

Being true to yourself

In today's marketplace, staying true to your personality and values can be the making of a brand (not to mention the beginning of a happier you). It's time to embrace your quirks and love them as much as your customers will

BE YOUR BRAND

There is a long-term trend for companies taking the name of the woman behind them – Emma Bridgewater, Sophie Allport, Jan Constantine – and for good reason. Customers are keen to buy into the personality behind the mug they treat themselves to or the cushion they buy as a gift. The item means more to them than if it was manufactured or sold by a faceless corporation. This is great news for one-person ventures like yours because you are in a perfect position to capitalise on this and spark the interest of potential customers.

Don't worry if the idea of talking about yourself and your business initially feels a little daunting – you're not alone. As Rebecca Kirk of Coach for Creatives (coachforcreatives.co.uk) sums up: "When starting your own business, one of the biggest challenges – but also one of the biggest opportunities – is being yourself." You can overcome this by starting slowly and

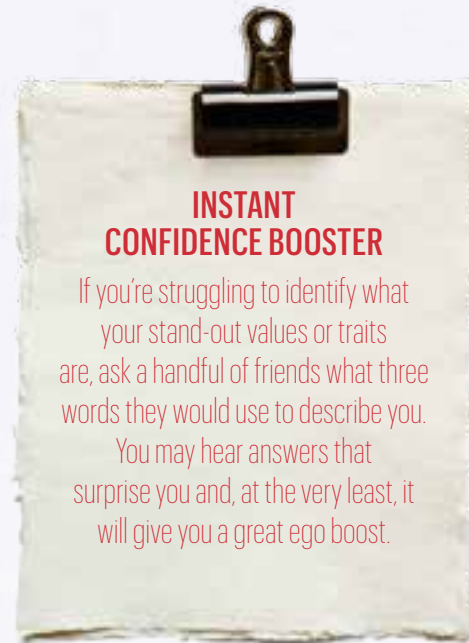
sharing little things like pictures of where you make your products or an explanation of what inspires you. You'll be surprised how quickly it begins to feel natural. This is also a great way to develop your unique selling point (USP). You might not be the only person out there who makes pet accessories for example, but there's a good chance you'll be the only one who lives in the

countryside outside Henley with an Irish wolfhound called Jasper. Customers love hearing details like that and it will make you more memorable.

DON'T AIM FOR PERFECTION

It can be tempting to feel pressure to project a 'flawless' version of you, but do this and you will be wasting time and energy on a fool's errand. Most often it's

actually the less-than-perfect elements of people's lives that customers find more relatable and attractive, whether that's the fact that Jasper the wolfhound is a naughty dog or that you're an overstretched mum juggling your business with the school run. So don't listen to the inner voice saying that you're not attractive, well-dressed, clever or organised enough. As we addressed in chapter three, none of these things are likely to be true, plus it's the genuine you that customers will warm to, not a shiny version of how you think you should be. "Just do and be the best that you can. Your ideal audience is much more likely to build an emotional connection with the authentic you than a clinical image of perfection," agrees Paula Hutchings of Marketing Vision Consultancy (marketingvision.co.uk). "Once you've decided on your brand identity, remain consistent with everything you do – from product creation to how you market the business and present yourself."



INCORPORATE YOUR VALUES

Going one step further is Nicky Moran of Empowering Creatives (nickyjmoran.com), who recommends that women entrepreneurs take time to consider their principles, which will form the foundations of their start-ups: "Gain clarity on your core values, skillset and purpose, so you can create a business that reflects your unique personality." She believes that this approach will help ensure a longer-term enterprise, greater fulfilment and more confidence. Rebecca Kirk agrees that all aspects of your start-up can be run according to your ideals and preferences, including offering a retail experience and after-sales service that you yourself would enjoy (see Exercise in this chapter).

ALIGN YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL SELF

If you're coming from a corporate background, you may need to adjust your mindset. We should all appear professional in a work capacity but sometimes we can take this too far and allow our true self to be a casualty of the process. In an office scenario, for instance, you might have emulated the behaviour of your colleagues in order to be heard by your manager. However, now you are self-employed you can set the tone and, while presenting yourself in a professional manner, you can not only retain and celebrate your personality, but build your brand on it.



REAL-LIFE INSPIRATION

Getting personal

Among the clients of Nicky Moran of Empowering Creatives is an opera singer who needed to build her career and profile, so they worked together on how best to represent her talent and personality

Name and location: Sarah Power, Glasgow
Business: soprano in opera and concert stage productions (sarahpower.com)

Identifying Sarah's flare for telling stories about her background in Ireland was the first step in Nicky's programme to create her client's personal brand. She then combined this with her singing style and encouraged the soprano to create a product that embodied both aspects: a CD of

songs that she was passionate about, recorded in Ireland. Sarah also decided to start writing a blog in which she could cover what it was like being on tour with her work and elements of her personal life, with the aim of making stronger connections with her audiences. The soprano has since attracted opportunities via her website to perform, including being a soloist in Handel's *Messiah* at the Royal Albert Hall.

TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS

By embracing your true self while building your business, you are also more likely to be in touch with your intuition and go with your gut feelings when making decisions, instead of trying to suppress what your mind and body are telling you. Combined with common sense and research, this behaviour is often credited with the success of entrepreneurs. Be aware of all the usual physical signs, as well as the positive or negative thoughts of your 'inner voice' (while keeping a check on imposter syndrome – see chapter three).

TRY NOT TO TAKE ANYTHING PERSONALLY

Like many aspects of business, it's a balancing act: incorporating your personality in your start-up while having enough distance to not feel hurt by rejection. Among the implications of this is "accepting that not every single person is going to love what you do, but that's okay," according to Rebecca Kirk. Remember the times when you've not enjoyed a dish in a restaurant or tried on a dress that didn't suit you? Mostly you can put it down to your own preferences rather than incompetence on the chef or designer's part. So a customer's lukewarm or downright negative reaction to your product or service shouldn't affect your sense of self-worth, but will more often than not simply reflect their own personal taste.