

# Do you know WHICH 50% OF YOUR EMPLOYER BRAND COMMUNICATIONS BUDGET you're wasting? (PART ONE)

## THE FIRST OF THIS TWO-PART SERIES EXPLAINS THE IMPORTANCE OF A WELL PLANNED EMPLOYER BRAND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY.

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**(b)** Building employer brand equity that creates competitive advantage in attracting and retaining talent takes time. The smart companies transition through an initial research and concept phase (usually takes between three and 12 months depending on company size, geographic spread and so forth) to develop their employer brand strategy. It should also involve an analysis of the effectiveness of current communication strategies to promote the company's employer brand and employer value propositions (EVPs).

Whilst an increasing amount of companies such as Google, Starbucks, UnitedHealth Group, IBM, Sodexo,

Deloitte and Deutsche Bank are deploying a co-ordinated approach to their employer brand communications, there are still many who lack the strategic foresight required to build employer brand strength and a clear understanding amongst the target audience of the benefits of the employment experience offered by the company. Google have been effective over a long period in 'telling their employment story' through engaging imagery (the physical working environment inside the Google offices), video and articles published around the world. On most occasions, it is someone else telling the story. There is nothing more powerful than a third party endorsement! I have been fortunate to be a guest at the Switzerland offices on two occasions and it's easy to see how a working environment can have a positive impact on productivity. But it doesn't happen by chance, there's a well thought out strategy that supports Google's employer brand communication efforts which has seen it consistently ranked as a 'great place to work,' and admired by its peers.

Decades of marketing research provides insights into why companies, in an attempt to build employer brand strength, are literally wasting millions of dollars in communication

expenditure by swimming against the tide. Companies are rushing to transfer communication budgets from online job boards, recruitment firms, and others into social media with little thought for their objectives or metrics to track success. Only four percent of companies have more than 10,000 fans on Facebook, yet companies spend thousands of dollars (and sometimes millions) trying to build a follower base when the budget could be better spent on achieving greater reach through alternative communications such as television advertising, SEO advertising or employee referral schemes.

Some of the challenges facing employer brand managers in developing effective employer brand communication strategies include:

- ❖ poor advice from agencies who are motivated by media commissions more so than helping companies to achieve their employer brand objectives;
- ❖ lack of integration or consistency across multiple online and offline communication touchpoints – a recruitment ad that directs candidates to a career website that contains out-of-date information and does very little

- to communicate 'what it is like to work at the company';
- ❖ inconsistent messaging about the employment experience due to global headquarter leaders failure to engage and empower regional leaders to support the strategy and branding guidelines; and
- ❖ a lack of performance metrics to track what's working and what's not!

**Communicating your employer brand** Employer brand managers should know how candidates 1) apply to work at their company; 2) situations when they think of the company, and 3) understand how the company fits into their daily lives. This knowledge will provide companies with the insights to ensure their communication strategies have the best impact with the target audience.

Deloitte in New Zealand established a Facebook fan page, 'Your Future at Deloitte (New Zealand)' specifically targeted at graduates and interns. Deloitte communicates with its followers using a range of hi-touch and lo-touch communication methods including live shows, live question and answer sessions, video, events, job hunt and applying tips, competitions and text among others.

Given the increasing fragmentation of media, communicating your employer brand and EVPs should occur across multiple media touchpoints including online and offline communication channels (see figure 1). The channel used and frequency is usually guided by resources, budget and strategy.

Traditional one-way broadcast communication tools such as e-newsletters are being replaced by videos, blogs, chat rooms, forums, instant messaging and social networks.

With the rapid adoption of social media as a preferred platform for employee and candidate communications, companies have responded by leveraging the power of these tools for communications. IBM

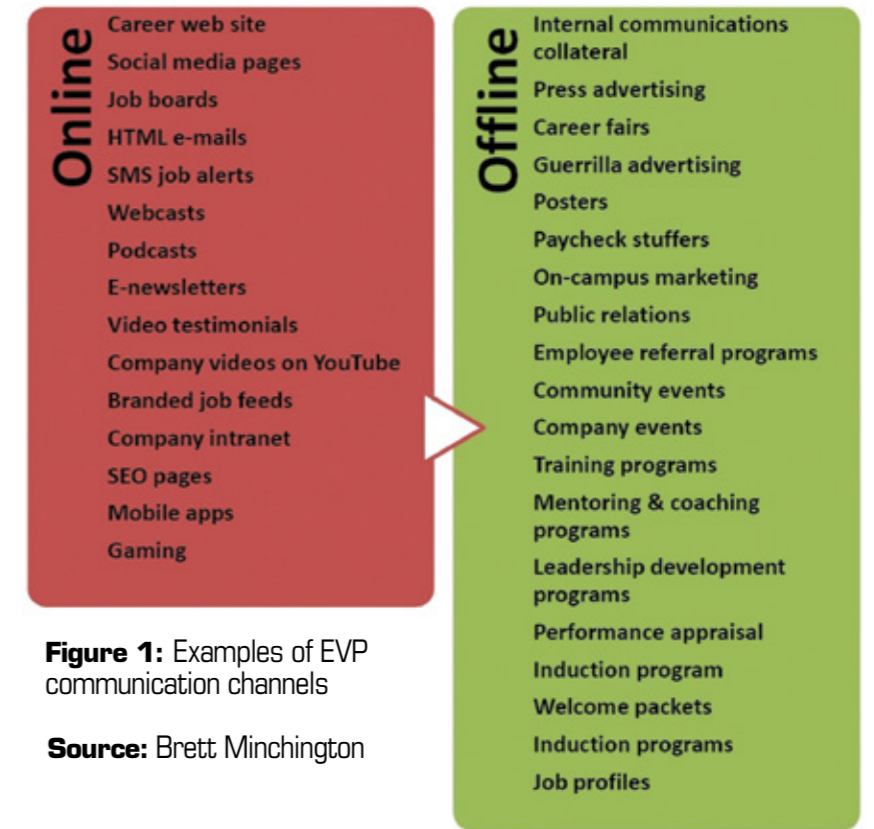


Figure 1: Examples of EVP communication channels

Source: Brett Minchington

and HP have built their own internal (behind the firewall) social networks which has had a positive impact on the employer brands of both companies.

Communication channels that resonate with the target audience should be researched for their success in getting your EVP messaging across. Using communication to enhance internal engagement is no longer just about sending all staff an e-newsletter once a week.

Leaders in internal engagement such as Best Buy are using a combination of communication tools to engage their workforce. Best Buy, a US specialty retailer of consumer electronics uses a mix of tools to open up the channels of communication to communicate with employees. This environment encourages employees to take part in the conversation, ask questions, challenge things going on in the company and bring ideas forward. This leads to employees who are much better informed, productive and engaged in the company's mission.

Best Buy uses practices such as face-face communication, social media and sophisticated discussion forums which allow employees and leaders to engage in productive and open communication about the good and bad of working at Best Buy. The forum has had more than 1.5 million posts in two years with more than 10,000 employees a week contributing. The mix of tools has made a huge difference and positive impact on the company's culture.

You will also need to determine your sourcing effectiveness to ensure you are focusing your efforts and investments in the most effective channels. Sometimes this will involve trial and error until you arrive at the best mix before you allocate further investments.

Next month's article will discuss how leading companies are deploying best practice employer branding communication initiatives to attract and engage talent. [\(HR\)](#)