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Where to next for employer branding?

Employer branding has evolved from a recruitment support function to a focus for organisations throughout the employee lifecycle, from hire to retire. **Brett Minchington** forecasts what the future may hold for employer branding

The business case for employer branding has become clearer for organisations. Prior to the GFC employer branding was mainly used to support recruitment functions. The importance of leveraging the employer brand to engage and retain talent is now high on the leadership agenda as companies discovered during the GFC that it was still difficult to recruit and retain talent.

The maturing of employer branding with a company's focus on the whole employee lifecycle from hire to retire has come at the right time as the economy in many countries has started to rebound.

Talent acquisition and retention have become increasingly complex. The need for systems integration, understanding of culture diversity, social changes, technological advances, the threat of declining fertility rates, inequality in global education standards and the impact of ageing populations in many developed economies have created multiple challenges for companies and they show no signs of easing soon.

Since 2006 I have witnessed the stages of the evolution of employer branding inside companies and amongst cultures during my two global tours to more than 40 cities in 25 countries.

Leaders I speak with around the world are saying where previously they could take 1-2 years to research, develop and implement their employer brand strategy the competitiveness for talent is demanding they react quicker and more decisively to stay ahead of the competition. The challenges of the jobless economic recoveries being experienced in countries such as the US require new applications of employer branding.

With the talent challenges and complexities now facing companies it is not surprising we are yet to see many companies evolve to the status of a Tier 1 employer branding company (see box "Where are you on the route to rebranding?").

How to move forward

The success of your employer brand strategy over the next 1-2 years will be determined by how well you:

Where are you on the route to rebranding?

TIER 1 – FOCUS

- Employer branding for business transformation
- Support of culture diversity across countries
- Dedicated employer branding department with representatives living in countries outside headquarters
- Open lines of communication across borders
- Systems integration to support global talent attraction, engagement and retention strategy

TIER 2

- Support employer brand strategy at executive level
- Integrating Employer Brand and EVPs into company culture
- Alignment of policies, systems, processes with EVPs
- Development and management of global careers site
- Employer brand metrics developed and reported on
- Employer branding across employee lifecycle

TIER 3

- Internal and external research to define EVPs
- Distinctive assets defined and promoted
- Employer brand strategy developed
- Cross functional collaboration on employer brand strategy
- Training of line managers in employer brand management

TIER 4

- Company siloed with very little collaboration on employer branding between departments
- Above the line EVP development
- Employer branding recruitment
- Knowledge of employer branding limited to few people in organisation
- Lack of support for employer brand strategy at Executive level

TIER 5

- Technical skills focus
- Cost control vs quality of hire/talent
- Recruitment disorganised, dysfunctional and highly operational
- Web career site
- Absence of coordinated global talent attraction, engagement and retention strategy

• Establish a strategic framework for employer brand:

Ensure internal and external stakeholders are working to achieve the same strategy. In my new book *Employer Brand Leadership-A Global Perspective*, I detail the 'Employer Brand Excellence Framework', which defines the employment experience from a stakeholder perspective (see figure 1). The Framework considers the role of employees, prospective candidates, customers, investors and society in employer branding. Less than 20% of firms around the world have a clear employer brand strategy, and as expected developed markets are leading the way with US/Canada rating the highest (19.7%), followed by Asia (19.4%), Europe/UK (18.4%), Australia (15%), Turkey (12.3%) and Russia (7.6%). Clearly there is still a lot of work to do!

• Allocate sufficient resources: To develop and manage the employer brand for the long term you need dedicated staff implementing the strategy. There has been a 250% growth in employer branding job vacancies since 2006 and many of these are seeking professionals from a marketing and communications background, so think broader than the HR department.

• Ensure collaboration between internal and external stakeholders: Ensure a consistent approach to the company's brand assets through a joint approach amongst stakeholders responsible for the corporate,

consumer and employer branding initiatives – eg marketing, communications, HR, PR, IT, etc.

• Build market reach: Employer branding initiatives should refresh employer value proposition (EVP) memory structures through relevant communication.

• Re-think your business model: The ability of organisations to attract and retain talent who contribute to growth and profitability is no longer limited to drawing upon the local or national workforce – companies now have tools at their disposal to tap into the global talent pool and what I call "pockets of talent excellence", small clusters of highly talented individuals or small groups who are on top of global issues and trends, adaptable and agile enough to move in and out of companies on a project by project basis.

• Manage employee differentiation: Understand the role of culture diversity in unlocking the potential of your workforce.

Companies need to act now to put the systems in place to ensure they are well positioned to react to the changes that will accelerate as the competition for talent across borders becomes more intense with companies seeking to expand their global footprint.

Have patience – employer branding is an evolutionary process! **HC**



About the author
Brett Minchington MBA, Chairman/CEO of Employer Brand International, is a global authority, strategist and corporate advisor on employer branding (www.brettmichington.com). His new book 'Employer Brand Leadership-A Global Perspective' is available at www.collectivelearningaustralia.com

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