cultivate.

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Cultivate Connection: Xena
Jan 2024

Who am I?

- Specialist PR & Marketer in Business & B2B sectors
- Cultivate is 11 years old this June 2024
- Clients largely financial services, SME and marketing…& nuts
- Long-time lover of PR: joined industry in early 2000s
- Obsessed with current affairs/ news and newsjacking stories for clients
- Love the PR game: earned media expert – nothing better than seeing your idea in the media (even as a ghost writer ☺)
- My entrepreneurial journey…. Taking that very first step. From having nothing to go to, to building my business. All my work has been referral…..

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Our session's topic

Cultivate Connection: Networking strategies for female founders…..in a digital world.

The key to unlocking your community as an SME.

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“Your Network is your Net Worth” – **Porter Gale, an internationally renowned public speaker, networker, and entrepreneur**

This gem holds true to this day, especially as SMEs operate in an increasingly **digital world.**

It's also said that **people like to work with people they like** so cultivating connections with others – without it being for obvious business or generating revenue – is key to starting and growing your SME.

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Building relationships should not only have a business outcome goal. This can be seen as **disingenuous.**

Instead, these highly precious connections should be nurtured, like any personal relationship, and that means engaging with others for nothing at all – at least not in the short term.

Who here has a strong network? Share your experience, why & what you've gained.

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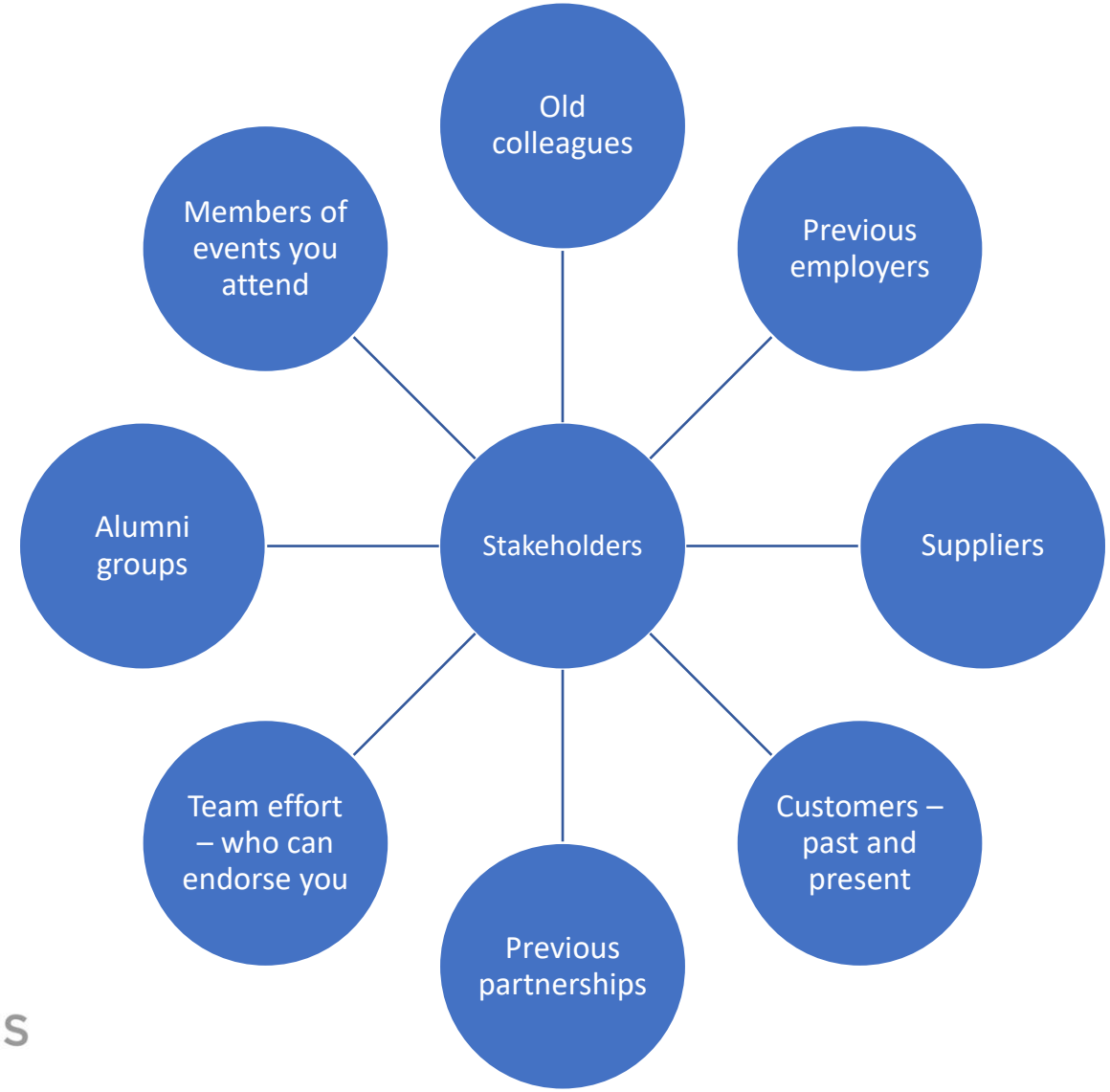
Who is part of your ‘network’? Any others?



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Why do they matter?

WHAT YOU WANT FROM THEM:

- Stay in touch – remain top of mind. If someone needs an expert to recommend you'll be first in line.
- Make sure they know what you do – now? Update them – over coffee, an email, newsletter
- Build a pipeline of referrals
- Generate new business leads
- Identify partnerships or collabs
- Leads to possible investment or investor relations
- Get endorsements and testimonials
- Alignment with complementary businesses

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Why do they matter?

WHAT THEY WANT FROM YOU….IT'S A TWO-WAY STREET:

- Referrals – give back the love
- Endorsements – write on their LinkedIn, give a testimonial if you've worked together, etc.
- Connections – you may have a big network and they want access to it
- Testimonials – share honest experiences working with them
- Your time and expertise – help where you can, for free (e.g. provide advice on a new brand*), share guidance and experience on your own journey, giving them pointers

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You don’t even need to talk business! Build relationships (ampd)

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Get connected in real life

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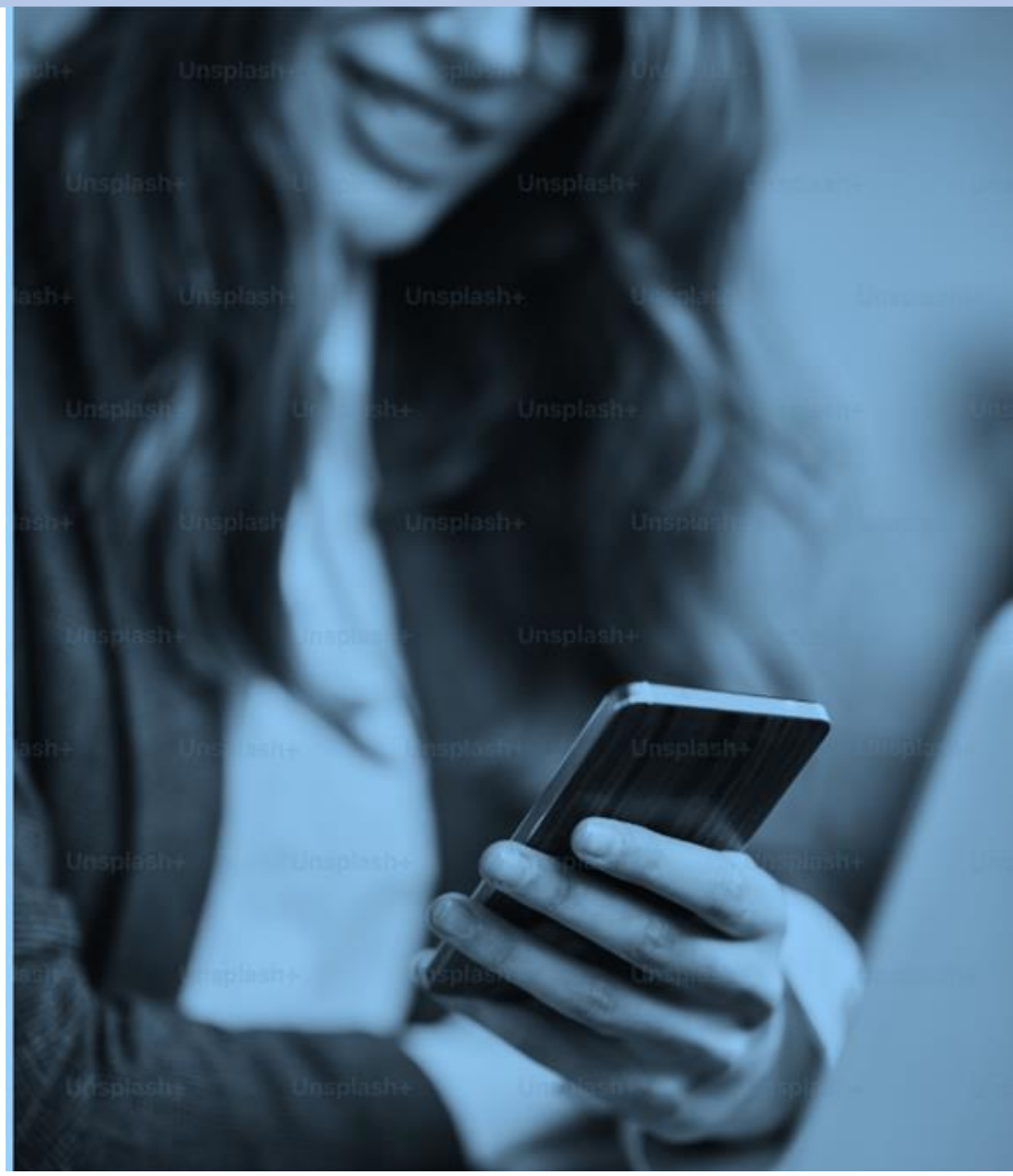
Digital isn’t the same as real-life

- We hide behind a screen all day – Teams/ Meets/ Zoom. Suggest a real-life meeting every now and then – it builds rapport that digital just can’t do.
- We’ve become shy of real-life relationships.
- Building digital relationships is key, of course, but they don’t beat the real deal.



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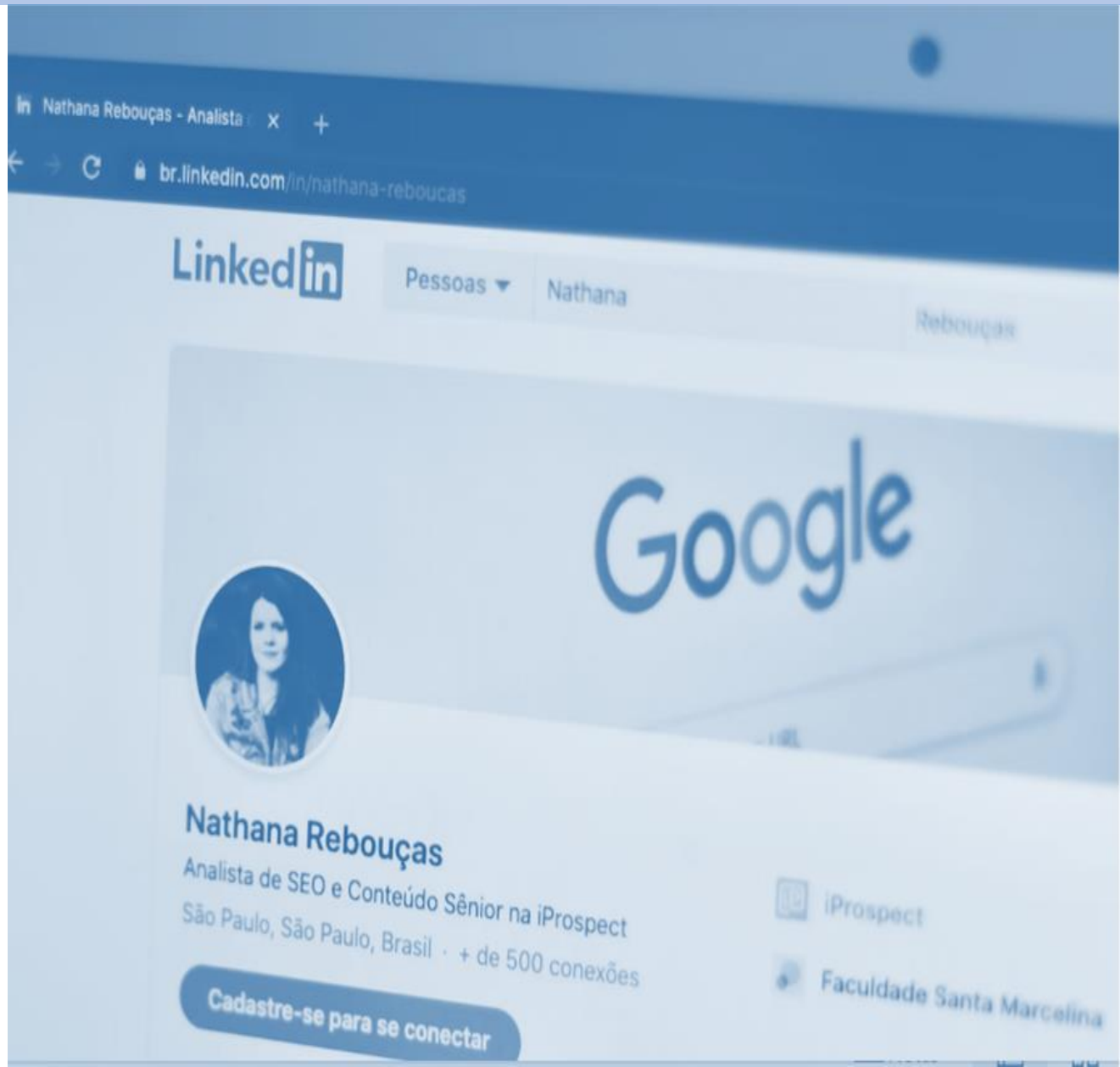
That said, you need an online presence

- Social media: LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Threads, X, TikTok (depends on your business type)
- How do you appear on Google? Stalk yourself.
- Build your brand as a thought leader, online (and off).
- Is your website as good as it can be – does it do you and your brand justice?



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How to get, and stay, connected: 6 top tips

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Top tips

Go for coffee:

Reach out to someone you know in your industry, or from previous employment days and catch up. Work doesn't even need to be spoken about!

Among women this is particularly true. While men create business leads on the golf course through a shared, enjoyable experience, women do it over a coffee or glass of wine.

I know for a fact, when networking, I talk 80% non-work and 20% business. Remember: people like to work with people they like.

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Top tips

Attend events:

From beauty to hospitality, there are several events to attend: trade shows, industry talks, workshops, online business groups (like Xena), etc. Show face at, and meet others, and yes even digitally*. Just put your phone down, except when you save someone's number.

*When blogging was a new thing, they would connect online and have regular "blogger meet-ups" to connect in person. Many recommended each other, or became guest editors etc. As drivers of digital content this just shows how important real-life connections are.

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Top tips

Accept invitations:

If you're invited to do a talk, host a panel or contribute to an article or white paper, take up the opportunity with open arms and gratitude. If you can get a copy share it on your LinkedIn or other digital sites to extend its shelf life.

While it takes time and effort, you are investing in your brand and your business. Let's say you're asked to comment on an industry white paper – spending that hour consolidating your thoughts will be worth it.

Should you be invited to give a talk (shout out to Xena here ☺) do it. Sharing experiences and expertise with others is beneficial to all, and hopefully you receive good feedback on your content.

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Top tips

Build rapport online:

Follow others in your industry and comment in a genuine way. Perhaps you like someone's work or perspective; like it and give a hands up without wanting anything in return.

Full disclosure: I don't post often other than Instagram. I should (this talk has inspired me). But I have a large network that has grown over the years – and still regularly get asked to "can I join your network".

It's worth posting your opinion on LI or X (Julia example) as you're building 'micro' thought leadership and others will see it and may resonate with your thoughts or position.

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Top tips

Share updates on your business:

Among those in your existing network you could share a short business update, via email or a newsletter, letting them know of new services or products you may have launched. While this is a harder sell, it keeps your community updated – and they could refer you once it's clear how your SME has expanded.

Never spam people trying to peddle your wares. Be natural. If you have coffee, follow-up with an email succinctly recapping your services in case anything comes across their desk that may be relevant to you (it happened to me).

Or if you have a newsletter data base share any new services or products but do it in a natural way. No one – esp. women – likes to be sold too hard. It can put you off (think of all those spamming emails).

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Top tips

Share testimonials on your website or LinkedIn:

While not networking per se, this showcases your work to others and is especially valuable if a customer or client provides you with their experience of your business. It's invaluable endorsement and can help influence others to use you. Put case studies on your website, ask for testimonials for LinkedIn and use in presentations/ prospectuses. Third-party opinions are priceless.

Do the same for your connections too.

Building your personal brand

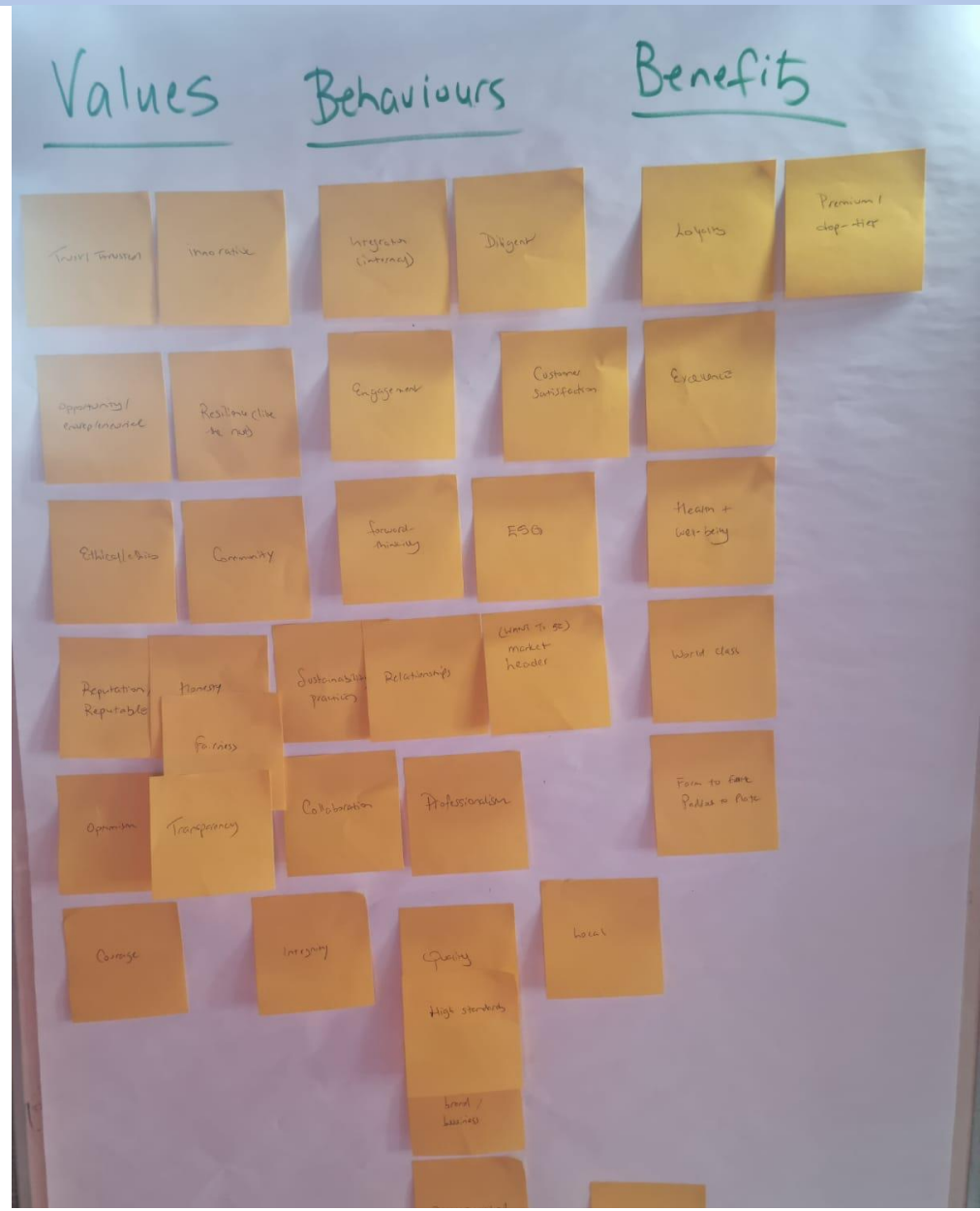
Build your brand, not just your business's

1. Do you know your professional values? What do you stand for and why?
2. Have you got a professional mission and vision?
3. Are you clear on how you want to be represented across your & others' channels
4. Do you have an elevator pitch of who YOU are, not what your business does
5. Do you have recent head shots?
6. Have you got a great bio?
7. Have you built a professional brand map for yourself?

Developing your values* – find alignment

Exercise:

- Buy some sticky notes. Have a big white board.
- Create three columns: Values, Behaviours & Benefits – they are marginally different to each other
- A value is your intrinsic DNA/ what you believe in/hold up high, a behaviour is how you work and a benefit is an outcome for someone – a client for instance
- Start writing sticky notes (one word) and stick under correct column. Some will overlap.
- Avoid ‘suitcase’ words e.g. excellence – what does this actually mean? Attention to detail is more specific.
- When you’re done, take a step back and understand who you & your brand are.
- Capture this one a document e.g. my core values are compassion, ethics, integrity, community etc.
- Do this for your personal brand and your business.



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Vision & Mission

Exercise:

Why this is as old as the hills, it still needs to be done. Avoid being wishy-washy; be clear on who you are and what you want others to 'see' in you.

A vision is your BHAGs. Maybe you want to become a key thought leader in your sector or grow your business by 100%. Have BIG goals but make them viable.

Mission: The how. The day-to-day work. What are your goals (again, personal and professional) and how will you get there.

Without your values, vision and mission you have zero direction. And if you're not sure what you do or want, how should anyone else understand – could miss opportunities to align so be clear on your offering.

These 3 things must be represented across your business, from your customer service, your store / or ecom page, your socials, etc. Know who you are and be unique to you.

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The elevator pitch

Exercise:

How many of you can sum up your business in one short sentence, or of a maximum of 30 seconds? A show of hands please.

Your elevator pitch is crucial. When networking you need to be able to explain what you do quickly and clearly.

Take your values, behaviours and benefits, as well as your product or service offering, and encapsulate what you do.

Cultivate's is "We deliver results that matter" – that took me months to come up with!

Take your time but get it right and stick to it.

We deliver results that matter.

Brand. Reputation. Content. Leads.

Your bio, boiler plate & photos

Exercise:

Once you know who you are and why, write a short 150 – 200-word bio about yourself (post on LinkedIn and cut it down for X). Share with people who you've connected with where relevant, be clear and concise is best. Write a personal bio and a company bio.

Photos: I have a strong opinion on this. Avoid using photos from 5 or 10 years ago. Be authentic and share yourself as you are now. Many use old pics, but that is not representing who you truly are; I have a professional photo shoot done every 2 years to ensure I look like I look – and that aligns to the business's and my values.

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Use your sector media, for free – how? (PR)

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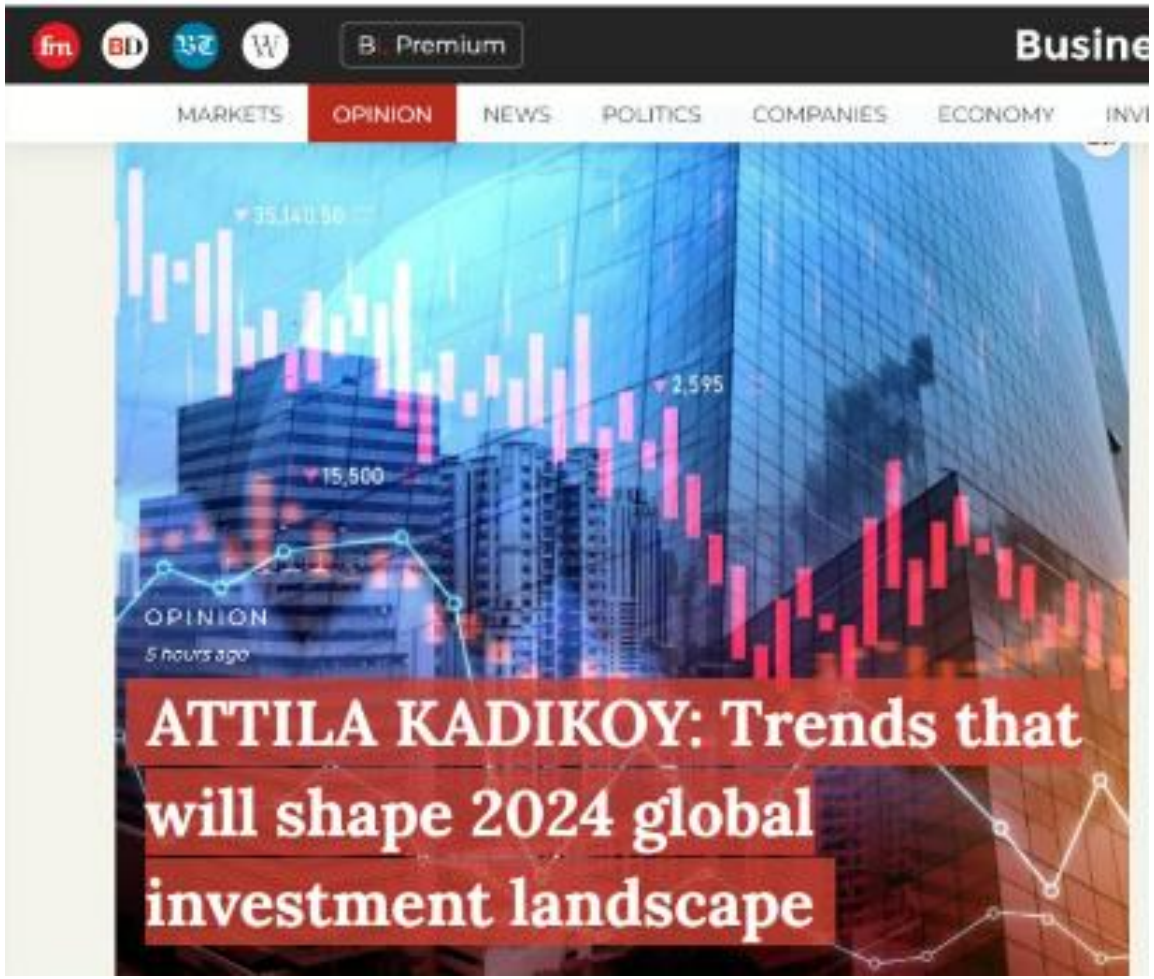
Be a thought leader in the media

Generate earned media.

Earned media is free editorial. It takes time to create but it could yield great dividends. If you're not using a PR (hint hint) you should identify the key publications in your industry – trade and mainstream – and create content for them.

Content, or thought leadership, must be editorial, not promotional. You need to talk to the 'now' and tie into the news. Give your opinion on the topic, don't flog your brand. You will get a byline and even a link to your company but stick to your thoughts and avoid a hard sell. Media won't use it anyway.

Building your name in the media can take months, but once you have plenty of links your Google ranking improves, your website traffic can increase and most NB, those who you're trying to reach know who you are.



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Top tips to creating an oped or media pitch

1. Have a strong angle. Build your opinion around it.
2. Write 800 – 1000 words (get someone to edit for you), include your byline, and submit to a publication in your sector (it's best to go to the opinion editors e.g. Dave Marrs at Business Day).
3. If you're published share the article's link on all your socials and include a press office on your website. If it's really big and in print even make a hard copy, frame it and put it on your office wall/ reception.
4. Never go back to the same editor more than once in a 3 month period.
5. Besides opeds, submit motivations of your work e.g. an architect or designer.* Visi e.g. may want to feature you.
6. It helps to engage your industry media once every couple of months – rotate them – and provide something useful. This increases your media network and you can really benefit from this third-party exposure.
7. All media exposure (on & offline) builds your name, makes you known in the industry and heightens your expertise.

Trends that will shape 2024 global investment landscape

US may have a technical recession, but likelier soft landing will strengthen stocks and bonds

THERE IS A GENERAL FEELING THAT US STOCKS ARE UNDERVALUED, PERHAPS BY 10%

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Closing exercise

Over to you: 3 ladies from different businesses.

Share who you are and what you do: elevator pitch), explain why I should work with you, give me 3 of your core values, provide 2 topics that could become thought pieces.

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What are your key takeouts of the session?

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Thank you. Questions?

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