

Personal branding: Perception is currency

There is still a quiet resistance among many senior leaders when it comes to showing up online and for good reason – we all know putting yourself out there is often times challenging because truth be told, media is a double-edged sword – “you live with it and can easily die by it”. But the question we must all ponder, is can any of us afford to be invisible and in so doing be associated with terms like “irrelevant, expired, invisible, declining”?

I recently sat across a close friend of mine who is also a senior executive and while we were chit chatting about a number of issues, they suddenly looked at me with this matter-of-fact, I mean business right now look and asked... “but Cynthia why should I spend my precious time posting on social media?”, I instantly sat upright because it dawned on me, that it is a defining moment for my friend. I had to assemble my thoughts and reason with them, something I do all the time. However, failure is not an option here because what I say will determine his relevance, his progress and his future.

Before I could open my

similar. “Me, I only post when I have something serious to say. I don’t just post online for the sake of it.”

Fair point, however, a dangerous one because here is the shift many are still resisting. Whether you like it or not, you already have a digital persona. The only question is whether you are shaping it... or leaving it in the hands of silence and everyone else.

As Warren Buffett once said, “It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it.” Today, it can take five minutes for people to form a reputation about you online, even if you have never posted a single thing but appear in searches or if you have one post on any social media channel.

Let’s ground this in reality, shall we? LinkedIn today has over one billion users globally. More importantly, decision makers live there, talent acquirers hunt there and jobs today are advertised there, etc. Studies consistently show that over 80 percent of B2B leads come through LinkedIn, and executives who actively share insights on LinkedIn are perceived as more credible, more accessible, more authentic, more progressive and more influential. We know many leaders who are brilliant in board rooms, but invisible online – respectfully, unimpressable outside. That invisibility is not humility; it is a missed opportunity.

If you are squirming in your chair because of what you are reading thus far, I have made my point but let me bring it closer to home.

Imagine two corporate CEOs in Uganda with the same experience, same intelligence, similar background, and even the same networks. One is completely silent online with no social media presence (know those MPs who suddenly get elected in office and scamp for open social media channels? Why do channels even show the date when they were opened, ironic).

Anyways, the other executive shares a social post or an article once or twice a week. Here, I do not mean motivational quotes copied from Google, but personal reflections, lessons, a short thought on inflation and how it affects Ugandans, a behind the scenes moment from a team engagement, a simple and honest take as they navigate their leadership role.

Six months later, who do you think gets called for panels, media interviews, partnerships or board opportunities? My friend, perception is currency!

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Branding

mouth to respond, he went further, almost amused. “Every time I read a LinkedIn post, I think... ‘show off, attention seeker; why did they even post this?’”

I smiled because I can definitely relate, I mean, don’t we all? Judgement is part of our nature after all.

Truth be told, he is not alone. From Mubende boardrooms to Kololo brunch tables, that sentiment is alive and well. A friend last year said something

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