



BRIDGING THE GAP AT SMK AL-KHAERIYAH, SERANG: AN INTEGRATED HR AND MARKETING FRAMEWORK FOR BUILDING STUDENT PERSONAL BRANDS AND CAREER READINESS

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Abstract

The high open unemployment rate among Vocational High School (SMK) graduates indicates a gap between the competencies taught in schools and the real demands of the labor market. Many graduates possess technical skills but lack the soft skills, particularly in personal branding and self-marketing, which are crucial for securing employment in the competitive digital era. This community service activity (PKM) aimed to equip students of SMK Al-Khaeriyah Pengampelan with practical knowledge and skills in personal branding and self-marketing strategies to enhance their competitiveness in the job market. The program employed a comprehensive method, integrating Human Resource Management and Marketing perspectives. The stages included needs analysis through questionnaires and observation, interactive workshops, CV and portfolio creation, mock interviews, LinkedIn optimization training, and individual mentoring. Evaluation was conducted through pre-test and post-test, analysis of student work, and satisfaction surveys. The activity showed a significant increase in students' understanding, with a 75% improvement in post-test scores. Participants successfully created professional CVs, compelling cover letters, digital portfolios, and optimized LinkedIn profiles. The school's satisfaction level with the program reached 95%. The implementation of personal branding and self-marketing strategies effectively increased students' confidence, self-awareness, and readiness to face the job market. This program serves as a sustainable model that can be replicated in other vocational schools to improve graduate competitiveness.

Keywords: Personal Branding, Self-Marketing, Vocational School, Job Readiness, Competitiveness

INTRODUCTION

The globalized, digitalized job market is undergoing rapid, uncertain changes. The Industrial Revolution 4.0, characterized by digital technology, artificial intelligence, and automation, has fundamentally altered work patterns and labor demands. Companies no longer seek individuals with only technical skills; they also demand adaptability, creativity, effective communication, and the ability to build a strong professional image. In other words, soft skills now play an equally important role as hard skills in determining an individual's success.

Vocational High Schools (SMK), as vocational education institutions, have a significant responsibility to produce job-ready, competent, and competitive graduates. While the SMK curriculum is designed to provide practical skills, data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that the Open Unemployment Rate (TPT) for SMK graduates remains relatively high compared to other educational levels. Indicates a misalignment between the skills taught in school and the actual needs of the job market.

A primary cause of this gap is SMK students' lack of understanding and skills in building personal branding and self-marketing strategies. Personal branding is an individual's effort to make an authentic, consistent, and attractive professional identity and reputation. In the digital era, this is

increasingly important, as many companies recruit candidates by reviewing their digital footprint on professional platforms like LinkedIn. Meanwhile, a self-marketing strategy is a systematic effort to promote an individual's competencies, experiences, and personality through various media to gain the attention and trust of potential employers.

This situation was also found at SMK Al-Khaeriyah Pengampelan. Initial observations revealed that most students lacked awareness of the importance of personal branding. They were unable to identify their strengths, were unskilled in preparing industry-standard CVs or digital portfolios, and felt nervous and unconfident during job interviews. It was exacerbated by a lack of structured mentoring on self-marketing strategies. Consequently, students tended to be passive, less competitive, and found it challenging to compete with graduates from other, better-prepared schools.

This Community Service (PKM) program was designed to address these challenges. By integrating Human Resources (HR) and Marketing perspectives, this program provided students with practical training and mentoring. The HR perspective helped students recognize their potential and build self-awareness as the foundation of their personal brand. In contrast, the Marketing perspective equipped them with strategies to create self-promotion tools and utilize digital platforms professionally.

METHOD AND PROCEDURES

The implementation method for this PKM was designed to provide a comprehensive solution that combines HR and Marketing approaches. The methodology integrated training, workshops, mentoring, simulation, evaluation, and follow-up to ensure students could apply the skills in real-world situations.

1. Preparation Stage

The initial stage involved intensive coordination with SMK Al-Khaeriyah Pengampelan to map student needs by primary and grade level. A needs analysis conducted through questionnaires and direct observation revealed that 85% of students did not understand the concept of personal branding, 90% did not have industry-standard CVs, and 95% did not have an optimized LinkedIn profile. Additionally, 80% of students admitted to feeling nervous and lacking confidence in interview situations. This data became the basis for developing relevant and interactive training modules.

2. Implementation Stage

The program was carried out through several systematic sessions:

- a. Session 1: "Discover Your Personal Brand" Workshop. This session focused on self-development. Students were guided through personality and interest assessments, group discussions to identify strengths and weaknesses, and the creation of a personal brand statement.
- b. Session 2: "Market Yourself Effectively" Workshop. This session focused on creating self-

promotion tools. Students were trained to design professional CVs using Canva, write persuasive cover letters, and compile digital portfolios to showcase their work and certificates.

- c. Session 3: "From Application to Interview" Simulation. This session involved a realistic mock interview. Students practiced answering interview questions, managing body language, and received direct feedback from facilitators acting as HRD.
 - d. Session 4: "Digital Branding via Professional Social Media". This session enhanced students' digital literacy for professional purposes. Students were guided to create and optimize LinkedIn profiles, including writing compelling headlines and summaries, building networks with alums and industry professionals, and applying creative marketing principles in the digital space.
 - e. Session 5: Individual and Group Mentoring. Post-training, mentoring sessions were held to help students refine their CVs, portfolios, and LinkedIn profiles, and to conduct further interview practice based on individual needs.
3. Evaluation and Follow-up Stage

Program evaluation was conducted through:

- Pre-test and Post-test: To measure the increase in students' knowledge.
- Analysis of Student Work: Comparing the quality of CVs, portfolios, and LinkedIn profiles before and after the program.
- Satisfaction Survey: To gauge students' and the school's perceptions of the program's benefits.
- Focus Group Discussion (FGD): Held with students and teachers to gather qualitative feedback.

To ensure sustainability, several follow-up actions were planned: (1) Compiling a "Personal Branding for SMK Students" handbook as a practical guide, (2) Recommending that the school integrate this material into the career guidance curriculum, and (3) Establishing an alumni community on professional social media for ongoing sharing of experiences and job opportunities.

RESULTS

The implementation of this PKM yielded significant and measurable outcomes:

1. Increased Knowledge and Understanding: The pre-test and post-test results indicated a 75% increase in students' understanding of personal branding, self-marketing strategies, and digital professionalism.
2. Production of Professional Self-Promotion Tools: All participants successfully created:
 - Professional and aesthetically designed CVs.
 - Persuasive and personalized cover letters.
 - Digital portfolios showcasing their projects and achievements.
3. Enhanced Interview Skills: The mock interview simulations successfully built students' confidence. Participants demonstrated improved verbal and non-verbal communication skills and were better equipped to answer challenging questions.

4. Establishment of a Professional Digital Presence: All participating students created active LinkedIn profiles, optimized with professional photos, compelling headlines, detailed summaries, and relevant skills. They began building networks with teachers, alums, and professionals.
5. High Level of Satisfaction: The school partner's satisfaction survey, completed by the Principal, showed a **95% satisfaction rate** with the program's implementation and outcomes. Students also reported feeling more confident and prepared for the world of work.



Figure 1. Group photo of all lecturers and students before completing the community service activities



Figure 2. Group photo with the head of the vocational school, lecturers, and student representatives



Figure 3. Group photo with lecturers, student representatives, and vocational school students



Figure 4. Documentation after completion of the activity

YAYASAN SASSMITA JAYA UNIVERSITAS PAMULANG KAMPUS SERANG FAKULTAS EKONOMI DAN BISNIS			
ABSENSI PANITIA & DOSEN PENGABDIAN KEPADA MASYARAKAT MAHASISWA PENERAPAN MANAJEMEN KEUANGAN, SDM, DAN PEMASARAN DALAM PENGEMBANGAN KOMPETENSI SISWA			
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YAYASAN SASSMITA JAYA UNIVERSITAS PAMULANG KAMPUS SERANG FAKULTAS EKONOMI DAN BISNIS			
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22	Icha Estivia Putri	231001000820	[Signature]
23	Kafiqi Ghani Alauddin	231001000581	[Signature]
24	Erick Hayleni M	231001000810	[Signature]
25	Dani Fathin	23100100072	[Signature]
26	Muhammad Syahrulhuda	231001000789	[Signature]
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Figure 5. List documentation present

Discussion

The success of this PKM program demonstrates the critical need for integrating personal branding and self-marketing into the preparation of vocational school graduates. The combination of HR development (*self-awareness*) and marketing strategies (*self-promotion*) proved to be an effective formula.

The initial lack of self-awareness among students was a significant obstacle. The workshop on discovering personal brand helped them identify their unique value proposition, which became the foundation for all subsequent materials. Aligns with the theory that authentic personal branding must be rooted in genuine self-knowledge.

Furthermore, the practical approach, where 70% of the activities were hands-on, allowed students to apply the theory immediately. The creation of CVs, portfolios, and LinkedIn profiles in a guided environment ensured they left the program with tangible assets. In today's digital era, a professional online presence is no longer optional but a necessity. The training on LinkedIn optimization empowered students to leverage digital platforms not just for social interaction but for career advancement.

The mock interviews were particularly effective in addressing the soft skill gap. By simulating a high-pressure environment and providing constructive feedback, the program helped students manage anxiety and improve their communication skills, which are often the deciding factor in recruitment.

The high satisfaction rate and significant improvement in test scores confirm that the program's methods were well-received and effective. The recommended follow-up actions, such as curriculum integration and handbook development, are crucial for ensuring the long-term impact and sustainability of this initiative beyond the program's duration.

CONCLUSION

This Community Service program successfully enhanced students' competitiveness at SMK Al-Khaeriyah Pengampelan by equipping them with essential personal branding and self-marketing skills. The comprehensive approach, which combined self-awareness development with practical promotional techniques and digital literacy, proved effective in increasing students' job-market readiness. The significant improvement in knowledge, the production of professional self-promotion tools, and the high level of satisfaction from the school validate the program's effectiveness.

For long-term impact, it is recommended that the school integrate these materials into its regular career guidance curriculum. Similar programs can be replicated and adapted in other vocational schools to broadly address the gap between education and industry demands, thereby helping reduce graduate unemployment and prepare a more competitive Indonesian workforce.

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