

Employer Branding 2020

Part 1 - Where we are today



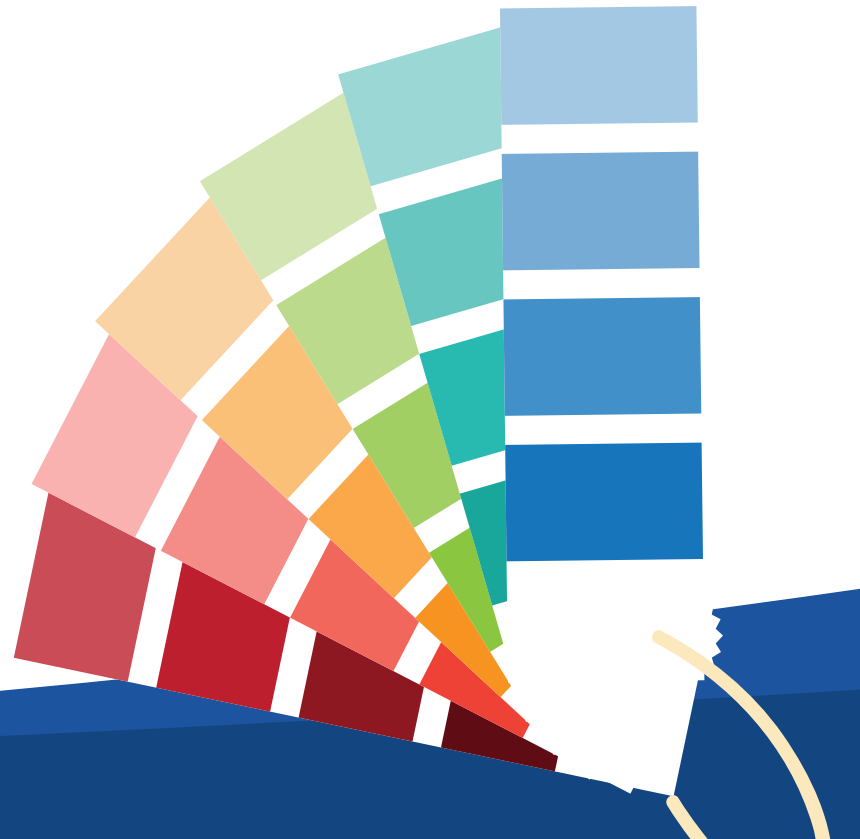
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Talent Management 2020
Whitepaper Series

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INTRODUCTION

The Cornerstone 2020 series has been created to explore the trends and challenges that organisations and talent professionals need to embrace to ensure a successful future. In this paper, we look at employer branding, and where it is today. We look at a history of employer branding and why – in today’s social, connected world – an authentic and holistic approach is key.



WHERE ARE WE TODAY?

The shortage of labour, or rather the lack of qualified specialists, was a familiar state-of-affairs in the 1990s. Indeed, it was in 1997 when McKinsey spoke for the first time of the now much-quoted expression “War for Talent”. To win this war, organisations recognised that they needed to build an attractive employer brand and make a name for themselves as an interesting and popular employer. Of course, this was only possible if the brand was transmitted to the outside world. Ten or fifteen years ago, if you skimmed through regional or national newspapers you would find pages upon pages of job advertisements.

However, in the mid-90s organisations began to enable online applications through their website. Then, around the turn of the millennium, there began a proliferation of online job boards, which today are still frequently utilised by organisations to recruit talent. Thus began the massive decline of job appointments sections in print media.

The appointments on the job boards and on the career pages of company websites were, for a long time, nothing more than the ads you could find in the newspapers and magazines – they just happened to be online. As such, the interface and usability was decidedly unimpressive. Information was meagre and applying was a complicated, tedious and boring process.



Indeed, the relationship between employer and employee was a single-sided affair, with the former assuming a position of power, “allowing” a hungry job market to apply to their positions and with no thought given to accommodating the needs and wishes of the candidate. Job ads were one-sided, simply putting forward the required skills and qualifications, and leaving the candidate in the dark about what may be in-store for them if they get the job.

Nobody had yet figured out that the talent market would soon evolve so that the supply-and-demand balance was firmly in the candidates’ favour.

But to anybody who recognised this, it was clear that they would have to radically rethink the recruitment practice and approach. Most companies today still find themselves in this transitional phase. And this is where employer branding can – and needs to – rise to the challenge.



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OLD-SCHOOL EMPLOYER BRANDING

Slowly, HR departments realised that other ways must be found in order to counteract the looming shortage of qualified specialists. And so they looked to the marketing department and examined how their marketing tactics and strategies could be applied to the acquisition of increasingly hard-to-find qualified specialists.

Elaborate promotional films were shot, using bold and mantra-like language. This “old-school” employer branding brings back memories of marketing campaigns and high-gloss brochures that positioned the company as an employer of choice. These were (and indeed still are) created using a promotional and rather self-absorbed tone to describe the company, without addressing the possible needs and priorities of the potential candidates.

But behind the façade, the external appearance did not match the reality of the company. Despite heavy investment in employer branding, potential candidates often saw straight through the ‘marketing speak’ language.

What is employer branding?

The purpose of employer branding is to form the perception of a distinct, authentic, credible, consistent and attractive employer brand.

It is important to anchor the brand in the actual identity, value and culture of the company. This will secure a higher level of believability and ensure consistency and coherence to the brand.

With an effective brand in place, it is then up to the organisation to find the target applicant group, and to communicate this brand to them. This is the objective of recruitment marketing. If done correctly this will foster interest and a degree of loyalty to the brand, and finally encourage and inspire quality talent to apply for suitable roles.

NEW REQUIREMENTS – AN AUTHENTIC APPROACH

Good employer branding must therefore be authentic. It must be transparent and communicated consistently – externally and internally. As author and academic Karl Moore points out, “authenticity can be considered to be one of the ten values regarded as most essential to Postmoderns” (Moore, 2014).

And organisations need to recognise the importance of this value for today’s workforce: “Millennial[s]...are not forgiving of brands that misrepresent culture...They want brands to be authentic” (Ford, Jenkins, & Oliver, 2013). Good employer branding must therefore be holistic. It must take place both with and for the current employees, and be consistent internally and externally.

Those in a company responsible for creating and nurturing an employer brand must therefore ask the following questions:

- How can I increase my appeal to employees that I would like to have?
- What distinguishes me from my competitors, so that people come to me rather than to them?
- What must I do so that I’ll be interesting to new employees?
- Are the values that are proclaimed to the outside world really active within the company?
- Are the messages from the company in line with the perception of employees, customers and the outside world?

At the same time, in addition to those fundamental measures already used (broadcast campaigns, PR activities, fairs, university events and similar), employer branding must also make extensive use of Enterprise 2.0 and Web 2.0 technologies.

A SOCIAL WORLD

Indeed, it is these very technologies that have necessitated – or at least largely influenced – this cultural shift toward authenticity. *“The postmodern worldview is increasingly shaped by the influence of technology and social media,”* says Moore. *“Facebook, Twitter, Instagram... the plethora of social media has made it much harder to fake it.”*

Indeed, to find out to what extent the promises made by a potential employer live up to reality, candidates are increasingly doing their own research on social networks. For example, they can go through their extended LinkedIn network to see if there are any current employees to whom they can reach out directly. Or candidates can use sites such as Glassdoor to read feedback from current and former employees in order to find out whether employer brand values hold true.

As such, employers need to be on these social sites. They need to re-focus away from a “broadcast” type approach to employer branding, and move towards a more two-way, conversational relationship with employees.

And crucially, the external employer brand communicated in these social interactions by HR and recruiters needs to be authentic.



WHAT DOES AUTHENTICITY LOOK LIKE?

HOLISTIC EMPLOYER BRANDING

In this social world, transparency is paramount, and what is communicated to the outside must be adhered to internally in order to remain credible. In other words, the external employer brand must reflect the internal employer branding. And this branding must reflect the real values of the company.

Employer branding therefore begins with the true values of the company, which cascade down into corporate strategy and then the human resource strategy. This is a holistic approach to “living the values” that is realised and exhibited both internally and externally. Once this holistic and authentic brand is in place, it of course needs to be communicated externally.

The implementation of the employer brand must also be done in an empathetic and authentic manner; employees will not communicate a positive image of the company externally if simply ordered to. However, when employees realise the company is committed to them and engages with their thoughts, they also engage with the company. And so will naturally promote the company externally.



CONCLUSION

Employer branding has become a must for any employer. Whereas the focus was originally on the communication of an external brand, it now has to apply internally to all employees in order to convey a sincere and positive image.

If employer branding works internally, the employer brand is, so to speak, "staff-created", and will be communicated naturally on social platforms through employee-generated content.

The second half of this white paper will focus predominantly on how to create a successful internal brand. We will also examine the steps that need to be taken to face the next five years successfully.



About Cornerstone OnDemand

Cornerstone OnDemand (NASDAQ:CSOD) is a leader in cloud-based applications for talent management. Our solutions help organisations recruit, train, manage and connect their employees, empowering their people and increasing workforce productivity. Based in Santa Monica, California the company's solutions are used by over 2,000 companies worldwide, spanning 18.1 million people across 191 countries and 42 languages. For more information about Cornerstone, visit www.cornerstoneondemand.co.uk.



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