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# passion is everything

**H**ow badly do you want to crush it? Is it an all-consuming feeling? Do you stay awake at night, your brain swimming with ideas and dreams? Are you willing to do whatever it takes for the chance to live entirely on your own terms? If so, you're lucky. You're lucky because you live in an age of unmatched opportunity for anyone with enough hustle, patience, and big dreams. I should know, since that's all I had to work with.

Three years ago I was an anomaly, a guy with very limited technology skills who used social media sites like Facebook and Twitter and Tumblr to build a highly fulfilling and profitable personal brand. Back then, a lot of people were unwilling to accept that the business world—that society—was changing, and if I had tried to tell you that you could build a business that creates wealth and the most happiness you've ever known with nothing more than passion and a willingness to work your face

off, you might not have believed me. Now, though, the opportunities are endless—I don't think enough people have yet grasped just how much society and business and even the Internet have changed—and my story is about to become a lot less unusual. If you want it badly enough, it can become your story, in a lot less time and for a lot less money.

Here's how fast change has taken hold: I helped take my dad's local liquor store, Shopper's Discount Liquors, and blew it up from four million dollars to fifty million dollars in eight years (1998–2005). I'm proud of that. But aside from a ton of hard work, it took millions of dollars in advertising with the *New York Times*, *Wine Spectator*, and other publications as well as radio stations and local TV. Compare that with when I started building my personal brand in February 2006—to this day it has cost me far less in money (less than \$15,000) than in sweat, and I'm having more fun than I've ever had in my life. You've got sweat, right? You may not have connections, or an education, or wealth, but with enough passion and sweat, you can make anything happen.

### three rules

You may have picked up this book because want to know the secret to my success. Well, my secret is that I live by three pretty simple rules:

- Love your family.
- Work superhard.
- Live your passion.

That's it. Notice that I don't mention the Internet, or social media tools, or even technology, even though they have been crucial to everything I've accomplished in the last few years. That's because I measure my success by how happy I am, not how big the business is or how much money I've made. And thanks to following those three rules, I'm 100 percent happy.

Don't believe me? Think it's not possible? I promise you it is.

If you don't already live the first principle, get on it, because what I'm going to tell you in this book is worthless if you're not taking care of your family. Your family always comes first. But if you've got that priority straight, and you're working hard, and you're still not 100 percent happy, it's probably because you're not living your passion. And that, my friends, although it is only one-third of the secret to success, is the whole key to staking your claim in the new business world we live in today.

Live your passion. What does that mean, anyway? It means that when you get up for work every morning, every single morning, you are pumped because you get to talk about or work with or do the thing that interests you the most in the world. You don't live for vacations because you don't need a break from what you're doing—working, playing, and relaxing are one and the same. You don't even pay attention to how many hours you're working because to you, it's not really work. You're making money, but you'd do whatever it is you're doing for free.

Does this sound like you? Are you living, or just earning a living? You spend so much time at work, why waste it doing anything other than what you love most? Life is too short for that. You owe it to yourself to make a massive change for the better,

and all you have to do is go online and start using the tools waiting for you there.

In this book I'll explain step by step how to use all the social networking tools on the Internet to take whatever it is that rocks your world—the activity that you would do every minute if you could, the topic that you just can't shut up about, the product that you would like to put in everyone's hands—and build it into not just a business but a powerful personal brand that makes you all the money and, more important, brings you all the happiness you could ever want. For those of you already living your passion but hungry to boost your business even further, you'll find some fresh ideas on how to do that, as will anyone interested in developing a strong brand identity for an already existing product or service. Social media give entrepreneurs and businesses an unprecedented chance to engage with their customers and communicate their message. Those who can harness their passion to the unbelievable reach and power of these tools are in a position to crush it on a level the world has never seen.

### the game has changed

Everyone knows the Internet represents one of the biggest cultural shifts since the printing press, but I think society has been slow to recognize that it represents the biggest shift in history in how we do business. Like, ever. It's matured from a haven for coding geeks to a second home for most Americans, who still spend countless hours shopping online but who are also increasingly moving their social lives there thanks to networking sites like Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Tumblr, and Twitter. It makes

total sense that if this is where the eyeballs are going, this is where business has to go. Money goes where people go—where there is an audience, advertisers are eager to follow. They used to spend their money on traditional media—radio, television, newspapers, and magazines. Those platforms are losing eyeballs to the online world by the second, and many media companies never implemented the leaner, meaner business model they needed to stay alive. They're dead. If the survivors in the traditional media don't adjust to this new competitor, thirty years from now our kids will examine them in museums with the same curiosity they now reserve for dinosaur bones and fossils.

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I'm going to make a lot of massive, bold statements in this book, but let me assure you that I'm not trying to be a shock jock. I wouldn't say anything unless I'd thought long and hard about it.

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Advertisers and companies need to spend money to stay alive, so why shouldn't they spend it on you? By building a personal brand using social media networks, you're practically doing them a favor. Since the only investment it takes to use these sites to grow a business is ridiculous amounts of time and hustle, these platforms are open to whoever has got the chops to get in the game. That's you, right?

#### NO EXCUSES

But, Gary, some of you might be saying, my passion isn't something cool and retail friendly like wine. I'm into *World of War-*

*craft.* I'm obsessed with belly dancing. I regularly piss off my wife because I'd rather hole up in the basement with my friends playing cards than do anything else. I want to build a business, but there's no money to be made in that. Plus, I've got rent or a mortgage, kids and elderly parents, student loans and car payments.

Yeah, well, so did Perez Hilton, and Ze Frank and Veronica Belmont, and Heather Cocks and Jessica Morgan (gofugyourself.typepad.com). They totally crushed it, and you can, too. Do it now.

But, Gary, someone else might say, have you kept up with the news over the past few years? The economy has taken a beating, a lot of people have lost jobs, consumers are not spending like they once did, and advertisers are far more conservative than they used to be. I'm reading this book to plan ahead for the day when I know for sure it's a good time to start a business.

*It's never a bad time to start a business unless you're starting a mediocre business.* I think economic downturns represent a huge opportunity for everyone to get their focus on and start to crush it. The person who can dominate during rough times is the person who can dominate, period. Yes, we've seen a lot of people close up shop in the past years, but if they had offered a *relevant and differentiated product or service*, had been adaptable, and most of all had known how to tell their story, they wouldn't have had to close. I know that's an unpopular thing to say, but I think once you read further and understand how our culture has changed and what the next generation—whether entrepreneurs or not—needs to do to make its mark, you'll agree with me. Booming economies like the one that recently ended keep all kinds of businesses afloat that should have sunk a long time ago.

Once the winds shift, there's only room left for the best. What kind of business did you plan on starting, a mediocre one or one that's kick-ass? You know the right answer. Follow the suggestions laid out in this book and your business will be standing and profitable for as long as you want it to be. Plus, you will have achieved more professional happiness than you ever imagined.

Maybe you're out of work and you're thinking you might dabble with some of the ideas in this book every day after you send out your résumé and make a few calls (the traditional résumé, by the way, is about to become obsolete, but more on that later). Tell me this, though: Did you jump up every morning eager to go to that job you lost? If not, why are you looking for another one just like it? You have an unbelievable opportunity. Use all this extra time you have to reinvent yourself or follow a totally different path from the one you were on before, maybe one where the only thing at the end isn't a custom-engraved watch that reads "Thanks for your service" and a surf-and-turf farewell dinner to send you off into retirement. You can do better so long as you're willing to live and breathe your passion. Do that, and you'll no longer differentiate between your work life and your personal life. You'll just live, and love doing it.

As for those of you still employed, even happily employed, this book is for you, too. Mark my words, if you want to stay relevant and competitive in the coming years—I don't care if you're in sales, tech, finance, publishing, journalism, event planning, business development, retail, service, you name it—you will still need to develop and grow your personal brand. Everyone—EVERYONE—needs to start thinking of themselves as a brand. It is no longer an option; it is a necessity.

My DNA made me want to start businesses and go big and bold and conquer the world and crush the competition and buy the New York Jets, and there are a lot of you reading this book who see what I've done and think, "Yeah, that's awesome!" I've got a lot to share with you. But if that's not you, I think I can still help you out. Maybe your DNA is totally different from mine. You just want to live comfortably, provide for your loved ones, prepare for the future, and not worry too much. You're set. The average U.S. salary is around 40–50K. You can earn that doing a job you love or a job you hate. Please choose love!

Of course money and security matters, and I am very aware that many people live paycheck to paycheck. Let me reiterate that the process I am going to be talking about takes a lot of time, effort, and focus, but not a lot of dollars, if any. That, my friends, is the game changer; everyone has a shot, not just those with extra cash.

Learn to live your passion, and you'll have all the money you need plus total control over your own destiny. That's a pretty comfortable place to be, wouldn't you say?

### this means you

What if you just don't have a hard business instinct? Don't worry; skills are cheap, passion is priceless. If you're passionate about your content and you know it and do it better than anyone else, even with few formal business skills you have the potential to create a million-dollar business. Here's why: let's say you love to fish, and you happen to know a load about worms. In fact, you're embarrassed at how much you like worms and like to talk about

worms. But there's no way you can make money on worms, right? Wrong. You can use the Internet to build a platform where you can talk about worms to your heart's content. Passion is contagious. If you channel it into creating amazing content and distribute that content using the social media tools I discuss in this book, someone like me who rocks at business development will eventually find it and become a fan. The day I hear you say that you can use a particular kind of worm to catch 80 percent more bass than you might otherwise, I'm going to see the business opportunity and contact you. Together we create an online show or a written blog or an audio podcast around your passion to reach the fishing marketplace, a billion-dollar industry. We launch the content, and people are immediately drawn to you, we build a community by capitalizing on all the social media tools and techniques at our disposal, we work as many hours as possible, and next thing we know we have the biggest fishing lure company in the country asking to advertise on our site. From there we start building word of mouth and opening up more revenue streams, and *ka-ching!* Your passion for worms in tandem with my passion for biz dev will inevitably result in a business that crushes it. Thanks to the accessibility and reach of social media and the zero cost, anyone can do this. "Salesman Steve" who rocked selling for Blockbuster needs to find One Man Stan the Fellini fan and build a million-dollar movie-review business. Joanne Jogger who chronicles her marathon training needs to find Marketer Marvin and create a running blog that kills it and attracts Nike as a sponsor. There is room for everyone in the world of social media, which is the same thing as saying that there is room for everyone in today's business world.

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Social Media

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Business.

Period.<sup>1</sup>

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Everybody wins in these scenarios. Stan and Joanne may seem like the big winners because they're enjoying some fame, yet off in the back room, if Steve and Marvin are living their passion, believe me, they're rocking that party hard. In fact, for all the Web fame and national TV appearances and coverage I have received, it's the behind-the-scenes brand building that has given me more happiness than anything else.

Maybe you're reading this and thinking, *Cool, I'm a businessperson, I don't have to think about my passion, I just have to find someone else who's passionate and use their content to create a business.* Maybe. If your passion, your true-blue passion, isn't business development and marketing and sales, you need to figure out what it is and do that instead, otherwise you'll fail. If you do have that passion for biz dev, however, you may not need a partner at all. I didn't.

### it's up to you

The messages in this book are timeless: Do what makes you happy. Keep it simple. Do the research. Work hard. Look ahead. Remember that when I started Wine Library TV in 2006, Face-

1. You want me to explain this global, over-the-top statement in more detail than I have room for in this book? E-mail me at [gary@vaynermedia.com](mailto:gary@vaynermedia.com).

book was still a college play; I didn't want to be the creepy guy peddling wine to underage kids, so I couldn't use it to bring an audience to my online show. Twitter had just been born and no one knew what it was. Once these social networking platforms caught on with the general population, however, I was all over them and knew how to make them work for me; but they only accelerated my success—they didn't create it. Keep that in mind as you start to put your dreams and plans into action. The tools we're going to discuss in this book will spread your ideas and give your personal brand more traction in far less time and for far less money than you might have been able to do otherwise, *but they are only as powerful as the person who uses them.*

Their power is also only as strong as their most recent incarnation. Technology and innovation and consumer demand are working together at such a frenzied pace that by the time you read this book some of the capabilities and reach of these platforms will have already changed. Regardless of what changes we see in the little details in the user interface or individual features of these tools, they won't affect the big picture—you can pimp your ride, but that doesn't change the essence of how you travel in your car. These tools will take you to your audience, where you can follow them, reach out, and make them listen.

I can show you how to use social media to plant a garden or build a whole new house. Some of you want to be mayor of the whole damn city, and I can help you get there. But no matter how modestly or high you set your sights, you have to keep tending and adjusting and making improvements once I'm gone. No matter how successful you get, you cannot slack off or the grass is going to grow, the paint is going to peel, and the roads will

start to crumble. Stop hustling, and everything you learn here will be useless. Your success is entirely up to you.

### turn water into wine

Here's the deal: if you want it badly enough, the money is there, the success is there, and the fulfillment is there. All you have to do is take it. So quit whining, quit crying, quit with the excuses. If you already have a full-time job, you can get a lot done between 7:00 P.M. and 2:00 A.M. (9:00 P.M. to 3:00 A.M. if you've got kids), so learn to love working during those predawn hours. I promise it won't be hard if you're doing what you love more than anything else. I don't care if your passion is rehabilitating abandoned ferrets; if you learn to tap into everything the digital world has to offer, you can turn water into wine—you can transform what you love into a legacy-building business that makes a crapload of money, and still be true to yourself.

Ultimately this book is not about making a million dollars, although it just might help you do that. It's about ensuring your own happiness by enabling you to live every day passionately and productively. Business is not just about making money, and if you think it is, you're broken. If you're already familiar with the social marketing tools we'll discuss in this book, I hope you'll pay attention to the big picture. It's too easy to forget what really matters once you're digging deep in these trenches.

Learn to navigate the digital waters of social marketing to build a business and promote a personal brand based around what you love most, and you will only be limited by how far you want to sail. Social media tools—Facebook, Twitter, Flickr,

and all the rest—are modern-day galleons that will carry you to the new world, allowing you to share your passion, differentiate yourself from your competitors, and deliver your brand to the broadest possible audience.

My secret to success is just one guy's way of doing things, of course, but do things my way—adapted to what works for your DNA, of course—and total happiness is yours.