

The Basics of Employer Branding

The not-So-Simple Practice of Branding

By Rayanne Thorn

Just a few short years ago, I was having online arguments about whether or not employment or employer branding was a real thing – of course, most of these arguments were with recruiters – why? Probably because they wanted to be the one and only reason a job seeker submits a resume or application. They said these types of things to me:

*“There is no difference between in-house culture and the company brand, logo. Or mission statement. Employment branding is bullsh*t.”*

“Employment brand only makes sense in pretty small organizations. You have a small office normally managed by the owner or a manager selected by the owner who then hires the rest of the staff or has the final nod on who gets hired. You will have a consistent company culture because the people have to fit with each other and they are the product of one or two individuals who started out hiring people.”

“There is no such thing as employment brand because it will vary with each department depending on who the head of that department is, what they do, and it may change with the change of departmental leadership, even within the same group, if a new one comes in and, of course, it will always be different at different locations.”

“A brand has to be something that stays the same unless the company is sold, the name goes away or some marketing guru decides that the

brand is so bad it has to be rebranded by calling it Company B instead of Company A.”

I was spun by these responses. But like most things, it does depend upon perspective, as well as use of the employer brand.

I think Starbucks or Disney might have a thing or two to say about the arguments above. Large companies, well-established companies which have leadership changes know the value of a consistent employer brand. Today, this really is a silly argument. Having an established and known employer brand is a necessity – if you don’t create and control it, disgruntled employees and spurned job seekers will.

What is it?

It’s as simple as this: the employer brand is how an organization is viewed or perceived as an employer – so yes, each employee or interested job seeker may have differing opinions – it ultimately is about perspective. But there are ways to align specific parts of an employer brand by setting standards – whether they are departmental or company-wide. And hiring authorities who rely on a consistent brand and truthful messaging will know whether or not that brand benefits their practice of hiring and recruiting or whether it hinders or hurts the hiring process.

Marketing vs. Branding

Marketing shares what you do, make, or distribute. Branding shares who or what you are when are doing, making, or distributing. And so, let's talk about branding, in particular, employer branding.

The brand on a cow or bull told the world all they needed to know – this animal belongs to the ranch that owns this brand. Branding was important part of ownership, recognition, and quality when it came to ranching. Rustlers were a real problem, and the brand helped curve thieves, as well as place true identification where it was needed.

While there are certainly similarities with the marketing function of branding today, the strategic forces behind today's branding has created an intense practice that covers consumer, product, service, partnerships, and the now coveted and quickly growing cross breed function of employer branding. It is easy to confuse talent brand with recruitment marketing with employer branding – I get them mixed up on the regular – but whether you are confused or not should not hinder gaining a general understanding of why this type of branding is now a necessity in this of social media and rapid communications.

Controlled Communication

As a recruiter - years ago, I liked to share as much information as possible about the employer and location, the particular department and job along with its accompanying compensation & benefits with those who showed interest in a specific

organization or job I was representing. I became very aware of the organic filtering process attached to my sharing of the truth about a job, company, and culture. **The truth** – interesting how that in the practice of filling job openings that this little essential is easily forgotten or abused in an effort to complete an open assignment as quickly as possible.

Retention

I preferred to fill job opening with the right placement, as opposed to the quick placement – and sometimes, doing something right takes a little bit longer than doing something quick. I always viewed bringing the right candidate to the table as a two-pronged retention effort. The right candidate who became the right placement would stay in the position longer than the one I convinced to take the job with falsehoods and flash – thus longer retention of that employee. Plus, if I recruited the right placement who was a quality employee and stayed in the job longer, then my own job was secure – whether I was an in-house, corporate recruiter or a third-party executive or contingency recruiter. I was establishing my own retention by being the hiring professional who didn't ruse, lie, or cheat. I was the one who recruited well.

It's actually quite simple, by sharing the truth about a job, the less lies I had to remember and then no one came to me later, angry because the job they took in a specific department with a particular organization was different than described.

Good employer branding is founded on truth, not rusing and lies, or in a great consumer brand, There are multiple examples today of

organizations that have incredible consumer brands but less than stellar employer brands. Think of your favorite gadget or service, your favorite grocery store or soda. Do those consumer brands match their employer brands? Of course, some do – because they get it. But the vast majority fall short, they are caught in the lies hiring companies like to tell.

The Social Media Conundrum

With the advent and total infiltration of all things social media, it is thoroughly imperative, *now more than any other time in the history of employment*, to have not just an employer brand strategy, but one that is based in truth.

Aside from the social media giants like LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook, other “sharing opinion” sites like Glassdoor and even Yelp provide opportunities for employees, past and present, to post experiences anonymously, without repercussion, either in support of a truthfully-touted employer brand or negating a brand that is grandiose or reeking of marketing lies. It is a shark-filled ocean out there now. Are you prepared to swim or sink?

Who?

If every single employer in the world came to me and asked whether or not I thought they should have a presence on social media, my answer would be the same for each asker. Absolutely, yes – why not? If you sell a product or service, or if you manufacture or distribute a product, you should definitely have a couple social profiles. If you don’t write about you and what you provide, someone else will – it is as

simple as that. At least this way, you are the one writing and posting about it.

Do you have employees? If the answer is yes, then there is already a perception among those employees of what your employer brand is. Ask them what they think – if this is the first time you have thought about this, be prepared for answers you may not like. If you don’t like the answers, figure out what you need to fix or change. You may like the answers, if so – yay for you, you must be doing something right. Expand upon it.

Shocking to believe that there are still businesses out there without a web presence, no website. There are even more without a social presence. If you don’t have one, get one.

What?

When was the last time you looked a business up in the yellow pages or a community directory? Most people today will use a search engine to find the business they need. Online directories are great, but they don’t allow for differentiation or what makes your business unique or better than your competitors. If you don’t have a website, have one built or at least, create business page on Facebook or LinkedIn where your contact information is easily found. From there, you can start to talk about, honestly, what it is like to work for your organization. What are your values, goals, vision, mission statement? Perhaps enlist employees to talk about what it is like to work for your company, if they have good things to say. If they don’t, you have other things to work on besides a few social profiles.

View this as an exercise in understanding every part of your business – not just what you sell, but what and how you matter to your employees. If this is something you have never thought about, you may be surprised by their response.

When?

Now. **NOW**, more than ever.

A proverb I love and was shared with me by Phil Noelting, the young CEO of Qwalify, Inc, “The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago. The second best time is now.”

If you haven’t thought about your employer brand or invested time in building a social footprint for your organization, it’s time to do that now. Now.

Where?

Your online presence is not in your complete control. Customers and employees have the freedom to write, post, tweet, say what they want. So Twitter, Yelp, Facebook, LinkedIn, Foursquare, and any other network out there is open to anyone, anywhere.

Be the one who posts the most about your business. Raise awareness on the channels and networks where your customers or potential employees might hang out. Then watch and listen to the responses, be ready to interact – to engage. Imagine walking into a business and asking a question, just to be ignored – would you keep buying from that business? Would you want to work there? The virtual world requires your response also.

Establish a few online company profiles and build from there. Rome wasn’t built in a day, neither was the awesome employment reputation of your favorite airline or coffee shop. But a bad reputation can snowball and get out of control before you even know what is happening.

How?

This is the biggie – I’ve answered it mostly already, but I’ll give you the basics.

- **Create a LinkedIn Company Page.** Post original content from you or your marketing team or other content you think your customers or employees would like or that would benefit their workday. Ask current employees to follow your company page that you have created and then share content from your page to their own – if they agree or find benefit from the content. At some point in time, it might be appropriate to have a company page specifically for your employer brand. Your marketing and HR department should work together to do this – these are streams crossing and it will be very powerful for your employer brand.
- **Create a Facebook Business Page.** Same as above, post marketing and employment content to your page. And again, there may come a time when it is right to create a careers page that spotlights the perks to working for your organization. Again, cross those HR and marketing streams.
- **Create a Company Twitter Profile.** Tweet information that is valid and important to your followers, whether they are customers or future employees

– or both! And again, as your company grows and your social media activity increases, there might come a time when you will benefit from having an employer branding or careers Twitter profile.

These are the top three and social media channels will come and go, start here and build out from there. Develop a content strategy that covers content creation, as well as content distribution. Have a blog on your website, share those posts through your established social channels and develop marketing and hiring campaigns as needed.

- **Listen.** The most important thing you can do is listen to your followers who may be customers or potential employees. Are you educating them in an entertaining way? Do THEY care about you or your brand? What can you do differently that might lead to them caring about your brand? Your greatest advocates will be those that are loyal to your consumer or employer brands. Loyalty will be built-in – but only if you start that ball rolling and establish loyalty to them, building an online brand that clearly and truthfully shares information about the company, product, service, or about what it is like to work for that organization.

So, now you know – or do you?

I may have not convinced you. Here's the thing, you may not think you need to do this, but you can guarantee that your competitor is. I shouldn't have to convince you – your recruiters shouldn't have to convince you – it just is – this is the way it is, now.

This isn't new. Years ago, we called it authenticity and transparency when we described great company cultures and how to determine whether or not someone was a "fit" for a particular organization. I used to tell job candidates to take the time to determine if the job was a right fit for them – because the employer is doing exactly that.

Attract the talent you need by sharing the truth about what it is like to work at your company. Why surprise them on Day 1 of their employment. Company success is built upon a foundation of successful employees. They are the company - not the widgets they build or the service they hawk. People are your greatest asset. So why not take care of your people – they will take care of you.

The Truth.

Carrie Corbin, a good friend of mine and an employer branding expert, asked

As an employer, should I not spend the time to survey my employees, to train my managers to pay attention and help create awareness if something is not working within a business unit so that we can then take the opportunity to address and fix?

That is what this is all about. Ask the questions no one has asked yet. Figure out what you don't know. Then and only then can you truly know what it is like for your employees. And then and only then can you set about fixing it, solving the problem or celebrate and highlight what you got right.

Point of View and Perspective

I have been *working* for many years, I have been *living* a lot longer and it is through that living, that I have waged a war against complacency and stagnation. I am a perpetual student, an eager enthusiast and early adopter when it comes to technology, and a *usually* consummate professional when it comes to using what I have learned to benefit myself or my company. I am one of those **crazies** who loves to work, and loves to talk and write about it.

But here's the most important thing I have learned about business and life – it is **all** about perspective or point of view. I have spent a considerable amount of time getting to where I am, and because my getting "here" is different than your getting "here," that achievement is going to mean something considerably different to each of us. My point of view has been developed over the years and through my *own personal experience* and it may have no congruence with your own.

Does that mean mine is wrong? Or that yours is invalid? We experience the same differences in business, in hiring, in job seeking, in conflict resolution, in almost all aspects of human interaction, *because* we are looking at it through different colored or older or younger or naïve or seasoned eyes. *No one* is going to have the exact same understanding or perspective as you.

How will we know unless we ask? You may think you have a stellar employer brand. And you might, but you also might not.

Start asking and start using the technology that everyone else is using to build your employer brand.

Just start.



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