

# The power of personal branding: Why you need to invest in it now

Sports icon Serena Williams is one of the greatest tennis players of all time and worth an impressive \$250m. Although four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka may have slipped down the ratings recently, she still made more money during 2022 than any other female athlete that same year. These two superstars have more in common than their prowess on the court - they also understand the power of personal branding.



Source: [www.unsplash.com](https://www.unsplash.com)

While the world's top athletes and personalities know the importance of controlling their brands, they also know they can't do it all on their own. "It's physically impossible to be a pro athlete and a digital marketer," says Mike Sharman, chief creative officer of digital marketing agency Retroviral.

"Athletes are small businesses, but you don't have to do everything yourself." Sharman was speaking at Momentum's inaugural Women Who Make Moves in Sports Summit, an exclusive event held from 8 to 9 August and attended by top female athletes from across the country. The Summit provided sportswomen with vital tools to support them in commercializing and building their personal brands to better attract sponsorship and endorsement opportunities.

However, these tips were not only limited to athletes, says Anneke Hanekom, Momentum Metropolitan's group head of PR, reputation management and CSI. "They can benefit many women professionals who are looking to build their personal brands. Whether you are an athlete, have your own business, or work in business, everything you do and say contributes to building or detracting from your personal brand and reputation."

## Building your personal brand

Sibu Mabena, founder, and CEO of creative communication agency Duma Collective and another speaker at the Summit, stressed that your brand persona is the heart and soul of your personal brand. "It's what sets you apart from the crowd – it's your true self, your story and your values," she said. "It is the foundation on which you'll build your social image." How to build an authentic brand persona? Mabena offers the following tips:

1. **Know yourself.** Understanding yourself is the first step towards building your brand persona. Be honest about your strong and weak points.
2. **Define your values.** Your values are the pillars of your brand persona; it's what guides you throughout your life and

determines your priorities.

3. **Write your story.** Your journey is powerful, and it is what will resonate with your audience and fans. As Sharman adds, “You don’t understand how remarkable your story is – you are a Nike commercial in your day-to-day.”
4. **Be consistent.** You should be the same person in every interaction, from social media to personal and professional conversations.
5. **Stay true to yourself.** Everyone will grow and evolve throughout their life – but your core values and identity stay this same. This is key to not only building a strong brand persona, but building character, too.

Mabena had further practical tips for the nitty-gritty of brand building, which could enhance your professional appeal. Firstly, know how to write a professional bio. This is not your CV, it is a succinct yet comprehensive introduction to your journey, your accomplishments, and your values. Include relatable details like your hobbies or interests and a clear call to action, whether that is for people to follow you on social media or contact you for professional opportunities.



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Mabena also advised not underestimating the power of the business card – with our lives all online these days, having a tangible contact card with your full name, discipline, or specialty, contact information and social media handles would help you stand out from the crowd. You should also set up a business email – yes, it’s time to let go of hotcakes23@yahoo.com – and Sharman’s tip is to reserve your vanity URL (that is, make sure you own www.yournamehere.com) and set up social media accounts on all channels with your name, so you own your own name on all platforms. You don’t need to post everywhere, but you should build name recognition.

## The power of social media

Once you have established yourself as a potential brand and put the wheels in motion to become a familiar face, it is time put yourself out there. Jessica Nkomo, sports analyst, agent, managing director of BSports Agency and another speaker at the Women Who Make Moves in Sports Summit, encouraged networking.

“You must engage and talk to people, learn, and develop, and find opportunities, she said. “Loyal supporters will elevate your visibility and credibility.”

To build this loyalty, you must be active on social media. “Reply and share. Stay active and frequent.”

Nkomo also reminded the audience of the importance of online safety: “Never share your password and change it frequently. If you get hacked, that’s all your followers and hard work gone.”

## What companies look for in personalities?

While massive brand endorsements such as LeBron James's US\$1 billion lifetime deal with Nike make the news and it seems as if companies have endless amounts of cash to shower on talented people, the reality is much more complicated, says Silke Bucker, senior director: Coca-Cola Category Africa at The Coca-Cola Company.

Speaking at the summit, Bucker shared insights into how companies make marketing and sponsorship decisions. "It's all about connection. Most brands want to connect with Generation Z – the children and young adults who were born with a phone in their hands. They make decisions in eight seconds, and they don't listen to brands – they listen to people they relate to," she shares.

"Brands want to connect with their target consumer and build brand love to sell their product – and the most powerful space is to partner where values align." As a brand ambassador, you are an extension of the brand, and you must be "squeaky clean," Bucker says. How can an athlete build these valuable connections with brands? Bucker offers the following advice:

1. **Be authentic.** You must know who you are and what you stand for. You must decide what brand you want to build for yourself and work with your agent to find a brand to connect with that.
2. **Find your edge.** What sets you apart? What can you speak about outside of what you do on the field?
3. **Choose your platform.** You cannot build a brand on every platform – choose one or two and intentionally build your brand there. Everything you do – how you dress and speak and who you surround yourself with – is your brand. You are building a community around yourself, which could then become commercially viable.
4. **Select your partners.** Be intentional about your partners, whether it's a short or long-term deal.
5. **Understand your commercial value.** Your commercial value is not about reach or impressions, it's not about follower counts and likes – it is about transactions. You must be able to commercialize your value to a corporate. How are you converting your community to buy their product?

"Ultimately, whether you are an athlete or a budding influencer, you should tell a story that people can connect with. Therein lies the power of personal branding on your journey to success – which could be lucrative if you manage it with authenticity and consistency," added Hanekom.

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