about signal vs noise.

Blogs help you get more juice out of that domain name you own, by constantly updating it with fresh content. You can also use it to feed that other valuable online business asset: your email list! Overall, it is just a good general principle to own your own distribution.

Twitter is a form of microblogging. It lets you export data easily and

your content shows up on Google without an auth wall. All good things. But you're still subject to an algorithmic feed. Social media followings are definitely not distribution that you own — but it can be worth it to make the Faustian bargain of growing faster on a platform (like Twitter) first, then pivoting that to your blog/ mailing list once you have some reach. Growing a blog/ mailing list from zero with no other presence is hard.

1.6 Marketing Your Business Value vs Your Coding Skills

1.6.1 Business Value

A large genre of “Marketing for Developers” advice basically reduces you to an abstract Business Black Box where your only role and value to the company is to Grow Revenue or Reduce Cost (or Die Trying?). I call this “**Marketing Your Business Value**”. This is, of course, technically correct: Technology is a means to an end, and ultimately your employer has to cover costs and justify your salary. It is *especially* in your interest to help them justify as high a salary as possible.

Have *at your fingertips* all the relevant statistics, data, quotes, and anecdotes for when you solved major product pain points, or contributed a major revenue generating/cost saving feature. Julia Evans calls this a [Brag Document](#). You should be able to recite your big wins on demand, and frame it in terms of [What's In It For Them](#), because *you will probably have to*. Managers and employers are well intentioned, and want to

evaluate you fairly and objectively, but often the topic of your contributions comes up completely without warning and out of context, and you want to put yourself on the best footing *every time*.

Consider this “applied personal branding” — You’ll know you’ve succeeded when your boss is able to repeat everything you say you’ve done to *her* boss, to advocate for you as full-throatedly as you should do yourself. Make *that* easy. If you can, get it down to a concise elevator pitch — Patrick McKenzie is fond of citing a friend’s business value as “[wrote the backend billing code that 97% of Google’s revenue passes through.](#)” Enough said.

You might notice some differences between the general form of personal branding we discussed previously, and this “applied” form of personal branding. They are different because you have different goals. With general personal branding, you are trying to be memorable and relatable. People want to get to know you and people like the somewhat familiar (But not too familiar! Familiarity breeds contempt.) With applied personal branding, you are straightforwardly trying to sell yourself and help others sell you. Here you want to focus on unique achievements and traits, including highlighting notable successes.

Be just a *little* shameless. Nobody’s going to like fighting for you if you don’t show any interest in fighting for yourself.

1.6.2 Coding Skills

Unfortunately, “Market Your Business Value” is not at all helpful advice for people who have yet to make attributable business impact through their work: Code Newbies and Junior Devs. Sometimes, even as a Senior

Dev, you are still trying to market yourself to fellow Devs. These two situations call for a different kind of marketing that is under examined: **Marketing your Coding Skills.**

To do this kind of marketing, you basically have to understand the psyche of your target audience: developers. What are they looking for?

There are explicit requirements (those bullet points that companies list on job descriptions) and implicit requirements (subconscious biases and unnamed requirements). You can make it very complicated if you want to, but I think at the core developers generally care about one thing: that you **Do Cool Shit**. Some have an expansive definition of coding skills - even if you've done something totally unrelated, they'll easily assume you can pick up what you need later. Others need something closer to home - that you've Done Cool Shit in a related tech stack.

If you're marketing yourself for employment, then the risk averse will also want to know that you have also **Covered Your Bases** — That, along with the upside potential of hiring you because you've Done Cool Shit, the downside risk of your being a bad hire is minimized. Do you know Git? Can you solve [FizzBuzz](#)? Is your code readable and well documented? If you have shepherded a nontrivial project from start to finish, and have people you can ask for references. If instead you're just marketing your projects and ideas, then downside matters less — it's easy to walk away.

The definition of **Cool** really depends on your taste, but people's interests are broadly predictable in aggregate. If you look at tech sections of popular aggregator sites like Reddit and sort by, say, most upvoted posts in the past year, you can see patterns in what is popular. In fact, [I've done exactly that for /r/reactjs!](#)

Even if your project is less visual, and more abstract, you still need to explain to the average programmer why your project is Cool - it solves a common/difficult problem, or it uses a new technology, or it has desirable performance metrics. The best **Cool Shit** will be stuff you have been paid money for and put in production, and that people can go check out live. If you don't have that yet, you can always Clone Well Known Apps (automatically Cool) - or win a Hackathon (check out [Major League Hacking](#)) - or [Build Your Own X from Scratch](#), another popular developer genre.

1.6.3 Portfolios vs Proof of Work

Usually the advice is to assemble your Cool Shit in a Portfolio. Portfolios do two good things and two bad things:

- They display your work easily and spells out the quick takeaways per piece - you control your narrative!
- They help you diversify your appeal - if one project doesn't spark interest, the next one might!
 - In this sense it is most like a Stock Portfolio — you're diversifying risk rather than adding upside.
- They look skimpy without quantity - meaning you feel forced to Go Wide instead of Go Deep. Quantity over Quality.
- They overly bias toward flashy demos (which doesn't really help if you're not focusing on Frontend Dev/Design)

- You can and should *buy* designs if design isn't a skill you're trying to market - it gives your projects an instant facelift which is generally worth multiples of the <\$100 that a premium design typically costs.

Some people plan their projects based on how they will look on a portfolio - the dreaded "Portfolio Driven Development." That lacks heart, and it will show when you talk about your projects at interviews and talks. Instead, pursue the projects that seem most interesting to you, and then figure out how to present them later. Your interest and enthusiasm when talking about them will go further than padding the portfolio.

In actual practice, there is a wide variety of devs and dev careers for which portfolios make no sense at all. Your humble author is one of them. You can market your coding skills in any number of more relevant ways, from doing major contributions to Open Source, to being Highly Available surrounding a Domain, to blogging. The most general, default marketing skill is definitely blogging. You can write about any kind of technical topic in your blog.

At the end of the day, what you really want to accomplish is to demonstrate **Proof of Work**. Just like in a blockchain transaction, anyone checking you out should be able to instantly and trivially verify that you have worked on some very non-trivial things. When it comes to marketing in public, this is a business card, resume, and interview all rolled into one.

1.7 Marketing Yourself in Public

The better you have a handle on your Personal Brand, your Domain, your Business Value or your Coding Skills, the easier time you will have marketing in public. Everything we've discussed up to this point is useful in public, so I'll just leave you with a few more pointers to consider whenever you engage and want to promote yourself online.

Pick a Channel. The best marketing channels are the ones you're already on. Whatever the reason you enjoy it, you have a natural affinity for it. For me, it was Reddit, and then Twitter. Dev communities like Dev.to are great too, as are the ones you build on your own (aka your mailing list). Just be aware that some platforms are less rewarding than others. For example, Facebook charges you to reach your own subscribers, LinkedIn is full of spam, and Reddit and Hacker News don't show an avatar so you don't get to imprint your personal brand. I think Instagram and YouTube are *huge* areas of opportunity for developers. Just pick one or two, and go all in. A lot of people use social media tools like Buffer to crosspost, but I think this is misguided, because you end up underinvesting in every platform and everyone can tell you aren't there to engage.

Don't Lie. Most things are taken at face value online, and this is wonderful for getting your message out there. But if you misrepresent what you were responsible for, or straight up fabricate something, you will eventually get found out. We like to think that things live forever online, but I think it's actually easier to erase something from Google than it is to undo the reputation damage caused by a lie. People will hold it against you for years, and you will not have a chance to defend yourself or atone for your sins. Stephen Covey calls this [the Speed of Trust](#). Once

you lose trust, everything you say gets run against a suspicion check, and you have to put up more proof points to be taken seriously. This also applies to promises of future commitment too — [if you simply do what you say you were going to do, you will stand out.](#)

Don't Share Secrets. You will gain more privileged information over time as you grow in your career. This is advantageous to you, and you should do everything you can to show you are a trustworthy guardian of that information. People might flatter you to get that information, or offer an information swap. But the only way to encourage more information flow to you is to show that you can keep a secret. If it helps, I've started by flatly saying "That's not my info to discuss" and people usually get the hint.

I always think about Christopher Lee, who fought in the British Special Forces in World War II before his legendary acting career. When pried for information about what he did in the war, he would say: **"Can you keep a secret? Well, so can I."**

Inbound vs Outbound Personal Marketing. I borrowed this idea from Hubspot's [Inbound marketing](#) and Seth Godin's [Permission marketing](#). **Outbound Personal Marketing** is what most people do when they look for jobs. They only do it when they need to, trawling through reams of job listings and putting their CV in the pile with everyone else's. **Inbound Personal Marketing** is what you'll end up doing if you do everything here right: people (prospective bosses and coworkers, not recruiters) will know your work and your interests, and will hit you up on exactly the things you love to do.

Market Like Nobody's Watching. Because probably nobody is, when you're just starting out. It's OK: this is your time to experiment, screw

up, find your voice. Because marketing yourself doesn't ordinarily fall within normal comfort zones, you should try to **do a little more than you're comfortable** with. An aggressive form of this advice? If you're not getting complaints about how you're showing up everywhere, you're not doing it enough. This advice makes sense to some people, and is way too upfront and annoying for others. We each have to find our own balance — it's your name on the line after all.

Market Like One Person's Watching. Marketing is more effective when it is targeted at a specific someone instead of just everyone. Customize your message to an audience that you choose. People often don't know what they want or why they care, so focus on what's in it for them, and tell them why they care. Quote their prior selves if possible.

Market for the Job You Want. This is a variant of "Careful what you wish for... you just might get it." You'll probably end up getting what you market yourself for... so make sure it's something you want!

1.8 Marketing Yourself at Work

It's both easier and harder to market yourself at work. It's easier, because it's a smaller pond, and your coworkers have no choice but to listen to you. It's harder, because while you have people's attention, abuse will not be tolerated.

If you are obnoxious online, people can mute you and carry on with their lives. If you are obnoxious at work, it can backfire pretty directly on you. In particular - always share credit where it's due and never take credit for something that wasn't yours. Of course this applies in public too,

but enough people do it at work that I feel the need to remind you.

Basics aside, you would probably agree that it's important to ensure you get visibility for the work that you have done. Here are some ideas:

- **Log your own metrics for significant projects.** Before-after latencies. Increase in signups. Reduced cloud spend. Uptime improvement. Increased session time. I'm sure your company has an expensive, comprehensive and well instrumented metrics logging system (this is a joke - one does not exist). **Don't trust it.** It will fail you when you need it most, or be unable to tell the story you want told. Hand collect metrics, links, press coverage. Take screenshots. Collect qualitative anecdotes, quotes, shoutouts. The best time to do this is right after you see a good result - you won't have time to go back for it. Stick it in a special place somewhere for a special occasion - like, say, a performance review. If you use Slack, it can be helpful to make your own Slack channel and Slack yourself your own notable achievements. This gives you a nice chronological log of work.
- **Awesome Status Updates.** Status Updates are a humdrum routine at most workplaces. Most people put no effort into them. You can buck the trend by making them *awesome* with just a little more effort. I've seen this "flip the bits" in team morale - after seeing just one person do this, people realize they can either continue being boring or join in the effort to do the best work of their lives.
- **Unprompted Status Updates.** Sometimes a project is disorganized enough that there aren't even regular updates scheduled. Management probably vaguely knows what is going on, but is too busy to ask for more. You can fill the leadership vacuum simply by doing your own regular status updates.

- **Do Demos.** Offer to do them every time. This is an internal marketing opportunity that people regularly turn down because of the stress of public speaking or because it's more work. You don't even have to wait for an assigned time for demos — since many workplaces are now at least partially remote and asynchronous, you can simply put up a short recording of your own demo! Good demos will spread virally — and so will you. Caveat: make sure you have the stakeholder approvals you need before you do this; don't demo work that isn't ready for prime time.
- **Signature Initiative.** I stole this idea from Amazon, but I'm sure other workplaces have terms for this. Basically, something that you do on the side at work, that sidesteps the usual org chart and showcases your abilities and ideas. After pitching the idea unsuccessfully for two years, [Zack Argyle convinced Pinterest's CEO to turn Pinterest into a PWA based on a Hackathon project](#). This had [tremendous business impact](#) and probably made his subsequent career. That's a very high bar, but don't worry, your contributions don't have to be that directly product related. Simpler initiatives I've seen might be to find opportunities to share your interests with fellow devs. Start an internal book club. A lunch and learn series. If leaders at [Google](#) and [Etsy](#) started an external talk series, why can't you? Matthew Gerstman [started a JavaScript Guild at Dropbox](#), and created a newsletter, forum, and event for hundreds of his fellow engineers to improve their craft. **This is wonderful!** I did something similar at Two Sigma, and when I left, my coworkers said they would genuinely miss my sharing and discussions.

For more ideas on becoming indispensable at work, check out Seth Godin's [Linchpin](#). You can find a decent summary [here](#).

1.9 Things That DO NOT MATTER

- **Appealing to Everybody.**
- **Short-term Optimizations.**
 - Day of the week and time of day that you post
 - Short term analytics (e.g. weekly traffic)
 - It's not really that they don't matter, it's just that you should be working on more evergreen things that make short term nonsense irrelevant.
- **Being a Celebrity.**
 - **Better to be rich and unknown than poor and famous.** If you can build a successful tech career without being a celebrity, then *absolutely* do that — unless you just crave the attention.
 - I haven't mentioned followers once in this entire essay. You can buy followers and everyone can tell. It looks sad.
 - Building real relationships with peers and mentors you respect is way more fulfilling than raw numerical mass appeal.

1.10 Recap

That was a LOT of high level marketing concepts. Do take a while to digest them. The last section is going to be a grab bag of tactical ideas for marketing yourself - *after* you get the important details in place.

To recap:

Assemble your Personal Brand, your Domain, and your Coding Skills/Business Value, then Market Yourself in Public + at Work.



As Troy Hunt often notes in [his career advice](#), good personal marketing is your Plan B. If you only start doing it when you need it, it will be too late. Take the time to work on it while the stakes are low, and you'll be much better at it when the stakes are high.

1.11 Bonus: Marketing Hacks

Here's a list of "hacks" that can get you quick wins with Marketing Yourself. Try them out and let me know how it goes!

- **Help Others Market.** This is so simple as to feel "dumb" even pointing it out, but it works. You want practice in marketing, but don't want to take the full plunge yourself, or don't feel like you have something to offer yet. You can find others who are brilliant but uninterested in marketing, and offer free marketing help! [Here's Dan Abramov:](#)

I'm pretty good at making demos, but I'm not very good at original ideas, so what I try to do is find smart people with really good ideas who are struggling to explain those ideas and why those ideas matter, and I popularize them because those ideas deserve that. And I think people respond to that. And **you remember who you learn from.**

- **Market the same thing three different ways.** A *great* exercise to hone your marketing skills is to interpret the same thing three different ways. During a prior job I was forced to queue up tweets for the same blogpost multiple times, but because of Twitter rules I wasn't allowed to repeat myself. I used to dread it, but then reframed it when I realized that this was a great exercise in figuring out how to market the same thing to different audiences. You can do this with your own personal brand, too. You're a multidimensional person — if there is some part of you that connects better with your audience in context, use that! I recommend [Leil Lowndes' How to Talk To Anyone](#) for great tips on this.

- **Crosspost on Industry Blogs.** A nice way to get attention for your work is to do great work on someone else's platform. Industry blogs (and newsletters) are pretty much always looking for quality content. For Frontend Dev, the ones with rigorous editing are CSS Tricks, Smashing Magazine, and A List Apart. For Backend, you can try Twilio, Digital Ocean, or Linode's blogs.

See more tips in **Write, A Lot** (Chapter 18)

- **Collaborations.** Related to crossposting and helping others — you can raise your profile by working with others who already have very high profiles. Justin Mares bootstrapped his own profile by [coauthoring a book](#) with Gabe Weinberg, Founder of DuckDuckGo. Same for [Blake Masters with Peter Thiel](#). [Ben Casnocha with Reid Hoffman](#). If you can work out a non-exploitative deal where you do a bunch of legwork but learn a lot, and then copublish with the author, take it. That's a rare deal; most often you will just be [Picking Up What They Put Down](#) and working your way toward becoming a peer the slow way. If they have a meetup, forum, podcast, or whatever platform, show up on theirs, and then get them to show up on yours.
- **Industry Awards.** Some people set a lot of store by awards and certifications. Well regarded programs include Microsoft MVP, Google GDE, AWS Heroes. As a pure signaling mechanism, certifications work like anything else works — an unhappy mix of credible, gamified, and incomplete. But having a bunch of logos on your site/slides generally helps you, so long as they are not your biggest claim to fame.
- **Memorable words/catch phrase/motto.** This is used by companies and reality stars alike, and can be a bit tacky if you try to, well, [make fetch happen](#), but if you strike a nerve and capture the zeitgeist you

can really carry your message far. Nike spends *billions* to make sure that every time you think of the words “Just Do It,” they come up. You can do that too.

- **Friendcatchers.** [Make them.](#)
- **Visualize your work.** If you draw, you can be WORLD BEATING at marketing. Draw everything you can. [Even the invisible stuff.](#) ESPECIALLY the invisible stuff.
 - If you say you cannot draw, that’s a lie. Use [Excalidraw.](#)
- **Elevator Pitch.** In the old days, you prepared pitch literally for when you ran into the decisionmaker on a 30-second elevator ride. A typical template goes something like “if you’re a **<role>** who **<point of view>**, I/my thing **<what it does>** in **<some eyepopping metric>**”. In this day of both TikTok and podcasts, attention spans are both shorter and longer than that. You need to tailor your elevator pitch accordingly. Be able to sell yourself/your idea/your project in:
 - 1 hour
 - 15 minutes
 - 5 minutes
 - 30 seconds
 - 280 characters (a tweet)
 - (stretch goal) [2 words](#)

- **Summarize the top three books in your field for your blog.** This idea is often attributed to Tim Ferriss, but I'm sure multiple people have come up with it. The idea is that you don't have to be original to have a great blog: it's easy to bootstrap your web presence — and your own expertise — by covering existing ground. If you do it very well you can rise to prominence for that reason alone: Shane Parrish and Mike Dariano built [Farnam Street](#) and [The Waiter's Pad](#) purely off summaries. Then practice marketing your summaries by syndicating them on Twitter. Make talks out of them at work and on YouTube.

Further Reading:

- [flawless app's Marketing for Engineers repo](#) - a hand-picked collection of resources for solving practical marketing tasks, like finding beta testers, growing first user base, advertising project without a budget, and scaling marketing activities for building constant revenue streams.