

Employer branding essentials

A Badenoach & Clark guide

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Employer branding – the latest buzzword to describe perceptions of an organisation as an employer – is being heralded in areas of the press as the answer to attracting and retaining the right talent in an increasingly competitive environment. It is not a logo, letterhead or a clever advertisement, but rather the communication of an organisation's personality and unwritten promises about its culture to potential hires.

This guide focuses on the top ten things employers need to consider.

“ Our employer brand is what identifies us in the marketplace; it's what makes us distinctive. It 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. We value it highly and work hard to live it.

Steve Gilliver, EMEA HR Director, Dell

1 Career prospects and planning attract

It's true to say that employers which have strong brand awareness rely on it heavily to attract the right staff - half the employers surveyed for our Accounting & Finance workplace study in 2007 told us that their brand was a key factor when recruiting staff, placing it alongside career progression as the two main attributes to promote to potential recruits. Clearly, brand reputation works harder for major employers and is reflected in the fact that less high profile employers may find the recruitment process more difficult.

There is however a disparity between this and what employees tell us. As might be expected, career progression is a key attribute, closely followed by salary. Yet jobseekers rate culture and location more highly than pure brand reputation when considering an employer.

Some employers are taking heed. We're seeing organisations secure the best talent by offering a clearly defined career plan, which maps out expectations of the individual and what can be expected from the organisation throughout their career.

2 Tailor your proposition to your audiences

No one proposition will work for all audiences. Whether it be demographics, cultural differences or technical skills the message is clear – know your audiences, understand what makes them tick and tailor

your offering and message. All successful businesses are adapting their employer brand to their various target audiences, taking into account differing values, ambitions, needs in addition to geographic and cultural backgrounds. What makes an older worker tick compared to a Generation Y employee or someone from a different cultural background will vary hugely.

Some great examples of this include Tesco who take the time to understand their audiences and tailor their recruitment messages, language and media appropriately. Competitor Asda have a value proposition focused on the over 50s. Citygroup, GE and HSBC, all of whom are active in China, tailor their propositions to reflect a culture where talent is at a premium and motivators are education, career development and learning.

With Generation Y accounting for a growing proportion of the UK's workforce, it is a key demographic to get right. Demanding more flexibility and better rewards for less hours, this group is harder to manage and will readily switch jobs – particularly if their needs are not met. Lose this group and you could lose a huge number of your workforce.

3 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 the organisation the more people will have already formed an opinion of it. 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 the 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.

4 Each impression counts

While a jobseeker's first impression of your organisation will determine their immediate interest in you, this judgement will keep changing. Each brush with your brand influences a person's 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 your billboard as a consumer, or calling your helpline as a customer, to receiving interview feedback as a jobseeker. Where is your brand falling down before, during and after the application process? Work with your recruitment partner, HR and marketing functions to help create the right experience at every encounter.

5 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 them to accept or reject a job offer (or even apply). So it's important that you're happy that the recruitment experience correctly reflects your brand and in turn attracts and engages the right people.

Just some of the things you'll want to consider are: where and how you advertise a role; how easy is it for people to apply; when and how you respond to applications; the number of interview steps; where, who and how your interviews are conducted; your rejection and offer process and finally how you stay in contact with the new recruit until the day they start to secure their interest.

6 Employees breathe and act as ambassadors

Make sure that your people support your brand. They should be your strongest brand advocates. They must live and breathe the brand, understand what the brand stands for and what you are trying to achieve. Include everyone, from sales and marketing through to PR and HR when developing your propositions.

Ensure it's fully communicated, understood and embedded internally before taking your brand to market. Focus as much of your efforts on internal buy-in as you would on your external marketing: there is no point spending millions on marketing campaigns for a potential customer or employee to then interact with an existing employee who doesn't visually or verbally represent the brand. It's inconsistent, will cause internal and external disconnect and any chance of sale and ultimately loyalty are lost.

7 Don't lose focus in difficult times

Effective employer branding relies on a consistency of message and delivery,

which should not change due to a weak economic climate, or internal instability. A well thought-out employer brand strategy looks to the long-term objectives and is built upon a clear understanding of whom you want to attract and retain. This shouldn't change with the tide.

In tough times, a strong employer brand, with consistent messaging, is even more essential. It helps make current employees feel more secure and confident. Don't be fooled into thinking there are more important things to deal with. The confidence and support of your employees – and your reputation amongst prospective employees – will play a factor in your organisation's future.

8 Engage management at all levels

The strongest, most thought-out and punchy brand identity will slip into oblivion unless it is kept alive by staff. But true employee engagement will only happen if the brand is embedded into the culture of the organisation, made second nature and nurtured by management.

When supermarket Morrisons rolled out a values-based employer brand in 2007/08, they used management workshops and supporting toolkits to help them engage their own teams. Moreover, underpinning its success is a senior leadership team that is leading by example and keeping values high on the agenda. By upholding a distinct leadership profile, listening to 360-degree feedback and giving managers one-to-one coaching in response, staff across the company are better equipped to translate Morrisons' brand concept into practical everyday steps.

9 Consistency

Any customer, supplier or potential employee who interacts with your organisation wants, needs and expects to see consistency of your brand. From marketing to sales to operations to delivery to finance – the complete experience needs to be consistent. In an

attraction and recruitment context, that means the visual identity, the tone of voice and the face to face experience that is used throughout your campaigns and process needs to be 'on brand'.

This requires communication, understanding and engagement of those involved with the process and can only be achieved by your employees understanding why these things are important and what they mean to the business and the potential employee.

10 Monitor progress

Finally, but most importantly, regularly monitor your progress. Find out what your employees and ex-employees think. Their feedback is crucial and will ensure you are on the right track and, if not, will allow you to make informed decisions about what to adapt.

Consider the most appropriate medium for carrying out the research, make it anonymous and ask questions that are relevant to your workforce and organisation.

Would they recommend working there to a friend? Would they sing your praises as an employer? How long do they plan on staying within the company? Are they prepared to go over and above to ensure company success? If they are ex-employees, explore why they left and what would perhaps make them return.

But remember the most important thing is to regularly carry out the research and be committed to taking action on the results.

Related articles

Finance Connections

2007 Accounting & Finance workplace study, Badenoch & Clark

Guide to employer branding

A Personnel Today publication, 22nd January 2009. For a hardcopy please contact Personnel Today on 01444 445 566.

Employer branding: a no-nonsense approach

CIPD, October 2007. Download a softcopy at http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/corpstrtg/empbrand/_empbrndapp.htm

Making talent a strategic priority

McKinsey & Company

The state of employee engagement 2008

Blessing White

Don't neglect your employer brand

Issue 8, Connections, Badenoch & Clark

Other Badenoch & Clark resources

Workplace studies

Detailed analysis of current trends in employment. See www.badenochandclark.com/for-employers for further details.

www.market-talk.co.uk

A quarterly electronic newsletter for customers of Badenoch & Clark, reporting news and discussing recruitment trends in each of our core sectors.

Connections

Our unique magazine for customers and contacts of Badenoch & Clark, published three times of year. Packed with comment, opinion, news and analysis on recruitment, talent management and broader business issues. See past issues at www.badenochandclark.com

www.happinessatworkindex.co.uk

A quarterly index tracking employee happiness across the UK office workforce. Results by profession and region.

Future guides

Throughout 2009 we will be producing a series of guides focusing on the key areas of attraction, retention and recruitment.

If you would like to get involved in any of these we'd be delighted to hear from you. Contact us at connections@badenochandclark.com