

White Paper

Employer Branding

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Strategic Recruiting and Employer Branding

Introduction

It's difficult to build, maintain and control an employer brand, but it's even more difficult to try to hire top talent in a competitive job market with a bad reputation as an employer. When you have a clear employer image and a clear recruiting message, you have marketable tools to help you attract and hire candidates more easily, more quickly and more successfully.

Employer branding helps with retention too because candidates who know what kind of working environment, projects, and career advancement opportunities there are before they accept the job are a better fit for the culture and will be more satisfied employees.

It's not easy to become an employer of choice but it is well worth the effort to know your employer brand and to create employer branding initiatives that will support your recruiting process.

What Is An Employer Brand?

Simon Barrow and Tim Abler defined employer brand in the Journal of Brand Management in 1996 as "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company."

- Can you explain your employer brand in a couple of sentences?
- Do you know what candidates think of your company?
- Does your company have an active, ongoing employer branding strategy?

If you don't know what your company's reputation as an employer is, you have no way to change or improve it. A strong employer branding program helps attract and retain top performers, while a poor employer brand or lack of an employer brand both have the opposite effect on recruiting outcomes.

Know Your Employer Brand

Unless you have an active and documented employer branding program, you won't really know your employer brand.

Get to know your employment reputation by:

- Conducting surveys of employees and prospective candidates.

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- Having your marketing department or an outside party conduct an employee engagement survey that asks how employees like working at your company, what their opinions are about the company history, current status and future direction.
- Putting a pop-up survey on your company's career page.
- Asking prospective candidates how the company is perceived as an employer.
- Doing some research to see how your company is perceived on the Internet. Analyze this information and use it to develop an elevator pitch to use during recruiting that accurately and quickly describes your company culture and what it's like to work there.

Build Your Employer Brand

If there is no actual employer brand, work with the human resources and marketing departments to develop one.

- Create an ongoing employer branding program that uses a motto and logo with recruiting messages such as job postings, on-campus recruiting event participation and the company employment or careers page.
- Make sure you have a consistent employer brand message on all social media platforms.
- Ask top performing employees to participate in employer branding campaigns with video testimonials or profiles on the company website.

If your company has a poor reputation as an employer, there are plenty of things you can do to address and improve that challenge in recruiting. Be honest and acknowledge the company's challenges, and let candidates know the company is working on improving conditions. Convince owners and senior management of the importance of employer branding and start to build a positive image for the company in the minds of your customers, the public and prospective candidates.

Promote Your Employer Brand

Promoting your employer brand should be part of any employer branding development and management program. Promote on Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, LinkedIn and any other social media platform the company uses.

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Talk to candidates about the company as an employer in industry forums, on-campus with students, professors and placement specialists and with vendors and customers when possible.

Use your employer brand to ensure a culture fit, explaining company history and culture during screening and interviewing processes.

Create a fact sheet about company benefits, perks, expectations, business operations hours and work systems so candidates can get a feel for how everyone works at a glance.

Manage Your Employer Brand

Management in most organizations thinks their company is a great place to work, and operates from that point of view. But managing your employer brand means much more than just espousing a public relations image or a catchphrase.

Candidates seek good culture fit just as much as employers and recruiters do, and use various avenues to find out what it's really like to work at a company. A recent Monster/Unum study of job seekers revealed that 87 percent of candidates want a company that cares about employee well-being.

Managing your employer brand is a key recruiting tool.

Monitor Your Employer Brand

Recruiters benefit from monitoring employee engagement and managing employee culture. Awareness of company reputation and brand through online sources such as Glassdoor and Vault yields real time employer brand perception. Building a strong employer brand and culture takes time but pays off in recruiting benefits by attracting good candidates.

Recruiters and employers who regularly survey employees and candidates, or implement candidate experience programs to capture honest input about employer brand, can use that input for continuous improvement in their recruiting practices and culture building activities.

Use a Clear Brand Message in Recruiting

Clear brand messages across all recruiting channels and methods help recruiters match candidates with culture. Job descriptions and internal and external interviewers should all give the same impres-

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sion of culture. Candidates should not get confused by your company culture or employer brand. Whether it's a fun, relaxed company culture or serious and fast-paced, your company culture should be apparent to employees, management, recruiters, and candidates alike so that recruiters have a foundation to work from when trying to match candidates and culture fit.

Nurture Your Culture

Hopefully, your company culture is something people want to be part of. But if it's not, find out why and work on changing it. An honest assessment of culture, through employee surveys (in-house or third-party administered) produces input that points to opportunities for improvement.

Candidates look for cultures that practice good values they believe in, cultures that incorporate appreciation and gratitude, and cultures that are communicative and functional. These are attributes that should be cultivated in company culture.

The Harvard Business Review describes company culture as an invisible force that guides employees' behavior and choices. The impression candidates have of your company can either support your recruiting practices or cost you candidates. Recruiters ignore it at their peril.

A poor employer brand is an opportunity to improve the culture to attract candidates. When a poor employer brand comes up in recruiting, be honest with candidates instead of deceptive or try to avoid it. "I realize we have somewhat of a reputation for quality problems in customer service and warranty support, but these are areas that our vice presidents are currently working to improve" is much more effective than "What reputation? We provide excellent customer service and warranty support."

How are you supposed to explain your company culture and employer brand to candidates who want to work for you or your company? Do you use just a job description and a printout of the company website when you talk to candidates? Employers who don't understand employer branding or use it as a key part of recruiting are missing out on the opportunities to impress applicants, brag about their company's "sweet spots," and accurately describe working conditions to build retention into the hiring process upfront.

Impress Candidates

Employer branding is more than just the latest recruitment buzz among hiring managers and staffing partners, and handing out a job description and discussing benefits is a fast track to losing good candidates.

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Employer branding requires talking about the company's concierge service for top performers, or the business casual work environment, or the monthly bring-your-dog-to-work day. Or whatever unique aspect of the organization impresses people and makes them want to work there.

Whether you're a one-person HR shop or part of a large recruiting department, incorporating employer branding and making sure your candidate is a culture fit are important.

Aspects of an employer's culture that attract candidates:

- Description of the employer's physical location. Are the offices sleek and ultra modern? Is the manufacturing plant clean and operating with the latest equipment? Is the employer located in a modern industrial complex with scenic walking paths or in an older factory area of the city?
- Discussion of employee programs for recognition and training. Does the employer recognize top performers? Are programs targeted to motivate continuous improvements? Are there on-going training opportunities?
- Showcase current employees' input in videos, blogs, company website, and social media. Do candidates have an opportunity to see directly that employees' input is valued and made available? Can they see for themselves how employees feel about their work and their company?

Brag About the "Sweet Spots"

Employer branding doesn't mean simply reciting company history, how the founder started a business in a dorm room or at the dining room table, or how big the company is. To get a candidate's interest, employers should brag about the "sweet spots" that impact employee experience at work.

Recruiters can talk up the brand-new state-of-the-art computer system, or the fleet of Mercedes S350s for top sales people, or the all-access training and advancement program. Recruiters must describe the healthy cafeteria menu, or the subsidized on-site child care center, or the brand new 24-hour company fitness center free to all employees and their families.

Don't be shy, and don't be afraid to compare the company's extras with similar companies in the area or in the industry. If your company doesn't have rock-star amenities, don't worry.

Employer branding includes talking about management's philosophy about meaningful work, or a generous paid time off policy, or how the company sponsors employee volunteer work.

Effective employer branding is all about promoting the position and employer by describing what it is employees like about working there.

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Build Retention into Hiring

When recruiters use employer branding and culture fit as an integral part of the recruiting process, they are building retention into hiring by making sure candidates know what it looks and feels like to work there before they are hired. A creative type with a laid-back style who just got a programming degree probably won't be comfortable or happy in a high-volume, high-stress IT environment. An experienced customer service representative used to a busy, high-call quota call center may not be challenged enough in a lower-volume customer service center for luxury goods.

What if you don't have a well-defined employer brand? Don't let that stop you from creating as accurate and descriptive a picture of the culture as possible.

- Use video tours of the work environment and company facilities.
- Have top employees provide testimonials about why they chose to work at the company and why they like the work.
- Use Google Hangouts to have hiring managers discuss the kind of work their employees do and describe business objectives.

What's Your Employer Brand?

Employers and recruiters should be able to summarize their employer brand and culture in a few sentences, as well as talk about it in detail to bring it to life for candidates. Your brand must be clear, concise, and easily identifiable to be effective.

How important is it that your candidates know about the company culture? It's a big deal. Some companies are giving equal or more weight to culture fit as they do to skill sets. Use employer branding wisely as your secret weapon in the war for talent.