

Your brand is you

By  Lunice Johnston

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In the last four weeks, our business networks, as well as friends and family, have been able to see us in our home settings via Zoom, Skype, Houseparty and Microsoft Teams. It may not be a pretty sight.



Image credit: visuals on [Unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com)

The barriers between your private and professional lives have lowered – not just as a result of Covid-19, but over the past decade as we have made increasing use of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media.

Since the work from home trend is likely to grow post-Covid, it is worth spending a little time thinking of how you link your personal and professional branding.

The same principles you apply in presenting your best image in the office, at presentations and important meetings should apply to the rest of your imagery. Your personal brand is the intellectual, visual and emotional impression people have of you.

It happens whether you have any control over it or not and it is formed in a matter of seconds, based on the way you speak, dress, how well you listen, your eye contact, and body language.

Lockdown meetings are in fact an opportunity to enhance your personal brand, to stand out from the crowd and make a

favourable impression.

Making a good impression on a Skype, Zoom or any other online meeting comes down to a few simple points, starting with your imagery:

- Raise the laptop so that you look straight into the camera.
- Don't sit on top of your laptop – the laptop/camera should be an arm's length away.
- Use earphones to hear better.
- Look at the camera all the time, as if you're in a studio.
- Be in a quiet place with no disruptions (close the door and keep the children out, if possible).
- Try not to have a cluttered background. A bookshelf or blank white/grey wall is better than looking as if you live in a caravan or a cave.
- The light or window should be in front of you.
- Switch your mobile phone and the alert on your laptop to silent.
- Don't take a phone call while in a Zoom meeting.

Video meetings also require following the same etiquette as you would in a face to face meeting:

- Be conscious of other people's time – don't use all the time just to get your own point across.
- End a meeting with a courteous farewell, e.g. "Bye-bye". If it's an informal meeting with colleagues or friends a wave will do, but if it's a business meeting then be as formal as possible.
- Be an active participant: don't look at your phone and walk around
- Dress appropriately, especially for a business meeting. You don't want your clients to remember you unshaven and in a dressing gown.

How you show up for a meeting online is as important as showing up for a meeting face-to-face. Be prepared and be on time.

If you're initiating the meeting, ensure there's an agenda and that minutes are kept.

But it isn't all video meetings – we are all using email a lot more than we used to. Here are a few reminders of how you can manage your email personality in a professional way:

- Rank e-mail addresses according to seniority of recipients.
- Always be professional in your tone – never "Hi Mr/Ms Client", Start with "Dear ..." or "Good day" and end with "regards" or "kind regards".
- Use a subject line that reflects the content of your message.
- Never use CAPITAL letters – it implies anger.
- Ensure your e-mail signature has all the correct details.
- Read your e-mail carefully before sending it.
- Be very judicious about using the "reply all" button.
- Keep e-mails short and to the point.
- Clean-up e-mails before forwarding them.

Your image is also affected by what you post and forward on public platforms. You should be distinctive – you can even be controversial. But it is a matter of common sense and courtesy to avoid making personally offensive statements and spreading information from unsubstantiated sources.

ABOUT LUNICE JOHNSTON

Lunice Johnston founded Lunice Johnston Communications in 2016. She decided to take the plunge and own her own reputation management business after gathering more than 25 years' experience working for various public relations and reputation management agencies. Lunice's scope of experience includes managing the full spectrum of public relations, media liaison, external, crisis management, social media, reputation management, stakeholder management and facilitation of related workshops.

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