WHY BRANDING CAN INCREASE A PROFESSIONAL ATHLETE’S VALUE:
A RATIONALE FOR DESIGNER ENGAGEMENT

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Master of Fine Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
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ABSTRACT

Brands allow consumers to make choices. They help them differentiate one individual, business, or product from the other by delivering a promise that leads to expectations and perceptions. The value of a brand is measured by this perception.

What the consumer perceives a business to be, not the business’s perception, is that business’s brand. Designers play a large part in influencing this perception by creating brand identity systems that become the tangible expression of a business’s identity. There is an opportunity for designers to play a larger role in a business’s success by capitalizing on the increasing reliance on branding to assist in wealth generation.

Professional athletes are small businesses. They are distinct individuals that ultimately rely on their fans to build wealth. The fan’s perception of an athlete, that athlete’s brand, influences the differentiation of one player from another. The decision to invest in the brand, whether it is to watch a game on television, buy tickets to the game, or purchase a player’s jersey after the game, rests on this perception. Designers can help professional athletes formulate strategies to positively influence their brand.

Strong branding could go a long way in increasing an athlete’s off-the-field opportunities. Since the career span of a professional athlete is relatively short, shared productivity between athletes and designers could generate increased, and more sustainable income for athletes. Designers could also benefit from these increased opportunities. If brands allow consumer’s to make choices, designers influence what choices these consumers make with keen knowledge of consumer behavior and sound design principals.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Since a very young age, my plan had always been to complete high school, college, and finally graduate school. At one time, I thought college consisted of grades 13 through 16. Graduate school was a little more difficult to understand, yet I knew it would be the logical next step. Once I finished the “16th” grade, graduate school was still difficult to grasp. I felt that I needed to apply, but I did not have a plan or a clear reason to. I needed time to sort things out (and pay some bills), so I accepted a position at Nationwide Insurance as a Visual Communications Designer.

After three years at Nationwide, I began entertaining my desire to continue my education. At the time, Brian Stone was my colleague on the Usability and Design Team at Nationwide. He was a full-time design professor at Ohio State and a part-time consultant at Nationwide. After inquiring about Ohio State’s graduate program, he told me I needed a plan. He also told me to contact Noel Mayo for more information.

Noel succeeded in de-mystifying graduate school for me by making it tangible which excited me. This excitement prompted me to begin the application process. I hit a snag when I asked myself “Why?” At the time, I still did not have the plan Brian suggested I have, so I put my graduate school plans on hold for an additional two years. After two years, a general direction formulated in my mind: to ensure total dedication and a maximum utilization of my abilities, I wanted to somehow combine two of my strongest talents into one strong business model. Few things in life keep me totally content: my love and participation in sports, and my talent, turned trade, design. I was now ready to apply to graduate school and this time I had a semblance of a plan.

The first quarter, I had one main theme—focus. I came in with grandiose ideas, and a plan that needed to be scaled back and focused into something that could fit into a limited time frame. With the assistance of Brian and Noel, my thesis gained more focus and was ready to go.
I would like to thank Brian for lighting a fire in me simply by being successful and respected in the design field. He believed in my ideas and was confident that I could make it happen. When, in my second year, he took a leave of absence, he trusted that I could continue on my path with minimal assistance. He gave me the tools; it is up to me to put them to good use.

Noel kept everything realistic. His approach to graduate school is more reality than theory. During our first meeting, he asked me something to the effect of “How will this make you million a dollars?” The question alone excited me because my undergraduate experience was based so much in theory. How to make a living was left up to the imagination. The question also frightened me because the only response I could come up with was “uhhhhh I don’t know.” I knew then that I had to regroup and figure it out. I did not visit Noel again until I had an answer—two years later.

Peter Chan helped solidify my interests in branding and let it be known that it was not an area to be taken lightly. His many literature recommendations, field trips to design firms, and insight into his own branding experiences, opened up a discipline and area of expertise that continues to excite me.

The entire graduate program embraced me and made me feel comfortable. My colleagues, especially Erik Aagard, Andrew Barrow, Richard Teynor and Mathew Stanford provided much needed support. Melissa Quintanilha, Andrea Marshall, and I; Brian’s 2005 advisees, formed a much needed bond and support system that helped smooth out the rough spots.

There would be no research if it were not for the athletes that took the time out for interviews. IRB regulations will not allow the subjects to be identified, but acknowledgement is warranted.

Thanks to my proofreaders for using the red pen (or red type) like a light saber: Michael Martin and Rhonda Burke.

Finally, this journey would be non-existent if I did not have a strong foundation. My Mom and Sister always provided the voice of reason whether I wanted it or not. While they were re-introduced to my signature mood swings and silent treatment, they still provided an attentive ear when I grew tired of holding everything inside. It probably will not get any better as I embark on the next segment of my life, yet I know where my support is.
VITA

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FIELD OF STUDY

Major Field: Industrial, Interior, and Visual Communication Design
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ABBREVIATIONS

NCAA................................................................. National Collegiate Athletic Association
NBA................................................................. National Basketball Association
NFL................................................................. National Football League
MLB................................................................. Major League Baseball
METHODOLOGY

In order to gain the most relevant insights into professional athletes’ thought processes, I decided to speak to them directly. I wanted answers to specific questions and, for clarity, I also sought to understand the reasoning’s behind certain responses. The controlled questionnaire administered during these interviews allowed me to acquire the needed data as well as the sometimes-spontaneous explanations or side notes, which frequently proved to be just as important. The questionnaire can be viewed in the Appendix of this document.

The principal subjects of this research were current and former professional athletes. For this research, former professional athletes are athletes that have not participated professionally in their sport for more than two years. Current professional athletes are athletes that are currently performing in their respective sport, or are less than two years removed from that sport.

The subjects used were accessed through a professional network that I am a member of. I was introduced to several of them and they agreed to hear more about my research. I followed up with a telephone call. The following script was used over the phone: “My name is Brandan Craft and I am conducting research in the Design Department at The Ohio State University to benefit my thesis studies. Would you be willing to grant me a 30 – 45 minute interview that revolves around design, services, business, and business relationships?” If they were willing to participate, a convenient date and time was established to conduct the interview.

Conversations with a sports agent, a financial advisor, a lawyer and a couple of small business owners gave me a better understanding of how different client-focused businesses operate. These conversations were on the record but very informal. This allowed the conversation topics to vary, and introduced unknown revelations.
The secondary research conducted revolved around three main topics: branding, personal branding, and the lifestyles of professional athletes. Design-related and traditional business practices were also researched. This research was gained primarily from books and web resources.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The topic of this research originated from my desire to investigate a subject that combined a couple of my favorite activities, sports and design. I am a former division one collegiate athlete and am still very much involved in various sports-related activities. I am also a designer by trade, where my focus has been website and graphic design. I believe that for these two disciplines to converge on an academic level, someone like me, a person with intimate experience with both subjects, is needed.

Creating logos at work and for freelance jobs quickly became my favorite assignment. Designing marks that would become the face of a business was exciting to me. I wanted to learn more about branding outside of simply just creating logos, and specifically around the practices used to brand athletes. Initial research regarding an average professional athlete’s career span found me wanting to help them earn additional income off-of-the-field using branding strategies. I was never too interested in the superstar athlete because for every uber-popular player there are far more middle-of-the-road players that may get a better use of branding services. I quickly realized that professional athletes need more than just a logo to set them apart from the pack. What unique challenges arise when attempting to brand professional athletes? Should they be treated more like an individual or a business? How does one measure the value of a brand? What education methods can be used to explain this value? The scope of this research inquiry seeks to shed light on these questions. I also introduce strategies to assist the designers who provide these branding services. Pricing structures, next steps, and business opportunities are explored as well.
CHAPTER 2

WHY?

2.1. There is a Niche

When research commenced, I struggled to find an agency, business, or individual that specialized in branding professional athletes. I did find marketing companies that utilized web-based marketing techniques to assist with an athlete’s brand identity. I also found companies that focused on branding professional sporting venues and organizations, but none that focused on branding individual athletes (This is not to say that none exist, I just had a difficult time finding any for this research).

Through my research, I speculate that these specialized services are not prevalent due to a lack of demand from the athletes. The brand-needs of the very small percentage of single-named athletes (Jordan, Kobe, Tiger, Beckham, A-Rod) are almost always handled by big named apparel companies like Nike, Adidas, and Reebok. The majority of professional athletes do not seek branding services because they do not know what branding is, or they think it is a service reserved for the ultra elite. They identify branding solely as shoe deals and commercials. These athletes need to be educated about the benefits of branding (Please reference Chapter 6).

2.2 The Business of Professional Athletes

“This is the best of times for sports. It is already the 22nd largest industry in the U.S. It ranks ahead of autos, lumber and air transportation. By 1995 total sports revenue had exceeded the $100 billion mark. Those figures may be fly droppings compared with the next 20 years.” (Helitzer 1999, 1) As stated in this excerpt, the business of sports is huge and growing everyday. At the very top of this growing business are professional athletes; the athletes who made it through all levels in their respective sports to reach the ultimate stage. Much like the most successful doctors, lawyers, entertainers, and entrepreneurs, professional
athletes are the best at what they do. Further, their additional earning potential is much higher than the average individual or small business, with average salaries exceeding the million-dollar mark for the three major professional sports leagues in the United States.

The top three major professional sports leagues in the United States:

- National Football League, NFL
- Major League Baseball, MLB
- National Basketball Association, NBA

Professional athletes are small businesses. A small business is one that:

- is organized for profit
- has a place of business in the United States
- makes a significant contribution to the U.S. economy by paying taxes or using American products, materials, or labor
- does not exceed the numerical size standard for its industry

(U.S. Small Business Administration)

Many athletes participate in for-profit activities off of the field like selling memorabilia, appearing at certain functions and speaking engagements, and selling training videos. They also conduct their business in the U.S., pay taxes, and usually will not exceed the numerical size standard for small businesses ($6.5 million or less.)

Due to the fact that these athletes are small businesses, they should be structured and conducted as a small business. Most successful businesses all share certain unique qualities, and one of them is a strong brand.
2.3 An Athlete’s Career Span

An athlete has a relatively short career playing a sport once he or she makes it to the professional ranks. The following statistics illustrate how difficult it is make it to the professional ranks:

- Less than 3 percent of male high school basketball players (3.3 percent for girls), 5.7 percent of high school football players, and 6.1 percent of baseball players will go on to play in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).
- Less than 1.2 percent of these NCAA basketball players; 1.8 percent of these football players; and 9.4 percent of these baseball players will get drafted by a professional team.
- About three in 10,000 high school basketball players, eight in 10,000 football players, and one in 200 high school baseball players will make it to the professional ranks. (Bracken 2007)

Once an athlete makes it to the professional ranks their playing days are numbered. Most professional athletes do not have the luxury of working in their field until they choose to retire. Once they cannot perform at a peak level (due to any number of circumstances), a professional athlete’s playing career is over. The following statistics support this:

- NFL - 3.5 years or about age 24 - 25
- NBA - 6 years or about age 25 - 28
- MLB - 5 years or about age 26 – 27

An athlete is potentially faced with 39 years of earning a living off-of-the-field of play if their playing career is over at age twenty-six, assuming a retirement age of 65. It may be a good idea for athletes to build capital off of the field while they are still playing so they have something set up when their playing days are finished. A professional athlete has the potential to have a very strong brand that can definitely assist in this wealth-building pursuit. Although an athlete’s playing career will eventually end (by choice, but more likely, by force), his brand can continue to pay dividends.
2.4 Playing Days are Over: Plans After the game

“The average annual NFL player’s salary is twenty-five times greater than that of the average U.S. household income. Athletes used to six- and seven-figure incomes find it difficult to adjust to a new standard of living.” (Gamesover.org, n.d.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NFL PLAYER</th>
<th>NON-NFL PLAYER w/ bachelor’s degree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Salary</td>
<td>$1.75 / year</td>
<td>$52,000 / year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 52% for expenses</td>
<td>$840,000 / year</td>
<td>$24,960 / year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Career Span</td>
<td>3.5 years</td>
<td>41 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Earnings Over Career Span</td>
<td>$2.9 million / year</td>
<td>$1.02 million / year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% Saved</td>
<td>$294,000</td>
<td>$102,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years to Age 65</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount/year until Age 65</td>
<td>$7,538 / year</td>
<td>$34,000 / year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 2.1: Salary comparison—NFL player vs. non-NFL Player
Source: (data adapted from Day and Newburger 2002; 52 Weeks, 17 Paychecks, 2008; Program Helps College Players Make Informed Decisions, 2008)

This chart demonstrates that, in a lifetime, an average NFL player’s lifetime earnings do not differ too much from an average household’s earnings. Professional athletes can fall into a false sense of security when they open bi-weekly paychecks that are comparable with an American family’s yearly earnings. These checks are large but they can stop coming in the blink of an eye. Again, additional opportunities off-of-the-field can help ease this transition.
CHAPTER 3

OPPORTUNITIES

3.1 An Under-Utilized Market

Design has a profound affect on professional sports franchises. Whether it is the design of the team logo, jersey, ticket or equipment; effective design influences ticket and merchandise sales. Even though design plays a large role in a league or franchise’s success, individual players rarely utilize it off of the field.

Most designers are accustomed to working with small businesses that need design services to prove their legitimacy and to sell more products. Professional athletes are unique small businesses that have the same needs. Their product is within; they need to prove that they can be utilized off-of-the-field to accrue an increased income. Strong branding, and other design services like web and graphic design, could assist in this endeavor. A designer could potentially have a bit more freedom to be creative when working with athletes because their profession revolves around playing a game and entertainment.

Between the big three professional sports leagues, there are approximately only 2,860 professional athletes on active rosters. This relatively small count suggests a somewhat rare and very close-knit market. Professional athletes rely on each other for advise, direction, and recommendations. Once a designer taps into this market there is a good chance that additional opportunities will arise if the client is satisfied with the work.
### 3.2 Earning Potential

By tapping into this close-knit market, designers would also be working with clients who have above average incomes. NFL Players, on average, earned about $1.3 million in 2006. NBA players earned $4.9 million and MLB players earned $2.5 million. This does not mean that high salaries automatically equal high invoices. It simply shows that there is an opportunity to tap into a market that possesses higher purchasing power, which can lead to higher levels of service and creativity.

The athlete, with a strong brand backing him, can potentially garner off-the-field earning opportunities like speaking engagements, youth camps, memorabilia sales, and coaching. These additional income opportunities also have the potential to continue after their playing days are over.
CHAPTER 4

THE DESIGNER’S ROLE IN SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSES

It is not very difficult to understand a designer’s contribution to a successful business. Take a business like Sony™. Sony makes televisions, DVD players, and stereos as well as many other products. Designers design these products but they do not differ too much from other top brands of TV’s and stereos. Due to the growing availability of technology and high quality materials, Sony cannot convince the consumer to buy their products based on product design alone. A strong and convincing brand is needed to lure the buyer into purchasing a product. This can convince the consumer that Sony’s DVD player is superior to other similarly priced and feature-laden DVD players.

Designers are responsible for how a product is packaged, displayed, and used; parts of its brand identity (see section 5.1.3). Designers play a prominent role in the implementation of successful brands. Designers design the face of the product, therefore designers design the face of the business.

4.1 Designers Design the Face of the Business: The Brand’s Identity

A brand’s identity is what the consumer sees first and makes snap judgments about. It is what the consumer feels when a certain products’ advertisement is displayed in a magazine or played on a commercial. It is how the company’s website is received before it is used to find information or make purchases. The popular saying “Don’t judge a book by its cover” is fine in theory, but it is not very realistic pertaining to brand. People initially judge everything by its cover; cover meaning its face, face meaning its brand identity. Designers play a critical role in making this “cover” as appealing as possible.
4.1.1 Brand Mark

“The designer is the medium between the client and the audience. A mark should embody and imply the client’s business goals and positioning, and address the end user’s needs and wants” (Katz 2006, 53). Because an athlete’s photo and value proposition cannot be on every website page or piece of correspondence, a brand mark is used to embody these elements.

*Carolyn Davidson—creator of the Nike “Swoosh”:* A graphic design student named Carolyn Davidson designed the Nike brand mark in 1971. This mark has gone on to become one of the most recognizable and successful brand marks in the world. At the time Phil Knight, Nike’s founder, wanted a design that suggested movement. What he received was a soon to be worldwide phenomenon; a mark that suggested speed, athleticism, innovation and above all, quality. Admittedly, Nike’s marketing monster can be attributed to some of these attributes but it’s hard to imagine another mark achieving the same level of success. (Clark. n.d.)

4.1.2 Website

A business’s website is its virtual storefront. Modern consumers research a business before they patronize it. Think of a website as a store or storefront within a humongous mall where every other storefront offers similar products or services. A specific storefront needs to stand out and encourage the consumers to step through its doors. A well designed and successful website accomplishes this by strategically exposing the consumer to the business’s products or services.

4.1.3 Packaging

“First I bought it because it looked cool. Later I bought it because it tasted good” (Grillo 2006, 134). Vying for consumers’ attention among a sea of competing products on a shelf might be the most competitive environment in retail. Packages are brands that you trust enough to take home. A product’s packaging could be more recognizable than the product itself. Perfume bottles all have unique designs that want to be instantly recognizable. Unique packages like Crown Royal’s velvet purple bag are routinely saved long after the product is consumed. How an athlete is dressed can even be thought of as that product’s packaging. Packaging design can make or break a product. (Wheeler 2006, 134)
4.1.4 Correspondence

Letterhead, business cards, brochures, and the like all give a business a certain level of credibility not found with websites and email alone. Business cards are portable marketing tools that are a direct reflection of the cardholder. Brochures need to “invite readership” with an easy to understand design. Well-designed letterhead implies that a business is indeed a credible one. (Wheeler 2006)

Branding could be defined as the process of making a business’s identity as appealing as possible. A heightened understanding of what a brand is, and its inherent value, is needed to truly understand the concept of branding. The numerous definitions of brand mostly share the same basic concepts highlighted in the next section. Designers can use branding techniques and processes to circulate these concepts to consumers.
CHAPTER 5
BRANDING AND ITS INHERENT VALUE

5.1 What is Brand?

“A brand is a name, term, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, which is intended to signify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors.” (Kotler 1984)

“Brands are defined by their presence in our consumer society, by their products’ physical attributes and emotional connotations, and by how they relate to consumers’ aspirations. The brand becomes the means by which a company differentiates itself in the minds of consumers.” (Klimchuk and Krasovec 2006)

“Brand is a promise about who you are and what benefits you deliver that gets reinforced every time people come in contact with any facet of you or your business.” (Chiaravalle and Schenck 2007)

“Brand is the promise, the big idea, and the expectations that reside in each customer’s mind about a product, service, or company.” (Wheeler 2006, 4)

Different definitions of brand serve differing needs but the constant among the various definitions is usually the consumer; specifically how the consumer perceives a company, service, or product. The following definition effectively conveys this: “Brand is a person’s perception of a product, service, experience or organization.” (Neumeier 2004). Since the idea of brand extends beyond just perception, a more comprehensive description can be formulated from the above definitions: “Brand is the promise a company puts forth to help consumers form expectations and perceptions that allow for product differentiation.” The last two definitions will be used for the purposes of this research. The former can be used when someone asks what brand is. This definition may be easier for someone to grasp in the midst of conversation. The latter may be best suited for documents, websites, and all other forms of official correspondence. This definition contains a couple of more ideas that may require additional time to think about.
To help an athlete clarify how a brand applies to them, these definitions can be personalized:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand is a person’s perception of a product, service, experience or organization.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Becomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand is the consumers and fans perception of you, on and off the field.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand is the promise a company puts forth to help consumers form expectations and perceptions that allow for product differentiation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Becomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand is what you do to help consumers make a choice between your skills camp and that of your competitors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1.1 Brands Allow the Consumer to Make Choices

Whether the consumer is a marketing person deciding between different athletes to be the spokesperson for their business, or a teenager deciding what player’s jersey to buy, an athlete’s brand allows that consumer to have these choices. If all athletes acted, looked, and played the same, the consumer would be left with few choices as to whom to support or follow.

This is evident when one compares the NBA to the NFL. The NBA is regarded as a “Star-Driven” league where individual star athletes drive the popularity of the league. The NFL is a “Team-Driven” league where the success of the league hinges on its most popular teams. One of the main reasons for this difference is that football players wear helmets on the field and basketball players do not.

When consumers see NBA players on the court, they see their smiles, frowns, hairstyles, and tattoos. A consumer could easily recognize an NBA player they saw play earlier, walking down the street or pitching a product in a commercial.
While on the field, NFL players are required to wear helmets at all times. The consumer is deprived of seeing a clear view of a football player’s face while playing so it would be more difficult to recognize an NFL player on the street without a jersey and pads on. NFL players tend to use different methods to separate themselves from the pack; from wearing long hair outside of their helmets, to wearing distinctive visors on their helmets, to taking their helmet off after a big play (this practice has been banned in the NFL however because it is viewed as taunting).

Imagine going to a police station to pick a person out of a line-up you saw steal your car. When you get there, everyone in the line-up is wearing the same football uniform and helmet. This makes the choice a little more difficult. Consumers want choices; branding helps to provide these choices.

5.1.2 Identity, Brand, and Brand Identity

A brand is not simply a logo. The golden arches alone are not McDonalds’ brand. Mercedes’ “brand” does not stop with the three-point star. Logos, or brand marks, are only a portion of what make up successful brands.

A business’s identity is who that business is. It is how they want to be perceived by the consumer, who that consumer is, and how they want to market to that consumer. The job of the business is to effectively convey this identity to the consumer so that the consumer’s perception of the company matches that of the company’s.
The consumer’s perception of the company is that company’s brand. Brand is not what you say it is. It is what they say it is (Neumeier 2003). A brand message cannot be forced onto the consumer because that consumer will form his or her own opinions based on knowledge gained from various sources; sources like brand marks, advertisements, and websites which are all used to influence a consumer’s perception of the business. Word-of-mouth and consumer reviews are also examples of elements that can influence a consumer, but companies rarely have control of these methods.

A business’s brand identity is the tangible expression of its desired brand, its identity. A brand’s identity system consists of things like the aforementioned brand mark, websites, and packaging. A brand’s identity is what the consumer sees, touches, or hears. The business wants the consumer to form a perception of the company, based on experiences with these elements, that matches its identity, and therefore shapes its brand.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDENTITY</th>
<th>BRAND IDENTITY</th>
<th>BRAND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who am I?</td>
<td>I am</td>
<td>Who is he?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who needs to know?</td>
<td>Brand Mark</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will they find out?</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why should they care?</td>
<td>Packaging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand identity is who you are.</td>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity is who you are.</td>
<td>Stationary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand identity is the tangible expression of who you are (Identity.)</td>
<td>Do I care?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand is who the consumer thinks you are.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 5.1: Identity, brand identity, and brand

5.2 Product: A Combination of Goods and Services

Most products are a combination of goods and services. A brand, the product, is the promise, the big idea, and the expectations that reside in each customer’s mind about a product, service, or company (Wheeler 2006). It is composed of goods like a brand mark, a website, or some sort of printed media like a brochure, poster, or flyer; all components of a brand’s identity. It also consists of services like brand management, brand marketing, and the processes needed to establish the brand. These services are all a part of branding.
A service is an intangible act, effort, or performance exchanged from producer to user without ownership rights. This means that the client cannot see, touch, or smell the service (Soloman, Marshall, and Stuart 2008). It also means that the client cannot truly own a provided service. A good like a baseball bat can be seen, touched, and smelled. Ownership of this good exchanges from the seller to the consumer once purchased. Sometimes services can be “seen” but they more than likely cannot be touched. Smell is up for debate and may be more applicable to personal brands (section 5.8). The purchaser of the service, however, can never own the service. The service provider may be hired, the process may be purchased, or the resulting product can be bought, but the actual service can never be owned.

The results of branding may yield product components like brand marks and websites. These components are considered products because they are tangible and exchanged with ownership rights. A brand mark can definitely be seen but it is difficult to touch although it can easily be interacted with. The service provider owns the mark until an agreed upon payment is made, whereby ownership transfers to the client.

5.3 Creating Value

Metrics behind value and returns on investment (ROI), when it comes to branding, may be hard to prove in the traditional sense. ROI is the ratio of money gained or lost on an investment relative to the amount of money invested. For example, if a $10,000 investment returns $2,000 in a year, its per year ROI is 20 percent. It is difficult to prove that a client’s $10,000 investment in brand services will have a ROI of 20 percent because of the seemingly non-existent tangibility of the services provided.

A boutique that is looking to stimulate their sales purchases some hot new shirts from a shirt company for $10,000. After six months, this boutique counts how many of these new shirts were sold in this time period to find out if their investment was warranted. It is concluded that the number of shirts sold totals $12,000, a 20 percent ROI (a 4 percent ROI when compared to the boutique’s $50,000 average for a six month period.)
If this same boutique, in hopes of improving their brand, invests $10,000 in a design firm and in six months nets $60,000, how does one prove that the $10,000 increase in sales (20 percent ROI) is attributed to the work of that design firm and the services they provided? Other factors may have an influence on the increase in sales such as the economy, weather conditions, or the hiring of new employees. It can be argued that the increase can be attributed to the new brand, but how much of that increase?

5.3.1 Return on Investment

One recommendation, prior to implementing the new brand strategy, would be to take an inventory of the processes used to run and market the business. In addition to and if applicable, document the company’s previous two-years of earnings. Implement the new brand strategy and after a designated time period, record the company’s earnings and any major changes made around running the business. The ROI attributed to the new brand strategy, compared to all the other factors, could then seemingly be measured. Again, this is simply a recommendation, or a liquid template that can certainly be modified to fit numerous situations.

This method could justifiably substantiate the value of the brand. For future clients, this data could become the proof needed to justify value, pricing, and pricing methods. Various design firms (Kreber, Chute Gerdeman, Integrate, and GSW) were visited for the purpose of this research, and asked how they measure the value of a brand. The consensus was that value is derived directly from past clients. Whether it is using case studies, or publishing success stories in trade publications, positive results and satisfied clients may be the best measures of a services value.

5.3.2 Develop a Strategic Branding Plan

Key questions that deal with an athlete’s business interests, social causes, and long-term plans can be asked to help a designer decipher a clear brand direction. Based on the answers to these questions, branding goals can be assigned that mirror the athlete’s proposed brand direction. A client that is new to the professional ranks, and has yet to establish a brand, can use a Brand Invention direction (see section 5.8.1).
A client that needs to distance him or herself from their current brand can be given Brand Reinvention as their direction (see section 5.8.1), and so on. With this direction in mind, a strategic branding plan can be developed that contains elements like return on investment, benchmarks, percentages, timelines, and success criteria. This plan can also be used as a tool to demonstrate the value branding provides.

5.3.3 Success Criteria

Consider this hypothetical scenario. An eighth year NFL receiver wanted to increase the awareness of his brand because he was in his athletic prime and understood that an athlete’s prime is very short. He also wished to, off-of-the-field, step out from the shadow of his larger-than-life superstar teammate and fellow receiver. He decided that he wanted to be perceived as:

- A good guy
- Flashy, but not over the top
- A philanthropist

Sets of goal-focused questions or keywords were distributed to focus groups before brand work began:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Do you recognize this person?</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(4 out of 10 consumer’s recognized him)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. What is your perception of this person?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAD GUY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. What is this person’s level of community involvement?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VERY LOW</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.2: Success criteria—pre-questions and results
Success criteria were determined based on the results from the pre-questionnaire. Criteria could have been set for each individual question, or one goal could apply to all of the questions. The success criteria agreed upon by the client and his brand partner was to **increase his brand awareness by ten percent**. A ten percent increase in each of the results was determined to signify the new brand’s success.

This meant:

- A minimum of 10 percent more people would have to recognize the photograph.
- A minimum average increase of one scale value was needed (ie. 6 to 7) for each of the remaining questions.

At pre-determined intervals of time, as the branding strategy was implemented, these same questions were distributed to the same type of focus groups and measured against the agreed upon success criteria to determine branding success.

![Figure 5.3: Success criteria—follow-up questions and results](image-url)
The results of the follow-up questions helped to quantify the success of the branding activities. The success criteria were met and were sometimes exceeded. These results helped to show that the client’s brand awareness was increased as a result of the provided branding services.

5.3.4 Media Feedback

Although the media is sometimes looked at in a negative light, it can be used to measure the effects of a brand, as the media has a heavy influence on consumers, especially sports fans. Media feedback in the form of press releases, printed articles, fan blogs, radio reports, and television mentions can be gathered and measured against set standards. Whether the media mentions are positive or negative is an example of one such standard.

Within the same team, the media covers baseball superstars Derek Jeter and Alex Rodriguez completely differently. Rodriguez, while largely considered the best baseball player in Major League Baseball, is often portrayed in the media in a negative light. He may have a high number of media mentions but it seems that most of them, that do not pertain to on-field actions, could be deemed negative. Derek Jeter, on the other hand, is beloved by the media. They talk about his good looks and relationships with various models and actresses. Both of these athletes’ media mentions could be tallied and sorted to help measure one another’s brand.

5.4 Value to the Designer

Working with professional athletes allow designers to utilize their abilities to create brand identity which includes developing brand marks, websites, and other marketing materials. This new and exciting market may also give designers the opportunity to practice and develop their business-oriented branding skills like setting up blogs, helping with business plans, planning public appearance etiquette, and charitable event planning. By venturing outside of their respective comfort zones, designers may successfully increase their value and add to their value propositions.

Business success, like brand success, depends on what other people think about you. Being good, by itself, does not guarantee success. A strong brand can help formulate the manner in which others, preferably your target customers, view you (Kaputa 2005, 3). This explanation of why a strong brand is
important can lead to a proper value proposition. One such example follows...*Starr360 is made up of well-educated and trained providers of quality branding services that help to increase the value of professional athletes and small businesses.*

The value proposition has to be simple yet complete. It should be what you do and are, not what you say or want. It should be very short and to the point, similar to an elevator speech. It should also be refined to one sentence that communicates who the target customers are, what will be provided to them, and why they will buy (Alt and Usborne 2006). This particular value proposition states that their customers are professional athletes and small businesses. What will be provided to them are branding services. The customer will buy because Starr360 will help them increase their value. There is no mention of designers or design work. As stated earlier, brand services encompass more than just logos. By stating that brand services are what Starr360 provides, it gives the company focus without getting pigeonholed to just a few service offerings.

The combination of a strong value proposition and a satisfied client can bring about additional work generated from the client. Another research conclusion finds that professional athletes generally have entrepreneurial visions that extend beyond their on-the-field exploits. After an athlete is serviced with a personal brand that he or she is satisfied with, he or she may be more likely to call upon the same designer to provide branding services for their present and future entrepreneurial endeavors. By making this client a “partner” in the process, the designer gives the client more of a reason to talk about the service he is receiving to his peers, colleagues, and business partners. This is described as word-of-mouth marketing, the act of giving people a reason to talk about your services and making it easier for that conversation to take place.

Both of these client-generated interest strategies benefit the designer because it is often more expensive to attract new customers than it is to retain current ones. This mantra, can be expanded to include new customers garnered from word-of-mouth methods, since the existing client is potentially providing a bulk of the new client generation.

In the long run, the value proposition will be stronger if the service provider manages to build a long-term relationship with his clients. My research shows that professional athletes prefer long-term relationships with their service providers. Long-term relationships amplify trust and loyalty factors that
yield new clients through word-of-mouth and observation. An advantageous value exchange, a sequence of steps necessary to keep both parties to the transaction satisfied, making it more likely they’ll continue to do business in the future, could possibly be used to strengthen a designer’s value proposition even further.

5.5 Value to the Athlete

Athletes can capitalize on their popularity to increase their visibility and income streams. This can lead to elevated piece of mind and a better quality of life. (see sections 2.3 & 2.4)

5.5.1 Increased Visibility

Since brand identity is the tangible expression of who one is, an athlete’s brand mark, website, and commercials keep him visible while he is not playing. George Forman is now known more for his grill than his hall of fame boxing career. In the past, Foreman’s visibility was regulated to old fight films and pictures (usually getting knocked out by Muhammad Ali.) His brand was—old, mean boxer who lost to Ali at the “Rumble in the Jungle.” Now, one cannot enter a department store or flip through the channels without seeing old George hocking grills or Meineke Car Care Centers. His brand is now—youthful old pitchman that held the heavyweight title in his 40s.

Figure 5.4: George Foreman’s brand marks

5.5.2 Increased Income / Income Sustainability

If an athlete’s brand is strong, he or she could increase their earning potential during and after their playing days. A strong brand means that the consumer views it in a high regard, meaning they would be more apt to support that brand as opposed to supporting a weak or non-existent one.

All time great NBA player Earvin “Magic” Johnson has become as deft an entrepreneur as he was a Hall of Fame point guard for the Los Angeles Lakers. His “Magic Johnson Enterprises and Foundation” has helped his brand become one of the most recognizable in the world.
As one of the most highly recognized people in the world, Earvin “Magic” Johnson’s Q Score is higher now than when he was playing basketball. Nationally recognized as the number one rated athlete for corporate endorsements (TSE Sports & Entertainment Survey, April 2007), and as one of the most highly rated celebrities able to influence consumer purchasing power (rated 6 out of 350 according to the 2006 Davie Brown Index), Johnson’s universal appeal is evident. (Magic Johnson Enterprises. n.d.)

Among his many business partnerships are thirty-one Burger King Magic restaurants, a Magic Johnson’s T.G.I. Friday’s, and his 24 Hour Fitness Magic Johnson Sports Clubs. (He incorporates his name in almost every business he heads) If the Magic brand was not so trusted and recognizable, none of this would be possible. His brand took a humongous blow after his admission that he had contracted the HIV virus, but he recovered through his strong and purposeful efforts.

![Magic Johnson Enterprises brand mark](image)

5.6 The Athlete’s Performance

In order for a designer to effectively create and influence a consumer’s choices regarding the athlete’s brand, a certain level of performance has to be maintained by the athlete. Professional athletes are players first in the minds of most consumers. An elite athlete’s introduction to the sports world is on a field or in an arena. This is where the connection between the fans and an athlete is maintained during and after their careers are over.

Since brand is the consumer’s perception of the athlete, performance on and off the field is directly tied to an athlete’s brand. Washington Wizards guard, Gilbert Arenas could not elevate his brand before his game elevated (see section 6.1.4). Keeping out of trouble and staying out of damaging headlines also plays a large part in creating conditions conducive to branding success. The Michael Vick and Kobe Bryant brands were both heavily damaged because of negative headlines. Conditions like these can seriously hamper a brands possibility of success. If an athlete’s expected level of performance is maintained, the consumer may even be more apt to remember, and subsequently support that athlete after their playing days are over. By maintaining a certain level of performance, the athlete sets the proper stage for the designer to build a brand.
5.7 What a Strong Brand can Provide

Again using Sony for example, a strong and convincing brand is needed to lure a consumer into purchasing Sony’s television instead of another brand of television. This brand starts with a unique and identifiable symbol that serves to differentiate it from competing products. This symbol is part of the consumer’s pre-existing brand image that is formulated from the company’s identity, its strategic goal for the brand. This is all part of Sony’s brand strategy to convince the consumer to ultimately purchase Sony’s products.

5.7.1 Successful Businesses have strong brands

Brand stories have plots and characters, and they rely heavily on metaphor to communicate and to spur our imaginations. As these stories collide in everyday social life, conventions eventually form. Sometimes a single common story emerges as a consensus view. Most often, though, several different stories circulate widely in society. A brand emerges when these collective understandings become firmly established. (Holt 2004, 3)

CNNMoney’s top companies on its list of “Blue-Ribbon Companies” (companies listed the most in Fortune lists) are also frequently listed on Interbrand’s “Best Global Brands” list:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPANY NAME</th>
<th>BEST GLOBAL BRAND POSITION</th>
<th>BLUE-RIBBON TIER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coca-Cola</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 (5 list appearances)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microsoft</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 (6 list appearances)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBM</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intel</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disney</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMW</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3 (4 list appearances)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nike</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 5.2: List of top companies and their brand positions
Source: (Data adapted from Blue-Ribbon Companies 2006 & Interbrand’s Best Global Brands 2006)
It is not a coincidence that the most successful companies have the strongest brands. As stated before, a company cannot rely solely on its product as a lure for the consumer. The top companies have very similar products due to the availability of the best technology, ingredients, and materials. Coca-Cola™ and its products are very similar to Pepsi’s™ products (brand #22). The difference is that Coca-Cola is perennially the most recognized brand in the world. Coca-Cola is relatively more successful than Pepsi because of this. Athletic brands like adidas™ (#71) and Reebok™ (out of top 100) possess the same technology, materials, and quality as Nike™. Nike continues to dominate the market because of their relentless attention to brand strategy.

5.7.2 Band Strategy: Gatorade™

Brand strategy is the ‘big picture’ plans and tactics deployed by an organization/brand owner to create brand equity (www.allaboutbranding.com). Gatorade created a new market in 1966 and has continued to thoroughly dominate this market despite the constant influx of heavy competition. The sports drink market continues to be controlled by Gatorade because of its very innovative and well thought out brand strategy. Because of this, Gatorade is now synonymous with sports and athletes throughout the world. (Rovell 2006)

![Figure 5.6: Brand placement—Gatorade cups](image)

NFL coolers and cups: In 1967 Gatorade signed a $25,000-a-year deal with the NFL to be the official sports drink of that league. This required tremendous foresight because the NFL was popular at that time but not nearly as popular as it is now. The deal required all NFL teams to place Gatorade branded coolers on their sidelines. These teams also had to drink out of Gatorade branded cups. The teams were not
required to drink Gatorade. However, to observers it seemed as if every team was drinking it. Gatorade effectively made people believe that everyone was drinking its product. Product placement is important, proper product placement is paramount. (Rovell 2006)

Figure 5.7: Brand placement—Gatorade baths

_Gatorade baths:_ To this day, Gatorade baths signal a big victory in outdoor sports, particularly football. Because of the strategic placement of Gatorade coolers on the sidelines of NFL franchises, something unexpected and wonderful happened to Gatorade’s brand. An athlete grabbed one of Gatorade’s coolers and dumped its contents onto the winning coach at the end of a big game. This was caught on television and was big news shortly thereafter. This “bath” was viewed as a celebratory gesture by the masses and was quickly copied around the league. Even though the dunking was originally more of a revenge-laden gesture, the extra publicity Gatorade garnered was priceless. Gatorade created its own luck by implementing a well thought out brand strategy. Its brand was strong enough to absorb that exposure explosion and it was nimble enough to ride it out for years to come. (Rovell 2006)

Figure 5.8: Brand placement—endorsements

_Be Like Mike:_ To grow its brand beyond the stratosphere Gatorade signed Michael Jordan to a ten year, $13.5 million deal to make him their exclusive spokesperson. Signing the most popular athlete in the world to an exclusive deal positioned Gatorade in a class by itself. Gatorade did not work on signing multiple personalities like Coke and Pepsi. Those brands were marketed to everyone so they had
entertainers like Michael Jackson and Elton John as well as athletes like Magic Johnson and Bo Jackson. Gatorade was a sports drink that marketed mainly to athletes. They knew that their return on investment would far outreach the $13.5 million they were investing in the ultimate pitchman, Michael Jordan. (Rovell 2006) Prior to signing Jordan in 1991, Gatorade’s sales reached $681 million. Gatorade now controls eighty percent of the market, with $1.5 billion in revenues (Johnson and Harrington. n.d.).

5.7.3 Brand Loyalty

For iconic brands, the conventional argument comes from emotional branding: Loyalty is produced by the customer’s relationship with the brand. As customers fall into a relationship—which often mimics interpersonal relationships with intimacy, reciprocity, loyalty, and so forth—they are less likely to switch, as doing so would violate the relationship. (Holt 2004, 150)

An example of this phenomenon is demonstrated every time a healthy debate wages between Apple™ and PC users. Each side defends their respective brand while lambasting the other as if they were akin to the product. Apple users that use PC’s at work and vice versa feel as if they are somehow violating their relationship. Athletes have strong loyalties with brand names like Nike and Under Armor™. Some consumers are very loyal to automobile manufacturers. If a driver has a bad experience with a vehicle, they may never purchase from that manufacturer again, while telling all of their friends never to purchase it either. Others, who have great experiences with their vehicle, may only purchase from that manufacturer from that point on because they are loyal to that brand.

*Cult Brands*: “Cult Brands aren’t just companies with products or services to sell. To many of their followers, they are a living, breathing surrogate family filled with like-minded individuals. They are a support group that just happens to sell products and services.” (Bueno. N.d) Cult brands are not necessarily the largest and most successful brands in the marketplace (Ragas and Bueno 2002). Multi-million dollar marketing budgets cannot compete with or replace the passion and relationships cult brands possess. Consider the contrast between Nike and Vans™. Nike is one of the most popular producers of athletic shoes and apparel in the world. They service sports from basketball to boxing, and, since the mid-nineties, have ventured into the skateboarding shoe market—but is having a difficult time gaining market share in this market.
Vans is currently tops in that market (in terms of dollars) (Top skate shoe brands 2002). Vans specifically develops products for “Core Sports” like skateboarding, surfing, and BMX biking. They have been around since the skateboarding popularity boom, rarely venturing outside of this client base, and constantly taking cues and suggestions from its customers. Vans is a business founded and managed by skaters; its shoes are designed by skaters; and its stores are run by skaters. Because of this, consumers of Vans products, skaters, feel like loyal partners, contributors, and followers of the brand. Vans succeeds in creating and retaining loyal customers that become brand advocates and walking billboards. These customers feel as if they are a part of a group, which human beings naturally yearn for. They may feel as if they are “cheating” on Vans if they ventured from the Vans brand. Even though Vans is a mere drop in the bucket compared to Nike’s financial prowess, its creative branding techniques help create opportunities for passion and enthusiasm to take place for the brand.

Under Armour™ is another athletic apparel company making strides to become a cult brand. By catering strictly to the “serious” athlete, wearers of Under Armour gear make statements on the field or in the gym, that “we are not like everyone else, we take this a little more seriously than you”, you, meaning the wearers of Nike, Adidas, and Reebok gear. Under Armour’s ultra-simple, performance driven apparel design, supports this sense of seriousness. It’s advertising material always features super-passionate, prototypical athletes participating or preparing for competition of some sort.

![Figure 5.9: Brand loyalty—Under Armour ad](image)

By using deft branding techniques, Under Armour wants a customer, wearing one of their shirts, to feel a connection to the athletes in the ads as well as the other people wearing Under Armour gear in the gym. Under Armour is building a sense of community. They are inviting customers to be a part of their group.
5.7.4 Part of a Different Language

“Brands aren’t just a way of remembering what you want to buy any more. They’ve become part of the fabric of our society. Brands are part of our system of ordering things—they even create context about who we are and how we live…They articulate who you are and what your values are.” (Atkin 2004, 115) Brands create an extended language. Stronger brands become intertwined within our way of communicating. When someone wants a sports drink they do not order a “sports drink”, they order a Gatorade. In some parts of the country all sneakers are called Nikes even though they might be Reebok’s. In other parts, all soda is called Coke even though it might be Mountain Dew. Basketball players around the world yell out “Jordan!” when they go to the hoop or shoot a fadaway jump shot.

5.8 Personal Branding

Top entertainers, politicians, and athletes have long used branding principles and strategy to create stardom. Now, savvy professionals, businesspeople, and entrepreneurs are also using self-, or personal, branding, so that they can be more successful.

If you study the lives of successful entrepreneurs, well-known business executives, politicians, performers, and the like, you’ll discover that hard work or luck alone wasn’t instrumental in their achievement. Rather, their success was the result of a conscious process, a strategic branding process, often undertaken with the assistance of advisors, coaches, and other mentors who propelled their achievements and celebrity. (Kaputa 2006, XV)

Individuals are judged by their brand identity: their appearance, business cards, websites and outward behavior. This judgment is made before any work or experience is shown. A personal brand is the idea that comes to mind when other people think about you. It is the process that combines your skills, personality, and unique characteristics and packages them into a powerful identity that lifts you above the crowd of anonymous competitors (Montoya 2002). It can and should be positive, but it, without the proper care, can also be negative. Everyone, whether they like it or not, has a personal brand. How serious they are about controlling it is up to the them.
In the book “UR a Brand!” one of the ways to strengthen a personal brand is to become a little bit famous. Playing sports professionally is one of the most public professions in the world. Almost every professional athlete is a little bit more famous than the average person. The world is allowed to peek into an athlete’s “workspace” on a (sometimes) daily basis. The football player’s football field is his workspace. The basketball court is a basketball player’s workspace. Multitudes of fans go, or tune in to watch these athletes perform at work. Oftentimes this observation does not stop when the player leaves the office. His or her image is constantly on display, at work or not.

5.8.1. Michael Jordan: Brand Invention

Figure 5.10: Michael Jordan and his Nike brand mark

From 1993 to 2006 Michael Jordan was this country’s favorite athlete. Michael Jordan is a good (albeit unique) example of how to create a personal brand. Nike succeeded in making Michael Jordan, the superstar basketball player into “Air” Jordan, the world icon. A new brand mark was created and was followed by a shoe with a new “Air” feature that placed an air bubble in its heel. The message was clear: Air Jordan is so good that he needs his own shoe, and if you buy his shoe you will improve your game.

Jordan is very particular about his personal brand. In order to protect this brand he rarely takes a stand on any hot-button issues. He rarely speaks publicly about anything not sports related but he always kept his game at a stratospheric level. Metaphorically, Michael Jordan, the man is likened to Clark Kent; while “Air” Jordan, the basketball player, can “fly”, and is our real-life Superman.

5.8.2 Kobe Bryant: Brand Reinvention

Kobe Bryant was lauded as being the next Michael Jordan: the next basketball player that could dominate on and off the court with skill and charisma. Bryant played the part, winning three championships
on the court, and signing lucrative endorsement deals off of it. He was a very likeable guy who spoke multiple languages and played in one of the worlds largest entertainment markets, Los Angeles. A brand identity was created for Kobe, which led to endorsement deals of all kinds.

![Figure 5.11: Kobe Bryant](image)

Unfortunately he made a bad move off of the court, effectively fracturing his ultra-clean image and subsequent brand. To compound this, his team, the Los Angeles Lakers, were not winning like in previous years. Needless to say, this led to the loss of many fans, supporters, and almost all of his endorsement deals.

Since then, Kobe’s brand has gone through a re-construction period. He changed his jersey number on the court, some say to mark a new beginning. He has softened his on-court persona and is staying out of the news off-of-the-court. Because of this brand re-invention, Kobe signed a $40 million deal with Nike and his jersey is back on top as the NBA’s top seller, which is a popular gauge as to how popular an athlete is. Above all, Kobe Bryant started performing at an even higher MVP-caliber level and his team started winning again. Although his brand probably will not be viewed in the same light as before, it is successfully changing consumers’ perceptions and making forward progress once again.

5.8.3 Tim Duncan: Brand Control

When one does not take control of his brand someone else will. Tim Duncan has been one of the NBA’s best players with a fundamentally dominant game that has contributed to four NBA championships for the San Antonio Spurs. Duncan does not have much of an off-court presence.
One athlete that cares a great deal about his brand is Shaquille O’Neal. At an All-Star game, the cameras caught Shaq calling Duncan “Big Fundamentals.” Because Duncan never really took control of his own brand, a more charismatic peer created one for him, for better or for worse. Acquiring the nickname “Big Fundamentals” incites that Duncan is basically an effective but very boring player. Any future attempts to shake this brand will be difficult.

5.8.4 Michael Vick: Brand Strength

If there is any case in professional sports where the importance of a personal brand is on display it is with Michael Vick, quarterback of the Atlanta Falcons and former face and future of the NFL. At the time of the writing of this document, Michael Vick was indicted for dog fighting incidents that occurred at a house he owned (Michael Vick Indictment 2007). Vick has not been charged with anything as of this writing, but he is not getting anything resembling the benefit of the doubt. All of his sponsors have terminated their contracts with him. Nike is not releasing his shoe and apparel line and Topps™ and Donruss™ have pulled all of his football cards from all future packages. More importantly, the Atlanta Falcons have ordered him not to report to training camp with the rest of the team.

Michael Vick has never been in any significant trouble, but his younger brother Marcus Vick (who was also a highly coveted all-star quarterback) and some acquaintances have had some publicized scrapes with the law. In my opinion, these minor infractions did enough to weaken his personal brand just enough so that he is almost one hundred percent guilty in the court of public opinion before he is found guilty of anything in the court of law.
Michael Vick’s personal brand was not strong enough to weather this storm. I believe that if his personal brand had been stronger; if he did not make that obscene gesture towards a fan after a game (Pasquarelli 2006), if he did not get caught with “drug paraphernalia” at an airport (Benn 2007), or if he carried himself with a little more professionalism, he may be getting a little more sympathy than he is now. Half of his endorsement deals pulled out prior to the dog-fighting incident because of this bad press. It does not take much to sully a personal brand and it is very difficult to clean up. Michael Vick would be smart to hire whoever Kobe Bryant hired, to clean up his brand immediately.

5.8.5 Tony Hawk: Brand Consistency

Tony Hawk is a skateboarding legend who turned pro at age 15. He became the best skateboarder in the world soon after because of his superb talent, skills, and dedication. Since then he has a perennial best selling skateboarding video game, a highly successful worldwide tour with fellow Xtreme sports stars, his own skater’s line of shoes and apparel, and a roller coaster at Six Flags Amusement Parks that simulates aerial skateboarding tricks.
Tony Hawk’s name recognition among young consumers ranks number one of all U.S. Athletes, surpassing even Shaq and Lebron James. For the many lucrative commercial deals he has accrued over the years, he has turned down many more because the companies and marketing approaches were too hokey or not realistic portrayals of the skateboarding culture. By staying true to his brand—a regular kid from San Diego who helped popularize a cult street activity for outcasts—Hawk has earned his consumers’ trust and admiration. The consistency of the Tony Hawk brand has proven to be its best asset. (Iwata. n.d.)

Going back to Gatorade—the success seen by Gatorade throughout the years came about without many changes to its original product or brand identity. Changes to a product’s brand identity or product can be confusing to the consumer, as was demonstrated when Coca-Cola introduced its “New Coke”. That product was not deemed as having a bad taste; the public just did not trust it. Gatorade’s unwavering dedication to its product and brand generates loyalty amongst its consumers. This loyalty is priceless, as the consumers become spokespersons for the brand, word-of-mouth marketing at its finest.

5.8.6 Marketing

When it comes to marketing the professional athlete, establishing a target customer is pertinent whether it is a business, individual, or community. The athlete (or his brand manager) has to know what his target customer holds in high esteem, what they do not believe in, where to find them, and how to get them to buy-in to what is being sold. Equally, or maybe even more important is how businesses figure out what professional athletes to covet to help sell their products and services. The businesses too, have to take into consideration its target customers and their values to hire an athlete that represents these same qualities. An athlete’s brand can help convince the business that it is him or her that they need to hire.

To help determine this dynamic, the Q Score marketing tool claims to measure the familiarity and appeal of sports figures amongst numerous other personalities and brands (www.qscores.com). A Q Score is basically a “brand” score since it attempts to rank how consumers perceive different identities. The “Ranking Report” gives individual personalities a “Q Score”. This score seeks to establish how positively familiar a personality is, and therefore how likely this individual will help sell a product or service. A strong personal brand could really influence this data since it is a collection of user surveys. If a user is familiar with an athlete’s brand, he or she may be more apt to give a favorable survey entry. The
“Demographic Appeal” ranks an individual personality in various demographic categories like age, gender, income, region, and race. The resulting Q scores can assist this individual’s brand manager in establishing suitable target markets. Sample Q Score data is located in the index.
CHAPTER 6

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN BROADENING AN ATHLETE’S UNDERSTANDING OF
BRANDING AND ITS VALUE

A brand designer may have to educate the client as to the benefits of a strong brand in order to spark
interest in acquiring branding services. If a client does not recognize the need for a service, he or she may
not be interested in the service. Proper education could also help to illustrate the added value the service
can provide. This newfound understanding may allow the client to make more informed inquiries and
decisions regarding their brand.

6.1 Methods

6.1.1 Use Popular Brands

Different methods can be used to facilitate this education. One could use successful, pre-existing
brands to help the client identify with what a brand is and how it can help them. From my research, the
majority of the athlete’s interviewed referenced popular brands like Nike and Adidas when asked what a
brand was. This shows that these potential clients equate branding with specific brands. By using brands
that they are already comfortable with, the service provider/educator could help the client recognize a
brand’s inherent benefit and thus recognize how a strong brand could be beneficial.

6.1.2 Make Comparisons

As described in section 5.1.1, brands allow consumers to make choices. To demonstrate this, one
could compare two or more products that the client is familiar with to, in simplified ways, demonstrate how
branding allows consumers to make these choices. An example of a lesson:
If a consumer were presented with two nondescript bottles of vodka that cost the same, how would they choose which bottle to purchase?

If the letter “A” is placed on one bottle and the letter “B” is placed on the other, a brand begins to take shape. Some consumers may select the “A” bottle because “A” comes before “B”. Some may choose the “B” bottle because they see it as the more progressive product.

Once labels and bottles are designed, consumers make their selections based on how each unique bottle connects with them. These bottle modifications represent modifications to the brands identity. One can see that every little detail effects how a product is perceived.

A bottle of ABSOLUT™ is a nondescript bottle of vodka that will struggle with differentiating itself from other competing bottles without its well thought out and iconic design and marketing.

This method could also work using businesses or individuals. Nike and Reebok could be compared. The second round draft pick, and overall invisible NBA prospect, Gilbert Arenas can be compared to the now NBA superstar Gilbert Arenas (or “Agent Zero”).
6.1.3 Compare Perceptions

In order to get to the essence of where the athlete currently stands and where they want to take their business, key questions can be asked. A survey could be administered to consumers familiar with an athlete prior to a meeting or session with that athlete. The same questions would then be administered to the athlete. These results would be compared and contrasted against the consumer’s results. The results will be displayed side-by-side to illustrate the differences between how the athlete perceives him or herself and how the consumer perceives them (Bueno 2008). Focused questions and strategies like these can help the service provider understand their client’s needs and point of view, while convincing the athlete that consumers control brands.

6.1.4 Use Successful Peers as Examples

The education methods described above can help the client realize that a strong brand carries unmatched value. Gilbert Arenas is an example of just how much value strong branding can provide. Examples of peers that are exhibiting strong branding principals can further an athlete’s understanding of a brand’s value.

As just mentioned, Gilbert Arenas was considered an undersized, nondescript second-round NBA draft pick in 2001. He wears the number zero because a high school coach, before going to the University of Arizona, told him that he would play zero minutes at that school. Once in the NBA, Arenas made an immediate impact on his team and was considered a great talent, being named the NBA Most Improved Player in 2003. He had not, however, achieved the superstar status that he currently has.

While Arenas’ play on the court garnered him a new contract with a new team, his off-court brand strategy has propelled him to superstar status. Largely created using internet tools, strong design principals, and his own engaging personality, Gilbert Arenas is put on display for anyone to experience, especially his consumers, the fans. In October, 2006 Arenas started a blog on NBA.com called “Agent Zero: The Blog File” (Agent Zero: the blog file 2008) that has become one of the most popular blogs in sports.
He has been called “the internet’s first Blog-fueled superstar”. Some wonder if his 2007 NBA All-Star selection is a direct reflection of his Internet popularity (Whitaker 2007). On NBA.com his blog receives about 101 replies per entry (18 entries, 1,826 replies). The number of Blog replies is a measurement of how many people are reading the content. In contrast, “The Court Reporters”, a blog that is written by actual NBA reporters, only warrants about 28 replies per entry despite having the most entries by far (510 entries, 14,476 replies).

This blog has spawned other important Gilbert Arenas-related personality illustrations. He challenged a teammate to a 3-point shooting contest after a practice in 2007 that was uploaded to the popular video sharing website, YouTube. The catch was that Arenas shot his 3-pointers with one hand. He won by hitting 73 out of 100 shots. Since its posting in February 2007, this video has been viewed over a million times (YouTube 2007). Gilbert’s consumers have also launched a Blog site dedicated to their favorite NBA personality called “Gilbertology” (www.gilbertology.net). Gilbertology is defined as the study of Gilbert Arenas and the site has lessons, history, and examples of some of Gilbert’s quirks that contribute to Gilbertology: like tickling a teammates armpit before tip-off or yelling out “Hibachi!” before launching a shot. Both of these tools (YouTube and Gilbertology) are consumer-generated which shows that his consumers, the fans, have become his “partners”. He has given them a reason to talk about Gilbert Arenas and has made it easier for that conversation to take place (word-of-mouth marketing, see section 5.4).

Jersey sales are a popular way to judge an athlete’s popularity. In 2005, Gilbert Arenas was not in the top twenty in jersey sales. In 2006, he finished the year twentieth in sales. He finished 2007, the first full year of his blog and everything that came with it, ninth in jersey sales only behind megastars like Lebron James and Kobe Bryant. This is even more impressive when one considers that Arenas has not had too much national media exposure.
Gilbert Arenas’ brand has catapulted him beyond being simply an NBA basketball player. He is a personality, someone to be watched, read, and listened to. The value of his brand has translated into bigger contracts, wider exposure, and consumer idolization.

Once the client recognizes the value a strong brand can provide, he or she will recognize the need. Once this is established, the client will need a designer to help fulfill their branding needs. The need and the value of branding has to be understood by the client before they will be comfortable with investing in it. Proper education can help in this understanding.

6.2 Investing in a Brand

Once the client decides to invest in brand services, the service provider has to establish, amongst many other things, the payment method to be used for compensation (see chapter 7). Again, the client may have to be educated about the different ways they can pay or invest in their brand. My research reveals that athletes will grasp payment method concepts when properly explained (see section 8.4).

Different strategies can be used to explain these concepts. My research has shown that athletes can be very apprehensive when it comes to any service that involves payment. One could use the words “invest”, “investment”, and “investing” as much as possible since that is essentially what they are doing when they choose to strengthen or “invest” in their brand. Phrases like “Investment options” and “First investment” can replace “Payment methods” and “First payment” respectively. One can go as far as to use marketing lingo like, “Investing in your brand is an investment in You!” By using the word “invest”, the athlete may better understand that branding can yield financial returns.

Like the method that involves pre-existing brands to educate a client about branding (section 6.1.4), one can utilize former and current clients (without divulging names) and the payment methods used for their projects, highlighting each unique situation. This method can help the client identify with a similar customer and their needs. Explanation of why a payment method is used for a particular project can help in their understanding.

Another method to help educate clients about differing payment methods is to devise a chart, diagram, or any other visual aid that illustrates the advantages of each method. Visual aids may help clients
that are more visual. Diagrams and charts are sometimes viewed as more reliable than someone’s explanation.

6.3 Opportunities for Continued Research

How and when to implement the aforementioned education methods may require additional research. When is the best time to start the education process? Is it while the athlete is still in college, during their rookie season, or maybe during the off-season when they’re less focused on playing? Are online education methods viable for this clientele, or are face-to-face interactions the best way to go? Do these face-to-face interactions occur in a school-like group training session, or are more relaxed individual sessions more practical? Is it a one-shot-deal or does the teaching span over days, weeks, months, or years? Answers to these questions could provide service providers a better understanding of when and how to implement their education strategies.

People tend not to trust what they do not understand. If an athlete does not understand what a brand is and how this brand can bring value, they will not trust the brand service provider and the payment methods they are attempting to push. Once understanding is gained, trust may be secured. Once trust is secured, branding may commence.
CHAPTER 7

PRICING STRUCTURES

Carolyn Davidson, the designer who designed the Nike brand mark billed Nike founder Phil Knight $35 for the famous Swoosh design. Knight is now worth $9.8 billion (Forbes 400 2007). And through his generosity, Knight compensated Carolyn twelve years later (!) with a Swoosh ring and Nike stock, however, one can not help but wonder how Carolyn would have made out if she billed Knight a percentage of his new company’s profits for the next twelve years instead of the flat $35 fee?

What if, when Knight propositions the graphic design student to create some designs for his new shoe company, Carolyn jumps at the opportunity and draws up an invoice. This invoice requests that Carolyn not be paid a set, one-time fee upon completion and acceptance of the new design. Instead it requests that the designer, Carolyn, be paid .5 percent of the company’s future earnings for the next twenty years. Nike is currently worth about $10.2 billion. Assuming that Nike was worth a third of that in 1991, at the end of the twenty-year contract, Carolyn would have received about $17 million dollars for her design.

Of course this is very hypothetical and exaggerated, however, the point is made. The pricing options generally used by designers are limited. Designers may need to adopt different and more innovative pricing structures as their role and impact on businesses grow and evolve. The fee-for-service and retainer payment methods are the most prevalent pricing methods currently used by designers.

7.1 Fee-for-services

This is the most widely used payment method where a set price is charged, dependent on the service(s) rendered. This price can be project based or based on an hourly contribution. The project-based method relies on the completion of the specified project. The final payment is made upon completion of the project, regardless of the hours spent. The hourly method relies on hours worked and a set rate for those hours. The
final payment is also made at the completion of the project but the fee is based on the hours spent on the project. Both methods generally utilize progress payments (scheduled segments of payments), which is an amount each at inception, approval and completion.

7.1.1 Advantages

- Familiarity
- Easy to manage
- Designer may have the freedom to take on multiple projects with multiple clients.

7.1.2 Disadvantages

- Client may not be the designer’s only client.
- Work and delivery estimates change but the fee may not
- No steady cash flow
- Short term client-designer relationships
- Client-designer relationships end after the project is complete.
- Compensation ends after the project is complete

7.2 Retainer

Attorneys and accountants most often use this method of payment for their services but the retainer payment method is gaining a foothold in the design industry as well. Henry Dreyfuss, an industrial designer, is widely credited for being the first designer to be taken seriously in the business world. Along with his wildly popular designs, such as the modern telephone (the Trimline and 500) and the Honeywell circular wall thermostat, Dreyfuss was the first designer to be brought in on retainer by most of his clients. In 1934 he was paid a $25,000 per year retainer to design Hoover’s Model 150 upright vacuum cleaner. (IDSA. n.d.)

The client hires a designer for a set amount of time, or a specific project, for a fee that is paid over an agreed upon schedule. A few of the different schedules used are an annual retainer, a project-based retainer and a service retainer. A 30 percent upfront fee is usually accessed for the first two methods. With
an annual retainer, the designer guarantees to be available as needed and is usually given a set number of
days or hours to be charged against the retainer. In a project-based retainer, an hourly rate is set and billed
against the retainer. Service retainers are longer-term agreements that usually involve equal monthly

7.2.1 Advantages

- Cheaper for the client in the long run due to discounts
- Preferential treatment from designer
- The designer’s availability is guaranteed for the duration of the project (or until the retainer runs
  out)
- Long term designer-client relationships
- Steady cash flow

7.2.2 Disadvantages

- Clients, if not careful, could lose control of time and costs.
- Clients may call too often for minor services.
- Clients may expect too much preferential treatment.
- The designer’s time is taken up, handicapping his or her ability to get additional work.
- Client-designer relationships end after the project is complete.
- Compensation ends after the project is complete.

7.3 Opportunities for Additional Pricing Structures

Financial advisors are paid a percentage of their client’s portfolio (usually 1 – 2 percent). The client’s
portfolio will not grow unless the financial advisor helps it grow. The percentage charged is justified
because the advisor is managing and growing the client’s money. A professional sports agent negotiates a
professional athlete’s contract and gets paid a percentage of that contract (usually 3 – 4 percent). The
percentage charged is justified because the agent is needed to help make the client more money. A designer
helps his client make more money by providing professional services that encourage current and future customers to purchase products or services. The designer is needed to help increase the client’s bottom line, but the designer is not paid any type of percentage for the services rendered.

There are opportunities for designers to adopt more diverse pricing structures, some of which involve percentages. Coursework conducted in Design 786—which focused on designers and billing negotiations—revealed that designers, although fairly comfortable with their current pricing options, are very interested in learning about additional pricing structures that could benefit them or their businesses. A couple of recommendations are as follows:

7.3.1 Percentage of Growth

The percentage of growth method is based on the amount of capital accrued as a result of the services provided. A retainer would be charged to the client before work begins. This retainer would be reimbursed at the end of the selected term (i.e., six months or one year) where an agreed upon percentage of the client’s income growth would be collected.

My recommendation is that the retainer be a set fee based on the number of services being provided. For example, a client needing only a website will be charged a $5,000 retainer. A client that needs a website and branding services will be charged an $8,000 retainer, and so on. Before the interviews were conducted, the intention was to charge the client five percent of their existing income as a retainer. When the test subjects were presented with this scenario they were almost unanimous in their staunch apprehension. Three of the subjects have been “burned” before when large up-front payments were required. Subject #2 was hesitant for a multitude of reasons but his first thought was that it would be hard for him to pay a new company, without an established track record, such a large retainer (see section 8.2.3).

Subject #3’s total football salary in 2006 was $4.8 million ($12.5 in 2004). Five percent of that is $240,000. It is my belief that he would not pay that amount as a retainer for a service he does not quite understand yet.

I would also recommend that ten percent of the total increase in income attributed to branding services be charged (see “Creating Value” section 5.3). The average NFL salary is $1.25 million per year. If an athlete making this salary increases their income by 20 percent in a year due to new branding services,
his revenue would increase an additional $250,000. The branding company would charge $25,000, ten percent of the $250,000 growth. When explaining this concept to the athletes involved in my research, they agreed that ten percent of the money the company helped generate was fair.

As stated earlier, sports agents are paid 3 – 4 percent of an athlete’s negotiated contract. For example, if an agent negotiates a three-year, $3.75 million contract for an NFL player, that agent takes $112,500 out for his fee. In terms of salary, the agent negotiates the athlete’s yearly income to be $1.25 million over three years (before fees and taxes). The agent’s per year income is $37,500.

To compare, an agent charges a percentage of an athlete’s total negotiated income, while a designer that incorporates the percentage of growth payment method, only charges a percentage of the athlete’s income growth attributed to branding services. It would be in a designer’s best interest to develop a highly effective branding strategy that would garner their client additional income, since the designer’s payment is based on this increase. The contract negotiated by the sports agent, benefits his or her clients immensely while they are on an active roster. The expanded benefits associated with an effective branding strategy also extend off-of-the-field.

7.3.2 Subscription

The subscription payment method will be offered to clients that would like constant service of their design needs but are not comfortable with the percentage of growth payment method. Based on the services needed, a set fee will be charged to the client before work begins. Upon completion of the services, the client will pay a monthly fee for as long as they want the services to be provided. The monthly fee will be based on the services they want and need. The client could also choose between differing term lengths (i.e., one, three or five years). This method will work well with clients that need web and other services (i.e., website updates, ebay monitoring, marketing services) that require constant updates.

7.4 Easing Consumer Apprehension

The research concluded that professional athletes are very apprehensive when it comes to forking over any sum of money without seeing an immediate return (see section 8.3.3). To help increase an athlete’s comfort level and trust, concessions could be made to how payments are presented and administered.
7.4.1 Consignment

An agreement could be made that communicates that any type of payment by the client would not be required until tangible progress is made. This progress would be an agreed upon step in the project that the client and service provider are comfortable with. Possible steps could be when:

- The first draft of a brand mark, website, or any other element of the brand identity is presented to the client.
- Results of the pre-questions are presented to the client (see the “Success Criteria” method of measuring value in section 5.3.3).
- The strategic branding plan is produced and introduced to the client (see section 5.3.2)

7.4.2 Incremental Buildup

Professional athletes are comfortable with the fee-for-services payment method, but the research showed that athletes were familiar, but not comfortable with, percentage-based methods. To help raise an athlete’s comfort level, the payment schedule could be tiered to utilize a payment method more in line with the client’s comfort level with the service provider and the particular project. For example:

1\textsuperscript{st} year – Fee-for-service
2\textsuperscript{nd} year – Retainer
3\textsuperscript{rd} year – Percentage of growth
4\textsuperscript{th} year – Subscription

Any combination of these methods and time intervals could be used based on the needs and comfort level of the client.

7.4.3 Partner with Existing Businesses

The service provider could partner with existing businesses that already have professional athletes as clients like sports agencies, sports agents, and marketing firms. Some professional athletes routinely contact their agent about anything they need off-of-the-field (see section 8.2.2, second question). The service provider could seek employment with that agency, or form a strategic partnership with it.
In this case, when a sports agent’s client needs branding services, you or your business would be contacted, while all contract negotiation inquiries would be referred to the agent. Another option is to invite the business to be a part of a virtual team (see section 9.1.2).
A formal questionnaire was verbally administered during the interviews, whether it was face-to-face or over the phone. Questionnaires were used due to the unique nature of the subject matter. By formulating a questionnaire I was able to ask professional athletes specific questions aimed at addressing my thesis question. As my thesis gained more focus so did my questions. The number of questions were kept to a minimum in order to keep the interview within a manageable time limit, in this case about 30 to 45 minutes. A maximum of 13 questions were formulated understanding that each question should take up to two minutes each. The questions used went through three iterations. Each iteration was an update based on feedback from my academic advisors and test subjects. The questions were separated into four distinct sections:

- **Design** related questions
- **Service** related questions
- **Business** related questions
- **Relationship** related questions

My research up to that point suggested that the success (or failure) of my hypothesis rested within these four separate yet related sets of questions. It was decided that stronger feedback would be gained if these questions were grouped together. The final number of questions ended up being 17.

The questionnaires were administered via direct face-to-face interviews. If face-to-face interviews were not possible, then one-on-one phone interviews were issued. The questions were printed out on a standard 3"x 5" sized index card. I did not want a large 8.5"x 11" piece of paper or notebook in front of me. The index card was small enough to be out of the way and its intent was to give the impression that I did
not have a large number of questions. I wanted to maintain eye contact as much as possible so it was akin to a conversation rather than a formal interview. I also recorded the session (only after permission to do so was granted.) The questionnaire is in the Appendix of this document.

8.1 The Research Subjects

#1 – This subject is a professional football player who has played in the NFL for the last six years. He received a design degree and currently dabbles with design-related projects. This player is also well versed in issues related to finances. In his downtime he has become a very successful day-trader.

#2 – Subject number two is a former professional football player who played in the NFL, CFL (Canadian Football League), and NFL Europe for a combined total of six years. At the time of the interview, he was a project manager at a large insurance company.

#3 – Subject number three has been playing in the NFL for the last nine years and is one of the best cornerbacks in the league.

#4 – This subject played in the NFL for one year before injuries put a cap on his football career. He currently runs his own insurance office as an insurance agent.

#5 – This subject is a professional golfer. He used to participate in professional golf tournaments but now he mainly makes his living teaching the game, running golf clubs, and dealing in golf equipment.

#6 – Subject number six is a former professional women’s basketball player who played in the WNBA and professionally in Italy for a year and a half. At the time of the interview she was the assistant varsity girls basketball coach at a local high school.

#7 – Subject number seven is a former professional basketball player who played overseas for three years prior to joining the NBA for the next seven years. He has written a book and is currently pursuing his MBA.
8.2 Questionnaire Results

#1 – Professional football player
#2 – Former professional football player
#3 – Professional football player
#4 – Former professional football player
#5 – Professional golfer
#6 – Former professional women’s basketball player
#7 – Professional basketball player

*Note: Listed are the subjects’ abbreviated responses.

8.2.1 Design Related

- What is your understanding of a brand identity?
  - #1 • Stamp on life*
    - Last Name
  - #2 • Company
    - Identified Companies like Mercedes, 3M, Toyota
  - #3 • Don’t know (needed explanation)
  - #4 • Doesn’t know
    - Image (after explanation)
    - Perception to public (after explanation)
  - #5 • Success one encounters
    - Who you are
    - Unavoidable in professional ranks
  - #6 • Initially doesn’t know
    - Recognizes Nike and sports brands
  - #7 • Authenticity
    - How he is perceived
    - Message

Some participants recognized that a brand identity had something to do with a company. Large and popular companies like Nike, Mercedes and Toyota were mentioned.

A couple of participants recognized that a brand identity tied into an individual person. One participant attributed this to the fact that most athletes are identified by their last name throughout their playing days. Therefore their last name is their brand.

One of the participants didn’t grasp the concept at all until it was explained. Every one of the participants needed further explanation because of some confusion or unawareness.

- Where did (or didn’t) you obtain your information regarding branding?
  - #1 • Life
    - Growing up
    - Being an athlete and having your name on things
All of the participants attributed life experiences and/or personal knowledge to where they gained their understanding of branding. No one cited school or their agent as reference points.

- Name three athlete related brands you are familiar with.
  
  #1 • Nike  
  • Reebok  
  • Adidas
  
  #2 • Michael Jordan/Nike  
  • Tiger Woods/Buick  
  • Dwayne Wade/Cadillac  
  *(all individuals promoting another brand)*
  
  #3 • Reebok  
  • Adidas  
  • Nike
  
  #4 • Nike  
  • NCAA  
  • Under Armor
  
  #5 • Taylor-Made  
  • Adidas  
  • Nike
  
  #6 • Nike  
  • Adidas  
  • Puma
  
  #7 • Michael Jordan  
  • Tiger Woods  
  • Lebron James

Echoing the earlier sentiment that brand identity had something to do with a large company, all but two of the participants chose three familiar athletic apparel companies. The participants that did not choose apparel companies instead chose three popular athletes and the companies they endorse.
• Do you see the benefit of having a brand identity?
  
  #1  • Yes
  
  #2  • Yes
  
  #3  • Of course
  
  #4  • Yes
  
  #5  • Yes
  • Every day corporate world or golf course
  
  #6  • Yes
  
  #7  • Yes

• Do you (or did you) have a brand identity?
  
  #1  • Yes
  • Last name is his brand
  • Middle name is used for his LLC
  • Designed a mark based on his initials
  
  #2  • No
  • Wants one for his future business
  
  #3  • No
  • Thought the mouthpiece he almost endorsed would be his brand identity.
  • Needed further explanation
  
  #4  • Used to
  
  #6  • Yes
  • Established a nickname
  • “The Truth”
  • Used when announced in college and pro ranks
  
  #7  • Wants to be known as someone who is more than a basketball player

One test subject has a couple of brands that he uses for business purposes. Both of his brands are derivatives of his name. The name of his LLC is his middle name and he has designed a mark that are his initials.

Two of the test subjects have had a brand that was based on their existing names. One of the subjects was given a nickname that described the type of player she was that followed her throughout her professional sports career.

One subject realizes what his personal brand is but has not taken full advantage of it. His personal brand has helped him further his career off of the field.

Two of the test subjects never had a brand identity but would definitely want one for future business endeavors. One of the subjects mistakenly thought that a brand he was going to endorse would in turn be his brand. He needed further explanation.

• Does (or did) anyone in particular handle your design needs?
#1 • He handles his own design needs (designer by trade)

#2 • No
• He would utilize his personal and business relationships to garner these services

#3 • No
• Agent tried

#4 • Yes
• One graphic designer created a mark then disappeared

#5 • Not at his level
• Higher level guys like Tiger have people
• His sponsor Taylor-Made Adidas allows him to custom fit his clubs.

#6 • Yes
• Printing company

#7 • Yes

The subjects that have had someone to handle their design needs hired individual designers not design companies. One athlete used the services of a printing company used to print promotional items, while another handles his own design related issues. The subjects that do not utilize anyone to handle their design needs have not identified or recognized these needs. None of the test subjects had anyone handling their design needs while they were playing.

• If you need design services where would you look or who would you contact?

#1 • Friends/colleagues
• Internet
• Top page of Google

#2 • Someone in the NFL

#3 • Call agent

#4 • Brandan Craft
• Friends

#5 • Folks in the industry

#6 • Ask around first
• Internet second
• Easier to see work on internet

#7 • Friends and references

8.2.2 Service Related

• What services do (or did) you utilize outside of the traditional agent-provided services?
#1 • Apparel marketing
#2 • Loans
  • Investments
#3 • Not many
  • Publicist later this year to get his name out to a wider audience.
#4 • None while playing
  • All about playing
#5 • Mostly all of his services are outsourced
#6 • Lawyer
  • Graphics person
#7 • Financial Advisor
  • Accountant
  • Lawyer

The answers here varied widely. One of the test subjects does utilize his agent for everything he needs such as hiring a publicist to help get his name out to the public.

• How would (or did) you find the service providers?
  
  #2 • Friends
    • Has many options
  #3 • Called agent
    • Agent secured his publicist
  #4 • Would not seek out other service providers
    • Just trying to make it to the next contract
  #5 • Word-of-mouth
    • Service providers find the athlete most of the time.
  #6 • Lawyer found through family
    • Agents approached her; It was a tryout
  #7 • Friends and colleagues
    • Most athletes use their agents for things like that

  In most cases service providers usually find the athlete when they are playing professionally. With respect to agents, it turns into a mini tryout where different agents vie to represent the athlete. If not that, then the subjects turn to their peers and word-of-mouth to find their service providers. One athlete would contact his agent to gain outside service providers. Another athlete admitted that this is indeed the norm in professional sports.

8.2.3 Business Related

• Do you currently have any entrepreneurial endeavors?
The subjects who have entrepreneurial endeavors have more than one. They all dabble in real estate. Two of the athletes hold a youth camp for their respective sports. All of the athletes that do not have any entrepreneurial endeavors plan to have some soon.

- What compensation method is (was) used for the aforementioned service providers?

  - #1 Percentage off of top
  - #2 A lot of them are free because I am helping them grow their business
  - #3 Does not know how publicist will be paid
  - #4 Flat fees
  - #5 Fee based
  - #6 Lawyer is hourly
  - #7 Lawyer is hourly
• What is your understanding of the percentage of income growth payment method?

  #1  •  No understanding
     •  Needs explanation
     •  Deals with interest

  #2  •  Needs explanation
     •  Currently service providers get percentage of entire pay before taxes.
     •  Percentage of income growth method is even better.

  #3  •  Clueless, even after explanation

  #4  •  Designer is paid the interest
     •  After explanation fully understood

  #5  •  Fully understands it
     •  This payment method is currently used

  #6  •  Charge is based on how much loot she makes

  #7  •  Understood but needed explanation for details

• How would you respond to the following proposition: “I could increase your yearly income by 20%”?

  #1  •  Laughs
     •  Would not go for it
     •  Needs answers to all questions
     •  It would help if service came from a referral
     •  Needs to be totally comfortable

  #2  •  Show me your plan

  #3  •  Curious to see how to make more money
     •  Wonders how the service provider gets compensated

  #4  •  Guaranteed?
     •  Skeptical if not familiar with the person
     •  May give the service a chance if the person in known
     •  Needs proof

  #5  •  Show me proof

  #6  •  No
     •  Look at the financial lifestyle of who is asking
     •  Look for quality business package

  #7  •  Very leery
     •  20% is virtually impossible unless it deals with real estate
Most of the test subjects would want to see some sort of proof before they would go any further. They are very skeptical of any sort of guarantee. They would want to see a presentation or a quality business package, a “deal closer” that would help ease their reservations (see section 5.3).

If this came from a referral, the subject may be more apt to listen. This would help with their comfort level.

• How about this proposition: “In order to get started I would need 5% of your existing salary as a retainer.”

  #1  • Very apprehensive
  • Tries to quickly work out dollar amounts
  • Flat dollar amount would make him more comfortable

  #2  • Tough if it’s a new company
  • He would look at the service provider like he was crazy.
  • Selling a dream
  • Sounds like there is a catch
  • Would help if a month or two of service is provided first.
  • Sounds too good to be true
  • Has been burned before
  • Needs some sort of assurance

  #3  • Does not trust the proposition based on past bad experience

  #4  • Understands and on board as long as the 20% is guaranteed

  #5  • Red Flag

  #6  • No
  • Doesn’t like large payment up front
  • May get burned
  • Has been burned before

• Do you currently sell anything?

  #1  • No
  • Design services are given away

  #2  • No
  • Interested in selling sports products
  • Interested in eBay

  #3  • No
  • Was very interested in marketing the mouthpiece
  • Sounded too good to be true; had to put up $100,000.00
  • Has never been approached to sell anything online

  #4  • Sold his image when conducting his football camps

  #5  • No
  • Planning an apparel line
#6 • Not sports related
• Interested in selling something online because she is online buying things all of the time.

#7 • Book
• Speaking engagements

Some of the subjects are interested in e-commerce because they currently buy things online.

8.2.4 Relationship Related

• What frustrates (or frustrated) you about the services and/or the people providing the services you acquired?

#1 • Timeliness
• Desired product is not always available
• He would like it if his Reebok contract were validated for a year so if you leave a team mid-year you are guaranteed product.

#2 • Too many clients
• Big clients vs. small client attention discrepancy
• He would find someone new and hungry that needs to impress

#3 • Dishonesty

#4 • No control over his brand
• Timeliness

#5 • Timeliness
• Product vs. service
• Lack of follow-up does not match the high quality product

#6 • Person has not done it for themselves
• Can’t answer all questions
• To make if better she thinks she needs to research more

#7 • Not working hard enough to get things done
• Pros and cons are not broken down
• Short term instead of long term relationships

Frustrations include timeliness, too many clients or lack of attention due to mega clients, dishonesty, lack of control, and follow-up issues. One subject would find someone new and hungry to quell some of these frustrations.

• What delights (or delighted) you about the services and/or the people providing the services you acquired?

#1 • Picks up the phone
• Hassle-free

#2 • Hunger to serve
• Hard work
Second contract was larger than expected
  • Very accessible

Finished product
  • Reliable support

Good product
  • Free product
  • On-going testing
  • (very product based)

Making money

The level of commitment is the same as bigger clients

What would satisfy you the most regarding the delivery of needed services?

Accessibility of information

Good relationship

Honesty

Prompt Support

Next-day turnaround

Timeliness

Delivering what is promised
  • Honesty

Prompt service, easy access to information, a good personal relationship, and honesty round out the ways to satisfy these athletes.
8.3 Questionnaire Results Breakdown

8.3.1 Design Related

- What is your understanding of a brand identity?
  Based on the interviews, an athlete understands what a brand is but needs to be educated on individual brand identity.

- Where did (or didn’t) you obtain your information regarding branding?
  Individual branding is not formally taught. Information about branding is obtained through experience and the world around them.

- Name three athlete related brands you are familiar with.
  All of the brands mentioned are very popular and well thought of.

- Do you see the benefit of having a brand identity?
  All of the participants said yes to this question. They recognize that having a brand could only be beneficial.

- Do you (or did you ever) have a brand identity?
  All but one of the test subjects who have had a brand identity have not utilized it to further their career off of the field. All but two athletes barely recognized that their name alone was a valuable brand. The test subjects that have never had a brand identity most certainly did not recognize that their name alone was a brand. They definitely would like to have a professional brand identity.

- If you need design services, where would you look or whom would you contact?
  Most of the test subjects would ask their peers first or contact their respective league’s for recommendations. Secondarily, they would turn to the Internet for information. One subject would contact his agent.

8.3.2 Service Related

- What services do (or did) you utilize outside of the traditional agent-provided services?
  Generally there seems to be trust issues between the athlete and their agent. All but one of the athletes seems content using their agent solely for contract related issues.
How would (or did) you find the service providers?

Service providers vie for a professional athletes’ attention in most cases whether the athlete likes it or not. Athletes are weary of service providers but when they are needed they call on their peers for recommendations. Most athletes, however, call upon their agents to find service providers.

8.3.3 Business Related

Do you currently have any entrepreneurial endeavors?

All of the athletes, if they are not doing so already, have visions of doing something outside of their respective sport or job.

What compensation method is (was) used for the aforementioned service providers?

The test subjects are familiar with percentage based payment methods because of how their agents operate. Many of the other service providers use some sort of percentage-based or flat fee method.

What is your understanding of the percentage of income growth payment method?

All but one of the test subjects needed further explanation. After further explanation one subject still did not understand. Two of the subjects thought it had something to do with interest.

How would you respond to the following proposition: “I could increase your yearly income by 20%”?

Even though the subjects were curious on how they could make more money, their initial reaction was almost always filled with skepticism.

How about this proposition: “In order to get started, I would need 5% of your existing salary as a retainer.”

The general consensus is very apprehensive. The subjects are apprehensive because they are not comfortable handing over large sums of money without an immediate return, it sounds too good to be true, and they, or some of their peers have been burned before.
Do you currently sell anything?

One subject sells a book he has written and does speaking engagements. All of the other subjects have not sold anything.

8.3.4 Relationship Related

- What frustrates (or frustrated) you about the services and/or the people providing the services you acquired?
  
  Timeliness is the biggest source of frustration. One subject wishes that more of his business relationships be long-term instead of short-term relationships.

- What delights (or delighted) you about the services and/or the people providing the services you acquired?
  
  Accessibility and all things related to accessibility is the biggest source of delight.

- What would satisfy you the most regarding the delivery of needed services?
  
  Prompt service and honesty would satisfy these subjects the most.

8.4 Summary of Questionnaire

When it comes to the general concept of brand identity, current and former professional athletes require formal education (outside of life experiences), to fully grasp the concept (8.2.1, first question). Most athletes equate branding with success shown by the immensely popular brands they immediately recognize (Nike, Adidas, Reebok, Cadillac, etc.). Once understood, the athlete is more than willing to entertain the possibility, and sometimes is very excited about obtaining a personal brand identity. Subject #4 frequently sat back in his chair and contemplated how branding could serve him better. He let me know that he would be more than willing to be my first client.

There are definite opportunities for designers and athletes to conduct business around branding. These opportunities can only materialize if the designer’s product is of the highest quality. Professional athletes are part of a close-knit network and they work amongst themselves, meaning that one satisfied client will undoubtedly breed additional clients wanting the same high-quality service. In the event
that they need a brand, personally or for entrepreneurial purposes, they will, more times than not, turn to
their peers for recommendations on designers or design firms (8.2.1, last question). It is very important to
find a way into an athlete’s circle of friends, acquaintances, and business contacts (8.2).

Design-related services generally fall outside of the services an agent provides to his or her clients,
which is primarily contract negotiation. These other services are almost always obtained using the word-of-
mouth method. Because a designer will be dealing with an individual, not a business, a designer must have
marketing ability and superb inter-personal skills. A designer should also have a working relationship with
multiple agents. Although trust issues run rampant amongst an athlete and their agent, a good amount of
professional athletes still utilize their agent to obtain any other services they need. This is partly because
the agent strategically places himself as the athlete’s primary connection to anything off of the field (8.2.2,
second question). A designer has to cover all bases in order to be successful.

Athletes generally have entrepreneurial visions that extend beyond their athletic backgrounds
(8.2.3, first question). Real estate is a popular endeavor amongst athletes. The NFL provides various
programs to educate athletes in various business ventures off of the field including real estate. Subject #1
informed me that these programs tend to have very low attendance because it is not mandatory and players
are very focused on on-field performance. Off-the-field issues are very secondary.

A designer is not limited to solely providing branding services. These athletes have the desire to
start businesses off of the field that will undoubtedly need other design services in addition to branding.
The designer could use this opportunity to increase his or her value by offering some non-design services.

The primary compensation method used by an athlete’s agent and other service providers is either
percentage or fee based, so they generally understand how percentage based payment methods work.
However, their understanding of the percentage of income growth payment method is limited. Most need
further explanation and education to grasp the concept entirely. One subject could not grasp the concept but
most understood it after a brief explanation (8.2.3, third question).

Professional athletes are always looking for additional opportunities to increase their income.
They are very apprehensive, however, when it comes to new ideas however, because they are introduced to
so many “too-good-to-be-true” propositions that fail to materialize. If an athlete is told that he or she could
increase their income by utilizing a service, they are interested but very skeptical. They undoubtedly would
need some sort of proof, whether it be a strong portfolio showcasing other satisfied clients, or a strong plan and business package. When asked about how they would respond to the proposition, “I could increase your yearly income by twenty percent,” Subject #1 immediately laughed while most of the other subjects would need to see proof. Any guarantees or methods of down payment make professional athletes very leery because of negative experiences. Concessions would have to be made in order to ease their apprehension (see section 7.6).

Even though athletes generally understand the concept of a retainer, muted paranoia occurs when it comes to up-front payment for services. Athletes are not comfortable and flat out do not trust anyone who is asking them to hand over large amounts of money without seeing an immediate return (see section 7.6).

When it comes to actually providing services to current and future professional athletes, prompt service, accessibility, honesty, and tangible results are the most desired attributes in a professional relationship. Some athletes also desire long-term (instead of short-term) business relationships. Subject #7 believed that short-term service providers tended to be impersonal so they were never trusted or recommended. To assist with his comfort level, he looks for longer-term business relationships. The largest sources of frustration in these relationships: lack of attention, limited control, and issues related to follow-up, are not conducive to having a long-term relationship.

In order to capitalize on the most successful means of garnering business, word-of-mouth, a designer has to make sure their services and business relationships are undeniably strong. Timeliness, accessibility, and lack of attention due to bigger named clients are all common sources of frustration amongst athletes and their current service providers. If designers want to separate themselves from the norm, then they need to excel in these areas.
CHAPTER 9

NEXT STEPS

9.1 What Can be Done: Start a Small Business Focusing on Branding Professional Athletes

The insight gained from this research presents realistic opportunities for moving forward with a business model that capitalizes on unique pricing structures and focuses on branding professional athletes. Professional athletes, however, will not be the only clients the company works with, and branding will not be the only service offered. These elements will serve as the unique entities that differentiate this business from others.

Since this research suggests that word-of-mouth and client/designer relationships can be the strongest marketing techniques when it comes to professional athletes, time will be taken to introduce the new business to the athletes used as research subjects. By granting interviews, these athletes have a general understanding of what this business is introducing and most of them would like to know more about it (as dialogue after the questionnaire indicated). Discounted services for a couple of these athletes may be provided to help clarify the business’s service offerings and work processes, while obtaining fresh material for the business’s portfolio. If the design company’s value proposition is carried out and the athlete is delighted with the provided services, they could become brand advocates for the company. This could aid in penetrating the athlete’s social and professional circles (see section 9.2).
Before all of this occurs, the business itself has to be branded. The name of the proposed company is Starr360, playing on the relationship between professional athletes and the word “star”, and using “360” to imply that the company offers a complete catalog of service offerings. The brand mark combines a typical star form with a linear figure that could be seen as “running” to convey motion.

Figure 9.1: Starr360 brand mark

9.1.1 Where to Market

Professional athletes are located all around the world. In the United States the biggest concentration of professional sports teams is on the East Coast.

Chart 9.1: Professional sports in the United States and Canada
Source: (Rosenberg 2000)

The United States’ largest metropolitan area, the New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island metropolitan area (with more than 20 million residents), is home to three NHL (National Hockey League) teams, two NBA (National Basketball Association) teams, two MLB (Major League Baseball) teams, and two NFL (National Football League) teams. It is truly the central place of sports teams in North America. (Rosenberg 2000)
If a service provider whose target market is professional athletes is looking to set up shop in the United States, they probably would be well served to locate in this area of the country. This is clearly where most of the professional athletes work during their seasons. It would be more convenient to get a hold of the client and travel times may be cut down because of the close proximity.

Another solution would be to find a location where most of these athletes frequent in the off-season. My experience shows that professional athletes go to warm locales in the off-season such as Florida, Phoenix (AZ), and California (Los Angeles, San Diego). Setting up at one of these locales may make it easier to conduct off-the-field business as the athletes do not have to contend with on-the-field matters.

Another idea is to conduct business near the universities that produce the highest number of professional athletes. It may be easier to gain the attention of a future professional athlete, following all NCAA rules and regulations, of course, before he or she ships out. Most of these athletes are fiercely loyal to their school and return frequently. They may have more trust in the service provider because the provider does NOT reside in one of the major professional markets. The source of ire for many of the athletes interviewed began once they became professional, while the majority of them reminisce about a positive and fun college experience. A light tie in with a university could draw upon this positive experience. The top five “champion factories”, universities that produce the most professional athletes, are:

1) University of Michigan
2) The Ohio State University
3) University of Miami (FL)
4) UCLA (University of California Los Angeles)
5) (Tie) Florida State University & Notre Dame University

(Lewis 2008)

Re-locating to Florida might be a good idea since two of the six schools listed are found in that state. Central Ohio would not be a bad location because of the close number two ranking and its relatively close proximity to most of the professional sports teams East of the Mississippi River.
9.1.2 Structuring the Business / Virtual Teams

Starting a business that focuses on professional athletes and their branding requires additional expertise that would complement designers and design services. As explained in section 5.1.3, branding consists of more than just design. “Some companies need a firm that can deliver all the components – from advising on a global brand strategy to brand asset management. Others have a strategy in place and need a world-class designer to reposition the brand. Some need a firm that knows how to create the look and feel across divisions, products or cultures.” (Wheeler 2006, 12) Marketers, public relations experts, and persons with a communications background are all needed, among others, to carry out the tasks mentioned above. Additional designers, artists, usability experts, and computer programmers may be needed for brand identity related assignments. If going for full service brand building, professional athletes may need some unique services from sports agents, personal assistants, travel agents or financial advisors. A business that focuses on branding could stand to benefit from each of these disciplines in some capacity. A few strategies for structuring the business including: design-focused teams, colocated teams, and virtual teams, are explored further in the following sections.

A design focused team: This business could conceivably focus solely on design-related services, specifically services relating to brand identity. If and when additional services are requested, the business could simply state that the services are not offered, and keep everything moving. Another approach could be to recommend another service provider.

Benefits: This business structure allows for a more specialized approach to its provided services. The lack of additional disciplines and skill sets can allow the business to focus on what it does best, providing brand identity solutions. This business structure calls for a smaller staff, which requires less office space and more intimate collaboration.

Drawbacks: Some opportunities will be sacrificed as a result of not offering certain services. Clients may be lost if they want or need services that fall outside of this businesses core offerings. If these clients are sent to other companies for services not offered, client retention may waver. Also, by only offering a very limited skill set, there will be a very limited marketing avenue to navigate.
A colocated team: If this company feels like they are missing out on too many opportunities when it comes to certain services, they could hire full and part-time employees to fill these gaps. Now, if additional services are needed or requested, they will be available. For the sake of argument, everyone would work together in the same office to encourage collaboration and communication.

Benefits: Since the business can now offer additional services, the business may be able to retain existing clients and could be better positioned to gain new ones. Communication is easier because employees are colocated, as is collaboration between different disciplines working on the same project.

Drawbacks: Since everyone is colocated, a larger office may be required which means higher costs. Experience dictates that during the course of a fiscal year, a business experiences work ebbs and flows. When growing, or flowing, paying new employees may not be a problem; but during declines, or ebbs, it may become an issue. Issues with insurance, raises, and promotions would also have to be addressed on a larger scale.

Virtual team: A virtual team is a design consortium where people with complementary skill sets agree to collaborate on a certain level. For Starr360, this consortium would operate under one umbrella company where the work would be subcontracted based on the needs of the project. Virtual team members are not all located under one roof or one set of business stipulations. They consist of individuals who work wherever they choose. Communication is achieved by using various technological methods like phone, email, instant messaging, Internet video, and social networking. Vertical, hierarchal organizational structures give way to more equal, horizontal systems. Occasional team building activities and face-to-face meetings are used to develop trust amongst team members. This also helps to guard against drops in productivity.

Benefits: A virtual team is able to deliver highly specialized offerings within a collaborative group. Its flexibility allows businesses to showcase its local knowledge while working in a global environment. Because a large office is not needed and there is no need to pay a bevy of employees, the natural ebbs and flows of a business are not as influential. This factor also allows the business to be choosier about projects. Instead of taking on any and every project presented in order to meet high quotas,
one has the option to turn down or defer projects if needed. The decreased time it takes for team members to commute to work could also increase productivity and reduce travel expenses.

Virtual teams also have the capability to cater to the specific needs of the client. Lets say an athlete asks for help opening a restaurant; “We have the right people for that job” could be the response. A financial advisor on the team could be utilized to offer guidance as to if opening a restaurant is a good idea or not. The realtor on the team could be called upon to help in the search of a viable spot, while the team’s designers could be assisting the athlete with design plans. If another client wants to start a non-profit foundation, one of the teams lawyers could help in drawing up a business plan while programmers can be called upon to assist in the development of an interactive website. Marketers on the team could help get the word out to the press. The ability to call upon various skill sets, to cater to the specific needs of the client, is another key benefit of virtual teams.

Drawbacks: Finding the correct mix of expertise, and forging productive and trustworthy relationships may be challenging. Once these relationships are established, availability issues are sure to surface. Since team members are not colocated, electronic means of communication can prove to be porous when immediate contact is needed. Rapid responses can be further hampered by time zone differences amongst team members. Studies also show that productivity in virtual teams drops over time (Durgin 2006). This can be remedied with regular team building activities and face-to-face interactions, but the issue remains.

For Starr360, The benefits of a virtual team outweigh its drawbacks. The flexibility and diversity of a virtual team can allow the business to extend its boundaries and influence amongst professional athletes, a very active, but limited market segment. There are professional athletes around the world. The benefit of potentially having a virtual team member, specializing in design, in Los Angeles to work with an athlete in that area is enormous. Being able to call on a marketing expert in Chicago, when a client wants to expand their reach to the Midwest, is invaluable. If creating a business that focuses on professional athletes and their branding is the next step, forming a virtual team may be the logical direction to take.
9.2 What can be Done: Strengthen Relationships Within the Professional Athlete’s Circle

Professional athletes belong to a tight knit fraternity, or circle that sometimes may frown upon outsiders that try to infiltrate it. My research has shown that many professional athletes, regardless of the sport, have been taken advantage of, whether by a corrupt sports agent or by a twisted venture capitalist. These service providers sometimes prey on these newly rich, but naïve athletes. Being very careful about anyone offering an opportunity that will cost them money, professional athletes mostly turn to their existing circle of friends, family, and colleagues for advise and business opportunities. Service providers whose target market is professional athletes, have to find a way into this circle. The challenge is finding an effective method for doing so.

Businesses that may already be within an athlete’s circle, like marketing firms and sports agencies, could be partnered with. This partnership could formally introduce a designer to the athlete’s circle. Some athletes may be more comfortable with this setup because they covet the security of an established business. The flip side of this strategy is: although the designer inherits some of the established business’s benefits, its drawbacks are also absorbed. If an athlete has, or has had, any bad experiences with the business, the designer may be associated with these negative incidents, even though these incidents may have nothing to do with design or the designer. This bad experience will travel around the circle with word-of-mouth marketing, just as a positive experience might.

A designer could simply eliminate the middleman and solicit clients on his or her own by establishing a relationship with someone already belonging to the fraternity (see section 9.1). Once established, the designer has to deliver fully on his or her value proposition and work on generating some excitement within their client to precipitate word-of-mouth marketing to occur. This client could become a champion of the designer’s brand.

9.2.1 Continued Research

Athletes endorse or denounce everything from restaurants to sports agents amongst their professional circle. A deeper understanding of an athlete’s inner-circle and how they interact and respond to different service providers, particularly designers, would be very useful research. It could help designers and other service providers gain professional athletes as clients.
9.3 How Other Professions can Benefit

This research inquiry focuses on the inner workings of designers and professional athletes. However, the knowledge and strategies gained can benefit other disciplines and their clients.

9.3.1 Other Clients

Successful businesses have successful brands. It is proposed that professional athletes are essentially small businesses so most of what is contained in this thesis document also applies to small businesses. Small businesses need strong branding in order to differentiate themselves from competitors. This differentiation can lead to increased profits.

Entertainers, whether they are musicians, actors, television, or radio personalities, already have significant name recognition. They already possess a recognizable brand that can be developed further with the help of the strategies proposed in this thesis. Up and coming entertainers could also benefit from strong branding because they are struggling to be recognized.

When we present the idea of Personal Branding to business owners and independent professionals, a significant percentage of them respond with something like, ‘But isn’t branding for big corporations?’ This bothers us, because that misperception is what keeps many individuals from branding themselves. Branding has nothing to do with market cap or budget. It’s about influencing perception and communicating value. You don’t have to run super Bowl TV spots to do that. (Montoya 2002, 28)

Whether they are starting a new business or trying to move up within the company they work for, individuals can benefit from taking control of their brand. As stated before, because a book is often judged by its cover, individuals have to make sure that the cover they present is serving them correctly.

9.3.2 Other Disciplines

Freelance designers, as well as design firms, can incorporate the pricing structures highlighted in this thesis document. If the service provided has the potential to increase the client’s income, percentage and time-based payment methods could benefit both parties. As stated before, providing the client with payment options can assist in making the client feel more comfortable and in control of the project.
Since professional athletes are a close-knit group, freelance designers can develop a strategy to provide design services for a certain group of professional athletes or specific players. If the service provided is deemed a success, word could spread leading to more work within that circle. Design firms could use their body of work and numerous resources to develop a similar plan to seek out larger and more popular groups of athletes.

As touched upon in section 9.2, designers and design firms can possibly partner with marketing firms that already work with professional athletes or desire to do so. I have found that professional athletes currently use marketing firms for services like websites, press releases, and sponsorship opportunities. Ultimate Pros (www.ultimatepros.com) and KCB Sports Marketing (www.kcbsportsmarketing.com) are two marketing groups that design and utilize an athlete’s website to increase that athlete’s endorsement opportunities. These marketing firms can add to, or strengthen their branding services by hiring designers or design firms well versed in branding.

Sports agents can read the information contained within this thesis document and decide to add branding to their list of provided services, by partnering with a designer or design firm that can provide it. While an agent typically is paid three to four percent of the contract negotiated, he can be paid as much as fifteen percent of a negotiated endorsement deal (Conrad 1999). These endorsement deals sometimes dwarf a players base salary. Strong branding may assist the agent in selling his athlete to a potential endorser.
Since an athlete’s brand is the consumer’s perception of the athlete, strategies that effect these consumer perceptions can lead to increased visibility. This elevated recognition can lead to higher marketability, and ultimately, increased income for athletes.

Designers can incorporate branding strategies that utilize a professional athlete’s unique stature and consumer base. By working closely with the athlete, a designer can devise the most appropriate branding strategy to convince an athlete’s consumers to invest in their brand.

Professional athletes need these strategies to grow their brand. This brand will help them outshine their competition, which could expand their off-the-field earning potential. By giving the consumer a better choice—a better brand—an athlete’s value will increase.
APPENDIX

Q Score Example – Ranking Report

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<th>Fair</th>
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<td><strong>Occupation (Adult)</strong></td>
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<td>White Collar</td>
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<td>Blue Collar</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>81</td>
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Brandan Craft  
The Ohio State University Department of Design  
Masters of Arts candidate

- These questions are to assist in my thesis research which is aimed at helping current and former professional athletes better manage their brand.
- The information gathered will be used in conjunction with other responses in order to gain a better understanding of current and future practices.
- The answers you give will be held in strict confidence and any future contact or inquiry will only occur if you grant me permission to do so.
- This questionnaire will take 30 – 45 minutes.
- This interview is voluntary, you are not obligated to answer any question asked of you.

Questions

Design
- What is your understanding of a brand identity?
- Where did (or didn’t) you obtain your information regarding branding?
- Name three athlete related brands you are familiar with.
- Do you see the benefit of having a brand identity?
- Do you (or did you) have a brand identity?
  - If so, how and where do you use your brand?
  - If not but you see the benefit, where do you see using your brand?
  - (explain what branding is then ask the benefit question again)
- Does (or did) anyone in particular handle your design needs?
  - If so, who?
- If you need design services where would you look or who would you contact?

Services
- What services do (or did) you utilize outside of the traditional agent-provided services (ie. contract negotiation)?
- How would (or did) you find the service providers?

Business
- Do you currently have any entrepreneurial endeavors?
  - If so, do you utilize the aforementioned service providers for these endeavors?
- What compensation method is (was) used for the aforementioned service providers (ie. fee-for-services, percentage, length of time, etc.)
- What is your understanding of the:
  - Percentage of income growth payment method?
  - (explain these methods then ask the question again)
  - How would you respond to the following proposition: “I could increase your yearly income by 20%”? 
  - How about this proposition: “In order to get started I would need 5% of your existing salary as a retainer.”
- Do you currently sell anything?
  - If so, would you be interested in selling it online?
  - If not, would you be interested in selling merchandise online?

Relationships
- What frustrates (or frustrated) you about the services and/or the people providing the services you acquired?
  - What would make the experience better?
- What delights (or delighted) you about the services and/or the people providing the services you acquired?
- What would satisfy you the most regarding the delivery of needed services?
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