

Employer branding essentials

A Modis International guide



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Employer branding is being heralded as the latest buzzword, but it's more than that. Your employer brand can define whether or not you are able to attract and retain top talent across your business and in an increasingly competitive environment, this is no mean feat.

What is employer branding?

According to Brett Minchington of The Employer Brand Institute, employer branding is "the image of the organisation as a 'great place to work' in the minds of current employees and key stakeholders in the external market (active and passive candidates, clients, customers and other key stakeholders)."

Employer branding is not about your logo, stationary, adverts or websites, but rather the relationship between your stakeholders and your business; it is also about how you communicate your company personality to existing and potential hires.

Julia Claydon, HR director at restaurant chain Nando's, who recently received the maximum three stars in the Sunday Times Best Companies' to Work For scheme, sees employer branding as being a more personal and emotional experience: "For me, employer brand is what we stand for – what do you want people to say about you and feel about you when they work for you."

Pete Bradon, head of research at Best Companies, backs this notion when he says "Employee engagement is integral to employer brand in that it's a measure of how proud people are to work there."

The benefits of employer branding

A survey carried out by The Economist and TMP into how companies can benefit from the development of their employer brand found many companies saw a broad range of expected benefits associated with this activity:

- 53%** expected a reduction in recruitment costs
- 73%** anticipated higher employee retention
- 70%** expected employees to recommend their organisation as a good place to work
- 59%** expected increased commitment by employees to their organisational goals
- 33%** saw benefits through enhanced marketing communications
- 30%** saw increased profitability

Employer branding can therefore have significant positive ramifications for your business. This guide has been written to help you get the most from your brand and shows how you can become a great proposition for new and existing employees.

Attracting staff

It's true to say that employers with strong brand awareness rely on it heavily to attract and retain staff. What's more, there can be no doubt that an organisation's employer brand and reputation will go a long way in attracting people. By putting greater emphasis on communicating your culture, philosophy and vision to potential candidates you will in turn develop a strong employer brand and increase your attractiveness as a place to work.

"One of the great things about brands is that they are beacons not just for customers but for employees," says Tim Pethick, Founder, Nudie Juice. "If you get a strong vision for a brand that has promise and personality pushed through an organisation you overcome many of the cultural issues in terms of bringing people on board."

A study carried out by the Bernard Hodes Group found that:

- 53%** of people surveyed felt a strong employer brand resulted in shorter time to fill
- 82%** felt it helped develop their reputation as an employer of choice
- 46%** recognised its value in helping increase their job acceptance rate.

Tailor your proposition to your audiences

No one proposition will work for all audiences. It's therefore crucial for you to know your audiences, understand what makes them tick and tailor your offering and messages accordingly.

Businesses that are successful in this area succeed because they adapt their employer brand to their various target audiences, taking into account differing values, ambitions and needs.

Asda is a great example of where a company takes time to understand their audiences and tailors their recruitment messages, language and media accordingly, with a value proposition focused on the over 50s.

With Generation Y accounting for a growing proportion of the UK workforce, it is also crucial to recognise what motivates this generation and to make sure you meet those criteria correctly. Generation Yers tend to be more career and less company loyal; work is something that fits into their lives, rather than the other way around, as in previous generations. They demand more flexibility and better rewards for less hours, and if they don't get it then they will readily switch jobs. Lose this group and you could lose a huge number of your workforce.

Align your employer and customer brands

Both your employer brand and your external customer brand strategies need to be aligned in order to reflect the brand effectively and consistently, and ensure you are attracting the right people.

The bigger your organisation the more people will have already formed an opinion of you. So it's essential that the two are in alignment and are not working against each other. When the two strategies are aligned, both current and prospective employees will receive complementary messages, ensuring these become synonymous with your organisation.

If your employer brand emphasises and cements the values communicated through your external brand, then when a prospective employee approaches your organisation, it will ensure they are being given the same consistent message and will make them a warmer proposition for additional activity.

Each impression counts

While a jobseeker's first impression of your organisation will determine their immediate interest, this judgement will change over time as they interact with your brand, which in turn affects their perception of you. So the process of building a favourable employer brand actually begins far earlier than the recruitment process itself.

Review every encounter an individual might have with your brand; from seeing adverts and press releases, or calling a helpline, to receiving interview feedback as a jobseeker. It's therefore crucial that every interaction follows a consistent brand and every point of communication is in line with how you want your brand to be perceived.

Check the consistency of your brand before, during and after the application process. If there are gaps then work with your recruitment partner, HR and marketing functions to help define

your key touchpoints and deliver a consistent experience across every encounter.

Your recruitment process needs to reflect your brand

Every step of the recruitment process will shape the impression a potential employee has of your organisation and influence whether they accept or reject a job offer, or even whether to apply in the first place. It's therefore important the recruitment experience correctly reflects your brand and attracts and engages the right people.

Consider the following steps when devising your recruitment activity:

Positioning roles

A well-written job description can serve as a viral marketing piece and get tremendous visibility for your roles and your company.

Rather than just focusing on the technical requirements for the role, also consider why potential applicants should leave their current position and what makes you an attractive proposition as opposed to other companies and opportunities.

Prepare to be researched

Potential applicants will inevitably want to find out more about you before applying for a role and that usually means visiting your website. If your careers section is under-developed and uninformative, then the likelihood is you are going to lose a significant proportion of your target audience before your campaign gets off the ground.

Make sure you take the opportunity to make your company as compelling as it can be:

- Introduce current employees
- show people what success looks like
- promote your culture and rewards
- promote your commitment to training and development.

All these things will highlight your commitment to your employees and position you as an open and rewarding employer.

Use the application process to promote your brand

Although information gathering will allow you to find out if someone is a good fit for your company, it also provides an opportunity for you to enhance your brand.

Gathering information beyond a standard CV will promote your company's focus on hiring the best, which in turn will increase your appeal and strengthen your brand.

Make sure to also get back in touch with every applicant and provide closure, regardless of the outcome. If someone has made the effort to apply then the least you can do is to say "no thanks;" otherwise you could seem uncaring and impersonal. It doesn't take

much, but treating all candidates with courtesy and respect will go a long way toward enhancing your brand.

Interviewing

The interview process offers significant potential to have more depth conversations with your applicants and enables you to become more personal, while increasing the opportunity to positively promote your employer brand.

To enhance your brand, make sure everyone a candidate meets is able to create a positive impression of your company and leave the candidate yearning to return. Impersonal gestures such as the interviewer turning up late, not being prepared for the interview or being ill-informed about the candidate they are meeting can create a negative impression in the mind of a candidate and in turn reflect on how well they communicate that experience to their peers

On-boarding

Just because someone has decided to accept your offer does not mean you can sit back and forget about the promotion of your brand. New hires can get cold feet and as a result may change their mind about joining you.

Having someone follow up with new hires in advance of their first day enables you to reinforce the bond that was created during the hiring process, calm any nerves they may have, recognise whether they are having second thoughts (for whatever reason) and provides an opportunity to reinforce your brand to a captive audience. This initiative also promotes the fact that you are a caring employer and that you value them as an employee.

Employees breathe and act as ambassadors

Employees can add so much to your employer brand and also do so much damage to the effort you are putting in elsewhere. There is no point spending on marketing campaigns for a potential employee to then interact with a current employee who doesn't visually or verbally represent the brand. This can cause an internal/external disconnect and potentially put your marketing efforts to shame.

It is therefore crucial your employees support your brand and act as your strongest brand advocates. They must live and breathe the brand, understand what it stands for and what you are trying to achieve.

Clare Harbord from the Ministry of Justice sees her employees as a key part of her marketing activity when she says her 100,000 colleagues "go down the pub and talk about the MoJ – so I have 100,000 people in my comms team!"

Don't lose focus in difficult times

Effective employer branding relies on consistency of message and delivery, which should remain regardless of how your company is faring or how the economy is affecting your organisation.

In tough times, a strong employer brand can prove to be even more essential and a particularly cost-effective recruitment tool. It helps make current employees feel more secure and confident, which in turn will affect your external perception and play a factor in your organisation's future.

Rebecca Clarke, CIPD adviser, organisation and resourcing, says: "Employer branding is still important, and in times such as these it's more important than ever. Budgets are under pressure, and it's now that HR needs to demonstrate that it is true to its principles. If you cannot avoid making redundancies, then you will need to work hard to look after the people who are leaving and the ones who remain, to retain the impression of how good an employer you are."

Engage management at all levels

True employee engagement will only happen if the brand is embedded into the culture of the organisation, made second nature and nurtured by management. Underpinning your success throughout a senior leadership team that leads by example and keeps values high on the agenda, means you will inevitably drive those beliefs throughout the business and instil a more immersive approach to developing your brand.

Steve Gilliver, EMEA HR Director at Dell believes the employer brand "gives everyone in the organisation a handle on what we are, and everyone interested in joining us a clear picture of what to expect. It infuses our recruitment process and the way we engage with our colleagues throughout the organisation."

Monitoring progress

Finally, but most importantly, regularly monitor your progress. Find out what your employees, ex-employees and even applicants think about your employer brand and how it is perceived. This will allow you to see what is working and what is not and allow you to make informed decisions about what to adapt.

For more information:

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