

Turbo-Charge Employees with Your Employer Brand

by Stefan Grafe

The concept of brand is difficult enough before you get to the conflicting definitions for what it is, who owns it, how it is best developed, and on what basis.

Development of the employer brand is often handled by numerous departments and people, including: HR people with little marketing and brand experience, and marketing and brand people with little HR experience, not to mention people with HR consulting or employment advertising backgrounds.

What an absolute mess!

The result is an employer branding landscape that is dominated by uninspiring buzzwords: work-life balance, opportunities, engagement, trust, empowerment and innovation culture. Spin is everywhere, leading to brands that lack differentiation or inspirational value, both of which should be at the heart, if not *be* the heart, of any brand development.

Making yourself the employer of choice

When you consider the reasons for building an employer brand, attracting and retaining employees should always be key themes. Your brand has to be different in order to attract talent and give your staff a reason to stay. Also, the idea of employer of choice implies that there is a choice—meaning there needs to be some differences between your brand and everyone else's.

But with many employer brands, this is not a given. In a study cited by *Professional Marketing*, Associate Professor Mark Ritson from Melbourne Business School researched the key attributes organizations attach to their brands. Ritson then estimated the prevalence of certain words in positioning statements, including the following: quality (70 percent), innovative (60 percent), value (50 percent), integrity (50 percent) and trust (50 percent). This is hardly territory to differentiate on.

Inspire or fail

When developing brand strategies, we often talk about brand stretch. A brand always has to be some kind of stretch. In employer branding, this has to be a goal or ideal that galvanizes and inspires employees, and directs their actions. If your only focus is in the context of employee needs and engagement, you will end up with half-baked mediocrity. You want to tap into your employees' motivations, but in a way that aligns with your company's values and goals. This collective motivation makes staff want to turn up in the morning and get the job done—and more.

Just as important is to get the right job done the right way. Everyone likes to know that they will be doing something worthwhile every day. Nothing moves people more than a clear and simple idea. If you have that great idea, top-down and bottom-up become obsolete.

The pitfalls of the development process

While so many employer branding projects start with the right intentions, the processes often kill great outcomes, instead of supporting inspirational brand development. Surveys are a great tool to get insight. However, when choosing and developing your questionnaire, make sure not to focus solely on the work environment, but also look for your employees' interests outside of work. Have you considered asking your employees about their upbringing, and their related work ethics and attitudes? Have you thought about going to their homes? Interviewing family or friends? I'd suggest getting someone with experience in consumer research for this job, and possibly use your best research contractor to do the work.

Consumer researchers are much more familiar with “nuggets” of insight than many employer branding companies. The reports produced by some employer branding firms only analyze functional levels, or embellish vague concepts such as innovation and trustworthiness. These concepts are then strung together as a set of values. However, the trick is to synthesize these to arrive at a strong underlying motivator (or call it an

Tips for developing an employer brand

1. A brand is about a feeling. If you cannot feel the brand deep in your gut, if you cannot feel genuinely excited about it, then how can you ever expect anyone else to feel it?
2. In evaluating your employer brand work, imagine shouting the proposition from your office window into a crowd below. Would anyone shout back “I want that!”?
3. When choosing a supplier, ask their staff what their (employer) brand is about. If they cannot answer concisely and with conviction, or it does not give you the “wow” effect, they will not do the trick for you either.

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- [Build Your Employer Brand by Creating an Inspiring Workplace](#)
Having a successful employer brand encompasses all parts of a company.
- [You Are How You Brand](#)
Mark Schumann suggests that

overarching idea). Simple tools such as benefit ladders and mind mapping are a great way to uncover any underlying motivators.

One of the great examples of an employer brand is Deutsche Bank's "Passion to perform." Initially developed during my time with BBDO Germany as a market-oriented idea, it became the global tag line. It also did a great job—if not a better job—as the employer brand. It is quite easy to see who would be attracted to that statement, what kind of work environment it promises, what culture it fosters, what behaviors are associated with it and what HR programs would support this.

The employer brand effect

There are many points to consider in determining the value of developing an employer brand, including: employee attraction and retention, productivity gains and reduced absenteeism. A difficult problem still remains though: getting sufficient funding for employer branding. But when you consider the powerful word-of-mouth effect of your workforce and the huge marketing value that comes with high-quality mentions from each happy employee, it should be a no-brainer.

Therefore, when looking at developing an employer brand, look at it as turbo-charging your workforce with inspiring ideas that motivate. This ensures that the best employees will come and stay, and market you and your offerings to the outside world.

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employer branding is most successful when employees understand and identify with the brand being presented to customers.
