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Employment Branding: the Only Long-Term Recruiting Strategy

The many benefits of an employment-branding program

Monday, January 07, 2008 | by [Dr. John Sullivan](#)

Almost every action and process in recruiting is designed for short-term gain. Despite talk about being strategic, most recruiters and recruiting managers alike respond only to requisitions, placing ads, visiting job boards, attending job fairs, and mining social networking sites in an effort to fill today's job openings. There is lots of talk but little effort placed on building out truly long-term recruiting tools and strategies designed to impact the business. If all the talk were true, nearly every recruiting function on the planet would have dedicated resources to employment branding, the *only* long-term recruiting strategy that is designed to bring in a steady flow of high-quality applicants over a period of many years.

Employment branding stands alone as the only approach corporate recruiting managers can leverage to guarantee an end to their talent shortage problem. Unfortunately, most corporate recruiting managers spend less than 5% of their budgets on this powerful long-term solution. In direct contrast, firms that have taken the time to invest in building a great employment brand like Google and Southwest Airlines have not only dominated their industries, but they have also turned the common talent shortage problem into a more desirable talent "sorting" problem. If you're tired of constantly fighting fires and of being continually bashed year in and year out by your managers for failing to produce a high volume of high-quality candidates, it's time to shift your focus to the only solution that can reduce your job stress and make you a hero

about the author



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The Many Benefits of Employment Branding

I have found that the primary reason why corporate recruiting managers under appreciate and under utilize a corporate branding strategy is because they have done a poor job in making the business case for investing in their firm's employment brand. You can't make a compelling business case unless you first know the possible benefits of the branding strategy. Over the years, I've advised dozens of firms on building a compelling employment brand (including a *Fortune* #1 Best Place to Work winner) and, as a result, I've identified the many benefits that a successful employment-branding program can provide. When demonstrated, these benefits can help sway even the most cynical nonbelievers:

- **A Long-Term Impact.** Once you have successfully built your employment brand, you can expect the positive impacts on recruiting to continue for at least five years barring any major PR issues surrounding your company.
- **An Increased Volume of Unsolicited Candidates.** You will significantly increase the number of applicants that your firm receives each year. In some cases, applications will increase by 500%.
- **Higher Quality Candidates.** Not only will you get more applicants, but the quality of your candidates will improve dramatically to the point where you will start getting applications from individuals who never would have considered your firm in the past. A great employment brand that highlights your firm's focus on innovation is necessary in order to attract game-changers, managers, and innovators who demand it!
- **Higher Offer-Acceptance Rates.** As your employment image becomes better known and more powerful, your offer acceptance rates will improve dramatically.
- **Increased Employee Referrals.** The percentage of hires from employee referrals will increase as a result of your employees' increased pride and knowledge about what makes their firm superior to others. Increasing the number of referrals has added benefits in that it increases employee ownership in the recruiting process, while simultaneously reducing recruiters' workloads.
- **Improved Employee-Retention Rates.** A compelling employment brand increases retention rates among your current employees because they will better know why working at your firm is a superior opportunity. In addition,

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their pride in your firm will grow as colleagues and friends routinely ask them, "Do those things really happen at your firm?" Unfortunately, the positive impact will be somewhat tempered by the fact that more firms will target your employees because of your strong employment image.



- **Increased Employee Motivation.** Employee motivation will be easier to maintain because of your employees' increased pride in the firm and the better management practices that are required to maintain an employer-of-choice status.
- **Improved College Recruiting.** Because college students are highly brand conscious, employment branding is especially effective for intern recruiting and college hiring.
- **A Stronger Corporate Culture.** Because one of the goals of employment branding is to develop a consistent message about what it's like to work at your firm, employment branding can help strengthen your corporate culture. This consistent message can reinforce corporate values and guide behaviors while a consensus develops across the enterprise among managers and employees with regards to what it means to be a part of the organization.
- **Decreased Corporate Negatives.** Effective branding programs identify and counter negative comments about your firm. This effort can decrease both the number and the severity of the negative comments that appear in the media and online.
- **Ammunition for Employees and Managers.** Most employment-branding efforts include elements that gather and centralize information on your firm's best practices and its compelling stories. As a result of this effort, it is much easier to provide every employee with an arsenal of information and stories they can share with colleagues in the media about what makes working for the organization the best possible opportunity.
- **Increased Manager Satisfaction.** The resulting higher quality of candidates and higher offer-acceptance rate means that hiring managers will have to devote less time to interviews, and they will be more satisfied with the recruiting function.
- **Increased Media Exposure.** As a result of winning awards, being placed on "best places to work" lists, and having managers give presentations at industry events, the amount of media exposure that your firm will receive will increase dramatically. Having the media brag about your firm's excellent people-management practices adds a level of external credibility that no recruitment ad can provide. As a result of this initial exposure, the number of times that reporters and benchmarking individuals will call your firm for future stories will also increase.
- **A Competitive Advantage.** Because employment branding efforts include extensive metrics and side-by-side comparisons with talent competitors, you ensure that your talent-management approaches are differentiated and continually superior. This superiority over competitors not only impresses senior managers, but it also improves your chances of winning over candidates who also apply for positions at your competitors.
- **Increased Shareholder Value.** The Russell Investment Group has demonstrated that being listed on *Fortune's* Best Places to Work list and the resulting improved employer image can positively impact a firm's stock

price. Google, for example, has noted in its SEC filing the important role that recruiting and retention play in its continued business growth.

- **Support for the Product Brand.** An employment brand can support the corporate brand and your related product brands because many consumers mentally make the link between attracting quality employees and producing a quality product.

Additional Branding Benefits

Some additional benefits of an employment-branding program might include:

- Increased knowledge and competitive intelligence, as more employees from top competitors join your organization.
- The increased focus on excellence in people-management programs brought about by the branding effort will result in the continuous improvement of those practices.
- Getting talked about in the press reinforces the stories you have already spread to your employees.
- The increased notoriety might also have a positive side effect on the business by making it easier to attract strategic partners who are willing to link with your firm.
- Employment branding works not just for large corporations but also for smaller firms and for government agencies as well.
- A great employment brand makes it easier to attract top recruiters and branding experts.
- The high impact and ROI of the employment-branding program will help build HR's image as a bottom-line contributor.

Final Thoughts

If you are part of recruiting management at an organization that has been facing continuous talent shortages, it's time to get out of that rut and focus your resources on the areas that can have the highest business impact. Almost universally, that means shifting your recruiting talent, time, and budget towards the programs that will have the most impact, starting with employment branding (other high-impact programs include employer referrals, professional event recruiting, prioritizing jobs, bringing back key former employees (boomerangs), and making your corporate careers page compelling). Yes, I know it's hard to find the time to step back from fighting fires but, at some point, you have to realize that you can't just talk about being strategic. You have to act strategically by investing in the only long-term recruiting strategy that's available.

If you want to learn more about employment branding, Dr. John Sullivan and Master Burnett will be delivering a multi-city workshop in partnership with AIRS this month. Attendees will also receive a draft copy of Dr. Sullivan's latest book on building your employment brand. More information is available at www.airsdirectory.com/mc/training_employment_branding_series.guid.

Dr. John Sullivan (JohnS@sfsu.edu) is a well-known thought leader in HR. He is a frequent speaker and advisor to Fortune 500 and Silicon Valley firms. Formerly the chief talent officer for Agilent Technologies (the 43,000-employee HP spin-off), he is now a professor of management at San Francisco State University. He was called the "Michael Jordan of Hiring" by *Fast Company* magazine. More recruiting articles by Dr. Sullivan can be found in the [ER Daily archives](#). Information about his numerous other articles, books and manuals about recruiting and HR can be found at www.drjohnsullivan.com. Dr. Sullivan is also the editor of *VP of HR*, an e-newsletter providing "out of the box" solutions for senior HR managers. Free subscriptions can be obtained on his website.

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[Putting Overarching Values On A Website Is A Good Starting Point, But Targeted Efforts Lead Us Closer To The 'Pot Of Gold'](#)

posted 1/7/2008 at 6:11 a.m. PT by [Joshua Letourneau](#)

Dr. Sullivan, thank you for this well-written article about employment branding. I think it does a good job of setting the stage for you and Master Burnett's multi-city workshop in partnership with AIRS this month. Employment branding is definitely the hot topic du jour and a day doesn't go by where a recruiter or sourcer doesn't see an article, discussion group post, or blog post about employment branding. I have to say that this is demand generation on a very large scale!

I don't want to delve too deeply into the following as I'm working on an article regarding this topic, however what I would like to briefly note is the following:

1. Employment Branding initiatives are critical and necessary as a PARITY POINT. In terms of game theory, it is not feasible to sit back and do nothing while your competitors supercharge their marketing efforts.
2. 'Standing for something' or communicating to your target market (in this case, your target candidate pool) what your organization and workplace stand for is a true step in the right direction . . . if and only if someone cares to know (and/or they happen to come in contact with your employer value proposition).

What I have observed about employment branding today is that the emphasis is on communicating overarching values as opposed to what marketers would term 'value proposition management'. For example, most would agree that Business Unit A and Business Unit B of the same organization have very different personalities and strategic objectives (consider New Product R&D versus the Marketing Department of the org's cash cows). As such, the same message that would resonate with a candidate for Biz Unit A may be quite different than the message for a target candidate of Biz Unit B.

In my eyes, this represents the future of employment branding - a progression from placing overarching values on a website or marketing brochure to actual targeted value proposition management (VPM) initiatives that are supported by the Sourcing function of corporate recruiting units. Targeted VPM is what I'm seeing actually occur within 'Candidate Development Teams' . . . it's just the marketing messages (employment branding tools) used to support the recruiting effort are more overarching than targeted.

Candidate Development is SELLING . . . and Employment Branding is MARKETING . . . the issue is marrying the two together in unison to drive better results.

Employment Branding, great... but HOW?

posted 1/7/2008 at 6:42 a.m. PT by [BILL GALLOP](#)

We have seen article after article on this subject but none have given a definitive method for doing this. This is almost as bad as the politicians saying they must cut the federal budget but they don't tell you how.

As a recruiter, how can we make this happen?

HOW to create a 'Magnetic Employer Brand'

posted 1/7/2008 at 8:37 a.m. PT by [David Lee](#)

Bill (and others wondering about the 'how'),

ERE has a number of 'how to' articles on Employer Branding that I've written over the years. The first in the series is at:

<http://www.ere.net/articles/db/249C274881214A5393A726333E06FD0A.asp>.

The 'long story short' of the 'how' is this: If you know what factors and practices create an inspiring/engaging work experience, and then you work with your management team and frontline employees in creating a workplace and work experience that is inspiring and engaging, THEN you'll have something to tell the labor pool.

My experience is that most organizations try to do the 'tell' before they actually create the great work experience.

In the three part series of that article, you'll find a step by step process.

If you're a recruiter, but not involved in the day to day employee experience, then I see your greatest influence coming from sharing with HR and management articles and research on the 'Why' - why it's in their best interest to do the HOW. Once they get that it's worth the time, effort, and financial investment, then share with them the articles on the 'how'.

If you go to the articles section of my website, you'll find both the 'why' and the 'how' articles.

Also, at ERE.net, there's an article that challenges the typical approach to Employer Branding that you might want to share. It's titled:

Before You Waste Your Time and Money on So-Called Employer Branding

<http://www.ere.net/articles/db/2BF6D117C4BD431389D1E7C0A6F26B48.asp>

Hope this helps.

Absolutely!

posted 1/7/2008 at 9:02 a.m. PT by [Michael Marty](#)

Joshua,
I think your response nails it right on the head!

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Guess who's not even looking?

