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The Five Keys To E-Branding Excellence

By Peter D. Weddle

The best candidates are fickle consumers. These passive, high-caliber performers have lots of choices and, deep down inside, they don't want to make one. They receive a constant stream of employment offers from recruiters and, almost always, they elect to say, "No." Why? Because they are generally well treated by their current employer and thus have no motivation to endure the disruption and stress a change would involve.

How can you overcome such reluctance? With a strong employment brand (or e-brand). Such a statement:

- acts as a magnet that draws even the most passive consumer into your recruiting process; and
- predisposes them to "buy" your organization's value proposition as an employer.

Effective e-brands aren't easy to create, however. They are unlike commercial brands in several important respects. Wish as some might that it were otherwise, selling employers to top talent isn't like selling insurance or cars. So, while our colleagues in marketing can be helpful, we have no choice but to develop our own guidelines for developing a successful employment brand. The following five "keys" will get you started.

1. Avoid Organizational Multiple Personality Disorder.

An effective e-brand highlights the two to three most important attributes of an organization's employment experience. These qualities define the essence of what it is like to work in the organization. When an e-brand tries to encompass more than that -- when it describes four, five or even more values, principles or cultural features -- it becomes too much for the candidate to understand and absorb. The employer is so many different things, it is nothing, at least nothing definitive. All organizations are complex, to be sure, but selling organizations to candidates requires that we simplify the offer by focusing on their two to three most engaging and differentiating characteristics.

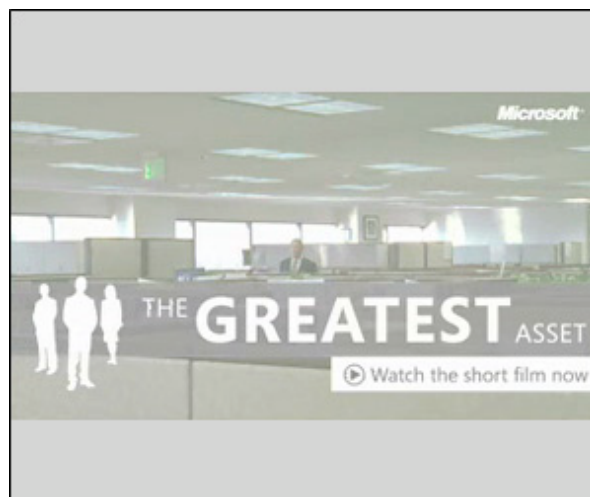
2. Announce the Attributes That "A" Candidates Want.

The key to selecting the right attributes to emphasize in your e-brand is the Golden Rule of Recruiting: "What you do to recruit the best talent will also recruit mediocre talent, but the converse is not true." Said another way, the secret to recruiting top talent is to highlight the characteristics that matter most to them. How can you identify those characteristics? Borrow a page from our colleagues in marketing and conduct a focus group with the top employees in your organization. Use this session to determine what

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attracted them to and sold them on your employer. As with any customer analysis, there is likely to be several clusters of opinion -- not every buyer acts for the same reason. The goal, then, is to identify which attributes were most important to all of the employees after any individual need or interest (e.g., its location or compensation policy) has been addressed. These universal factors define your organization's strategic value as an employer for "A" candidates.

3. Don't Get Tied Down by a Tagline.

The attributes of a car or a cruise are generally well known, so a brand for organizations that sell them can be short and memorable. In effect, a commercial brand is both a reminder (of what a car or cruise is like) and a differentiator (for a specific company's car or cruise). For commercial brands, therefore, a tagline is appropriate. For recruiting, it isn't. Famous product or service brands will attract active job seekers, but they will not influence passive, high-caliber prospects. They don't contain enough selling power to persuade a person who doesn't want to make a change that they should. As a result, an employment brand must be more than a tagline, more than an advertising jingle. It must be a statement that informs and differentiates. An effective e-brand will present the essence of an organization's value proposition as an employer and do so in clear, compelling English and without jargon (e.g., "employer of choice") or rhyme.

4. Employ Your Employment Brand.

Promoting your employment brand on your corporate career site is important, but promoting it elsewhere online (and off) is even more important. Why? Because one of the primary functions of an e-brand is to draw otherwise reluctant consumers -- those pesky, passive prospects -- to your recruitment process. If the brand doesn't do that, then all of the promotion in the world on your corporate site isn't going to improve your yield. Where should you employ your employment brand? Where your target demographic hangs out. That's the second question you want to ask your focus group participants: What are their favorite web sites, their leading conferences and their most popular publications? Use that information to focus your e-brand advertising where it will do the most good, and then, keep at it even when you aren't filling openings. The drawing power of an e-brand grows by nonintrusive repetition, and that takes time.

5. Create an Expectation That Comes True.

Your e-brand creates an image of what your organization stands for as an employer. The best candidates, however, are savvy consumers. While they may be attracted to your organization by its employment brand advertising -- the expectation you create in the marketplace -- they will look for evidence to confirm (or deny) that image as soon as they get there. Positive reinforcement -- an expectation that comes true -- will accomplish the second purpose of your brand: to predispose them to buy into your employer. Negative reinforcement or no reinforcement at all will have exactly the opposite effect. How do you create that positive reinforcement? By designing your recruiting practices, procedures and policies to demonstrate your key attributes as an employer. In other words, illustrate your organization's employment culture and values by using its key attributes to shape the candidate experience in your recruitment process.

E-branding is an essential component of any organization's strategy for recruitment success. Employment branding, however, isn't an exercise in selling cogs. Rather, its purpose is to convince cognitive beings. For that reason, it has its own keys for success, and they open the way to victory in the War for the Best Talent.

-- Mr. Weddle is an author and commentator, and publishes [Weddle's](#), a newsletter about successful online recruiting.

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