



## Will Gary Vaynerchuk Crush His Business?

**Putting your personal brand ahead of your business brand has some major risks. Here, the founder of Vaynermedia defends the strategy.**

By John Warrillow | Oct 19, 2010

**If you own** a company you'd like to sell one day, should you build your personal brand or your business brand?

Take Oprah Winfrey and her production company, Harpo, as an example of a personal brand overwhelming the business brand.

*The Oprah Winfrey Show* has 75,000 followers on Twitter; Oprah's magazine, *O*, has 106,000 followers; Oprah Radio has 25,000 followers.

Oprah, the person, has 4,250,000+ followers.

So are people loyal to Oprah or her business? Will the value of Harpo be discounted because Oprah, the person, is 'bigger'?

For an answer to the brand-your-company-versus-brand-yourself debate, I turned to Gary Vaynerchuk, one of the most prolific personally branded entrepreneurs on the planet.

Vaynerchuk got his start working for his dad's liquor store. He noticed an opportunity to sell wine to novices and, among other things, created a video blog called Wine Library TV. Vaynerchuk promoted his new show through sites like Facebook and Twitter and ultimately became one of the first entrepreneurs to capitalize on the economic potential of social media. He then wrote the book [Crush It!](#) to reveal some of his social media wisdom. It became a *New York Times* bestseller.

Vaynerchuk decided to promote his personal brand ahead of his company. His 850,000+ Twitter followers learn more about Vaynerchuk's dreams (he wants to own the New York Jets), his no. 1 rule ('take care of your family'), and what pisses him off (lazy people) than about his company.

So should company builders brand themselves ahead of their company? Here's our exchange:

**Warrillow:** You've built an amazing personal brand, but was it a mistake to promote yourself over your company?

**Vaynerchuk:** I know if I stopped hosting Wine Library TV, we'd probably lose 75 percent of our audience, but the remaining 25 percent is still a big number.

**Warrillow:** I think business owners reading this would be horrified at the thought of losing 75 percent of their customers.

**Vaynerchuk:** I understand, but look at the numbers. The average liquor retailer in the United States sells for 30 cents for every dollar in revenue, so a \$10-million liquor retailer is worth around \$3.5 million. I've been offered two dollars per dollar of revenue for my business, so I'm confident the value of my personal brand is accruing to my business, as well.

If people are worried about undermining their business value by promoting their personal brand, they are not thinking big enough. Look at Oprah or Martha Stewart or even Martha Stewart's chef, Emeril Lagasse, whose business interests (Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia) just acquired for \$70 million.

**Warrillow:** So what's the secret of transforming a personal brand into one that benefits your company?

**Vaynerchuk:** Brands mature over time, like a marriage. The bond you feel with your spouse is different than when you first met each other. Excitement and discovery are replaced by comfort and depth. Personal brands mature over time, and if you nurture the relationship you have with your audience for long enough, your personal brand will evolve to one that benefits your company.

**Warrillow:** Okay, so let's say you have convinced readers to build a personal brand as well as a company brand. What advice would you give to those just starting their personal branding journey?

**Vaynerchuk:** Don't be a brand whore. Do you know how many companies have wanted me to do an energy drink for them because I named my book *Crush It!*? It might be fun one day, but right now I think it would undermine the personal brand I've built.

You have to understand your own personal DNA. Don't do things because I do them or Steve Jobs or Mark Cuban tried it. You need to know your personal brand and stay true to it.

**Warrillow:** The name of your media company is a derivative of your surname. Will that make it tricky if the Vayner in Vaynermedia ever wants to sell it?

**Vaynerchuk:** Having your personal name in your company name is not right for everyone. Again, I think you have to know your DNA. I know how to make a brand larger than life, and I have no plans to sell Vaynermedia, so the name makes sense to me. Plus I get a little extra respect in meetings since my surname is on the door.

*[John Warrillow](http://www.BuiltToSell.com/blog) is a writer, speaker, and angel investor in a number of start-up companies. He writes a blog about building a sellable company at <http://www.BuiltToSell.com/blog>. You can also follow him on [Twitter](#) at [@JohnWarrillow](#).*

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Inc.com, 7 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007-2195.