

## Be a talent magnet

Just like any strong consumer brand, a great employer brand can do wonders for your recruitment and retention strategy

A bag by any other name is still a bag - unless it is a Bottega Veneta or Hermes. In today's consumerist market, a brand is everything, which explains why many are willing to pay several thousands for a Hermes handbag when they could get a lesser known brand at a fraction of the price. Likewise, to survive in this competitive business environment, your unique selling proposition (USP) must be clearly communicated through your brand. What is your USP to your potential employees?

The concept of an employer brand started in the late 1990's. However, it was not until the new millennium that employer branding began to gain more prominence. As talent increasingly becomes more mobilised, the battle has intensified and globalised. Employer branding is now more apparent and companies are investing more resources into managing its perception among its employees, potential employees and other stakeholders. The sole objective is to communicate a consistent and favourable brand image to draw top talents while retaining the best.

### **Resilience in times of talent shortage**

While some companies look at employer branding from a cost perspective, a well-managed reputation does have its long-term benefits. One of the greatest advantages is that a favourable employer brand is more resilient when there is a shortage of talent. For all things equal, talent would be attracted to join an organisation that has a strong employer brand image. This gives the company more leverage over its competitors when it comes to "selling" the job vacancy. And in times of abundance of talent, the human resource department has the desirable problem of choosing higher-quality candidates out from the pool. A good employer reputation also improves the offer-acceptance rate.

### **Employees as brand ambassadors**

When the employees are passionate about the company they work for, they would be eager to talk about its HR policies, corporate ethics, corporate social responsibility or work environment. The positive word-of-mouth from these brand ambassadors would reinforce the company as an employer of choice. Employee referral programmes have a higher success rate as employees would be inclined to recommend their friends or even relatives into the organisation. This considerably reduces the hiring time and advertisement costs for the employer.

In addition, in times of a public relations crisis, the employees could be the employer's greatest friend or foe. A bad employer brand would have difficulties to stop any disgruntled employee from leaking internal news to the media. On the other hand, if the foundation is firm, the employees would be the greatest ally against any negative backlash. The chance of riding out the storm is higher when the employer has a supportive employee base.

### **Increased fame and fortune**

A successful employer brand also enjoys a fair amount of good publicity. Getting into the '100 Best Companies to Work For' or 'Top 100 Employer of Choice' list helps to increase brand awareness among the public. Not only does it generate favourable media mentions, it also adds credibility to the employer's reputation when an independent third party endorses your brand.

One common trait among the great companies is that they value their employees. Employee motivation is kept high with various pro-employee incentives. CEOs of these great companies recognise that when you take good care of your employees, they will in turn take good care of your customers. Research has shown that great employer brands do in fact enjoy higher productivity and churn out better financial results.

### **Not for the faint hearted**

Although the ownership of such exercise might lie with the HR and/or corporate communications department, ultimately the board members must support and drive such an initiative. Not many business units within the organisation understand the need for employer branding and they might not be co-operative in upholding the company's brand promise or vision.

Employer branding is all about winning the hearts and minds of talent. Therefore, it is vital that companies approach employer branding from a long-term perspective. It is also not advisable to rest on your laurels when you start seeing results. Inconsistent efforts will only cast doubts on the employer's sincerity in creating an employee-friendly corporate culture. In the worst case scenario, it could even backfire and destroy all past merits.

In a nutshell, the basics to effective employer branding is to be sincere, consistent and engaging. Only then, you are able to become a truly talent magnet.