COLLEGE INFO GEEK
PERSONAL BRANDING CHECKLIST
BY THOMAS FRANK ([FOLLOW ME ON TWITTER](#))

Just by downloading this checklist, you've taken a huge step towards establishing a personal brand, getting a leg up on other students, and landing your dream job.

However, just looking over this list won't get you any results – you must **take action.** I've tried to lay out the process of establishing a personal brand as clearly as possible here.

Of course, building a personal brand isn't something you can do entirely by following a list – it's something that requires your creativity and individuality to truly come to fruition. Still, this list should take care of the basics and get you on the right track!

Remember – you can email me or tweet me any specific questions you may have. I'm also working on developing content that will dive deep into all of the following subjects, so there will be even more guidance in the near future.

Let's get started!

Foundations

Before we get into anything technical, it's important to establish the foundations of your personal brand – your skills, passions, and values. If you don't know these, you have no direction – so think hard about each one.

☐ Figure out what you're **passionate** about

> *A note about passion: You may not yet know what your passion is. If you're in college, you probably haven't had a ton of time to get really **good** at something – and thus, you may not yet feel a calling.*

*Therefore, pick something that interests you (probably your major right now), and focus on getting **ridiculously good at it.** In time, you'll be able to see if it becomes your passion.*
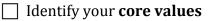
☐ List your **skills** and **talents**
☐ Identify where the previous two items **intersect**

How can you utilize the skills you currently have to work on your passion?

☐ Find out if this intersection is **marketable.** Is there a job you can get/viable business you can start in this area?
☐ List any skills or knowledge you **need to gain** in order to get that job or start that business

There are probably some skills you still need to learn in order to realize your goal. Think broadly here. Do you need to learn a programming language? Brush up on your public speaking skills? Become a better writer? Brainstorm, and then come up with methods for gaining these new skills/knowledge.

☐ Identify your **core values**

> *How much money do you want to make? What kind of work environment do you want to be in? Does location matter? Corporate culture? Autonomy?*

Telling the World Who You Are

Now that you know your passions, your skills, and how you're going to utilize them in a marketable way, it's time to figure out how you'll communicate that information to other people.

☐ Define your **3 Essential Pitches**

> *It used to be standard branding procedure to develop a simple 30-second "elevator pitch" to describe yourself. With today's torrent of information and extremely different work environment, I believe that*

type of pitch isn't the only good one, though it is useful. Use these three types of pitches (including the elevator pitch) to market yourself when meeting people

☐ Your **one-word** pitch

How can you define yourself in one word? Google did it with "search". Obama did it with "forward". What's your word?

☐ Your **question** pitch

*How can you frame the benefits you can offer someone as a question? I could ask the question, "Are you **as prepared as you can be** to market yourself after college?" From there I can offer my expertise. How can you offer yours?*

☐ The **elevator** pitch

As I said, the elevator pitch isn't always the go-to these days. However, I think it's still beneficial to figure out how you can pitch your passion,

expertise, and background in about 30 seconds. Make it interesting – don't make it typical. Try a method that will make the person you're talking to want to ask a follow up question. For example, if I were meeting someone, I could I'm a blogger – or I could say I do "internet stuff". Which is more likely to pique a person's interest?

☐ Write your **3 Bios**
    ☐ Twitter bio (160 characters)
    ☐ Short bio (2-3 short paragraphs)
    ☐ Long bio (the whole shebang)

Your Twitter bio, obviously, will go on your Twitter profile. It's also useful for other social networks that only allow a short bio, or for when you don't need to write a lot.

Your short bio is the most versatile of the bunch. It can go on many social networks, including Facebook in your "About Me" section, if you choose. It's also very useful if you're ever being interviewed or featured in any kind of press. I'm often asked for a short bio whenever I'm being

featured. I keep a few variations of my short bio in my personal Evernote notebook that I can pull for such occasions.

The long bio can go on your personal website, on its own page. It is seldom read all the way though, but is good to have up anyway – you never know when someone is interested to read your whole story.

Your Online "Home Base"

You can only reach out to a certain number of people in person; that's why it's so important to build a strong online presence for yourself. Not only does it get you, your expertise, and your brand in front of more eyes, but it also builds your credibility. The first step to establishing a strong online presence is building your "home base" – your website.

- [ ] Create a **personal website** (read my [complete, step-by-step website building guide](#) if you're not sure how, or want clarification on any following points)

Your personal website is the centerpiece of your entire online presence, and should be used to communicate who you are and who off your work.

☐ Secure a **domain name** based off your name (e.g. firstlast.com, firstmiddleinitiallast.com, firstlast.me)

☐ Include pages:

    ☐ About page (your long bio can go here)

    ☐ Resume page

    ☐ Portfolio page (show off your past work)

    ☐ Contact page

    ☐ Press page (if you've been featured publically)

    ☐ "Hire Me" page (if you're offering freelance services)

    ☐ *Optional:* An Impossible List for your goals (this has been one of the most useful pages to me personally)

☐ Link to your **social media** profiles

☐ Spend some time customizing your theme and creating an attractive design (e.g. don't just stick with the default theme)

☐ Add a **blog** section to your website (or build a separate blog site) and write about topics related to your area of expertise

> *This isn't absolutely necessary, but having a blog related to your interests really shows off your knowledge and dedication to your topic. A blog can help you become a "go-to" person in your niche, and generally makes good things happen. If you want proof, look no further than the site you downloaded this checklist from ;)*
>
> *If nothing else, blogging will help you to become a better writer, which will give you a **huge** leg up on other students. With email comprising the bulk of business communication these days, becoming a good writer is an essential skill.*

☐ **Email me** (thomas@collegeinfogeek.com) when you complete your website and send me a link to it. You'll just have to trust me here - this is going to pay off for you ;)

Social Networking

Using social networks to your advantage is essential to building a good personal brand. If you think about your personal website as a company's office, then social networks are like conferences and gatherings that people from tons of companies go to in order to meet up. You've gotta have your company there too!

- ☐ Establish profiles at the following social networks:
    - ☐ Facebook (I'm sure you have this)
    - ☐ Twitter
    - ☐ LinkedIn
    - ☐ Google+ (this one is becoming very important for search engine placement)
    - ☐ YouTube

    These five networks constitute what I consider to be the bare minimum. Even if you aren't super active on all of them, it might be prudent to establish on other relevant networks. If you're a designer get on

Behance, Dribbble, and maybe even *DeviantArt. If you're a programmer, you need to be on* **GitHub** *and possibly* **Forrst.**

There are a ton of social networks out there. Depending on your industry, there might be a lot more that can be useful to you. Also consider forums related to your topic. As a blogger, I utilize **Fizzle** *to meet other online entrepreneurs. Your niche probably has a related forum as well.*

☐ Review your privacy settings on your social networks (especially Facebook) and make sure you're comfortable with them

☐ Take down any photos and content on your social networks you wouldn't want employers seeing

☐ Strive to get all your social network profiles to 100% complete

☐ Google yourself – look out for links to content you don't want seen, and see how far down your actual results are

You may be like me and share a name with a well-known author, or even a celebrity. If that's the case, you might not show up on the first

page of your search. Don't worry about it too much – while it is possible to increase your rankings, it will take time. Focus more on just establishing your online presence so all profiles lead back to your website and can be found from there as well.

☐ Set up Google Alerts for your name (and any other terms associate to you) so you can be notified when you're mentioned somewhere online

☐ **Facebook-specific** tasks:

    ☐ Set a cover photo

    My advice here: use a personal photo here. Some people make custom graphics that look all professional and link to profiles and stuff… I think having a graphic like that makes you look like a tool. Facebook is first and foremost a personal networking site.

    ☐ Add links to your personal website and Twitter accounts to your About section

    ☐ Add your work experience, and include any big projects where you achieved specific results that you want to show off

- ☐ Claim your vanity URL (e.g. facebook.com/thomasfrank instead of facebook.com/userid=1324521 or whatever the default is) – [do this here](#)
- ☐ **Don't** make the mistake of thinking your Facebook profile has to be absolutely professional. Treating it like LinkedIn will make you seem like a robot.
- ☐ **Twitter-specific** tasks:
  - ☐ Set your username to your name, or something related

    *You don't **have** to use your name on Twitter. You can use a pun (I'm [@TomFrankly](#)), or an interesting word. However, I'd recommend trying to avoid using numbers or underscores. Also, a shorter username is usually better.*

  - ☐ Set a good avatar, cover photo, and profile background
  - ☐ Set your bio (you should have already written your 160-character) Twitter bio
  - ☐ Add your personal website to your profile

- [ ] Follow people you admire, people in your industry (or the industry you want to be in), and your peers
- [ ] Reach out to the people you follow – introduce yourself, compliment their work, and share links to their website or articles
- [ ] **LinkedIn-specific** tasks:
  - [ ] Get your profile as close to 100% as possible (LinkedIn guides you through this process)
  - [ ] Use the Contacts section to add people you know to your network
  - [ ] Ask employers and co-workers to write recommendations for your past (or current) jobs
  - [ ] Ask people who know you well to endorse you for the skills you've listed on your profile
  - [ ] Join groups that are relevant to you – i.e. groups for you college, the Internships and Interns group, Students and Recent Grads, etc.
  - [ ] Reach out to 2nd-degree connections and build your network
- [ ] **Google+ specific** tasks:

- ☐ Add a profile picture (I recommend a good-looking headshot – this is more important here than it is on Facebook)
- ☐ Add a cover photo
- ☐ Fill out your profile
- ☐ Add links to your website and other social profiles
- ☐ Set up a short URL for your G+ profile at gplus.to (your regular Google+ URL is just a bunch of numbers – impossible to tell someone in verbal conversation)
- ☐ When your personal website shows up in Google search results, hit the +1 button on it.

Getting +1's on your website helps it rank better in search results – essential if you want to be found.

P.S. – if you're super nice, I'd absolutely love it if you would hit the [+1 button right next to the CIG logo](#) on my website as well ☺

☐ Join groups on G+ relevant to your interests and chat with the community!

☐ **YouTube-specific** tasks:

    ☐ Simply make sure your Google+ profile is linked to your YouTube profile

    You can do this by making sure you use the same Gmail account for your Google+ profile and your YouTube channel

    You really don't need to go making a bunch of videos to build your brand, but establishing your channel is good for future use. You can also use your channel to make video thank-you notes that you can send to companies you've had interviews with.

☐ Extra social networks:

    This is a less important task, but it might be a good idea to simply go out to some of these other networks and secure your username. This is

useful in case you ever decide to use these networks, and it also prevents other people from using your username and causing brand confusion.

- ☐ Flickr
- ☐ Tumblr
- ☐ Vimeo
- ☐ Disqus
- ☐ LiveFyre
- ☐ Last.fm
- ☐ Instagram

- ☐ SlideShare
- ☐ Foursquare
- ☐ Bit.ly
- ☐ About.me
- ☐ World of Warcraft (easily the best branding site ever)

Offline Branding

Now that you've established a strong online personal brand (great job, btw), it's time to do the same thing offline. Don't worry, there aren't nearly as many things to do in this section.

- ☐ Create a resume

- [ ] Include a link to your website
- [ ] List specific achievements for each item in your work history. Use numbers and concrete stats if possible.
- [ ] List hard skills you have (software, coding languages, etc). Don't list soft skills like "good communicator". That should come through in your interview.
- [ ] Get your resume reviewed by a **career advisor** at your school and make any edits they suggest
- [ ] Tailor your resume so it fits the type of job you're applying for
- [ ] Print that sucker on out linen paper – regular printer paper is for tools
- [ ] Create custom business cards ([use one of my templates](#) or [learn how to design your own](#))
- [ ] Buy a suit and get it tailored so it looks good on you

That's it for the checklist! Remember, personal branding is an ongoing process that you'll be doing for pretty much your entire professional life. If you've done

everything on this checklist, then **congratulations –** you're *light-years* beyond where most students are, and your career options are most likely going to reflect that.

If you have any questions, feedback, or suggestions regarding this checklist (or anything else in college), don't hesitate to contact me!

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