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Build your personal brand online

A strong digital presence is increasingly vital for any successful artist – and it starts with the right name

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If you're an individual artist or freelance creative, there can be a lot of equity in what you call yourself. Whether you simply use your given name, create a smart pseudonym, or refer to yourself as a studio or collective, one thing's for certain: clarity and consistency is key.

As your reputation grows, particularly online, crafting and maintaining a personal brand can also make you more memorable to prospective clients and collaborators. This doesn't have to mean a fully-fledged logo – simply securing the right domain name for your website and rolling it out consistently across any social media handles is a good start.

For Amsterdam-based freelance illustrator Hilbrand Bos, this all proved relatively straightforward. "I'm lucky to have an uncommon surname, and as an Xennial I also got to be the first to choose handles on all the platforms," he smiles.

For those a little later to the party, or with a more common name, Bos advises that the right domain is the most crucial thing to secure. "It's your business card; your headline," he points out. "You must make it as easy as possible to find you once people first hear of you."

Top: Gold by David Spriggs; Above: Cover artwork by Hilbrand Bos

CHOOSE AN EXPRESSIVE EXTENSION

UK-born, Vancouver-based artist David Spriggs has encountered the issue of username shortage first-hand. "It'd be wonderful to be the same across all platforms, but as most people know, this is often impossible," he says. "I don't have the same username for my various social media platforms, but I'm glad to have at least my name for my web address."

For Spriggs, moving his online presence from a .com address to davidspriggs.art was a conscious strategy to separate himself from the world of commerce. "I am a romantic for art and like to think that commerce and art are separate things," he explains.

"Ideas and creativity need freedom from commerce, at least in the concept phase. For an artist, there's nothing worse than giving yourself financial crutches in the creative process or making art just to be sellable. I like having a .art address as it guides people into thinking about my work as art."

Bos agrees, suggesting that his .art domain extension helps set his website apart. "I've always loved descriptive domain names," he says. "When alternative extensions came out, the option became available to have the extension be part of the phrase. It tells my whole story in the shortest way possible: 'Hilbrand Bos' art' becomes hilbrandbos.art."

Acts of Power by David Spriggs

CRAFT A MEMORABLE ONLINE PRESENCE

A visual expression of your personal brand isn't always necessary, but a logo can be a powerful way to tell your story as an independent creative, with the bonus of practicing what you preach as a designer.

"I've had my own personal brand since the start of my career five years ago," reveals Raymond Shen, a graffiti artist turned digital designer based out of San Francisco who maintains his online portfolio at iamray.art. "I went through countless iterations of building my identity to truly find my own style and passion as a designer, and then kept that design consistent across any professional platforms," he adds.

Bos has also developed a simple but distinctive mark to express his personal brand: "My logo is my initials, the way that I sign my drawings," he reveals. "It's personal to me, and I think it reflects my practice in a nice minimalist way."

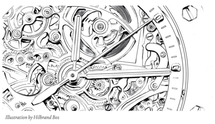

Illustration by Hilbrand Bos

BUILD YOUR CREATIVE NETWORK

"I think a brand starts when we declare it," suggests Katerina Belkina, a Russian-born artist and photographer now based in Germany. "First your family and friends know about it, then the circle expands. It may be enough to become popular on some platform, and the fame of what you do spreads."

Belkina admits to being "relaxed and naïve" about her presence on social media when the major platforms were still in their infancy. "I was represented on every possible network as well as my personal website at belkina.art, but it was like a hobby. Just pleasant networking," she explains.

"When I started treating it as a full-fledged job, I found out that successful social networking is much harder to do now," Belkina continues. "Now the viewer is not just someone who comes to exhibitions, but someone who visits your profile. You must invest time and money in the loyalty of your online audience. It's all part of your brand."

Like Bos, Belkina uses her artist signature as part of her personal brand. "The name is actually a creative pseudonym," she reveals. "At first it was sort of a joke, a nickname I used on photo sites. But when people started to recognise me by it, my gallerist told me at the time: 'Don't dare change it.' So now my artistic name is a part of me, always constant."

Greening The Rising Star by Katerina Belkina

LET YOUR WORK DO THE TALKING

The most distinctive and relevant aspect of any artist or designer's identity, of course, is the work itself. "I guess in some way an artist's work is a sort of brand," reflects Spriggs, whose large-scale installations use a technique of layered transparencies to explore complex subjects such as transparency, power, and the nature of perception.

"Over many years I've built a style, technique and conceptual basis for my work that over time – by exhibiting my work across the world – has made my work recognisable," he adds.

"Be aware that everything online can be visible across the world, so only present your best," is Spriggs' advice. "People have very limited attention spans, so make it easy to access the content you want them to see. We don't need to see everything you have ever made."

Roadside Picnic by Katerina Belkina

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