

# Beyond a personal brand

A guide for general counsel



# In this report we will...

- Highlight key findings from our survey of general counsel.
- Explain more fully what is meant by personal branding.
- Look at the impact of personal branding.
- Consider factors that can limit personal branding.
- Explain how GCs can develop their personal brands.
- Feature personal insights from prominent general counsel.

Many executives and entrepreneurs engage in personal branding. But it is far less common among general counsel. While many in-house lawyers believe it's important for professional and personal development, our research suggests that most of them devote almost no time to it.

Our aim is to explain why general counsel should make time for personal branding, and to look at the initial steps they can take, as well as the benefits it can bring to their business colleagues and to society more widely.

The evolving role of general counsel worldwide has the potential to give their personal brands a particularly broad resonance and value – hence the title of this report. A general counsel who builds a strong personal brand is creating a potent tool to extend their influence and effect wider change. And as the profile of the profession continues to diversify, we will inevitably see innovative GCs exploring ways to secure wider benefits from what might once have been a purely personal asset.

We hope you will find this report both useful and inspiring, and would be delighted to discuss any aspects of it with you.



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‘ Your brand ripples out: it reaches everyone you associate with and everyone you touch. ’

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# Seven key findings

1. Most GCs are **familiar with the idea** of a personal brand – only 16% say they are not. But only 20% are fully familiar with it.
2. Only 3% of GCs believe that a personal brand is not **something for lawyers**.
3. Only 18% of GCs **work hard** to improve their personal brand. Over half (56%) don't work on developing it at all.
4. 67% of female GCs feel their **gender has been an obstacle** in the development of their personal brand. Only 13% of male GCs feel the same.
5. GCs generally believe that legal skills are less relevant in building personal brand than their **relationships with stakeholders**. 66% say developing internal relationships within their company is highly important, compared with 21% who feel the same about being 'the best' in technical legal matters.
6. Nearly all GCs have **LinkedIn profiles** – but only a minority make full use of LinkedIn.
7. Only 5% of GCs have **used an adviser** to help them develop their personal brand.



# Introduction

## The brand called You

Many of the ideas that inform personal branding have been around for a long time. But the concept itself was only articulated in 1997, by the renowned business and management writer Tom Peters. He argued that personal branding was inescapable and that "to be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You."

Peters subsequently developed his argument that everyone has a personal brand. "A personal brand is your promise to the marketplace and the world. Since everyone makes a promise to the world, one does not have a choice of having or not having a personal brand. Everyone has one. The real question is whether someone's personal brand is powerful enough to be meaningful to the person and the marketplace."

In this argument, the business world is full of weak personal brands – the brands of people who have not developed the reputation and influence that enable them to stand out. Here we will examine how general counsel can avoid this trap and build strong personal brands that will help them to succeed in their careers.

## The importance of influence

Our previous reports for GCs have concluded that for general counsel to be successful they must be influential, since their advice is essential in achieving corporate goals. And at its most basic level, personal branding is a tool that helps GCs communicate their value proposition to their business – an essential element in influencing decision-making.

Of course different corporate models tend to enable different degrees of influence. Those GCs who work in organisations that promote empowerment have a brand-building advantage over those who do not.

However, there is a virtuous cycle here. If a GC who has established a strong relationship with senior management can exert their influence to address major challenges or seize opportunities, then their influence increases and it becomes increasingly easy for them to play a proactive role. GCs are leaders, and the best leaders are not only responsible for leading others but also have influence over them. They reflect both their personal essence and the values of the brand they represent.

And as prominent professionals, with natural authority in topics such as ethics and governance – as well as, increasingly, in issues such as diversity and sustainability – they also position themselves to play a wider social role.

So while personal branding requires time and effort, it can benefit not only the GC but also – moving far beyond the purely personal 'brand called You' – their team, their business, the legal profession, their community and society. The GCs who are best at making this happen are likely to be those who think most deeply about what their impact is and what it could be, and who identify most clearly what matters not only to them personally but also to a wider community.

## Promoting diversity

One thing that has become much clearer since Tom Peters' 1997 article is that personal branding is not a level playing field in terms of diversity and equality. This was highlighted in our survey when 67% of female GCs said their gender had been an obstacle in the development of their personal brand, compared with only 13% of male GCs. We have heard similar comments elsewhere in discussions of e.g. race and disability.

Inequalities in a variety of areas – from corporate hierarchies to speaking opportunities – can make it harder for some GCs to develop their personal brands effectively. The situation is gradually improving, but there is much hard work to be done before we reach a situation where no-one is disadvantaged in this way.

All GCs and other lawyers can help to address the issue. Indeed, we would argue that those fortunate enough not to be subjected to discrimination or unequal treatment have a particular duty to be supportive of those who are. As noted by a number of the GCs we interviewed, having a strong personal brand helps them to be advocates for social responsibility and the development of diversity and inclusion.

# 1. What is a personal brand?

Personal branding is a structured process that creates and maintains an authentic and positive (but curated and consistent) public persona for an individual, focusing on particular topics in order to reach and influence a defined audience or audiences.

It will typically seek to position the individual in the eyes of their audience as an expert or an authority on particular matters, or as someone who has particularly relevant, interesting or entertaining insights or experience.

Its ultimate goal is typically to increase their influence, advance them professionally, create new opportunities, and increase their commercial or societal impact.

However, a lot of professionals find the idea of advancing their personal brand difficult. And while lawyers in private practice have grown more accustomed to marketing themselves, for many GCs – especially those whose senior career has been spent entirely in-house – this remains an uncomfortable idea.

Some are afraid of appearing ‘in your face’, or of ‘oversharing’. And different cultures have different levels of tolerance for self-promotion: something that seems quite normal in one country can look rude or brash in another.

But personal branding is not the same as self-promotion. Even very private and self-effacing people have personal brands. And while culturally specific concerns such as social ‘face’ or having a ‘good name’ may complicate personal branding, we are not aware of any that negate it or render it impossible. All cultures have space for the creation of a personal brand, although the size and shape of that space may vary.

## Key characteristics of your personal brand

### Positioned



Aimed at a clearly defined audience, typically with interests similar to your own.

### Positive



Intended to make a favourable impression and build a good image and professional reputation.

### Promising



Providing assurance of talents, experience, insight and skills.

### Personal



Incapable of being delegated in terms of communication, development and skills, as well as comparison with others.

### Polished



Dependent on the responsible and considered use of words and images to support your message.

## The value of a personal brand

At the most basic level, having a well-managed personal brand helps you cultivate a clear and consistent approach to your career, and helps other people understand your value and your focus. Although the practicalities of personal branding can vary between cultures – not least because in some societies standing out from one's colleagues or peers is not always seen as a good thing – the merits of clarity, reliability and focused expertise are appreciated worldwide.

The strongest brands are distinctive, and differentiation is one of the factors we talk about in this report. But it is important to remember that even if your brand does not make you stand out from the crowd in some special way, it can still be useful provided it is clear and consistent. You don't have to be the best or the most popular to attract an audience, or to show that you have value, or to demonstrate that your insights are worthwhile.



The aim of personal branding is to connect people – for their mutual benefit, or the benefit of others, or both.

*Professor Arancha Ruiz Bachs*

Developing your brand involves becoming known for something (your skills, your knowledge, your character, your story or some other distinctive attribute) and sharing it through your insights, behaviour and actions. A strong brand will open doors to new experiences and opportunities which will in turn, in a virtuous circle, fuel your brand.

The 'sweet spot' for a GC's personal brand is where self-interest and self-promotion align with doing the right thing and influencing positive change. And you have to start with self-advancement to reach the position from which you can deliver stronger, broader benefits, and leverage your expertise and your engagement with issues that are important to you to help to bring about positive change.

Not all GCs will wish to do this. For some, it is enough to have a personal brand that makes them respected and influential within their business. Arguably, that will always be the core of any GC's personal brand.

But as well as being a passionate advocate for their business and its values, and a trusted adviser to senior management, a GC is well-positioned – in some cases uniquely positioned – to be an inspirational role model or thought leader in a wide range of areas, such as:

- ABC (anti-bribery and corruption) issues
- Alumni programmes
- Change management
- Charitable work
- Criminal justice
- Cultural matters
- Developing nation issues
- Diversity and inclusion
- Education
- Elder rights
- Environmental issues
- Ethical business and trade
- Family issues
- Health and welfare
- Human rights
- Innovation
- Leadership
- Legal technology
- LGBT+ issues
- Mentoring
- Minority rights
- Non-executive board roles
- Pro bono work
- Professional development
- Public policy
- Regulatory reform
- Sector-specific issues
- Social justice
- Social responsibility
- Sustainability
- Women in leadership
- Young people

These are all areas where a GC can make an impact, and which would be meaningful aspects of a personal brand. But at the other extreme your brand might reflect, for example, sports or hobbies which are significant to you. If you are a passionate mountaineer or sailor in your free time, that can be part of your brand too. Stories and lessons from leisure activities to which you have a genuine commitment can be strong brand reinforcers. So can feedback from more passive activities: many dedicated sports fans have built narratives of resilience or optimism around their support for less-than-successful teams.

Whatever you build your brand around, it should not be all 'push'. You can develop it by asking other people for advice or assistance. And whether you ask or not, people will inevitably contribute to your brand through how they interact with you and what they say about you.



## Dessi Berhane Silassie

**Chief Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Officer and Global Head of Legal for IP, Financial Services & Asia Pacific at IHS Markit**

Covid and homeworking have blurred the lines of the personal and the professional. It's been testing for leaders, including GCs, to pivot to leading employees in organisations where there are no longer some of the traditional demarcations between different versions of people's lives. Every day we have conversations that would previously have been seen as non-work-related. And this is taking us closer to the essence of what we are.

As a leader, you have to navigate this, and the issues it raises, including D&I issues. There isn't a CEO who isn't talking about safe spaces and being who you are – your "authentic" selves.

Authenticity is a major theme in our D&I strategy. But it's also key to being effective in our business. In APAC, where I'm based now, and in Africa where I am from, trust is the nucleus of most relationships. For many relationships, I'd say it's critical. And if there's a sense that your brand is inauthentic, that can actively harm your relationships rather than help.

I think people sometimes hear about personal branding and think they are starting with a blank sheet of paper. That can lead to inauthenticity. What people need is to be more aware of their existing brand. That's the most important thing: being aware of how you show up and how other people receive and perceive you. Not just how you show up when things are OK, but how you appear when you're stressed, under pressure or tired. And we need to be self-aware of our good points and virtues but also understand our vices.

You want your brand to represent the best of yourself, as that will help you to be the best of yourself. I tell all my team I want them to show up as the very best of themselves.

There's no question that building your brand does require effort. You have to invest time outside of work, especially as you grow in years of experience. And you should invest personally – don't wait for the company to invest in you.

You have to manage and continuously curate your brand in a deliberate and focused way, through experience, training and self-reflection. Think of it as driving into the best version of yourself, your true self. Find areas that give you joy, purpose and impact, and develop them.

When I first engaged with personal branding, I didn't know that was what it was called. About six or seven years ago I was an emerging senior leader, and I became cognisant of the need to be more aware of how I was received and perceived. So I started to find ways to do that: training, journaling, 360 reviews etc. And that process remains ongoing.

The timing was right for me, because it came at a time when many in-house lawyers were redefining themselves and the complexity of their ever-changing roles. Traditionally we in the legal industry were confined to a definition of legal roles: managing risk, compliance and being deep domain experts on legal issues.

Now we have evolved by redefining our role and personal branding to GCs being considered as executive business leaders. Partly because of the holistic total view that comes with an in-house role, and our unique knowledge, skills and perspective of our companies, we have become better at using our position to allow us to be critical business, ethics and corporate leaders.

When you're an in-house lawyer, people are looking to you to help achieve their outcomes. You are key to identifying and implementing solutions which are key to the success of a business. And that can be a very empowering and valued role.

 You want your brand to represent the best of yourself, as that will help you to be the best of yourself.

It's also empowering to think about your personal brand and manage it proactively so that your business leaders can understand your true value – rather than just being pigeonholed as the lawyer who manages the risks.

One thing that makes it so fun, rewarding and challenging to be in-house lawyers is that, unlike any other central corporate function, we are truly the glue of the company. There's no business or function legal doesn't work with. As such, there is no one who is in a better position than a GC to influence brand and culture within a company. The role allows one to be the nucleus of the organisation, set the tone, and develop a perspective which goes far beyond legal knowledge.

## Perfect, authentic?

The perfect brand is powerful, memorable and consistent. It's authentic and honest. And it's easy to articulate. But, of course, your brand won't be perfect. Things will sometimes go wrong. Sometimes people you would like to connect with won't wish to connect with you. It doesn't matter. You can't (and shouldn't try to) connect with everyone.

However, if you feel your personal brand is actually failing – if problems are frequent rather than occasional – don't be afraid to review your brand and your approach to developing it, perhaps with the assistance of someone else. It may be that your brand needs a rethink or a reboot.

But while you might alter the focus of your brand, or your target audience, or even change important elements, your brand must remain authentic to you.

You are the palette of colours from which you paint your brand. You could choose to paint countless different images – but whichever you select, you have to use what's in that palette, in the combination that works best for you. If you import colours that don't belong there, your authenticity will be lost, along with the integrity of your brand.

## Mind the gaps

The totality of your brand has to make sense in the context of who you are and what you stand for. If you could transfer it unchanged to someone else, it would not be a very good brand.

Although it includes your achievements, your brand isn't your resumé. It's what you are, not what you've done.

Nor is it a discrete part of your life whose maintenance is separate from your other actions. On the contrary, everything you do potentially helps to reinforce your brand (or undermine it).

This is one reason why authenticity is key for a brand. It is, in fact, the anchor of your personal brand. If your audience become aware of a gap between the brand you have built and your reality, it may be very hard to regain their trust.

That trust is hugely important because, while your brand is all about you, it is ultimately determined by other people. You can shape it, build it and maintain it. But although your personal brand is what you are known for, its success rests on how you are perceived by others.

Jeff Bezos of Amazon is credited with the aphorism that "*your brand is what other people say about you when you're not in the room.*" It may be driven by who you are, and what you do when you're in that metaphorical room, but its ultimate value comes down to what your audience thinks of it, rather than what you want them to think. If there's a gap between those two things, you may have a problem – depending on how big the gap is and what it covers.

## Accidental brands

If everyone has a personal brand, as Tom Peters suggested when introducing the concept, then clearly you will have a brand even if you do nothing at all to develop it or protect it.

Your brand in that case is more likely to be weak, and will mostly arise from – and periodically be changed by – the uncoordinated interplay of various actions and events in your life.

When we talk about personal branding in this report, we are referring to active and intentional personal branding. But even an active brand builder can bolster their brand unintentionally, just as they can damage it without meaning to.

It is not quite true that, to adapt Socrates, the unexamined brand is not worth having. But it is certainly the case that an unassessed and uncurated brand will – even if it is a net positive – bring relatively few benefits to a GC.

Importantly, too, it is far less likely than a measured and well-managed brand to provide the sort of reach and leverage that will extend a GC's influence in the way envisaged by this report.

Some people will argue that the most personal aspects of a personal brand are among those that are hardest to control and develop. They will point out aspects of your personality which are not easy to change. But a personal brand which is authentic, as personal brands should be, can often embrace and even celebrate such attributes. Your personality is part of what makes your personal brand unique. And it is not inauthentic to foreground some personal characteristics over others: on the contrary it is an essential part of branding, and indeed of the way we conduct our everyday lives.

## Finding your audience

Personal branding involves identifying the audience you want to reach and designing a message that clearly conveys what you can contribute as a distinctive attribute. Focus on a small number of themes that will be meaningful to that audience – areas in which you are, or could soon be seen, as a credible authority.

Professor Robert Cialdini, whose work featured in the [third of our reports for general counsel](#), has identified 'authority' as one of the key principles of influence: as his studies show, "people follow the lead of credible, knowledgeable experts".

Your audience may include one or more of several classes of people – for example, your peers, your team (who will see you as a leader), your business, and your sector. In some cases, a GC may have a much wider audience e.g. if they are promoting sustainability or diversity & inclusion.

Does a GC's personal brand lose its naturalness if the GC deliberately approaches some individuals and avoids others? Does avoiding criticism and certain audiences mean losing authenticity? Does planning a message to convey a better image of oneself imply manipulation?

The answer to all those questions is: no – quite the opposite. Your choice of words, behaviours and images increases the influence of your message and its success. Whatever your brand, you need to shape an effective way to convey your authentic, relevant and distinctive message to your key audience, and to reduce distractions and diversions.

You cannot please everyone. If you try to do so, you will most likely be criticised for being inconsistent. A GC developing their personal brand needs to focus on their key audience, and not be concerned to reach audiences for whom their activity is irrelevant or of no interest.

## Own your achievements

In developing your brand, you need to own your successes, both professional and otherwise. When you achieve something, you should take credit for it. It demonstrates your value, and in many cases will also highlight your personal values. By enhancing your brand, it helps you achieve and collaborate even more in future.

If you let your work 'speak for itself' then it's not speaking for you, unless you draw people's attention to the fact that you're responsible for it. Your immediate colleagues might know, but few others will make the effort to find out. If you don't highlight your contribution, it won't enhance your reputation.

You will need to find the best means of doing this – a way that you are comfortable with, and which acknowledges the contributions of others, while making your personal achievement clear. Sharing credit fairly is not only the right thing to do but also a boost to your brand, as it shows both what you've accomplished and that you are a leader who recognises and celebrates the accomplishments of your whole team.



## Vanessa Vilar

**Group General Counsel Ice Cream –  
Unilever**

I have been at Unilever for over 18 years and today I lead the Latin American legal team. Working in a company that innovates a lot has been very challenging. We are always at the forefront of development, branding and communication. So, if for me the concept of a personal brand is quite new, it is closely related to who we are and what we do at Unilever.

I have been working for Unilever for a long time and I think one of the reasons for this is because I feel my personal values are in line with Unilever culture. It is important that your own opinions be aligned with those of the company you work for. You can't be in a position where there isn't some kind of alignment between your values and those of your organisation.



I think personal branding is a consequence of discovering your leadership style.

For me, personal branding has a lot to do with the legacy you leave behind, because I know nobody lasts forever and having the opportunity to access a broader public and the backup of a strong brand helps you to convey your messages. In my case, for example, it's about diversity and inclusion.

I sincerely believe that in my role I have a duty to foster diversity and inclusion, and much of my personal brand development is related to that. I have been involved a lot in discussions related to this because I really believe that everyone should have the right to be themselves, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race, origin, disability. Having a strong personal brand helps you be an advocate for that social responsibility or the social role you play in your industry.

When you talk about personal branding, you really need to know who you really are, your values, what you stand for, what you do, the legacy you want to leave behind. This is a lot about getting to know yourself, your real self and projecting this to the rest.

I think personal branding is an exercise in leadership, so everyone should be self-aware to then develop their leadership style and their personal brand. It's important because it's very difficult to be a leader without being self-aware. I would say the first step is to get to know yourself to be a good leader and then be perceived as such through your personal brand.

You must know, understand who you are, what it means to be consistent in the way you show yourself to people. If you don't really know yourself, it will be a mismatch between who you think you are, or how you think you do things, and how people around you see you.

So the general counsel role is a leadership role, and you have a responsibility to your team. I think personal branding is a consequence of discovering your leadership style. So once you really know who you are and the leader you want to be, you probably have your personal brand. Maybe some general counsel will humbly say, "I haven't thought about it", but probably everyone is doing something in a way that will be perceived by others as their personal brand.

## 2. The impact of personal branding on a GC's career

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Personal branding can help you manage both your career and your influence, enhancing your strengths and increasing your professional contribution to your organisation, and even your contribution to society.

In particular, personal branding can help GCs structure their careers successfully and attract valuable opportunities for collaboration by:

- Defining a particular career strategy based on their distinguishing skills.
- Building strategic networks with interested audiences.
- Growing influence.
- Increasing visibility.

The most immediate impact of a GC's personal brand may be in daily life. But perhaps the most consequential impact is on their long-term career development and influence.

A growing number of GCs aspire to senior management or C-suite positions. And while most other GCs intend to continue in in-house roles, others have broader ambitions,

seeing the position of general counsel as a stepping stone to a wide variety of opportunities and new careers.

GCs who intend to move beyond in-house legal will find a strong personal brand and the credibility it brings to be great advantages.

But even those GCs who are happy to continue being GCs will find that the in-house profession changes around them. They are likely to acquire new and evolving responsibilities. They may need new skills and may have to influence a different selection of stakeholders. Having a strong image and recognition in the business – and outside the business – will make it easier for them to navigate these challenges successfully.

### Aligning your personal brand with your business brand

Some businesses have a positive expectation that a GC's brand will reinforce their own. In certain cases, there are also well-defined limits on what the GC and other senior employees can publicly say in their professional capacity.

At the other extreme, a GC's business may be relaxed about what they say, as long as they do not create bad publicity or other negative consequences for the business.

In practice, though, it is important a GC's personal brand is aligned with the brand of their business. 'Aligned with' need not mean 'similar to': the most important thing is that the two brands are not in conflict. But if there is no connection between the two, as well as no conflict, then both the business and the GC will fail to benefit from potential synergies.

Some GCs are increasingly involved in shaping their corporate brands through their involvement in areas such as ESG and ethical business culture. The more this is the case, the more the brands of the business and the GC will be intertwined. As more GCs take on roles covering matters such as diversity, equality and inclusion – as they have previously taken on responsibilities in areas such as compliance – and as more businesses opt to take an active public stance on ESG and related topics, this may increasingly become the norm.



## Helen Fletcher

General Counsel UK at BNP Paribas

There's increasingly an expectation for people in my role to put themselves 'out there' – to speak on behalf of the institution, to join committees and trade associations and so on. And it has a dual purpose: it's beneficial for the bank, but it also works for me.

This change may be partly a generational shift. When I started this role, I was taking over from a GC who was retiring. Things had developed during the 20 or so years he'd been in place. And this changing view of personal branding has gone hand-in-hand with the evolution of the GC role. We've always been trusted advisers, but my observation is that the expectation that we will step outside the narrow scope of pure legal advice is something that's changed.

I'm now involved in culture, D&I, ESG – anything to which there's a legal aspect but which also impacts more widely on the institution's wider role in society. And a GC's ability to get involved in leadership outside pure law can help with branding. It's easier to build your brand if you're not just advising on the nuts and bolts of the law. And as long as it's authentic, and I'm choosing what I'm speaking on and stand true to what I am, then I can feel confident in what I do, even when I'm challenged.

If you're in a senior role, you can feel quite exposed to challenges. It can be tempting not to open up so much. There can be bravery in building a brand – because you know that if you're not active on LinkedIn or doing interviews or whatever, there's less for people to hold against you or to use to criticise you. But without that, how do you really move forward?

Of course there will be setbacks. I've taken some knockbacks, including being made redundant during the credit crunch, while I was on maternity leave. You take the knocks – but if you have a brand and a network, you can call people and you'll find other opportunities open up. It made me more aware of the importance of a personal brand, as I've moved through different sorts of roles on my way up.

And while it's not always easy, I think some of the obstacles I've encountered are ones that I've imagined or made myself. For instance, I took on this role during lockdown. That was a challenge, and unfamiliar territory for everyone, and

I found myself wondering if I needed to be less honest – less 'different' or less 'me'. I was trying to curate my brand, so I did some interviews, took part in round tables, that sort of thing. But I was also concerned about whether it was OK to be myself. The first few times I attended board meetings, I wondered 'am I enough?' I had to give myself a bit of a talking-to, and persuade myself that actually I was enough.

That worked for me, but some people may need different kinds of support. We've got leadership schemes and various other programmes. Some find training helpful. I try to inspire my team, to give them permission to go out there and do it, whatever 'it' is. I'm really keen on that: there's a need to develop people, as in-house legal career paths aren't always obvious and it's good to broaden options.

You also have to give people more permission to be themselves. Our previous GC did that when I worked with him. His attitude was 'just do it your own way.' We were the yin and yang, quite different but complementary. He was direct and challenging, and I was more about taking a back door approach and persuading people. I find that more effective – you can get someone's ear much more. And once you're established, you've got trust.

That trust is where the authenticity of a personal brand relates to a wider diversity of thoughts and perspectives in the business. Diversity isn't just about race and gender – it's about different backgrounds and different ideas, and understanding how they may fit into corporate culture, and even how they may ultimately help it develop.

Having worked in different institutions, I'm quite aware of how corporate cultures vary, and I know this from first-hand experience having worked in both US and European financial institutions. The variety of my experience – like working in business functions, as well as legal ones – has helped me see how people can build their brands in different environments, with different role models and perspectives, and diverse mindsets, and different ways of doing things. Whoever you are, wherever you are, it really is something you can do.

### 3. What factors limit a GC's personal brand?

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As our findings show, most GCs are not engaging fully with personal branding. This is true even for some GCs who are quite familiar with the concept of a personal brand – understanding how something works is very different from knowing how to make it work.

There are many reasons for this lack of engagement, including a lack of time, uncertainty about how to proceed, concerns about perceived obstacles and anxiety about cultural appropriateness.

The chart on the next page shows some of the issues most commonly cited by general counsel as obstacles to the development of their personal brand.

#### Focusing your efforts

GCs are busy people, so it's unsurprising that many struggle to find time to develop their personal brand. In fact, lack of time is the reason GCs most often give for not developing their personal brand – just as our previous research with GCs has shown that many struggle to develop the strategic aspects of their role, or to enhance their professional influence, because they are trapped by the relentless day-to-day demands of their job.

It is true, of course: successful branding does take time. A significant amount of initial work may be needed in conceptualising and establishing a brand. And after that you will have to continue to make time for activities that will maintain and develop your brand. Making and maintaining meaningful connections, both within and beyond your organisation, also requires the commitment of time.

It will be hard to do this – and to justify to yourself that commitment of time – if you do not view your personal brand as a professional asset that will, in the long term, make your engagement in other aspects of your professional life easier, more effective and more rewarding. The boost that your brand can give your career and your work as a GC is the single most potent reason for making it a priority and using effective time management to make sure it is not neglected. You owe it to yourself, and to the others who will benefit from your stronger brand.

#### The 80/20 rule

In prioritising their brand actions, some GCs may find it helpful to adapt the Pareto Principle, otherwise known as the 80/20 rule. Taking this rule of thumb as a guide may enable GCs to do better, rather than just doing more, and to focus their networking and communication efforts.

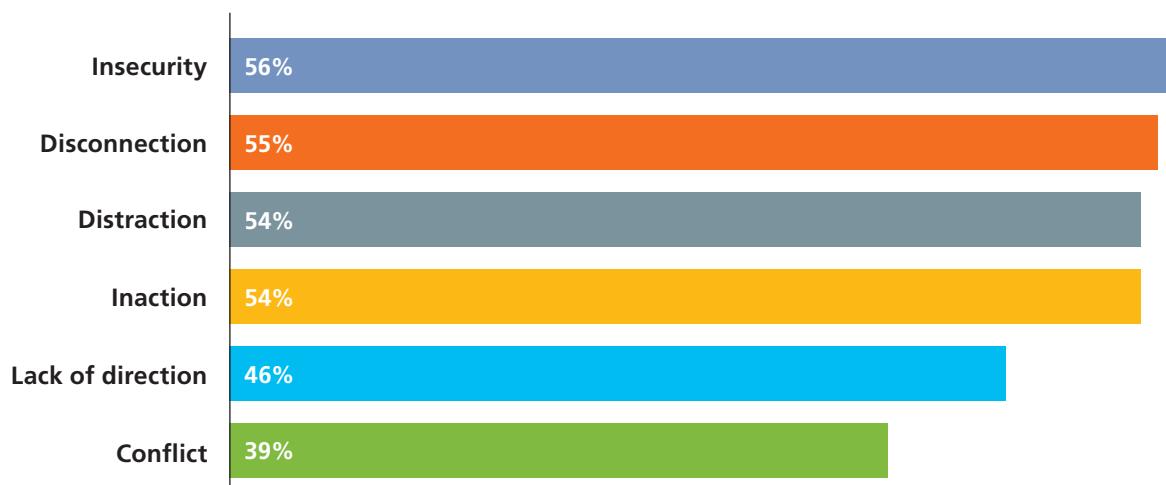
For example, GCs could focus on the most effective 20% of their contacts, on the assumption that this would achieve about 80% of the potentially available benefit from all contacts. They could concentrate on the 20% of speaking opportunities that would be the most effective, or only aim to comment on social media posts from the top 20% of influencers in their chosen area.

Focusing on an even smaller percentage is an equally valid strategy, if the GC selects the most appropriate targets.

GCs trying to build a personal brand should not confuse quantity with quality. A large network may not be a good one. The most potent networks are diverse, connected and dynamic. Many versatile professionals enjoy the benefit of a heterogeneous network that can support them in overcoming a wide range of difficulties, as well as opening opportunities that may not be immediately obvious.



## General counsel experiencing obstacles to personal brand development



### Insecurity

Some GCs doubt that their abilities live up to expectations created by their personal brand. This is a variant of 'imposter syndrome', whose sufferers experience persistent doubts about their skills and accomplishments, and irrationally fear being 'exposed' as frauds or imposters. It is disproportionately common in high achievers such as GCs.

### Disconnection

If the creation and maintenance of networks is neglected, as it often is due to the pressure of working life, it can be difficult to build, maintain or revive work relationships. For some people, this is a problem that has been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic.

### Distraction

Some GCs feel that they are too busy to focus on communication and networking – or, if they do have time, that they get distracted by other interests or find it hard to reject proposals that divert their attention.

### Inaction

In some cases, the distractions described above are actually avoidance behaviours. There are GCs who know they should engage with personal branding, but find it difficult or uncomfortable and so avoid it. Sometimes a lack of enthusiasm means that GCs simply do not try to create or use opportunities to communicate their personal brand.

### Lack of direction

GCs may not be sure of the objective of their personal brand, either because it is difficult for them to define or because they are not convinced that it is what they want. A lack of certainty about goals generally leads to an uncoordinated approach which lacks impact.

### Conflict

Nearly four in ten GCs reported that the desire to avoid conflict was a brake on their ability to develop their brand. However, conflict need not be bad. A good personal brand can benefit from constructive criticism while being strong enough to stand up to unconstructive criticism. And the ability to manage and resolve conflict can also be a strong part of a GC's personal brand.





## Gonzalo Smith

General Counsel of Falabella

For years, and until not so long ago, a general counsel in Chile was viewed as a manager of external lawyers who provided a low-complexity in-house legal service. This was the case in most instances. In fact, the term 'general counsel' was not used for company lawyers.

I have devoted a lot of time and effort to trying to change this perception, and it was probably the first relevant step toward building my personal brand: I began doing something my predecessors didn't. I looked for a distinctive element to show the value of my work and to be able to give another approach to the general counsel position, in support of a differentiating strategy.

Personal brand development involves a combination of the role you play as an individual, as a spokesperson for the company and the role of the company itself.

In my case, incorporating governance management into my role as a lawyer was a milestone. I set myself the challenge of creating an area that sets out expected behaviours for members across the entire organisation, and therefore we pioneered the use of the term governance applied to private companies in Chile, but with a broad meaning and not just as corporate governance in connection with shareholders.

Now, it should not be forgotten that everything you do as a general counsel, obviously, can be interpreted as an act of the organisation. A letter, a column or an opinion from Gonzalo Smith may probably be read as an opinion of Falabella. Notwithstanding its limitations, it puts you in a place that allows you to engage in public discussions, give your opinion and advocate for changes in society.

The problem, I think, generally lies in that we general counsel put ourselves in a corner. We deal mainly with day-to-day work and remain oblivious of public matters, failing to understand that we, the company lawyers, have a relevant responsibility in a very important area, where trust – in my opinion – is the most relevant attribute for the person fulfilling this role. Therefore, the existence of a personal brand has more relevance than initially would have been thought.

If there is something you want to do, if you have a dream in life, if you want to contribute to society and the world for future generations, having a personal brand is a feature and a tool that will give you credibility, authority and access to opinion forums. In my particular case, my project has been to contribute to the discussion on diversity – I have

two daughters and I want to help change the world for them. I want to be able to contribute to changing the views on integrity in companies and I am fortunate enough to have a platform like Falabella, which is a huge company with a lot of influence in Latin America.

Delving deeper into this subject, I feel that developing a personal brand is a qualifying virtue or attribute, i.e. it allows you to achieve your goals. An individual's brand and a company's brand feed back into each other. If I manage to talk about diversity and inclusion, give my opinion and generate a discussion in the legal and corporate world about this matter, then Falabella also wins because it is a company that is very concerned about diversity too. There is ongoing feedback between my role and the company's role. It is very likely that on my own, without being a spokesperson for Falabella, I would never have had the impact or dissemination platforms to which I have access.

One of my recommendations for younger lawyers is that they care about strengthening their personal bonds, spend time building relationships as individuals, and make themselves known little by little. Out-of-work instances often provide a wonderful time, where people can get up close and personal, which is usually not seen when you are at the office. But it takes time and effort, in a deliberate and conscious manner. Using dissemination platforms, such as seminars and talks, is also very important and should not be dismissed. When I developed the Falabella integrity programme, we had a lot of communicational visibility at the provider community level and these communications started circulating on social media, creating great value for the company.

The personal brand is a qualifying attribute that one should positively take care of, because it will allow you to do things and reach audiences that otherwise you would not.

If I had to summarise the requirements for building a robust personal brand, I believe that you must have certain qualities as a leader and of course you must be a good communicator. In addition, you must create a consistent story and be clear on what your goal is; it is crucial to find your north, plan your course and be consistent along the way. You must hold the steering wheel constantly, because there are distressing forces that will push you off course, but being consistent and remaining focused – e.g. avoiding at all costs getting distracted by trying to be everywhere at the same time – are key actions.

# 4. The personal branding process

At its most basic level, a brand is the repetition of a simple message to a key audience. But behind this simplicity lies complexity. And many GCs will ask: how can I summarise myself in a simple message? How can I define and describe my most relevant or distinctive talent? How do I know which audiences are most interested?

The answers emerge through the **personal branding process**, which enables a GC to identify and prioritise the most relevant elements.

A GC's personal branding process should address a number of questions, including:

- What is the GC's most relevant role?
- How is the GC's distinguishing quality identified?
- How should the GC create their personal brand vision and message?

- Who are the GC's audiences and how can they be reached?
- How can GCs measure and improve their personal brand?

The rest of this report focuses on how GCs can find the best answers to these questions.

## Three key principles in personal branding

### *Gain perspective*

A personal brand is most effective if it is based on insight and strategic thinking. Gathering and analysing information and feedback will help GCs:

- Expand their vision of their own skills and current or potential situation.
- Establish their own capacity and the availability of resources.
- Prioritise tasks – weigh what they want, what they can do, and the opportunity cost of preferring one option to another.
- Identify key allies who can provide information and resources, as well as support and encouragement.
- Ensure timely and adequate communication of their personal brand.

It may take time and effort for even high-quality and valuable contributions to be noticed. It is important not to be thrown off course by setbacks, and not to lose your focus on what you want to say. If you are struggling, always consider seeking assistance from others – whether friends and colleagues or professional consultants.

### *Above all, take action*

You cannot overcome obstacles if you do not attack them. Personal branding works when we decide to take risks, convey our message and later examine its impact. Many GCs see the positive value of active personal branding when it is present, but fail to realise its impact when it is absent.

### *Maintain your self-confidence and focus*

Building a personal brand is not always easy and brand communication does not always get the desired results. When you start to develop your brand, you may discover that initially very few people outside your immediate circle of family, friends and colleagues are interested in what you have to say.

## What is a GC's most relevant role?

GCs generally feel that legal skills are less relevant in building personal brand than their relationships with stakeholders.

Two-thirds of GCs (66%), for example, believe that developing internal relationships within their company is highly important, compared with just one in five (21%) who feel the same about being 'the best' in technical legal matters.

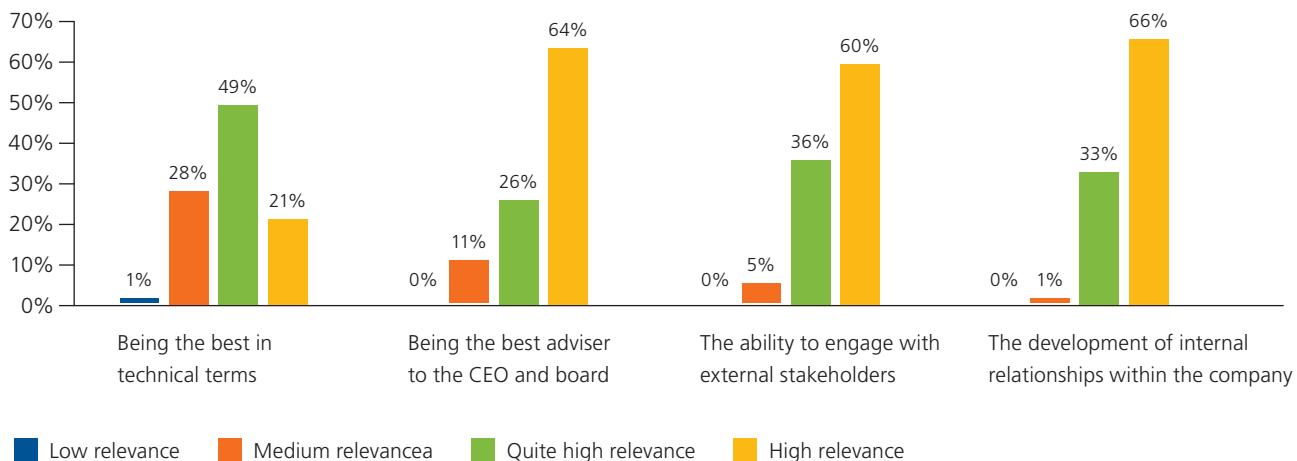
Over many years, our GC research has confirmed that truly successful GCs are usually seen – and see themselves – as business people, as well as trustworthy facilitators and in many cases ethical advisers and influencers. Strong legal skills are necessary for a lawyer who aspires to be a successful

GC, but they are not sufficient, and in most cases are not the main criterion by which a business will judge them.

The role of most GCs will always have as its foundation the requirement to deal with legal issues. But GCs who aspire to be genuinely successful and influential will typically want to expand their activity far beyond this.

A GC's personal brand has to be shaped not only by that basic role but also by their expanding influence and responsibilities, by their commercial insight and ethical impact, and by their aspirations for future growth and development.

### How relevant are the following factors in building a personal brand?



## The GC's distinguishing quality

What's your distinguishing quality in your professional life?

There are many tests that purport to describe aspects of your personality, or how your possession of a characteristic compares with other people's. Some GCs like to use these as a way of evaluating themselves, and they could certainly be used when considering the development of your personal brand.

Equally, for the purposes of brand development, you can rate yourself on your own attributes – whether on a scale that's numerical (e.g. 1-10) or descriptive (e.g. from very bad to very good). An honest assessment of your technical skills, managerial skills or any other attribute will always be a good thing. But it is only useful in building a brand if it enables you to benchmark yourself against your peers.

Most GCs, for example, would be clustered at the top end of a scale that showed 'legal expertise'. So however good a lawyer you are, you're unlikely to be able to use that as a differentiator when you develop your personal brand.

You might be able to refine the point in a useful way – e.g. to highlight expertise in a particular area of the law. But you are more likely to be successful if you focus on attributes that are less common among GCs, or perhaps on an unusual combination of attributes. If you can find a combination puts you in a different place from most other GCs, you may have found a valuable element of your personal brand.

And, of course, if your brand changed because your role changed – if, for example, as some GCs have done, you became a COO – then your legal background might be a stronger differentiator.

## How others see you

Where you want your personal brand to be positioned, or where you believe it to be positioned, may not be where your audience thinks it is. We don't always see ourselves as others see us.

GCs need to understand not only what quality or attribute sets them apart, but also whether their audience perceives it in those terms. If they don't, that is something the GC has to address. A GC may be able to do this to some extent by making comparisons themselves, especially if informed by relevant metrics. But ultimately there is no substitute for asking third parties about their perceptions.

A person may be valued for having a quality not because they alone have it, but because they stand out compared to other people against whom they are measured. An averagely organised GC might be seen as very organised, for example, if their predecessor's style was chaotic.

Equally, though, if they have a differentiating quality that enough other people subsequently acquire, it will cease to be a differentiator, thus making their brand less distinctive. GCs should periodically review third party perceptions, to understand whether different brand actions are necessary.

## Creating your personal brand vision

You won't communicate your brand vision effectively if you surround it with less relevant detail.

A GC can start to create their personal brand by focusing on certain key questions. Who are you? What do you do? Why are you important? Their answers will be determined by many things – for example:

- The size of their business, its industry sector, its location, its structure, its legal team.
- Their particular expertise and responsibilities.
- Their personal background and interests.

- Whether they work on legal matters alone or have responsibilities such as ESG, HR or external affairs.
- Any pro bono activity, social roles, directorships or other activity that arises from their status as a GC.

A typical personal brand statement might highlight your key expertise/quality and its practical value to a particular audience or group. Here are three (fictional) examples.



I am a general counsel with 20 years' experience, passionate about promoting equality and diversity in the legal profession and in society.



A senior counsel in the technology sector, I am focused on helping my business achieve market leadership in key commercial applications for artificial intelligence.



I am well known both as a leading lawyer in the retail sector and as an innovator in the management and motivation of in-house legal departments, with a strong track record of improving performance, productivity and talent retention.

Each of these statements could easily be different. For example, in the first one, should the GC say something about their business? In every case, the right choice depends on the GC's personality and priorities.

Ultimately, the most effective personal brand visions for general counsel will be those that are attuned to the key issues of our times and the GC's wider role.

### Vision – Mission – Message

Your **brand vision** is a simple statement of who you are and/or what you want to be known for. Often called a personal brand statement, it's a short version of your personal value proposition.

Your **brand mission** is what you aim to do with your brand – who you aim to influence, and what you want to achieve.

Your **brand message** is what you want to say to your audience, and how you want to say it. It grows out of your brand vision, and helps you fulfil your brand mission.

## Creating your brand message

Once you have crafted your brand vision (and your brand mission) you can consider your brand message.

Your message should be limited in size and scope, and capable of being endlessly repeated. It must be relevant to your audience, and ideally demonstrate your affinity with your audience. It may have several elements, but it must be coherent. You won't always use the same words to express it – in fact the more ways you can find to say it the better – but it must be consistent. Thanks to the internet and social media, you can also use images and audio to help express your message.

Additionally, the most effective messages have an emotional component, which largely depends on your character and personality. Your message should be true to who you are. And as you look beyond the purely personal aspects of your brand, you will want to ensure that your message has broader relevance and resonance.

The message of the GC's personal brand is built on a content plan that enriches their story. This content plan consists of the GC's news, commentary and analysis on relevant topics in their area of interest. Having conversations and giving opinions repeatedly on the same topics strengthens the GC's personal brand. The content should be clear, direct and to the point.

It should also be as simple as it can be – but you may need to put a lot of work into deciding what that is. Think about your values, your interests, your skills, your achievements, your vision and your goals. Also consider what your key audience will find engaging.

Above all, your brand message must have **impact**. This is an overarching quality: without it, all the other aspects of your message will be diminished.

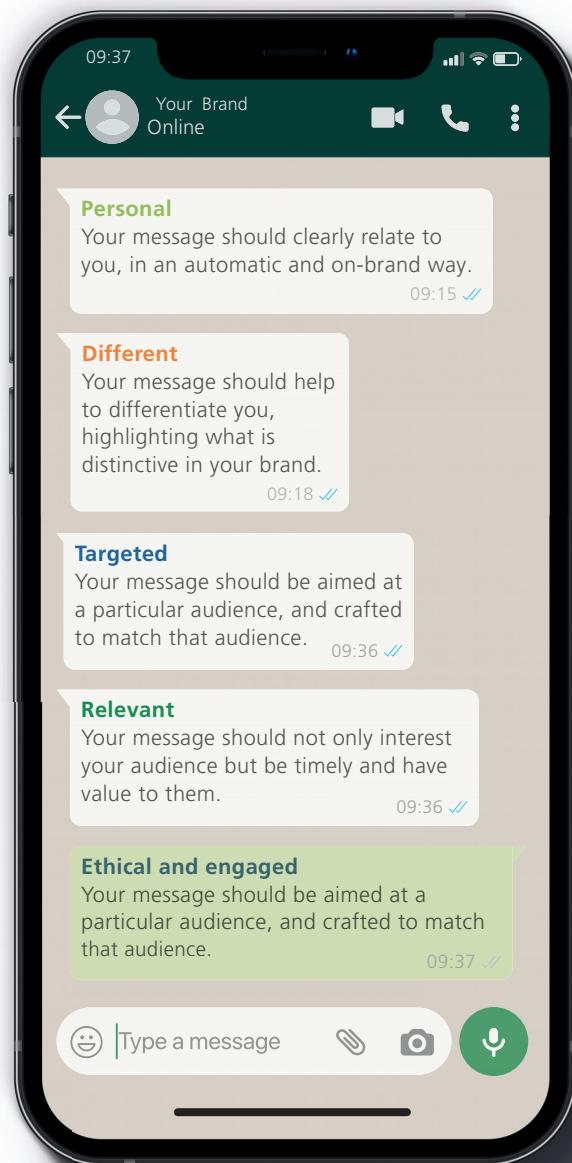
GCs who find it easier to focus on other elements of the message and hope that the impact will look after itself need to step outside their comfort zones on this issue. A brand – personal or otherwise – which lacks impact is simply not an effective brand. GCs for whom this is a particular concern may wish to discuss it with personal brand consultants or other specialists.

A successful personal brand for a successful GC will have one other overarching quality. **It needs to matter**. This quality is related to being targeted, relevant, ethical and engaged, but goes beyond those attributes to fundamental questions of value.

As we have discussed in some of our other reports for GCs, the role of general counsel continues to evolve, involving ever greater levels of ethical leadership, professional innovation, change management, corporate influence and broader social impact.

GCs who lead the way in this – or who aspire to – need a message that not only reflects their personal value but also shows their worth in a context that itself has value.

Like the top sports person who needs to play in a top league in order to achieve their full potential, GCs who want to make the most of their capabilities should be active at the highest possible level. This doesn't have to mean working for the biggest business or being involved in the highest value matters. But it does mean that those GCs make the biggest difference they can, in a space where that difference is worth making. Their personal brand message should both reflect this and facilitate it.



## The elevator pitch

As well as articulating a brand vision and a brand message, you might find it useful to spend some time drafting an elevator pitch for your brand.

An elevator pitch is a brief statement that explains and promotes something (archetypically, the idea for a movie) to a potential backer, buyer or user. You should be able to articulate it in the course of an elevator ride with them – let's say in 30 seconds at most. And as it may be your only chance to interact with your audience, it should be rehearsed, polished and highly effective.

Such a pitch for your personal brand has to focus on the absolute essence of your offering. Don't, for example, waste time explaining what a GC does. Someone who doesn't already know that is unlikely to be part of your key strategic audience. Instead, focus on the most distinctive and impactful aspects of your brand. Make sure your audience in the theoretical elevator has something unique to remember you by, and a strong appreciation of your value and your values. Caveats and qualifying statements can be saved for a subsequent conversation – your elevator pitch needs to be clear, powerful and unambiguous.

As with your brand statement, you might have to craft a number of different elevator pitches before you arrive at one that's really right. You might 'road test' (or perhaps 'elevator test') them by getting feedback from people whose opinions you trust.



## Delphine Sak Bun

**General Counsel Northern Europe  
Asia Pacific at Eviden**

Among in-house lawyers, I believe there's been very little awareness around the topic of personal branding. If you compare private practice to in-house law, one difference is that in-house you're more likely to forget that you need a personal brand. In private practice it's almost compulsory: you can't live without it, because you need to differentiate yourself. It's part of the process of shaping who you are as a professional.

When I went in-house I erased this aspect a bit, to support the wider business. I did not want to over-insist on any speciality – it was more about how I could help and advise more broadly. It only came to mind as I progressed in my career. Once you're a GC, the seniority of your role and the stakeholders you interact with play a significant role in raising awareness and reinforcing your personal brand.

I believe I'm perceived as trustworthy and reliable. If I'm brought in, I would give my honest and professional view without trying to please anyone. Over time, it has helped me to add value: people ask for your opinion and include you in topics beyond what you're doing because they respect your judgment. It's much harder for people who are less visible to build relationships of trust at a senior level.

That's one of the reasons why I'm keen on empowering my team, getting them to grow professionally in Atos. And if you have a strong brand as GC, you are more able to empower your own team – in my view, that's part of leadership. It's key for every member of my team to be seen as an integral part of the business, moving from being a support function to being part of the strategy from the outset.

I also believe in building a strong diverse team and that, when it comes to diversity and inclusion, actions speak louder than words. Building the team the way we've done it, with team members coming from various backgrounds each bringing their own perspective and value, speaks to who we are as a team. And that diversity, that authenticity, is part of the team's brand. In developing my own brand, I had the opportunity to benefit from the perspective of a coach who supported me, and helped me reflect on who I am, what I stand for, and how I deal with what's around me. That was the spark. After, I worked on curating it. As lawyers, that's a natural thing we do. Once we've identified something, we tend to want to make it nice and clear.

Self-awareness is the most important thing in developing your personal brand. At INSEAD, I learned about the Johari Window, which visualises this as four quadrants – a matrix of what you know and don't know about yourself, and what other know and don't know about you. The analysis helps you understand how big your blind spots and 'hidden areas' are.

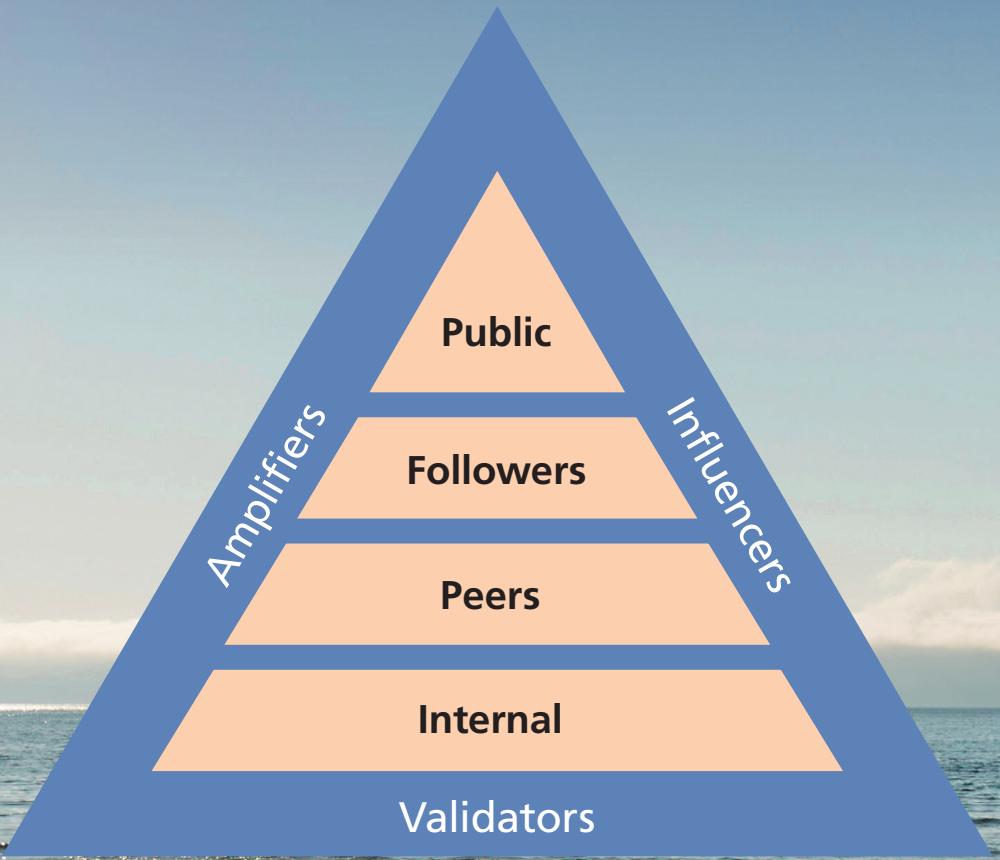
I know my reflection on my brand was also influenced by how I looked at my own mentor. When you see what your mentor or role model does, and what they do for you, you want to do that in turn for the people you work with.

Considering personal branding here has made me reflect on the fact that I should continue working on it more. One day I'll dedicate enough time to it, but I'm not there yet. Every day is a fight to prioritise properly – to give myself space to do things that really matter. You need to discipline yourself to have time to develop yourself and bring more value.

**» Your brand ripples out: it reaches everyone you associate with and everyone you touch.**

It also makes me think that I've been looking at personal brand from a company-centric perspective, and probably should expand and think more broadly. Your brand ripples out: it reaches everyone you associate with and everyone you touch. If I'm outside my work environment, I may not be touching on the same topics, but it still corresponds to who I am. How I behave in my personal life, whether with family or friends also aligns with my personal brand – in the end the same values apply.

# Key audiences for general counsel



This diagram shows the key potential audiences for a GC's personal brand. The horizontal bars represent categories of audience. The groups in the outer triangle are defined by behaviours and overlap with those audience categories – any behavioural group may overlap with any audience category.

## Reaching a GC's key audiences

As the diagram on the previous page illustrates, a general counsel has four key audiences:

**Internal** – The board, the CEO and the leadership team, other internal clients, the legal department. *A strong personal brand will enable a GC to convey confidence, influence to achieve goals, and promote partnership opportunities in their work environment.*

**Peers** – GCs, other senior in-house lawyers, senior external lawyers and advisers.

*Developing relationships with peers allows a GC to give and receive support, as well as developing their professional credibility and status, and potentially creating opportunities*

**Followers** – Those with an active interest in the GC's brand who are neither within their business nor senior lawyers. May include e.g. social media followers, members of a shared social circle, junior lawyers in other businesses, colleagues from previous businesses, law school alumni, and those with a particular interest in non-law topics that figure in a GC's brand. *The extension of a consistent personal brand to a wider audience will, if done effectively, extend a GC's influence beyond their immediate professional and business sphere. It will also help to boost the corporate brand of a GC's business, assuming the two are aligned.*

**Public** – Most GCs will not have public brand recognition. The few who do typically acquire it in very specific circumstances – e.g. speaking repeatedly for the business during a high-profile crisis, or taking on a political role. But, particularly in a social media world, exceptional GCs who advocate strongly and effectively in areas of public interest such as sustainability or diversity may have the potential to 'cut through' to public notice.

*Again, this should help to boost the corporate brand. But it is more likely to have a transformative effect on a GC's own image and influence.*

In addition, members of these groups may play further roles as amplifiers, influencers or validators

**Amplifiers** repeat a GC's core brand messages to their own networks.

**Influencers** are respected and followed for their expertise on particular topics – their approval of a GC or their repetition of a GC's message will be seen as a valuable endorsement.

**Validators** will subject a GC's brand and brand messages to scrutiny. This might range from a review in a legal directory or a legal industry award to a press profile or a sustained critique of a GC's position on a particular matter. The resulting validation will likely be seen as quasi-objective.

Our research suggests that many of the GCs who are already developing their personal brand are typically doing so within their own businesses. Beyond the business, their brand exposure is usually very low.

GCs who want to expand their brand coverage need to begin by realistically defining a broader audience or audiences and then devoting significant time and effort to reaching them. They should make an effort to identify new forums where they can engage with peers and potential followers, and must establish a routine to initiate and maintain an active presence. These forums may include business platforms and conventions hosted by business and law schools, professional gatherings, prestigious publications, and select other media opportunities. But the biggest forum of all, of course, is social media.

## Bonding or bridging?

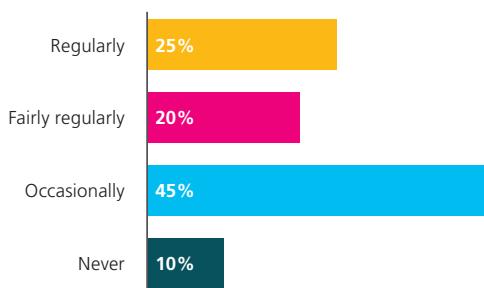
In another context, Harvard sociologist Professor Robert D. Putnam famously distinguished between 'bonding social capital' – which comes, broadly, from connections with people in your organisation or your community (essentially, people 'like you') – and 'bridging social capital', which arises from developing connections with people in other social groups or demographics.

Bridging social capital is often weaker than bonding social capital – but it's also more likely to result in new opportunities and, potentially, more differentiated engagement. The internet and social media can be powerful tools in the development of bridging social capital, making it far easier than it was a generation or two ago.

## Social media

Social media and digital platforms have become fundamental tools for promoting personal brands, overcoming many of the barriers inherent in face-to-face networking and analogue media. But while most GCs engage with social media to some extent, only a minority make the best use of it as a channel to develop their personal brand – although it has become the single most immediate and effective means of reaching people beyond your immediate circle.

### How often do you interact on LinkedIn (recommending, commenting or posting content)?



As a GC in the 21st century, your work is unlikely to bring you into contact with people who really know nothing about you. Even if all they've done is looked you up on LinkedIn, people you meet will have some familiarity with you, or at least with the outline of your career. All GCs should be mindful of how their online presence reflects their personal brand, whether they are active social media users or not.

Our research shows that a GC's age does not determine their attitude to social media. GCs are intelligent and motivated: if they believe there are real advantages in using social media, they will mostly do so, regardless of age. However, younger GCs may be more inclined to 'live online'.

The oldest members of 'Generation Z' are now in their mid-to-late 20s. In just a few years, many senior in-house positions will be filled by these so-called 'digital natives', and the way in which the in-house profession communicates will evolve accordingly.

For example, we expect to see more use of videos, as GCs who grew up with – and sometimes themselves have been – online influencers use YouTube and similar channels to promote their brand messages.

For GCs, the choice of which digital social network to use and how often to use it will depend on an individual's goals and circumstances. At the moment, nearly all GCs have a LinkedIn profile – but no other platform comes near to that level of popularity among GCs. We found that 8% use Twitter, for example, and 7% Facebook.

Your image on social media is not the same thing as your personal brand. It may be a significant aspect of your brand – but your brand will have other aspects too. Some people enjoy having a high level of exposure and generating opinions, while others do not, without it being a sign of greater or lesser professional competence or a better or worse personal brand.

**98% of GCs have a LinkedIn profile. Only a quarter of GCs (25%) who use LinkedIn interact on it regularly. 10% never do so.**

You may be constrained by the social media policies of your organisation, and in some cases by the requirements of regulators. You will certainly have to comply with them. But this can work to your advantage: social media posts in areas of overlap between your personal brand and your organisation's brand, for example, are more likely to be shared widely by your colleagues.

Social media success is an alluring metric for measuring the overall success of your brand, as it's very easy to see the number of likes or hits that a piece of content attracts online. But the most convenient metrics are seldom the most revealing ones. GCs who are good at building their personal brands will take full advantage of social media to assess their progress, without confining themselves to it.

## Content is king



Generate content that your audience will value – because it's unique, or interesting, or insightful, or helpful, or empowering, or moving, or fun. Or any combination of those attributes. You don't have to be tied to a single type of content, and value for your audience may come in a variety of forms.

However you share material, try to develop and curate a portfolio of content that bolsters your brand. Spread your efforts across different sorts of output – e.g. don't just get involved in podcasts, but generate video content too. Don't just post text, but share images or infographics.

## GC personal branding tips for social media

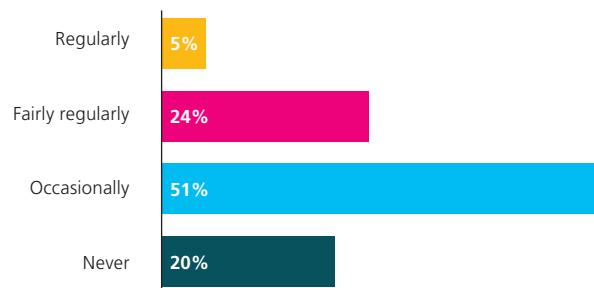
- Make a description that summarises your value proposition in a few words.
- Include key words related to your activity (position, occupation, role, company, skills).
- Highlight experience, achievements and skills that give an understanding of the scope of your role and your distinguishing characteristics.
- Use an appropriate and professional picture that reflects your personality.
- Connect with other GCs, co-workers, partners, clients and providers.
- Accept invitations only from people who are known or “recognised” for their interests and affinity.
- Post and share interesting and quality content.
- Write compelling headlines on posts.
- Make insightful comments when other influencers post – they will get you noticed and encourage others to connect with you.
- Take advantage of reciprocity – e.g. if you recommend people online, they are more likely to recommend you.
- Update your profile regularly, and include any new roles promptly.
- Material published online will often continue to be available for a long time. Your brand may evolve but some old posts and profiles can live on for years. Don’t be afraid to engage online, but be mindful of that before you post.

## Conferences and other events

The pandemic has profoundly disrupted the world of conferences and events. Nevertheless, many have continued – whether in person, in a hybrid form or entirely online. For GCs, participation in legal and business events promotes external visibility, strengthens networking and creates learning opportunities which benefit both GCs and their companies.

We asked GCs about their participation in major legal and business events as speakers or opinion leaders. Their responses show that, although most of them have participated at least once, these types of contributions tend to be sporadic. Only a small number of our respondents said they spoke at such events regularly.

### How often do you attend major legal and business events in your region?



**20%** of GCs never attend major legal and business events. Only **5%** attend regularly.

## Measuring your personal brand

You can't measure your personal brand with a scientific degree of precision. But you can measure it well enough for that measurement to be valuable.

In particular, you can establish some firm benchmarks that will enable you to see how successful you are in developing your brand over time.

Finding metrics is not always easy. There are some easy-to-quantify measurements, such as social media 'likes', number of online followers, number of invitations to publish or speak, number of networking opportunities, etc. But these will not always offer the most valuable insights, and should be supplemented by harder-to-gather feedback and evidence.

It doesn't matter if some of that feedback is subjective, as long as you treat it and evaluate it in the same way whenever you gather it, so that you can reliably track your progress.

Common criteria used to measure personal brand are:

- **Brand attractiveness:** positive reaction from others.
- **Differentiation:** ability to distinguish your brand from other people's.
- **Brand recognition:** a strong memory of your brand in the minds of others.

GCs should establish indicators that show the level of impact of their personal brand in each category. Where the impact is low, they should plan specific actions to improve it.

There is no 'correct' way to measure your brand. What matters is that you choose a method that suits your circumstances, and is objective enough and consistent enough to deliver value.

Here are a few points to consider.

- Ensure that your measurements reflect the perceptions of other people as well as your own.
- Try to gauge the impact of your brand, rather than just your work on it.
- Assess whether your brand's relation to your situation is changing.
- Does your brand consistently embody your value and your values? Look at how you are building and demonstrating value – is there scope to do more? Can you gauge the value your brand brings to you and society?
- Remember your brand is a long-term narrative. Trends over time are much more important than minor fluctuations.





## Zelma Acosta-Rubio

**General Counsel and VP Corporate Affairs, Interbank**

I'm curious by nature. From the beginning of my professional career I decided to learn about the issues related to my role and I invested time in learning how to create solid relationships, being an approachable and accessible leader to my team and to the people around me. That vision allowed me to position myself as an expert in certain subject matters. It is a path where you build knowledge and legitimise your expertise, and if you contribute value and are generous with what you know, people listen to you, because they know that you also want to learn from them.

I think that the differentiating element that contributed to the creation of my strong personal brand in Peru is that I am a person who values and appreciates transparency and vulnerability. People who read or view my publications feel like I'm speaking directly to them. I am very frank, transparent and authentic. I do not present myself as being the person who has all the answers; on the contrary, I am rather the type of person who learns from her surroundings and leads closely and collaboratively.

The call is to go looking for the path that interests you, to discover the issues in which you want to have a voice and an opinion. The greatest way to develop your personal brand is to look for the spaces and forums where you feel comfortable contributing, where your voice has value because you do so with passion. For me, the creation of my personal brand has value to the extent that bridges are built. It is learning from others through conversation.

In recent years, personal branding for legal team leaders has taken on a lot of value and this represents an advantage for everyone, especially for today's professional women, since social networks provide us with effective platforms and communication channels to influence society. Why? Because social networks have served to erase some structural barriers to visibility, access restrictions and stereotypes.

Like any discipline, the development of a personal brand requires planning (something that I am just learning today), otherwise it is very easy to lose focus and not to achieve your specific objectives. Without a doubt, having a methodology works well. Making a plan is easy, but you must make it relevant, with content and substance, and you must ensure that your narrative manages to build value for you and your company.

When you increase the visibility of your personal brand, somehow your opinions are no longer just yours. When you appear on LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, or any other social network or publication, you are speaking for your company. You represent its values and therefore

you must think carefully about what you are going to say because it is not possible to separate who you are from the place where you work. I am the same person when I'm sitting at Interbank, talking to the press, speaking for an NGO or living my daily life. Never forget that consistency is one of the most important qualities we can cultivate: the connection between what we say and what we do.

Social media has reduced the separation between private and public life. If you really want to have a strong personal brand and be an opinion leader, the principles by which you live your private life should not be different from those by which you live your public life. You cannot work in a company that is not aligned with what your principles and values are. You only live one life. There is no Interbank version of Zelma or Intercorp version of Zelma. The reality is that people see what you do as either for "positioning" or for your beliefs. The lack of consistency – between your private sphere and your public image – undermines your degree of trustworthiness.

I did not undertake to develop my personal brand. Rather, my brand has been a consequence of my narrative. I looked for topics that were relevant to me and aligned with my work. Obviously, I did not communicate or express my opinion about everything I did, but I chose which matters I wanted to focus on because I understood that this would allow me to learn and share with those who had similar interests in the issues in which I decided to develop an expertise: in my case, for now, corporate governance, reputation, inclusion, sustainability, and high-performance legal teams in a digital environment.

In particular, the issue of corporate governance is an issue that I worked on a lot and that gave me a lot of visibility over time. I wanted my immediate team to be one of the first world-class support teams in governance, and for us it was very important to achieve visibility in certain spaces, to share what we learned and to continue learning. The same thing happened with diversity and inclusion, and for this reason I participate in forums such as the Advisory Council of the Association of Corporate Secretaries of Latin America and Women in the Profession of the Cyrus Vance Center.

My strategy today is to expand my circle, seek different opinions, create community and generate a more inclusive conversation that allows building with different points of view. "Tejiendo tribus", as someone once told me, literally translated as "weaving or knitting tribes", but meaning "uniting people or bringing them together".

# The virtuous circle



As we said at the start of this report, a strong brand opens doors to new experiences and opportunities which in turn, in a virtuous circle, fuel your brand.

This diagram is a visual representation of that process. With the exception of the path that leads from new opportunities through new experiences and more brand content to a stronger brand, it consists of two-way processes.

So, for example, new opportunities can lead to more responsibility, but more responsibility might equally lead to new opportunities. More responsibility may also lead to a stronger brand – which, in turn, can lead back to more responsibility.

But our diagram also operates as a full circle. For instance, new opportunities can lead through new connections to a stronger brand, which may then widen reach and grow influence, leading once more to new opportunities.

In the real world, of course, these processes overlap, with many in motion simultaneously. And while GCs can influence them to some degree – e.g. by actively making new connections or by the careful selection of new roles – in practice, some motion in the circle will always occur independently of the GC's actions.

Nevertheless, visualisations like this can be useful for GCs who are thinking about what they do and how they do it. We hope this one encourages you to consider how your activity and choices can strengthen your brand, and illustrates how this is never a discrete process but always part of a continuing cycle.

# The never-ending journey

As our study shows, many GCs are already developing their personal brands. But most of them could do much more, such as:

- Designing a better personal brand message.
- Increasing and strengthening relationships with their peers.
- Building networks and working on their visibility.
- Maintaining continuous participation in forums and publications.
- Creating habits and routines to help them develop their brand and indicators to measure its impact.

Personal branding is a never-ending journey. If you don't manage your brand, it will tend to decline. If you work at building a network of contacts, you will also have to work at maintaining it. And you will need regularly to review and reassess your brand position.

What happens if you decide you need to make major changes to your brand? If you are dealing with an audience that did not previously know you, the process may be straightforward. An audience that knows you well may be slower to react. However, we are all capable of adjusting

our opinions over time, because we know that people do change. And your audience will be more attuned to what you are doing, and more inclined to accept change easily, if both your old brand and your new brand genuinely reflect aspects of your personality – in other words, if you're changing emphasis rather than trying to be a different person.

In some cases, you may have to foreground what has changed. One way to do this is to use the metaphor of a 'personal journey' or 'personal growth', showing how you have changed or matured.

Another method is to synchronise your change with a change in your role or your personal life. This is also a good occasion to reach out to a wide variety of contacts and update them on your new direction or interests.

A personal brand offers great potential value to GCs who know how to use it. We hope that the data and resources provided in this report will help you take the next steps in building your personal brand in a more strategic way, with much greater reach and a more positive impact.

# About this report

In April 2022 CMS published a report in Spanish on personal branding for GCs in Latin America. This English language version has contributions from GCs elsewhere and some additional content.

The report's data is from an online survey of more than 100 Latin American GCs, run in the second quarter of 2021. Its conclusions have also been shaped by conversations with many GCs elsewhere.

We have used the term general counsel or GC to denote senior in-house lawyers throughout. Some of those we surveyed have job titles such as legal manager – *gerente legal* – or in-house counsel.

We are delighted that Professor Arancha Ruiz Bachs of IE Law School, a specialist in and author of books on personal branding, was able to support our project with her knowledge and expertise.

We are grateful to the GCs who took part in our survey, and especially to those who shared their thoughts with us in interviews. For this global version of our report, we particularly thank Dessi Berhane Silassie, Vanessa Vilar, Helen Fletcher, Gonazlo Smith, Delphine Sak Bun and Zelma Acosta-Rubio.



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