

Business figures with bankable personal brands include the "Barefoot Investor", investment adviser Scott Pape, whose book of the same name has made him one of Australia's most popular financial commentators and speakers; mortgage king John Symond of Aussie Home Loans; and demographer Bernard Salt, a partner with KPMG.

With an unerring ability to capture the spotlight, Salt has turned the dry science of demography into a gripping narrative of social and cultural change – including two best-selling books, *The Big Shift* (2001) and *The Big Picture* (2006). For more than a decade, his forensic analysis of population data has been packaged into revealing snapshots of society – from where the eligible bachelors live to where the tree and seachangers are heading.

As well as carving a lucrative career for himself on the international speaking circuit, Salt attracts a stampede of clients to his trend forecasting practice at KPMG. Since 1997, he has produced KPMG's annual population growth report, always packaged for maximum media attention, but also highly sought after by business clients. One objective serves the other.

Corporate publicist Marjorie Johnston, principal of Melbourne firm Wordmakers, worked with Salt to launch his first report, and several after that. From the beginning, Johnston says, Salt had an intuitive understanding of what would appeal to the media, but "always with a very strong commercial purpose".

"Bernard was absolutely passionate about the content of his reports," she says. "He was interested in finding out why these changes were occurring year to year, he had the expertise and the methodology to identify trends of real substance and he knew how best to communicate those trends."

Working with Salt on the first report, Johnston recalls his insistence on producing more than 80 customised media releases so that media outlets throughout Australia received releases focused on their local communities.

"People say to me, 'I want to be like Bernard Salt', but they don't realise the personal commitment and hard work behind the scenes that's necessary to really understand the material and make sure that the message is attuned to what his audience is interested in."

Johnston says building a personal brand of Salt's stature is a huge undertaking. "He's passionate about what he's doing. You have to have the

passion and commitment, otherwise you can't last the distance, because it's so much work," she says.

Personal branding adviser Sue Currie, director of Sydney consultancy Shine Communications, says personal branding is about "achieving recognition, enhancing your profile and building your overall reputation". Currie urges her clients to reach an understanding of their personality characteristics and values, and seek a frank assessment of how others see them. "Self-reflection can be the hardest step to creating a personal brand," she says. **BRW**

Self-packaged success

Adrian Raftery has achieved the seemingly impossible: he is a celebrity accountant. When the managing director of Sydney chartered accounting firm Adrian Raftery Wawrzyniak adopted the personal brand of Mr Taxman this year, the impetus was simple. "We were looking at ways to make ourselves more noticeable," he says.

As well as tax, ARW specialises in financial planning, superannuation and business consulting. Raftery decided Mr Taxman covered all the bases – and was a name likely to stick in people's minds.

Raftery promotes his new identity relentlessly. He signs off as 'Adrian Raftery, Mr Taxman' in business communications, has registered the phone number 1800 TAXMAN and plans a Mr Taxman website.

Raftery blitzes journalists with media releases containing

topical financial tips. The ARW website chronicles Raftery's media appearances, including his column in *Woman's Day* and spots on TV news.

Raftery does his own public relations. "It's been fun learning what works with the media and what doesn't," he says.

The Mr Taxman brand is paying off. "It's easily recognisable and it differentiates us from the 21,500 other tax agents in Australia."

ARW, which Raftery founded in 1997, has 20 staff and annual revenue of \$1.8 million, three offices in greater Sydney and one in Cairns. He plans to open eight more by the end of 2009.

Raftery is also founder and chief executive of Accountants R Us, a national marketing co-operative of 62 accounting firms. He says the outlay for his personal branding campaign has been less than \$10,000.

MANAGEMENT

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The breakfast club

• Networking seems to be back in vogue. Not computer networking, but the kind that involves schmoozing with potential customers and business partners, influential contacts and possibly future employers.

In fact, "networking" has been going on well before it was given a snappy name and became a highly organised activity – something that consultants could advise on and event promoters could sell.

There was a time, 10 or 20 years ago, when networking was up there with jogging, gym membership and cigar clubs. If you were in business, management or the professions, you networked. Everyone was on the hustle, and there was a respectable name for it. Like most business fads, networking reached its use-by date. Well, networking is back in fashion. One indicator is the re-emergence of the business breakfast, an unhappy import from the United States.

For a time, business breakfasts lost their allure; organisers found that breakfasts were a hard sell and numbers were down. Perhaps in the end there were too many of them, or people just realised that life is too short. Yet there was a time when business breakfasts were considered the networking vehicle of choice – in theory, because high-powered entrepreneurs and executives were too busy for lunch.

Now the business breakfast is back, along with business lunches, which are also enjoying a resurgence after some lean years. And the "n" word is back. Brochures and advertisements for breakfasts, lunches, seminars and conferences once again emphasise the importance of networking.

Some of the big accountancy and law firms encourage their young partners and emerging talent to become more adept at the art of networking – how to work a room and keep the small chat flowing. Some even provide training and coaching in the art. Successful entrepreneurs are assiduous networkers and swear by it, and generation Y has taken networking online.

Networking has its adherents, and rightly so – if by networking they mean striking real relationships with peers, being actively involved in the community, and being a participant in industry and professional associations. But gathering a group of people at a networking event for the purpose of swapping business cards hardly constitutes genuine engagement.

Successful people have always been adept at building relationships, conducting themselves with ease and authority in work and social situations, and engaging with the world around them. Networking, in its most organised form, ultimately fails because it is an artifice, a superficial ritual that mimics real relationships.



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