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How fresh is your brand? Entrepreneurs make over their view of work

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Jacqueline Whitmore spends each year pursuing a fresh objective – a professional initiative designed to improve her outlook on business, develop new products or marketing campaigns, and set her on a new course.

Last year, she tackled social media. This year, her goal – her “mantra,” as she calls it – is “reading, writing and reinvention.” The West Palm Beach professional etiquette consultant and speaker focused on learning more about her industry (“reading”), penning her second book on the topic (“writing”) and evolving herself and her brand as the “etiquette expert” (“reinvention”).

“I’m getting calls from editors looking for me to write my second book,” said Whitmore, who wrote her first book on professional etiquette, “Business Class,” in 2005. “It started when I began writing my blog and reading more blogs last year. I began thinking about my business and where I wanted to go. It’s a natural evolution.”

The new year is a good time to reinvent a business. Any slow year is a better time, said Bob Preziosi, professor and chairman of management at the **H. Wayne Huizenga School of Business and Entrepreneurship** at **Nova Southeastern University** in Davie. Whether a storefront retailer, a manufacturer or a home-based consultancy, many businesses experiencing flat sales or a falloff in inquiries will look for something to reinvigorate the sales, marketing or product development process, he said.

If the product is stale, repackage it, he said.

If the competition is capturing the market’s attention, “you have to surprise people,” Preziosi said. “If they know what to expect, you’re not going to get them more energized about your product or service.”

Impress for Success

Successfully energizing your brand – and yourself – through reinvention comes by knowing what will impress them, said Irma Becerra-Fernandez, professor and director of the **Pino Global Entrepreneurship Center** at **Florida International University** in Miami.

Study your market, she said. Read trade publications, follow trends, ask your customers – all the while “trying to adjust and align with what they need.”

Whitmore’s testing process includes running observations and development concepts past her “mastermind group” – a clutch of 10 entrepreneurs with whom she chats via conference call each month to discuss new ideas.

She has also discovered that reinvention is an ongoing process of personal and professional development. It’s an annual process that often delivers very tangible returns – especially between client engagements or at a time when, as Preziosi suspected, business may be soft. Her pursuit of social media last year transformed her into a prolific blogger who actively posts to Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. She hired a designer in Texas to design her blog, www.jacquelinewhitmore.com, and another in Orlando to create her Twitter page, @etiquetteexpert.

Whitmore found her forays into social media led almost naturally into personal exploration and reinvention, she said. Where her Web site has articles on business etiquette and tips, her blog offers personal insights and “Whit-bits.” The blogging process inspired her to write more from a personal perspective – and to build her personal brand somewhat apart from the Etiquette Expert.

“I had a place to write and publish every day. I started revealing more about myself, my personality and business. People tend to like that,” she said. “It’s kind of like the new me now. I’m sharing more of myself. A Web site is like an office, the bricks and structure. A blog is like a person’s home. You see what it’s like to be with them on a personal level. I’m branding more of Jacqueline Whitmore. I’m becoming the go-to person in the world of etiquette.”

Whether it’s a Web site or blog site makeover, exploring new topics to write about, or taking on new clients or challenges, Whitmore tries not to take on too much – just enough to keep her relevant among her clients and prospects, and keep business personally exciting, she said.

“Every year, I try not to conquer the world,” she said. “As a solo-preneur, you have to focus on one thing, or you’ll get overwhelmed and distraught and throw your hands up. This should be a rewarding experience.”

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