

Branding Yourself

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Our here in the western US a “brand” is distinctive symbol placed on livestock (cattle, horses) to indicate their ranch of origin. Brands originated in the 1800’s to deter thieves and to place lost animals. The brand is applied by heating an iron template to red-hot and then burning the brand into the hide of the animal. In that context, the title of this essay may be quite disturbing.

Branding of commercial products became common in the U.S. during the post-WWII economic boom. Products were proliferating to meet the needs of the burgeoning population, but the physical differences among them were becoming increasingly small. The result was that consumers were overwhelmed with the dizzying array of available products and services. Brands emerged to help the consumer organize their understanding of the commercial world, pass information to each other, and allocate their resources to meet their needs.

Database researchers live in the same kind of information environment that consumers do. We are overloaded with books, technical reports, articles, and talks that present us with information intended to influence our thinking. But we need to handle all this information efficiently because the most important priority is producing our own research rather than reading the output of others. How does the database research consumer effectively allocate their scarce time resources? Partly by relying on “brands.”

Researchers depend on brands when deciding where to publish their work. Do they go with ACM or IEEE? Do they send their conference submission to VLDB, PODS, or ICDT (all of which are brands)?

Interestingly, researchers themselves are brands. When you scan a journal issue or conference proceeding, or indeed, an issue of *SIGMOD Record* such as the one this article appears in, do you first look at the name(s) of the authors (as well as the title, of course) to determine how much time you will invest in reading the article? Researchers have reputations, and their reputation is part of their brand.

This implies that *you* are a brand. This realization can be helpful in your career. By understanding the concept of brand, you can more effectively convey your ideas and insights to maximize their impact on the field. Specifically, thinking about yourself as a brand and even promoting your brand can be helpful in organizing your career and in deciding what activities you wish to participate in and which activities might be less helpful to you.

Initially this concept, that you are a brand, may also be disturbing. You may be thinking, “I’m a complex individual, with many interests and abilities; reducing me down to something as prosaic as a brand is insulting and plays to the worst kinds of influences present in our modern world.” Rest assured that we are not saying that branding *per se* is good, or that rampant commercialism is good, or that branding should dictate any particular decision. We’re only saying that it might be a useful metaphor, a new perspective that might give you some insight into your choices of how and where to present your ideas.

1 What is a brand?

Most people have a general understanding of brands, which are omnipresent¹ in this commercial, market-driven society in which we find ourselves. An important aspect of brands is that they are *abstract*.

Think about the following brands. What abstract quality does each invoke for you?

Nike

Pepsi

Starbucks

Volvo

¹The 2004 Brandweek Directory lists over 6,900 individual brands.

If you are like most consumers, each of these brands has an identifiable personality. The goal of the Pepsi brand is to ensure that your mental construct of Pepsi is not about colored sugar water; it is about reestablishing your connection with your youth whenever you drink a Pepsi. Volvo makes cars, but what they really provide is safe transportation for you and your loved ones. Nike markets sneakers, but in actuality identifies the inner athlete, the talented, confident, successful competitor lurking inside. Starbucks sells coffee, but what each Starbucks cafe represents is a warm, comfortable gathering place. The marketing theory is that by associating these abstract, highly compelling qualities that consumers desire with specific products, those consumers are more likely to purchase those products, and to derive pleasure, and thus value, from those products, far beyond their utilitarian benefits.

Effective brands work extremely well. As a personal example, the first author stops by Starbucks every single Sunday to purchase a “venti vanilla mocha half-caff ” for himself and a “venti soy latte” for the second author. Ten years ago this person had very little idea of what those words even meant, yet now these words roll off his tongue, a little worldly panache in this cowboy town. (Starbucks has a free brochure on how to speak in “barrister”.) Recently the cashier taking his order called him by name, which admittedly felt very good; in a small way, he “belonged”. A colleague admits he spends over \$1,000 a year at Starbucks, which translates into an awful lot of very expensive (and very profitable) coffee.

Brand management, the design and promotion of a brand, is a central task of most marketing departments, with large companies allocating millions of dollars a year to the establishment and promulgation of their brands.

Hewlett-Packard under Carly Fiorina recently started an ad campaign to instill its brand “You + HP”: “HP’s radically simple picture-making technology is the focus of its ‘You + HP’ brand campaign, launched October 2, 2003 with television, print and online ads. Only HP lets you be in control of the entire picture-making process, and only HP gives you all the digital tools you need: camera, printer, computer, inks and paper.” The company makes TV and print ads available on their web site². For IT professionals, HP has a different, though related brand: “Change + HP”: “On Monday, February 9 [2004], HP launched the largest global enterprise advertising campaign in its history. Themed ‘change+hp’, the initiative demonstrates how HP Adaptive Enterprise solutions help customers capitalize on change. The ‘change+hp’ campaign positions change as a positive force to create business opportunity and a competitive advantage. This wave of advertising builds on HP’s groundbreaking consumer launch in October 2003 and complements HP’s ongoing ‘customers+hp = everything is possible’ global brand advertising campaign.” They have print ads, television ads, and online ads at their web site³. The important aspects to note are that brands are *abstract*, they are *simple* (just a few words), they *connect* to the customer, and they are *distinctive*, easily differentiable from other brands.

For several decades the field of marketing has been embroiled in a discussion of the extent to which marketing is a science. In a neat reverse of this conversation, J. Paul Peter and Jerry Olson asked an entirely different question: Is Science Marketing? [Peter and Olson 1984]. They affirmatively show that “science can be effectively analyzed as a special case of marketing—the marketing of ideas.” Our thesis is a corollary to theirs: database research can be viewed as the marketing of ideas, with brand management an important component. Simply put, one can increase the impact and acceptance of one’s research insights by utilizing this brand metaphor.

2 What good are brands?

Why should a database researcher even consider branding himself or herself? First, it helps get one’s ideas out into the “marketplace,” into conversations at conferences, into discussions of related work in papers, and ultimately, impacting the work of others and perhaps improving DBMS products. Branding does so by making your ideas memorable. In doing so, branding can help your career. Many of the successful database researchers have used branding, either explicitly or intuitively, without even knowing what they were doing. Branding can enable synergy. Branding can tie together disparate activities so that the visibility of one effort increases the visibility and impact of a separate activity.

As Peter and Olson emphasized in their paper, the major product of science is ideas. Note that “brand” and “product” are very different. A brand is an abstract notion associated with a company (or person). A product is a specific concrete deliverable being sold by the company. A product of database research could be an insight, an algorithm, or the basic idea of a paper. Modeling database transactions as a partial order of read and write operations is a product. The Apriori data mining algorithm, developed by Rakesh Agrawal, Tomasz Imielinski and Arun Swami, is a product.

²<http://www.hp.com/hpinfo/newsroom/hpads/you/>

³<http://www.hp.com/hpinfo/newsroom/hpads/demandmore/>

Branding increases the visibility of your product, so the first task must be to develop a superior product. Careers are not made through effective branding of a poor product. Without a good product, marketing is counter-productive.

One benefit of a strong brand is that it goes both ways. When I⁴ think of “HP,” the words “computer printer” come to mind. But, more importantly, when I think of the words “computer printer,” HP immediately comes to mind (as does Epson and, more recently, Dell). As a result, I own two HP printers and one Epson printer. (I also own a Samsung laser printer, but that brand is not as closely associated to printers, as least to me.) What HP wants to do with its “You + HP” brand is to more closely associate, in the consumer’s mind, the broader range of products: cameras, scanners, computers, and photo paper, with HP.

3 People as brands

For each of the following names and entities, pause for a few seconds to catch the first few words that come to mind. Associate with each person no more than three words. Write those words on a piece of paper

- Jim Gray
- Pat Selinger
- Jeff Ullman
- Stan Zdonik

Before going on, please take just a few minutes to write down a few words that first come to mind for each person. Rest assured that there are no right or wrong answers; you will not be graded! Have fun!

What is Jim Gray’s brand, to you? What about Pat Selinger? What comes to mind when you hear Stan Zdonik’s name? To me, all three of these highly-regarded database researchers have strong, recognizable brands.

Jeff Ullman, by virtue of his breadth, has a variety of distinct brands. For compiler folks, Jeff’s brand is his influential book on compilers, with Aho and Sethi. For theoreticians, Jeff’s brand are his equally influential books on algorithms (with Aho and Hopcroft) and automata theory (with Hopcroft and Motwani). Some database researchers know him primarily for his work on Datalog; others see him as a data mining or information mediation person; older folks remember his pioneering work on the universal relational model. And Jeff is now trying to establish yet a new brand.

As mentioned before, brands go both ways. The following is a list of research areas in databases. Please read each area, then pause for a few seconds to catch the first name that comes to mind. Write that name on a piece of paper. Then go to the next area.

For example, when I hear the words “relational database,” the first name that comes to my mind is “Ted Codd.” Perhaps a different name comes to your mind. The important thing is not to think too hard about this. Free associate.

- ARIES Recovery
- Data Privacy
- Similarity Search
- XML Indexing

⁴“I” in this paper refers the first author.

Who did you associate with ARIES? I immediately thought of C. Mohan. What about Data privacy? If you were a program committee chair or journal editor and needed someone to cover XML indexing, who would you think of first? If you wanted to reference a paper on similarity search, which person would you search for first on DBLP?

A strong brand helps with tenure letters. The much desired “coherent research stream in X ” statement is equivalent to “has an identifiable brand.” A strong brand enables evaluators to assert “is one of the top people in Y .”

4 Brand positioning

The important point is that each person already *is* a brand, with some people associated with strong brands and others associated with weak or ineffectual brands. Your products (your ideas) are promoted through your brand. While which brand you promote is your decision, you don’t have a choice as to *whether* to be a brand.

What is *your* brand? What do people think when they see you at a conference or when they see your name listed as an author? What are the two or three words that initially pop into their head? Do they think about a recent paper that mentioned your work, or do they only have some vague recollection that you do something with databases? Do they know you primarily as that person from a specific university, or as that person from a particular state or country?

Brand positioning is the characterization of a brand. One of Carly Fiorina’s most important jobs as HP CEO is to determine what HP’s brand should be. And similarly, one of your, dear reader, jobs is to determine what your brand should be. The alternative is to let your brand be arbitrarily determined by random events and associations.

The most prominent form of brand is by topic. For example, the topics listed above are all brands for a small number of people. Recall that a brand must be distinctive. In any particular database researcher’s mind, there are no more than a few names that come to mind when a specific topic is mentioned. To see this, try to list ten people who work in spatial indexes. Don’t spend more than two minutes on this exercise.

After the first three or four, did this exercise become more challenging? Yet there must be at least a hundred people who have written multiple papers in spatial indexes. But only a few people can have this distinctive brand.

An application area might also be a brand. Some people are closely associated with “query execution.” One of the first people I think of is Goetz Graefe, who wrote some seminal articles on this topic. When I think of “constraint databases,” one of the people I think of Peter Revesz; when I see Peter Revesz’s name, I think of “constraint databases.”

Methodology can be a brand. Over many years, Mike Carey wrote a series of superb papers on concurrency control algorithms; he evaluated those algorithms using a sophisticated transaction simulation system. That methodology served as part of his brand. CS departments often have methodological brands. Wisconsin’s brand is empirical (as much of the database work done there has a strong empirical flavor to its evaluation); Toronto’s brand is theoretical database research. Some people are more closely associated with the SIGMOD conference (I am in this category), some are more closely associated with PODS, and a very few are strongly associated with both conferences (Jennifer Widom is, to me, one such example).

Interestingly, style can also be a brand. When I see Dennis Shasha, I immediately think first of his book, “Out of Their Minds”, and then of his other book, “Database Tuning,” and then of his columns in *Scientific American*. What unifies these disparate venues is beautiful writing. So that is part of Dennis’ brand to me. When I see Mike Stonebraker, a series of truly imaginative phrases come to mind: “polishing a round ball,” “time travel,” “how to get a Turing Award,” “intergalactic dataspeak.” Mike is better than anyone I know at coming up with pithy and dead-on phrases to describe complex technical ideas in an engaging way. That is why Mike appears so often in panels: he knows his stuff and can communicate it in an engaging and entertaining fashion. So part of Mike’s brand is a provocative style.

Some people bristle at being confined to a single topic. Their research ranges over a great many areas. If a common methodology is employed, that may be their brand. Or they might be known simply as “that person who does all sorts of things.” Their brand may be “Jack of all trades.”

5 Brand promotion

Once a brand has been positioned, it can then be promoted. There are three basic ways to do this: advertising, direct selling, and indirect promotion. Again, the objective of this paper is to view brand promotion merely as a metaphor, as another way to classify ways to get your ideas out there.

5.1 Advertising

Companies advertise their products and promote their brand in a variety of ways: print ads, radio and television ads, billboards, and signs at sporting events. Similarly, there are a variety of outlets for promoting your own brand: technical reports, newsletter publications, articles in workshop and conference proceedings, journal publication, technical monographs, and web sites. All can be considered advertising in that they are presenting the brand and/or product in your own words, for others to see and absorb.

It is useful to employ the name of your brand in the titles of your papers and books, to help make that connection for others. Check out these paper titles from SIGMOD'04: "Adaptive Ordering of Pipelined Stream Filters," "Static Optimization of Conjunctive Queries with Sliding Windows Over Infinite Streams," "Data Stream Management for Historical XML Data," "Holistic UDAFs at streaming speeds," and "Dynamic Plan Migration for Continuous Queries Over Data Streams." This tells me that "streams" is already an established brand. It also tells me that new people getting into this area will have a hard time becoming known as one of the top "streams" people, just because there is already so much activity in this area. It is hard to have "streams" as your own, distinctive brand.

Web sites are becoming increasingly important for brand promotion, whether for HP or for a database researcher. Your home page is in effect a succinct (or not!) statement of your brand. Does it convey your brand accurately, in an interesting and engaging fashion? Can it be read and absorbed quickly? Does your web site enable easy access to your product (your papers, your books, your software)?

Projects, labs, and research groups also benefit from a coherent brand. If you have a group project, what is its brand? Look at your group web page to see how well it positions the group's brand. This is a good example of synergy: a strong group brand can enhance the brand of its members. Anything that brings recognition to the group automatically enhances the brand (and reputation) of that group's prominent members.

Monographs of one's work are another form of advertising. A book-length monograph allows one to elaborate more fully on a topic than one or even several papers can accommodate. Sometimes these are collections of one's papers, edited to make a coherent package. The following are good examples. All have been effective at branding a project, rather than a person, though of course the author's brand benefits.

- **The Ingres Papers: Anatomy of a Relational Database System**, edited by Mike Stonebraker
- **Time Granularities in Databases, Data Mining, and Temporal Reasoning**, by Claudio Bettini, Sushil Jajodia and Xiaoyang Sean Wang
- **Spatio-Temporal Databases: The CHOROCHRONOS Approach**, Manolis Koubarakis, et al.

Finally, some journals, e.g., *IEEE TKDE*, place a biography of each author at the end of the paper. This one paragraph is a superb place to state your brand. After reading your biography, the reader should have a clear idea of your identity.

5.2 Direct selling

Direct selling involves the seller interacting directly with the buyer. Concerning database research, there are several such opportunities: workshop and conference presentations, talks at departments and companies, and one-on-one conversations.

While brands are by definition abstract, associations are most powerful when they are concrete. Having a face to connect to a name makes that person much easier to remember, and strengthens the brand. This is why workshop and conference presentations are so important: they connect the person to the ideas.

It is useful to have a variety of canned presentations available: 15-second, 30-second, 2-minute (so-called elevator conversations, when you meet someone in an elevator and she asks what you do), and 5-minute versions. These can be tailored to present your brand. The person who is interacting with you wants to first, make a personal connection, and second, make an intellectual connection. If your comments are unfocused or touch on too many different specifics,

the person will walk away with an unclear notion of what you are about. If on the other hand you state your brand clearly and effectively, there is a greater chance that the person will walk away with a strong association between you and your brand.

This may appear to be very manipulative. Brand promotion is only one of several objectives, and it certainly should not be the primary objective. Otherwise, you'll end up sounding like you are a fish oil salesman giving a canned speech. As with all human interactions, there needs to be a genuine connection in such conversations. It suffices just to keep in mind what your brand is, so that you can naturally and unobtrusively communicate that to others.

5.3 Indirect promotion

In indirect promotion, companies utilize disparate vehicles to indirectly publicize their brands. The Nike "swoosh" on a star golfer's hat, the company logos on the side of a soccer field or on a race car, and the list industrial sponsors on the SIGMOD/PODS conference web page are all examples of indirect promotion.

Indirect promotion is a win-win proposition. The sponsor is connected in the consumer's mind with a positive, possibly prestigious event, and the event gains needed financial support. IBM's sponsorship of the ACM International Collegiate Programming Contest⁵ benefits IBM, because it implies that IBM has top-quality programming. IBM basks in the glow of the ACM imprimatur, which enhances IBM's reputation by association. And ACM as a volunteer-based organization is able to organize and run this expensive contest without using member dues.

Indirect promotion is a very effective way to promote your brand. The most used indirect promotion is participation on conference program committees. The conference obviously benefits from this free reviewing time (which would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars per conference if contracted for) and the PC member benefits through association with the conference. This works just as well for narrowly-focused workshops.

But there are a multitude of other indirect promotion opportunities for marketing ideas: surveys, tutorials, bibliographies, glossaries, special issues, edited books, and practitioner books. Researchers often don't think of these venues, concentrating instead on the more obvious conference and journal papers.

For the researcher, indirect promotion is also a win-win. By volunteering one's time on these activities, the survey, tutorial, bibliography, or glossary gets written, the special issue and edited book gets put together, and the practitioner learns a new way of doing things. The entire community benefits from these activities. And of course if chosen carefully in the context of a well-designed brand promotion strategy, such activities can go far in establishing a brand. As with all brand promotion, care must be taken in tailoring the brand to the vehicle.

Say that you're working in a new area, tetra-dimensional databases⁶. You write some papers on tetra-dimensional databases, hoping to establish yourself as the world's expert on this topic. This is actually easy to do, as *no one else* in the world is working in this area. While your brand is closely identified with you, few others care about your brand.

The solution seems contradictory: to increase the value of your brand, you need to get other people involved in your area. The more people that are involved, the stronger the topic, and thus the stronger the brand (as long as you continue to excel in this area). Indirect promotion does just that. By promoting the topic, the research technique, the algorithm, the sub-discipline that is your brand, you enhance your association with that topic, technique, algorithm, sub-discipline. It is indirect promotion because you are not promoting your *product*, your ideas; rather, you are promoting a topic, mentioning your ideas along with those of everyone else.

Introductory article After you have written an article or two on a specific aspect of your brand, especially if it is a truly novel topic or approach, it is useful to introduce it to the world. The title should include the name of the brand (e.g., tetra-dimensional databases). The paper can define the brand, show how it is related to other closely aligned topics, and identify the key research questions. The paper essentially explains to people why they would want to work on this topic. Of course, for more established topics, such an article is not needed.

Two venues are particularly useful for this purpose: *SIGMOD Record* and the *CIDR*⁷.

Special Sections An especially effective way of establishing a brand is to edit a special issue or section. Many newsletters and journals allow this (in general, it is best to check with the Editor-in-Chief before preparing a detailed proposal).

⁵<http://icpc.baylor.edu/icpc>

⁶I just did a search in Google, and no one as yet is looking at this problem, so it is ripe with promise as a new brand.

⁷<http://www-db.cs.wisc.edu/cidr/>

To identify emerging brands, check out the special sections. As but two examples, the *Annals of Mathematics and Artificial Intelligence* recently had a special issue on “Spatial and Temporal Granularity” and *SIGMOD Record* just had a two-part special section on “Sensor Network Technology and Sensor Data Management.”

These special sections can be time-consuming to put together. You have to write a proposal, which is vetted by the Editor or Editorial Board, then advertise the special section, find reviewers for the (potentially many) papers that are submitted, and finally make the editorial decisions, all while adhering to a tight schedule.

Such projects really put the editors on the line. If they do well, that is noticed by the community and by the Editor-in-Chief of the publication. If they don't do well, that is noticed also. It is disheartening to observe someone who is cavalier about their duties as a special section editor. They spend a good amount of time on the project, but in the end suffer for their shoddy work. Effective promotion of weak ideas means that a lot of people are now aware of these weak ideas. High-powered indirect promotion vehicles like special issues should be taken very seriously.

Glossaries A unified terminology is in my view critical to the establishment of a sub-discipline. The best such glossaries are highly interactive, with many people participating. This tends to bring the field together (fields can be brands). The best time to work on a glossary is fairly early in the evolution of that sub-discipline, when there have been enough papers to have the start of a distinct vocabulary, but not before the terminology is ingrained.

Developing a glossaries requires a great deal of tact, because many people are beholden to their favorite technical terms. However, this process does offer the opportunity of being identified as an intellectual leader.

Edited books An edited book is the research equivalent of an infomercial. An infomercial is a paid 15-minute or longer television or radio show that goes into great length on the positive attributes of a particular product. For those (few) consumers willing to sit and watch it, an infomercial provides much information, helping to establish the brand.

An edited book can do much to coalesce a field. And they can represent a win (for the editors)-win (for the authors)-win (for the community)-win (for the publisher) proposition. However, such books can be an amazing amount of work, both by the editor(s) and by the authors of the various chapters. And the readership of these books can sometimes be minuscule.

Bibliographies To create a strong brand, one needs to present evidence to the world that this is an active area of investigation. Bibliographies are an excellent way to indirectly promote a brand. Bibliographies are also useful because people like to reference them: “There has been a lot of work in tetra-dimensional databases [...]”

Panels Conference panels are another way to draw attention to your brand. However, pick the panelists carefully: negative attention (sometimes, but not always!) can hurt a brand.

Tutorials Tutorials are talks given at conferences on hot new topics. They may have started at the Data Engineering (ICDE) conference, but now appear at all of the top database conferences. These are generally either one session (90 minutes) or two sessions (3 hours) long. As with surveys, they are a lot of work, but can also have a lot of impact. If you are careful, tutorials can be given multiple times.

If you want to see brand promotion in action, just check out the tutorials that are being offered. Here are the ones to be given this month at PODS'04 and SIGMOD'04.

- “Trees, automata and XML,” by Thomas Schwentick
- “Security of Shared Data in Large Systems: State of the Art and Research Directions,” by Arnon Rosenthal and Marianne Winslett
- “Fast Algorithms for Time Series: algorithms and applications to Finance, Physics, Music, Biology and other Suspects,” by Alberto Lerner, Dennis Shasha, Zhihua Wang, Xiaojian Zhao and Yunyue Zhu
- “Indexing and Mining Streams,” by Christos Faloutsos
- “Tools for Design of Composite Web Services,” by Richard Hull and Jianwen Su

Earlier we had mentioned that perhaps streams was no longer a good brand to try to adopt. However, this topic, because it is so hot, is open for sub-disciplines. Christos Faloutsos is well known for his work with text indexing. “Indexing and mining streams” is a brilliant brand, in that it connects with Christos’ strong indexing brand, while also connecting to the other strong, but at this point very broad brands of “streams” and “data mining”.

As an aside, focusing solely on brand promotion, it is best if the tutorial title is short and to the point. However, Alberto’s tutorial title is very intriguing, which will probably increase his audience. As far as benefiting from indirect promotion, it is best to have one or at most two authors. But then again, if multiple people participated in preparing the tutorial, then they deserve co-authorship.

Tutorials can also appear in print. *SIGMOD Record* is an excellent venue for short tutorials. And the IEEE Computer Society has an entire book series of tutorials on various topics.

Surveys A survey is another way to promote a brand. It implicitly sets the author up as an expert in the topic of the survey, and as such is very helpful in establishing a brand. As with bibliographies, surveys are an easy way to get referenced.

While *ACM Computing Surveys* is a wonderful place to publish a survey, *ACM TODS* and *IEEE TKDE* now both accept surveys; these latter two journals, being more focused, will perhaps be noticed sooner than *Computing Surveys*. However, only *TODS* surveys⁸ are guaranteed to appear on the *SIGMOD DiSC*, though there is a good chance that database papers in *Computing Surveys* will eventually appear in the *SIGMOD Anthology*.

Monographs A book-length monograph can be considered either as advertising, if it contains primarily one’s own ideas, or as indirect promotion, if it deals more with a general topic.

Notice how the titles of the following books name their brand.

- **Data Mining: Concepts and Techniques**, by Jiawei Han and Micheline Kamber
- **Data on the Web : From Relations to Semistructured Data and XML**, by Serge Abiteboul, Dan Suciu and Peter Buneman
- **Introduction to Constraint Databases**, by Peter Revesz
- **Searching Multimedia Data Bases by Content**, by Christos Faloutsos

Monographs are very time-consuming to write and may attract a small audience (few researchers have time to read an entire book on any one topic). But as with surveys, monographs can be quite helpful in establishing one’s expertise in an area.

Practitioner books and articles I end with this vehicle because I’m somewhat ambivalent of its effectiveness. The present article is about establishing yourself as a strong brand in the database research community. In that context, writing a book that has practitioners as its primary audience must be considered to be indirect promotion. But unlike tutorials, surveys, and other vehicles, which are at least read by the research community, practitioner books and articles generally are not seen by the research community. Their value is to potentially increase the impact of your work.

A sign that a brand has “arrived” is when it is listed in conference calls for papers. SIGMOD’04 in its CFP explicitly encouraged “work on topics of emerging interest in the research and development communities” and listed among others, the following topics.

- integration of text, data, code, and streams
- large-scale information fusion
- peer-to-peer data management
- personalized information systems
- embedded and self-organizing databases

These are all emerging brands. A few lucky or diligent or insightful researchers have or will become strongly associated with each.

⁸In the interest of full disclosure, I am Editor-in-Chief of *TODS*. I am not currently associated with these other two journals.

5.4 Consistency

When considering tactical decisions, be consistent with your established strategy. Realize that writing a single paper in a new topic might be fun, but won't contribute to the brand you are trying to establish. In fact, it could very well dilute your brand. If your brand is tetra-dimensional databases, and you want to work on user interfaces, you'll get the most synergy by working on a paper entitled something like "Effective User Interfaces for Tetra-Dimensional Databases."

That said, one of the nice things about a research career is that you are generally in control of what you do (especially if you are an academic [Snodgrass 2002]). So if you really want to write a paper that has nothing to do with tetra-dimensional databases, go for it! (After all, this is my first and probably last paper on branding...)

6 The big picture

You are a brand, whether you planned it that way or not. What is your brand? What brand do you want to be? Once you've figured that out (a very difficult question indeed), then you can decide how to strengthen that brand. A compass is useful, but only if you know where you want to go.

It is important to keep this in perspective. First, *marketing isn't everything*. In fact, it's not even the main thing! The critical task is to have a good product. As mentioned, doing effective promotion of a weak idea just means that a lot of people now know about your weak idea. You want people to know about your very best work.

Think about marketing strategy perhaps 5% of the time. It is useful to try to identify your particular brand, and to promote it effectively. Use branding only as a suggestive metaphor, as a way of thinking about how to best communicate your ideas and insights. After all, ideas are why we are in this business in the first place.

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