

Personal Branding in the Digital Age

Stories of Entrepreneurs & Experts



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EXPERTS AND ENTREPRENEURS FEATURED

- Penelope Bellegarde, From corporate to entrepreneur | Founder & Digital Analytics Consultant at The Data Touch <http://www.thedatatouch.com/en/>
- Milena Bottero, From struggling intern to entrepreneur | Founder Room for Tea Room for Tea <https://www.roomfortea.com/>
- Suki Fuller, Analytical Storyteller | Entrepreneur, Competitive and Strategic Intelligence Advisor, Global Keynote Speaker <https://www.linkedin.com/in/sukifuller/>
- Esther George, Geek combating cybercrime | Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Prevention Specialist <https://www.linkedin.com/in/esther-george/>
- Mindy Gibbins-Klein, Book Coach | Founder of The Book Midwife®, International Speaker, Author <http://www.mindygk.com/>
- Jessica Gioglio, Visual Storyteller | Author, Speaker & Marketing Executive <http://www.jessicagioglio.com/>
- Daniel Gurrola, Executive in transition | Telco Senior Executive <https://www.linkedin.com/in/daniel-gurrola-54140aa/>
- James Saward-Anderson, Millennial hustler | Director of The Social Selling Company <http://thesocialsellingcompany.com/>
- Riaz Kanani, Born entrepreneur | Business and Marketing Leader, Marketing Tech/Adtech <http://riazkanani.com/>
- Ekene Som Mekwunye, Award-winning filmmaker | CEO Riverside Productions <http://www.riversideproductions.net/>
- Naomi Sesay, Media guru | Global Speaker, Head of Youth Media Engagement at Media Trust <https://www.linkedin.com/in/naomi-sesay-7b925b21/>
- Russ Shaw, Building influential Tech community | Founder, Tech London Advocates <http://www.techlondonadvocates.org.uk/>
- Olivier Zara, From Military to consultant | Management & Social Media Consultant, Author, Expert in Collective Intelligence <https://www.linkedin.com/in/olivierzara/>



PILLAR #1: HOW THEY FOUND THEIR PATH?

Nollywood filmmaking | Ekene Som Mekwunye

Ekene Som Mekwunye is an award-winning filmmaker and the CEO of Riverside Productions.

“I never knew I was going to be a filmmaker; it was not a passion I always had. Filmmaking came to me along the line. I was into advertising and we created TV commercials and I just realised that I enjoyed working with the camera.

From there, I decided to go to film school and I learned filmmaking from one of the earliest people in Nollywood, the name for the Nigerian filmmaking industry. After that, I briefly studied in Los Angeles at Universal Studios.”

Ekene enrolled recently in an executive MBA program at Lagos Business School.

“A lot of my classmates asked me what a filmmaker will do with an MBA. I always tell them this. Filmmaking is business, especially in Nigeria where filmmaking is big business; it contributes significantly to our GDP.”

According to [Fortune](#)ⁱ, Nollywood had surpassed Hollywood as the world’s second largest movie industry by volume in 2009, ranking right behind India’s Bollywood. In 2014, the Nigerian government released data showing that Nollywood is a \$3.3 billion sector.

“My purpose of doing an MBA is to understand the rudiments of business and how to grow what I do into a multi-billion dollars business. You know, as much as it’s a passion also it’s also a business.

“One of my biggest purposes in life is to influence people for the better, not just with my films, but also through teaching. One of my major passions is teaching young people. I organise training for young people who want to learn filmmaking.

I want to help build a generation of young people who will not just be filmmakers, but live a life of purpose. I believe I am living a fulfilled life in the sense that I’m doing well in my career as a filmmaker. My films are going places and my films are being seen across the world.”

Driven millennial entrepreneur | James Saward-Anderson

Twenty-six-year-old James Saward-Anderson is the founding director of the Social Selling Company, a B2B social media service provider based in the UK with customers ranging from small start-ups to FTSE 250 organisations.

James likes to push his limits. He completed a challenge of a 40km run through 40cm of sea water with 40 pounds of weight on his back, ‘all with holes in his shoes’, to raise money for Water Aid.

“The drive for me to do these challenges is to face adversity, to put myself in a situation where I have to be tested physically and mentally, because I believe human progress doesn’t happen unless if there is some kind of difficulty.

“I’ve been very privileged in my life, to have had loving parents and grow up in a loving home. I had no real problems, which is a blessing. But as a result, I felt like I needed to challenge myself in different environments and push my body and mind, because by doing that I’ve learned so much about myself and it’s really been a self-realisation.

“I've never been very good in an employment situation. I didn't click. I didn't thrive. I'm quite a lone-wolf but my parents have been supportive.

“I believe this is what I am here to do. I will do it if I had no money, if I had a load of money, and I would keep doing it because I feel like I've really found what I love to do.”

PR savvy | JessicaGioglio

Jessica Gioglio is a social media expert and co-author of “The Power of Visual Storytelling: How to Use Visuals, Videos, and Social Media to Market Your Brand.” She is speaker at social media and tech conferences, and previously led social media for Dunkin' Donuts. Her work resulted in numerous industry awards.

“I was working for Comcast, the US's largest telecom company, when I started a personal blog called [The Savvy Bostonian](#) in 2006. It's my passion project and creative hobby, but I started to become a micro-influencer in Boston and was a well-known blogger.

“I was getting invited to many events and PR people were pitching me to cover their events, whether it was a new restaurant opening or Fossil, a watch company that invited me to their holiday preview and giving me a free watch.

“I went into PR because I was a good writer and a good speaker. And I always liked journalism, but I realised the future was going to be more in online marketing and online media. That's how I made the pivot with this blog passion project.

“What I realised, whether it's public relations or marketing, it's about understanding the bigger picture of those fields and how they connect to achieve the company business objectives. I think I'm creative at heart, a content producer and a storyteller, but if it doesn't roll into the bigger picture, I knew I wasn't going to be successful.

“You have to celebrate who you are, what you've done and what you're inspired to do next. That's why I feel like I'm living my purpose, because I recognize I'm not perfect. I am okay with that and I recognise that I get excited by what's to come. I'm going for it. I'm going to hustle.

“Living your purpose and your passion is not about getting to the finish line, it's embracing the journey.”

Passion for Analytics| Penelope Bellegarde

Penelope Bellegarde left a cushy corporate job to start her own digital analytics company, The Data Touch.

“I decided to go solo to have a day-to-day fulfilment and freedom. I'm passionate about digital analytics and that's why I wanted to launch my own company. This is exactly the type of services I could sell to clients, and it's freedom, because when you are in charge. You get to decide the types of clients you interact with and the types of projects you get involved in.

“I feel a lot more in control of my career, but also in my life. And getting to that stage of control that is something that I really wanted to reach.

“My career started in marketing after I've got my Masters. Then I moved to online marketing, and within two years of starting work I realised if you want to be credible in a marketing job, you had to be able to show tangible results. That got me to switch my focus to web analytics, which is now called digital analytics.”

Innate Entrepreneurial Spirit | Riaz Kanani

Riaz Kanani is a B2B marketing professional specially in marketing tech/AdTech/data science. He launched and sold his marketing tech start-up, Digital Oxygen, and is the chair of the Cass Entrepreneurs Network.

“My family is entrepreneurial. The idea of starting a business wasn't something that was made to feel intimidating or scary. It was normal. A lot of things that people fear when they think about starting a business and the risks associated, I've never really felt that.

“I set up a magazine at the age of twelve, which I distributed to about five people. I also did other small projects to make a little bit of money, but nothing major until the age of sixteen or seventeen when I started to understand business a bit better. Understanding things, like legal structure, accounting, and finance, allowed me to start building what I call ‘a real business.’”

Riaz moved from the Midlands to London and worked with tech start-ups before the dotcom bubble.

“I've been among the precursors of the Internet and I did understand that space. It was a pretty easy next step to go in, advising companies on the Internet and how they can take advantage of it.

“My two big passions are Internet and technology, but also psychology and people. How do people behave, how people work, and how they get things done?”

“I didn't really know about marketing. For me, business was finding a need that people had and figuring out how to communicate to solve that need. That's marketing in essence, but I didn't really know that. What I was talking about with all of these companies was how you do you communicate and how you take advantage of current technology. Those two things together got me into the realm of marketing technology.”

The Connector | Russ Shaw

Russ Shaw is the founder of Tech London Advocates, a community of 5000+ influential digital entrepreneurs, experts, financiers, investors and politicians committed to selling London as a world-leading technical business hub.

“At university, I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do. I studied accounting and finance and I did Economics and Spanish, and then I got my first real practical job and realized I didn't like it. So, I went back to graduate school at Harvard Business School, which is where I met my wife who's from London. That's when I really decided that I wanted to get involved in marketing.

“I like the creative aspect of marketing; how do you manage and promote a brand. Marketing today is very different from when I started. Digital marketing today is very scientific. So, it was those aspects that I really enjoyed: what is it that the customer wants, and how to develop the right proposition; how to build the right product around that has been of much interest.

“Fast forward to today, when I look at London tech as a proposition, I ask what can we do to better market and promote what we're doing that allows us to do it in a credible way. So rather than being government sponsored or becoming a trade association, I felt it was

important that we were an independent voice that can promote great things that are happening, but also be very critical.”

Analytical Storytelling | Suki Fuller

Suki Fuller is an analytical storyteller, speaker and mentor. Founder of Miribure

“When I was a child, I was always telling stories, but I never liked to write them down. Whenever I explained something in my family, I would tell a story, even if it was completely logical.

“Coming from a family with a mixed heritage, you know, Caribbean, Asian, telling stories are what we do. I have a math and science background. My father being a computer engineer means that was built into my DNA.

“I am both introvert and extrovert. The engineering part of me was the introvert part. Being in the lab for five hours, I could get by. But a part of me wanted to interact with people, so you get a little conflict in situations like this.

“I stopped school for a while to figure out what I wanted to do and I came across the intelligence studies program. It was a mix of analysis, practical experience and theory. Being an analyst feeds the introvert side of me, because you are in a room by yourself with a lot of data.

“In the intelligence world, you get all kind of information, put them together and analyse them, then you tell the decision makers what should happen.



PILLAR #2: HOW THEY FOUND THEIR STRENGTHS & EXPERTISE

Being honest with yourself when searching | Daniel Gurrola

“There might be skills or talents you don't see but others do. This usually comes about when you have conversations with people. My key strength is my ability to form meaningful relationships with people. I have the ability to strike conversations and get to the core of the matter and discuss it in a way that engenders trust from people. It's very easy for me to do that.

“Now, you may think that's a skill, but how do I use that skill at work? Well, you will be surprised by the number of positions available for people who are able to establish relationships: relationships across borders, across the world, and across industries that fosters trust. They may not be called relationship building jobs, but account management, business development, a trust advisor, a senior adviser. These fancy names are about relationship building.

“I also speak different languages, which means I expand my circle of people I can establish trust with. When you're able to speak the language of someone else, and they know you are not a native speaker, they appreciate you taking the time to learn their language.”

Being able to do many things very averagely! | James Saward-Anderson

“I can do pretty much anything. I can design most sites. I've designed marketing content plans. I've sold to C-level executives in FTSE 50 companies, at some conferences. I've done coding. But all of those were done at a very rudimentary level. I am very good at building templates, so experts can come and add their finishing touches.

“As an entrepreneur, that is probably one of the strongest characteristics you can have. And that's probably why I never really done very well in a work environment, because when you work you're put into a specialism: you are a website designer, you are a chef. I am someone who can get involved in lot of different things at quite an average level.

“We have to accept that with the Internet, especially if you're a small business, you have to be relatively competent in all areas of business. You can't just specialize in one thing anymore, because those days are gone and that's just the way the world is now.

“By interacting with different products, I realised that people didn't understand social media and how to make money from it. This is why I started this business.

“I think social media is the biggest change in human communication since the jump from radio to television. I really believe we're going through a massive cultural, technological change and it is truly seismic. We can't really believe it, because we are in it.”

Transforming creativity into business impact | Jessica Gioglio

“I just have this strange ability – maybe it's a wonderful ability – when I'm thinking about a marketing campaign or a public relations campaign or social media, I start to get a lot of creative ideas and visions in my head.



“I think about ways to reach a customer, what can we do that's going to inspire them, to delight them, and make our message memorable to them. On the not so sexy end of this is data, analysing your performance. If you can deeply understand these things, that's how you pivot the creativity into impact and that's where my sweet spot is.

“I like to be in a room and throw three to five amazing ideas that are out of the box to see how we can innovate and try something different.

“Finding your focus and your niche is important, but I think you also need to be able to see the bigger picture. Don't be too much in your tunnel and in your lane where you don't understand how you can innovate. When I talk to companies, I say my specialty is in content creation, storytelling as a brand and social and digital strategist.”

Connecting at a deeper level with audiences | Naomi Sesay.

I have this unique way of speaking to connect when I'm doing public speeches, or even when I'm talking one-to-one to someone that connects in such an emotional way that the client usually feels fizzy. Something clicks in their head and they say, ‘Oh my, God. I didn't think about it in that way.’

“It's not something that I've created. It's not something I can pick up and give to you. It's something that comes from within that I'm gifting to you, and you get it. And once you get it I've given you part of my uniqueness and that is my expertise.”

“There's always something you're passionate about. It could be books. What is it about books that you absolutely love? You may love the story, the arc of it, or you are very good at discerning the actual subtext of that book.

“Well, that means your skills can be in research, in analytics, in investigating something or in storytelling.

“You can dig deeper to find out why you have a passion for books, then develop and evolve your skills more and more as you discover the why behind it.”

Analytical mindset as a strategic business tool | Penelope Bellegarde

“I realise that people tend to be isolated in businesses. There isn't much interaction between the IT department and the rest of the company, and I think one of the reasons for that is language.

“There are a lot of misunderstandings. Business people use their own language. Analytical people use a technical language, sometimes. My skill is a combination of technical skills and business skills, and making sure that the insights I derive from my analysis are clearly understandable by anyone and are actionable by the business.

“At the beginning of my analytical career, 80% of my time was spent producing reports. A lot of data was being created because there was big pressure from senior management wanting a broad mix of reports on a daily, weekly and monthly basis.

“The downside with that is it doesn't leave much time for proper insight and analysis. And that's when I started to realise that this job should not be just about producing numbers and reports. It needed to be about influencing the shape of a business, and for that I needed to understand what makes an audience like the C-suite tick. That's when I started to change my focus, change my language, and talk to very different types of people inside of the organization as opposed to just people in my team.”

Communicating complex ideas in a simple way | Riaz Kanani

“Technology is often, at its earliest stages, quite complicated. It's not until it matures and becomes mainstream that it introduces a more simplified approach for its users. I'm very good at understanding how new technology works and I'm very good at communicating in plain English to people.”

“Self-awareness is important in finding your expertise. It's being aware of who you are and how you fit in and what your skill sets are. It's spending time reflecting and thinking about yourself. All the leaps and bounds of progression we've made in communication have meant the world is smaller and competition is greater. If you want to be the best in that space, then you need to be aware of your own strengths and weaknesses, better than you needed to be before.”

Helping people make sense of disparate pieces of information | Suki Fuller

“I'm able to explain numbers, data and information in a way that it resonates and gives insight.”

“You know something is your passion when you can work on it for a long time without going to sleep and you never get tired or bored from it. Usually people are already aligned in some way, shape or form. But it's really self-doubt that prevents them from taking their passion to a new level and going for it.”



PILLAR #3: HOW THEY UNDERSTAND THEIR AUDIENCE

Having conversations to achieve your goals and meet their needs | Daniel Gurrola

“During transition or when you are looking for a new job, you will reach out to a wide range of people, like your personal contacts, your friends, employers and head-hunters.

“It is important to understand why you are talking to a particular person how you present yourself to them, and clarify the message you have for each individual.

“Do you want to find out about available jobs? Is it because you want to understand how they do their own job? Understanding this will allow you to have a successful exchange with them. I used the word exchange because I'm not a one-way street.

“I think one should always be prepared to offer something in return. What does that mean? In my case, what that means is offering advice from your own experience, or offering contacts you may have, or offering insight about your industry, how it works, and always remaining open for the possibility to follow up if they have a question later.”

Making the most of your meetings

It's about understanding where you want to go, understanding your strengths, and what you really want to do. When you start talking to people, you start in your comfort zone and talk to people you know, people you trust. Along that journey, they will introduce you to their friends. Doing a minimum preparation will help you understand people on LinkedIn or on company websites. Check what their perspectives are, where they are coming from, what's going on in their world, and then, frankly, it is about the conversation you have. Be open and always make it an exchange and not a one-way street.

Very few people out there are looking to give jobs, so if you approach people from the perspective of 'I need a job,' you should think twice because you are placing a big burden on the person you're speaking to.

It's better to ask their guidance on how to enter their industry and understand how the industry works, etc. That changes the dynamic. You immediately place the person as an expert in their field. It's flattering to them and it puts them in a position of mentorship. People respond favourably from this perspective.

During the conversation, they may think about opportunities that you will suit you. Always be thankful for the time this person spent to meet you and follow up with an email, thanking them for meeting you and taking time to see you. It's even good to recall one or two of the points you discussed, then move forward, leaving the door open for further discussion. Those little things can go a long way.

Using research organisations to understand clients | Ekene Som Mekwunye

“As a film-maker, I have to realise what people want to watch. In the Nigerian film market, one thing that sells a lot is comedy. If you say you're going to do science-fiction, the chances are you would not make as much money if you had decided to do comedy and had done it very well. That's not to say you won't make money, but it's very important that you understand your audience.

“My audience varies from film to film and the kind of story I want to tell. The immediate people I look out for are people that want to enjoy a good story and people who want to

enjoy a good film. The population comes in different strata. You have the educated, the non-educated, then you have the old and the young. They are different people and have different taste of films they want to see. It's difficult to put them in a box, because there are different genres of film and different genres appeal to different kinds of people.

“I don't forget I'm into filmmaking to also make money, so I try to target as many people as I can within the different demographics. There are specific kinds of films that women enjoy and those that men enjoy, and there are the films that children enjoy. I try to capture as much as I can.

“To understand what people are looking forward to watch, we use research organisations to conduct market research. Recently, I had a meeting with the owners of the largest cinema chains in Nigeria. These people can conduct your researches constantly to understand what people want.”

Experimenting at a micro-level | James Saward-Anderson

“Our audience is business owners and marketing directors of SMES. We pick them because social media is a really great equalizer. You don't need a lot of money to have a presence on social media, whereas other channels like advertising, pay-per-click or SEO you need serious money to get anywhere. With a Facebook ad campaign, you don't need nearly as much to get a good ROI, so that's our target market. People with businesses understand that social media is important, but they have no strategy or idea how to use social media for their business.

“At our company, Social Selling, we love working at very small scale with customers as early as possible and with a small financial commitment for both parties. What this means is rather than sitting around and theorising all day, we go out into the market at a micro scale, learn what the market is saying about that particular product and that particular company. Once we understand this, we understand far better what our client needs; we experiment with it. We have a traditional interview question-led sales pitch, but that's how we experiment quickly.

“We had no money when we started the company. We started from ground zero. It's a very lean start-up. We are agile and can look at someone's account and within days understand the market and their problem very quickly.”

A holistic view of your audience – surprise and delight | Jessica Gioglio

“Where does your customer spend time? Is it in face-to-face business? Do they spend time online? What channels do they use? Map out the demographic criteria, where they live as well as what they're interested in.

“What are the top questions about your business? What are the top customer service queries or pain points? How are people finding your website? What keywords are they putting in, where are they landing, where are they bouncing? Look holistically at all the data you collect on your business and analyse that to understand who these people are, what they care about and where they spend their time when engaging with your company. This can help you draft the right marketing strategy.”

Great customer experience to eliminate competition and delight customers

There's a lot more competition in business now than ever before. The companies who provide the best customer experience are the ones that are going to win and thrive. Think about that. Everyone has had a customer service issue, whether it's with your cable service provider or a delayed flight.

I once was flying from London to Boston. I was being a bit cheap and I took a flight that connected through New York between London and Boston, which you really wouldn't do, because it's not that long of a flight, but it was several hundred dollars cheaper and I was on a budget and my connection from New York to Boston got cancelled. I got notified before I left London, so I tweeted Delta and said can you help me. In six minutes they rebooked me on the more expensive flight between London and Boston I was too cheap to purchase in the first place.

What a great customer experience. What if every customer interaction could be this way? Everything from providing the right content to the right person at the right moment, or anticipating your needs and serving them, to making information easy to find about your business that helps customers make a purchase decision, or when something goes wrong, handling it swiftly and with the customer's respect in mind.

I think this is hugely important, but it gets bigger than that. Companies now look at experience design, everything from in-store experience to web experience. How easy and how intuitive is this? Is there a delightful or experiential thing where you can try on a new pair of running shoes at Nike? You go jog on a treadmill and see how they feel before you commit to buy.

This is the era we're in and I think for people to succeed they have to think creatively about what the customer needs, not just questions they have, but how could you take it a step further to really dazzle them and provide this great experience. Some people might think it costs a lot of money. Yes and no. It doesn't have to be. One thing we did at Dunkin' Donuts was a surprise and delight program on social media.

I had a team of ten that volunteered a couple hours a day to help do all of the community management, because it's a brand that gets hundreds of thousands of posts and we felt that simply responding to consumers at scale was good for customer experience, but then we took it a step further because when we started, after we spent so much time we realised people were saying the nicest things about us.

We were really good at handling negative comments, such as 'my coffee wasn't made right' or 'my bagel was burnt.' But besides responding and saying thank you, we thought we could do better with positive replies as well. We implemented a surprise and delight program. My team would nominate a certain number of people each month and send these individuals hand-wrapped packages in the mail, nothing expensive, about five to ten dollars each, maybe a gift card, a coffee mug. We'd look at where the person lived and what was mentioned in their reply. If they lived somewhere more rural, maybe we'd send packaged coffee beans and maybe a coffee mug, or if they lived close to one of our stores we'll send a gift card and maybe a wacky pair of sunglasses or a T-shirt or something fun. Nine times out of ten, people would take pictures of what we sent, then tweet it out and say, 'I didn't do anything but Dunkin' just surprised me and sent me something for being a loyal fan. Best customer experience ever.' Programs like these are amazing, and you don't have to go crazy with it.

I would encourage everyone to think about how you can drive more delight with your customer base. This applies even if you're in B2B. Why couldn't you surprise and delight a B2B customer on Twitter? Wouldn't this make our days better and smile, especially if

it's something useful or if somebody is tweeting you at a conference and they're very active about your CEO's talk. Why couldn't you do a surprise and delight type initiative or something for your top spending or most loyal customers? Maybe it's their customer anniversary or end of year holiday present. There are a lot of ways you can do VIP events with an exclusive speaker.

I think the future is around robust experiential loyalty programs, as well as surprise and delight, fun customer experience, either of which you can do. I think this is very important because people will think about it and remember your company.

Also as part of your own personal brand it's important to think about who you want to influence with your ideas and think creatively. As a professional, one of the things I struggle with is to get a lot of requests to pick your brain for a cup of coffee kind of meeting. It's hard because when you run your own business you don't always have time. I try to do a few of those every month because there are people that could really benefit from your advice and are not find it somewhere else. I think giving back could be your surprise and delight in your customer experience and you can make an impact in someone life who's struggling to get to the next level, and how grateful they're going to be. I think it's simply finding out the ones who are really going to really benefit from it.

Satisfying your customer's deeper emotional need | Naomi Sesay

"I am most passionate about serving two audiences. They can be any age. The ones who don't know that they don't know, meaning they are the ones who are walking and talking about something but don't know why they are doing it and are looking for extra information. I love to guide people like this because there is a little chink I can open up.

"The other ones are those who are totally opposed to what I say, because I find that as a challenge. I love to change their mind into something deeper, bigger, and more wholesome, so they can actually feel as if, 'Okay, I get what you're saying and will take a piece of that away.'

"I think everyone has an emotional need and that emotional need is hardwired when you were younger. So, the reason they come to you with the questions they ask, you can hear what that emotional need is.

"To know your audience, you have to know their emotional needs, and lead them to a place where they feel satisfied. Often people don't want what they think they want. They want what they emotionally feel they need.

"Let me explain. If I can pick up an iPhone, I may think I want an iPhone because everyone has one and it makes me look cool, but that's not why I want the iPhone. Really what I want the iPhone for is probably to feel significant, but you can't buy significance. It may be I want to look as if I have made it, that I'm successful, but you can't buy success. So, these needs came from something that happened to someone in their environment when they were younger and that's the reason why some people choose the outward experience of buying cars or whatever else in order to satisfy those feelings. But you can never satisfy an emotional need with a material gain. You can only satisfy an emotional need with an emotional gain and that's what it's like in marketing. If you can find your audience and satisfy an emotional need 'to want something' by giving an emotional response, they would suddenly work it out for themselves."

Use data to segmenting your audience and listen | Penelope Bellegarde

"I've got three different parts of markets:

"The first is the B2B market, businesses who want to leverage their digital assets, who want to feel a lot more empowered with data and insights. It could be any sector: retail, media, travel, and government, any industry that has a presence online or wants to have one at some point.

"The second is the higher education market: business schools, universities providing masters in digital marketing and MBA. These institutions want to stand out from the crowd and competition by offering insights from the real world.

"The third is people who are already in a job and want to enhance their career prospects by understanding digital analytics more.

"I teach how people can bring more analytical thinking into their workplace. When I came up with the idea of developing my own digital analytics course, I had an idea of what I wanted to put into the course, but first I surveyed my business network to find out what people might be interested in.

"I asked them to rate each topic and give me ideas around anything else they want to see in the course. My point is to rely on the data and not your opinion. That has helped me.

"I also spend a lot of time listening to clients. You think you have an idea of what they might want, what they might benefit from. But they can share their story and what they are struggling with. It's important to go through the listening stage to end up with something they're happy with, which doesn't mean you can't suggest other things that are right for them. Listening to your clients' wants is basic but sometimes very easy to forget."



PILLAR #4: HOW THEY DOMINATE AND STAY RELEVANT IN THEIR FIELD

Enlarge your field | Daniel Gurrola

“As a senior executive, I have a deep expertise in the telecoms industry and a very strong knowledge of strategy, business development and partnership setups. I also have a strong network of contacts at very high levels around the world and a very international outlook.

“I have worked in twelve countries. I speak five different languages. That's important to some employers, knowing you are multicultural and can adapt to different situations.

“I am very much in tune with innovation, what's going on in the world of start-ups and apply it to the corporate world.”

Stay relevant in your field by enlarging your reach

“I have enlarged my field from telecoms to technology. You need to be informed, especially when you're not working. Continue following the industry, understand what's going on and make sure you are always learning. Take time to read books that are relevant and keep in touch with people.”

The winning trio: Know your strengths, do your homework, follow up

“The best way to deal with competition is to understand what your real strengths are and then tailor those strengths to your audience. If you are talking to a potential employer, you must be able to articulate your strengths in relationship to what they are looking for. This used to be common sense. But in today's world, I find when I'm at the other end of recruitment very few people do their homework.

“So, do your homework. Understanding the people you meet, not only the organisation can go a long way. And tailor your strengths to the job or the potential role, make it relevant to the client, and tell them how they can get value out of this.

“And follow up. Follow up sets you apart. Very few people do that. You always need to be grateful and offer to follow up in case they have any questions.”

Organise high impact events | Russ Shaw

“One of the ways I try to stay relevant is through the events I do. I do big TLA events twice, sometimes three times a year. I think about the themes of those events and decide usually six months in advance, considering what is going on at the moment so that we stay fresh and relevant. We bring the most dynamic leaders and speakers together for each of those events.”

Demonstrate ROI with tangible results

“For example, the last event we did with ‘Women in Tech,’ I didn't just want to talk about it, I wanted to have specific, concrete actions that demonstrated it is worth doing, and get everybody involved behind it.

“It's about getting tangible actions in place and one of the ways I measure this is through [Profinda](#), a collaborative database. I get stories, anecdotes, and examples from advocates who use it to tell me the activities we are doing are working.”

Invent your field | Riaz Kanani

“The easiest way to stay relevant is to invent your field. Obviously, someone has to be the follower, but I'd much prefer leading the industry. For that you need to look at the market and look at the challenges inside. Figure out what's next, keep doing that and make sure you can deliver on it.

“That means you need to surround yourselves with people who are bringing different perspectives and skills.

“I love data so, on the one hand, I love the idea of spending days and months analysing the competition. But if you're going to lead the industry, you shouldn't spend too much time worrying about the competition. You should be out executing them and innovating ahead of them.”

Follow the trends | Ekene Som Mekwunye

Moving from reality TV to film production in Nollywood

“We passed through different phases at Riverside Productions. The first niche was producing reality TV, but right now we are moving towards film production.

“This was born out of our passion for film. We have done a couple of short films and they have done well and gotten a lot of accolades. Another reason is because the film industry right now in Nigeria is growing. The return on investment is very high. We are getting more screens now for cinemas. Films that used to only make in the past about 50-60 million naira are now making about 700 million.

“One of the things that give us an edge at Riverside Production is the quality of work we do. We make sure the quality of our work is of international standard and for us to be able to achieve this we have to constantly be abreast of what's happening.”

Shifting the notion of competition

“I tell people in filmmaking there's not so much competition. Do you know anyone who decides to watch only one film in a year? When you've finished watching one film, you won't continue watching the same one; you want to watch another. This means if you don't watch my film today, chances are you want to watch it tomorrow, and if you don't watch it tomorrow you might want to watch it the day after tomorrow. There is enough space for us in that ecosystem. You have to understand the business and how it works.”

Play at the intersection of different fields | James Saward-Anderson

“Our job is to interlink with wider marketing channels and marketing leaders to advocate social media as a strong and profitable channel. I don't think people are doing that, especially in B2B. It's still let's just tweet or post this stuff. You can get serious ROI from social media if you use it well.

“We are extremely targeted, and we get ROI. There are lot of social media companies that do postings and build strategies, but we come from a sales background, so we apply social media in a sales oriented approach. We have a process to deliver ROI, whether it's meetings and downloads. Whatever the KPI, we use our methods of social media to achieve the goal.

“We work with a lot of SMEs who don’t have a sales team. We are not marketing experts. We are not sales experts either, but what we do is marry two, at times, very competing and different teams (marketing and sales teams).

“The Social Selling has a no brainer way to deal with the competition. They deliver results to clients upfront for a small financial commitment rather than strategising and showing pretty diagrams and case studies.”

Keep abreast of your industry and be a practitioner | Jessica Gioglio

“Each day I voraciously read all of the industry publications. I sign up for email news digest for all my favourite publications and that means my email piles up like crazy, which is a struggle because I like to be an ‘inbox zero’ kind of person.

“With social media and digital marketing there's a change every week, an innovation, a new feature, a new ad solution. So, for me to be an expert means I need to be reading about it.

“But you also need to be a practitioner. One of the things I struggled with when I left running the social media program at Dunkin’ Donuts was wondering if I was going to still be relevant, as I'm not in the trenches using these platforms every single day. But in fact, if you invest in your social media personal brand like a company, you can stay in touch.

“Even if you're not in digital marketing or social media, what you will learn from publishing even one or two articles a month on LinkedIn and stay active on Facebook and looking at what other people are sharing, you're going to form opinions on how this should be done based on what's been successful for you.

“You can use social media to stay on top of what's going on in the industry. You can go to conferences, meet ups and use groups. I know sometimes it's a struggle to go to expensive conferences, but usually you can find free or low-cost events in most major cities. There are also tons of free webinars and inexpensive courses online you can take. So, no matter what your budget is, there's always something you can find. “

I think personal and professional development is so important; if we don't invest in ourselves, who's going to? We have to be the ones driving ourselves forward.



PILLAR #5: HOW THEY MANAGE THEIR IMAGE AND REPUTATION

Using a professional PR service | Russ Shaw

“I use a wonderful firm called Seven Hills. They manage my events, my website and put me in front of the media. So, whether it's BBC News, Bloomberg, The Times, or whatever, I use Seven Hills as an outside outlet to manage my image.

“This enables me to get out there and speak about what my company's doing, and share stories with a broader audience. Whenever I go to CNBC, I sit down first with Seven Hills to discuss tactics. I say things like, ‘This is why they've invited me. This is the topic they want to discuss. Let's you and I agree on the key messages I want get across.’

“If you've watched me on a television interview there are key messages I'm getting through. They are not rehearsed or official, but I do have two or three points I need to get across in each interview.

“Seven Hills and I agree on key messages. We write it out, then step back. It's about managing all of those with a certain set of values and perspective and controlling it to a certain degree, because you need to control your own personal brand. You need to manage it tightly. I always say to people, ‘The one thing you never want to really screw up is your reputation, because that is probably the toughest thing to get back.’

“When working with a PR service, make sure you stay ‘true to your word,’ you're consistent with how you operate, and if something goes a bit out of synch, be honest by saying, ‘Look, this doesn't quite fit with who we are or who I am in terms of my principles.’ It's an art, but it's certainly possible to do.”

Leave a footprint that others may want to follow | Daniel Gurrola

“It's about how you conduct yourself and how you communicate. Always be very wary about what you write online and the way you express yourself. Leave a footprint that others may want to follow. Be careful and knowledgeable that the ways you express yourself says something about you, and others may take it either against you or for you. So, always be concerned with that.

“But I think the more important thing is to always go back to your personal values. Live your values and stay consistent.

“Recently, a friend wanted me to work with his organisation as a contractor to develop their telecoms practice. Financially it was going to be somewhat lucrative and somewhat interesting, especially if you don't have an income; you tend to jump on whatever it is.

“When I started the discussion, I realised that the expectations of what my output was going to be was extraordinary and almost unattainable. It would have been very easy to jump in and get the money and not deliver. But what I realised is that if took the job, I would not only be placing myself at risk, but also the friend who recommended me.

“After a deep reflection, I thought about my own reputation, my friend's reputation and decided that it was not the right thing to do, because I didn't have the elements of success. I wrote to my friend explaining the reasons why I didn't think it would be a good idea. It worked out pretty well in the end.

“That's an example of how you can control your image and your reputation, because people think it is this superficial thing; they don't think about the deep values.

“I have a set of overarching values that I always express and they can be summarised in five points: openness, honesty, being straightforward, friendly and result driven. These are the professional values that define how I conduct myself. It’s not about colour. It’s not a style of writing, but whenever I communicate I use these values and always go back to them.”

Assume everything you post online will be seen | James Seward-Anderson

“I maintain a clear divide between my public and private life, but everything I post on social media I anticipate that anyone can see it.

“To carve out a unique voice, you can have two completely contradictory ideas to create your own idea. I’m relatively young; therefore, if I go down the route of being the hipster, young Shoreditch kind of bloke who wears glasses, I will be one of millions.

“But the traditional corporate image is very stuffy, old, middle aged men. I like to speak in a corporate tone of voice, but social media has an image of not being very serious. But with two opposite beliefs, I can portray quite a unique voice.”

Control your image and reputation with visual storytelling | Jessica Gioglio

“I started my career in corporate PR. I’ve done this for companies, for executives, and now I do this for myself. It’s really about the content, the image, and making you look professional. I’m thirty-four. I’m mid-level in my career, but even from an early age working in corporate PR you’re immediately shoved in front of C-level executives.

“You have to learn how to interact with senior leadership at a young age, very quickly and that’s been the best lesson of my life.

“Dress professionally, compose yourself well at all times, and be cognizant of what you post online, especially when you’re young or you’re out having drinks with friends. It seems so funny in the moment, but then you go back and look at it the next day and say maybe I shouldn’t have posted that.

“You don’t have to be stiff. You can be human and have a life and show you’re having fun, because if you’re too stiff and boring, who’s going to pay attention to you? I think it’s a mix of being professional, but infusing personality and showing you’re human as well.

“When I do public speaking, I really like to wear strong colours. When you’re speaking on stage, you want to stand out and I think in general for photography, a solid colour is always the best rather than a lot of patterns. I like red. I like blue. I like purple, but I also like a classic black ensemble, because you can never go wrong with a great black or navy dress.

“My style is more classic and modern. I do like a good leopard print blazer every now and again. As I’ve gotten older and I travel a lot more, I’ve started investing a lot more in clothes that travel well, things you can put in a suitcase and are fairly wrinkle-free and are just no muss no fuss. If you invest in good classic pieces you don’t need to buy as much. You can mix and match and you save money, because they are appropriate for any situation.”

I think about the colour of my energy | Naomi Sesay

“I like colours that make my brown skin pop☺. Orange is my favourite colour. I like bright sunny colours, like green, and pinks and other vibrant hues. I don’t think about image and colours or what they mean when paired together when I’m out there speaking.

“What I think about is the colour of my energy. So, when I'm out there speaking, I know you're going to feel my aura and that aura has a hue. Whatever you feel is what I'm wearing.

“I have different faces. When I'm out speaking to thousands of people, I'm very sure of myself, very confident, and very powerful, and I make sure that everyone has a fantastic time. If I'm in a network situation, I'm in the corner and sitting there speaking to one person. Although I portray confidence, the truth is I hate going out to speak to other people.

“I am not a networker. If I'm with my family, they would probably tell you I'm bossy. If I'm at work they will say she's really fun to be with, but don't cross that line.

“I think having many faces is great when you're in different environments, because people will see you doing your thing appropriately, and I think appropriateness is very important when it comes to authenticity.

“You cannot be the ‘happy person’ all the time, because life doesn't dictate that. So, if I'm not feeling happy, you will know about it and I have the right to say I'm not, but too many people hide it and that makes them ill. When you're facing different people be the authentic person within the crowd which is appropriate for that time.”

Stick to your principles | Penelope Bellegarde

“What's important for me when doing business is that I stick to the principles I have, particularly in my line of work where I get access to a lot of data. One principle is client confidentiality. I never discuss who my clients are or give out details on their issues, because they value confidentiality. For me that's key. I'm a woman of my word.

“If I say something, I will make it happen, and again, it sounds basic for me. Unfortunately, I come across so many situations where a lot of people don't keep their words.

“I'd rather not say anything if I know I won't be able to honour it. People do business with you because they trust you.”

Keep it simple; be helpful and supportive | Riaz Kanani

“I don't spend huge amounts of time, if any time, but maybe I should, thinking about my image online. A lot of what I do is try and innovate, and do interesting new things.

“I typically go into the public arena from two perspectives. One is to support, to help other people. I'd say that this underlines everything I'm doing. But the second is pushing boundaries and trying to look at new ways of doing things. I suppose you could call it educating myself and others, which then again goes back to the idea of supporting.

“I guess my image would be one of being helpful and supportive in growing an audience of people who are interested in learning.

“If you look at my wardrobe for the last decade, it basically consists of a blazer and jeans, and in the last five years it's basically a Polo neck shirt and a jumper. My wife's a fashion designer. She pretty much picks my wardrobe for me, but I keep it simple. That's my view. Keep it simple on clothing.”

You can't maintain fake for too long! | Suki Fuller

“For people to stand out, they need to be distinct. But it’s about being authentic. Be your true self, because if you're not people will eventually know it. You can't go around pretending. Actors pretend, but that's a skill. But after a while, they're done with that. You see who they are. You can't maintain fake for too long. It usually eats you. Actually, it doesn't eat some people and only those who are generally evil. And even if they are evil, they are still at some point genuine with somebody or even themselves.”



PILLAR #6: HOW THEY CONNECT WITH THEIR AUDIENCE

Leading by example | Russ Shaw

“It requires commitment and it requires an investment in time. I try and clean my inbox every day. It’s not always easy, but I try.”

Russ is very reactive with his emails. When he receives an email from TLA members, he tries to respond the same day, even if it’s a short answer to acknowledge its reception.

“I think personal engagement in the age of digital, where things are virtual and sometimes seem a bit distant and remote, is important. If you talk to many advocates, there’s a personal element of people coming together. I feel it’s important to lead by example. If I’m not doing it, advocates are not doing it.

“I see personal engagement happening amongst advocates, especially with leaders of the working group. It’s quite remarkable. But I think that helps with the authenticity. If I get it wrong, I’m first to say, ‘Look, I’m really sorry I screwed up. How can I fix it? How can I make this better?’ It’s something you learn over time, when you feel comfortable with who you are and what you stand for.”

Using an authentic and powerful voice | Naomi Sesay

“I used to use social media quite a lot, like Facebook and more recently Twitter and Snapchat. I don’t feel that I connect properly with that. My favourite mode of communication is my voice.

“If I pick up the phone and you hear what I have to say, with the tonality I’m using you’re going to get it straight away. And if I can’t do it with my voice, when I’m writing I choose words that have the same energetic feel.

“To build meaningful connections, especially if you’re doing it in for business on LinkedIn, follow up. Be authentic and when people respond, follow up, have a conversation. We’ve lost the art of having conversations, because social media is such a short span attention channel you think you are having a conversation. No, it’s not. That’s your initiation, not your conversation.

“Once you start having a conversation with someone they’re going to ask questions. Be interested. Ask questions back. It’s not about you. At the end of the day it’s about them. So, keep on asking questions. ‘Tell me what else you want me to do? How can I help you?’ That’s how you continue connecting, by having conversations.”

Be prepared to be vulnerable | Daniel Gurrola

“Be prepared to be vulnerable at times. Be honest about your situation if you have questions or fears or insecurity. I’ll give you an example that took place yesterday.

“I was in Spain meeting with the CEO of a company. Another company suggested that I could help them. I discussed with a friend who works in that organisation and told him I didn’t know exactly what the brief was.

“My friend said it was a great start. His boss works from a trusted position and he said he thought I should be open and not come off as the expert and say I’m going to do this for you if it won’t work.

“I took the advice and the conversation went pretty well. The company told me to let’s figure out what we can do together. We started from that ground point and built something that could be very interesting and promising by establishing a level of trust together.

“So, I think it's about being open and straightforward. Be prepared to be vulnerable, but also listen to others and empathise with their vulnerabilities as well. Those things can go a long way.”

Leverage newsletter and social media | Riaz Razani

“I had a blog for 10-15 years. I used to write here and there, but I'd probably spent the last two or three years not writing very much for various reasons. I've just been busy with other things, but I wanted to get back to writing.

“So, three months ago I started a newsletter. Every week I now write a newsletter which connects with my audience and talks about the different things related to marketing and sales. That’s what I focus on, but I’ve done work in A.I. (artificial intelligence), in data science and in lots of different areas.

“I have gone back to the idea of looking to the future and looking at disruptive things that are going to change the world, like robotics, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality. And I often have opinions, so it's my way of thinking about the future.

“I have two audiences, my B2B marketing audience and the future of tech type audience. I push the newsletter content through the social networks. I don't have a blog anymore, partly because I think the world has changed a little bit.

“I have a natural audience in my LinkedIn network, on Medium, on Twitter and Facebook. There are disadvantages to joining all these networks rather than building an audience myself through a blog, but equally it delivers on my needs if you like to just deliver it through those channels. I capture emails by connecting on LinkedIn, Twitter and through the various websites where people sign up for the newsletters.

“I get up early on Sunday morning when my wife and daughter are asleep and write. It now takes me a couple of hours to deliver it. One of the major goals for me is actually to get back into writing. As a result of getting back into the rhythm of writing the newsletter, I’ve also got back into the rhythm of writing articles for various publishers.”

A system to create sales conversations | Penelope Bellegarde

“I wouldn't say that I have a particular channel. I use social media, email and the phone. I also try and make in person as much as I can, because I feel it's important. However, what I find useful is a tool which you could describe as a sales management system, because it keeps me on my toes.

“I log all my clients’ and prospects’ conversations, and for each of them the system forces me to allocate an action. I get a reminder whenever I need to send something, email somebody or have a call. And that's really helping me to maintain regular contact with clients, because if I didn't have that things would get done but on ad hoc basis, and you just forget some opportunities.”



PILLAR #7: HOW THEY'VE BUILT THEIR NETWORK

Start early and build your network with a multi-channel strategy | Jessica Gioglio

Develop your networking skills

"I have the best parents out there. My father is in sales and marketing. He knew I was going to go into business and started arranging networking meetings for me with other successful female professionals when I was in high school.

"These people were in marketing or government relations or other fields, so I could network with them, hear about their jobs and what they were doing so I could start making decisions.

"Marketing is a very broad field and there are different areas or different industries you can work on. You have to understand what would be exciting to you and what you want to focus on. So, he really taught me how to network, which was a great skill.

"What I realised as I advanced in my career is that I wanted a creative outlet. I wanted to have a blog to write about lifestyle things I enjoyed. I realised when it started getting popular that we can do things outside of work that benefit us on our jobs. We can use the Internet and blogs. This is before the social media era and when Facebook was a much different experience.

"I could see how a blog like [ThesavvyBostonian](#) could help you pave a business or just help you brand yourself for the career path you wanted. That was the most powerful aha moment.

"As I started to advance in seniority in my career, what really helped was to go to conferences in Boston or meet ups or after work networking. You start to bond with people in your industry and get to know them and what they're working on.

"This is how a lot more opportunities came my way, because half the time when someone is recruiting for a new job, they ask me for recommendations. This is how a lot of opportunities happen, through word of mouth.

"The same is true if I'm looking for a freelancer or I'm looking for a speaker for an event. Tomorrow I'm moderating a panel at a tech event because somebody dropped out last minute and a friend said I bet Jessica would be great at this. They recommended me for it.

"So, you just have to invest in getting to know people without expecting anything in return by giving and sharing advice, making recommendations, and doing a favour here and there, such as guest posting on websites and just doing what you're passionate about.

"Good people attract good people. People want to do business with people they believe in and trust. That's why I don't really like events that are branded as networking events. People are too transactional. I tend to look at events that have a conversation on a topic I'm interested in. It's a chance to meet like-minded people."

Leverage social media to build relationships

"Understand social media platforms. Get the right content mix and be frequent on those channels. You really have to invest the time in doing that and also don't just post things. When people comment, comment back. You have to engage with them too by liking a comment or leaving a response.

"It's also about being responsive and following up. When we go to an event, we get 10-20 business cards. We meet great people and then we do nothing with them. I know it's hard

because for every occasion that I nail this there are probably two or three others that I've dropped the ball.

“But think about it after every event. Connect with them on LinkedIn, but don't just send them a LinkedIn request. Send a nice note saying something like it's lovely to meet you and how you really enjoyed chatting.

“A mistake people make is they either don't leave a message or they leave a message trying to sell their services. It's about building that relationship and knowing when the right opportunity is to pitch.

“Whether it's by email or LinkedIn, do follow up. Be responsive with your emails. I struggle with it too, because we all get so much email, but if you want to maximise business opportunities, you have to be responsive within a reasonable time window. When people show interest in your services, if you don't jump on it quickly they will go to someone else.”

Build a great tribe of people around you

“Build a great tribe of people around you. The best differentiator for me is having friends – someone like my co-author, who is a sister/best friend/almost a mentor, people that can be brutally honest and with who you can ask questions and be able to accept their honest feedback.

“It's good to have these kinds of relationships. I've got a handful of women in my life that I can go to any time and just ask for advice, or get feedback or allow them to kick me back when I'm not doing it.

“We all need friends are like that. It's not just women, both men and women are important. I do have some great guys in my life, whether it's my father or other men who are successful professionals that I can just get honest advice from. It's hugely important.”

How to build your network overtime | Daniel Gurrola

Build and expand your network

“I have come across many individuals who have been in whatever industry they're in for a long time and have a very limited network. That surprises me because networking comes naturally to me. But I found that it is not necessarily a natural trait for everyone.

“I think many individuals are interested in doing their job, doing a good job, going to work; if they have an office to go to, interact with their colleagues, with their boss and whatever stakeholders they have, and then go home and talk to a set of friends who work in the same industry and that's about it.

“When people move out of there they're out of sight, out of mind. When it comes a time of need, they have no one to turn to because they never built a network beyond the people they work with.

“It's important to expand beyond that network. Your network can be people around you but also people in the industry, suppliers and partners in your industry.

“How do you build that? Well, you build it overtime. Try attending conferences, symposiums or association meetings. Be proactive and once you're there, talk to people.

“It may be that you go in and you don't know anyone. Most people go to conferences to network, so if you see an open table join it and be part of the conversation. Have something

to say. Don't be shy. Nobody's going to reject you. The people there are there for the same reason.

“Then follow up, exchange business cards and talk. Have coffee or tea meetings. In other words, get together with these people and over time you will see that this will add up. And in time of need, these things come back to you.

“Remember that a network is a two-way street. There may be a time when those individuals may also need help from you. Be kind. Try to help. Be out there and help people and when your time comes you will be surprised how many of these things come back tenfold or hundredfold.”

You haven't done this alone

“There's been a whole network of support behind whatever you have achieved in life. That can range from your family, your partner, your beliefs, if you believe in God, your spirituality and how that has guided you, and lastly mentors.

“I don't necessarily believe in appointed mentors like an institution appoints a mentor to you. But I do believe in informal mentors. I have had many informal mentors that have helped me along the way. Some of them have been my bosses or people in the organisation that I admired the way they conducted themselves. I ask them from time to time their advice and develop a relationship with them.

“It maybe people that you follow from a distance, people who are in the media or people that are leaders in your field that you follow. Look at the way they conduct themselves and learn from them. It's a process of learning and reflection and about how they go about themselves and you see how that applies to you.”

Embody your community values | Naomi Sesay

“I hate networking, but I love community. Sometimes I feel when we focus on our personal brand we become a little too insular and we just stop thinking of community brand.

“If we take our community and start to feel that I am the community instead of I am me, look what are the values, the emotional needs of that community and start to become that.”

Build a power team that keeps you in check

“I had mentors, friends, colleagues and people I don't even know teach me something, show me something or demonstrate something I never knew.

“I've had social media managers that have consistently worked in my capacity on social media and build up a community I didn't previously have. This gave me an audience I can utilise to create workshops or other online events.

“I think friends are as important as your audience. We've got to understand that the most important thing to have around you is a power team, people who can keep you in check. Because sometimes when you're an entrepreneur, you feel like you can do everything and nothing at the same time.

“When you have your power team around you, they say things like, ‘don't do that right now, maybe do that in a week's time but not right now and this is the reason why.’ I've had many of those colleagues say to me, ‘No, sit on your hands, Naomi. Put that phone back down.’ These moments gave me breaks to see, not only perseverance but patience, clarity and focus. My team helped me go through different levels and stages in my life.

“Trusted friends will say things in a point-blank manner and you may feel dismayed about it, but it's true. You can only build trust like this if you both connect in a binary way within the relationship. Having a power team is key to anyone's success.”

Different levels of networking | Riaz Kanani

“Your network gives you insights. There are plenty of times when I've asked my network for advice. It helps open doors. People move from jobs and they'll pick up the phone and say look I'm now here, come and talk to me.

“There are several competing theories to building your network. I'm yet to see really which one is the best. I guess there are different levels. On Twitter, I'll happily follow anyone who follows me; it's a loose network and a loose relationship. To the other extreme, on Facebook I don't really add anybody I don't know. I only add closer people.

“As a result, my most engaged community is on Facebook and my weakest is on Twitter. This is a good example that if you curate your network well and you nurture it, one will give you more value than another.

“The other theory is you have a small group of people who are extremely valuable to you, who will introduce you to their networks, and so on and so forth. I use elements of this, but equally I like the opportunity for some ambiguity, so, I don't close off.”

The joy of being a mentor

“I've never had a mentor, but I'm a big fan of them. I think they're really important. In fact, I spend a whole bunch of my time mentoring. But I never found anybody who would want to mentor me. I've had people who have acted informally, giving me advice, but that is it.

“I think what you gain the most as a mentor is the stories. The big difference between mentoring and coaching is mentoring is all about talking about your own experiences and how it's applicable to the person you're mentoring. For me it is about telling those stories and not necessarily saying this is what you should do.

“It's best to say, ‘This is what I've seen. Think about it when you make your decision.’ Mentoring helps not to make so many mistakes.”

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