

Be a talent magnet

Just like any strong consumer brand, a great employer brand can do wonders for your recruitment and retention strategy

A bag by any other name is still a bag - unless it is a Bottega Veneta or Hermes. In today's consumerist market, a brand is everything, which explains why many are willing to pay several thousands for a Bottega Veneta or Hermes handbag when they could get a lesser known brand at a fraction of the price.

Similarly, the same brand dynamics crucially works the same way in distinguishing employers of choice from the vast sea of organisations. In this competitive business environment, a company has to clearly communicate its unique selling proposition (USP) as an employer in order to attract and retain the best talent within its ranks.

What's in a name?

Employer branding is essentially creating positive perceptions about working at an organisation. Just like branding a product, it is an accentuation of certain culture and personality traits that employees can identify and build a relationship with.

The concept of employer branding started in the late 1990s, but it was not until the new millennium that it began to gain more prominence. As people became more and more mobile, the battle for talent consequently intensified and globalised. Companies who were quick to recognise this trend started to pour more focus into the shaping of their image as employers.

Resilience in times of talent shortage

While some companies look at employer branding from a cost perspective, a well-managed reputation does have its long-term benefits. One of the greatest advantages is that a favourable employer brand is more resilient when there is a shortage of talent. For all things equal, talent would be attracted to join an organisation that has a strong employer brand image. This gives the company more leverage over its competitors when it comes to "selling" the job vacancy. And in times of abundance of talent, the human resource department has the desirable problem of choosing higher-quality candidates out from the pool. A good employer reputation also improves the offer-acceptance rate.

Employees as brand ambassadors

When employees are passionate about the place they work in, they would naturally be eager to spread the good name of their employer, be it its policies, corporate ethics, corporate social responsibility or work environment. Besides reducing the hiring time and advertisement costs through a higher rate of recommendations for employment, the positive word-of-mouth from these brand ambassadors contributes to the overall impression of the organisation among the general public.

In times of a public relations crisis, employees can prove to be an organisation's greatest friend or foe. Where weak employer brands tend to experience difficulties in containing information leaks to the media, strong employer brands find that their employees would be more inclined to stand by and ride out the storm with the company they believe in.

Fame and Fortune

As a bonus, companies that devoutly build themselves successfully as good employers get to enjoy the fair amount of good publicity that comes with making it into employer indices, such as the *100 Best Companies to Work for* or the *Top 100 Employers of Choice*. Not only do they generate favourable media mentions, such third-party endorsements add credibility to the reputation of the company.

In addition, research has shown that great employer brands enjoy higher productivity and churn out better financial results. One common trait among the great companies is that they value their employees. CEOs of these great companies recognise that when you take good care of your employees, they will in turn take good care of your customers.

Not for the half-hearted

Very often, the biggest hurdle to an employee branding exercise is in following through with its implementation wholeheartedly. There may be instances where some divisions within the organisation view employer branding as an unneeded expense and effort. Therefore an organisation's senior management must ultimately be the all-important support and drive, so that such an initiative has the right weight and backing to fulfil its intended effect.

Employer branding is all about winning the hearts and minds of talent. Therefore, it is vital that companies approach employer branding from a long-term perspective. Inconsistent efforts will only cast doubts on the employer's sincerity in creating an employee-friendly corporate culture. In the worst case scenario, it could even backfire and destroy all past merits.

In a nutshell, the basics to effective employer branding is to be sincere, consistent and engaging. Only then, you are able to become a truly talent magnet.

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