

BRAND MATTERS

There is a need for an increased capability for HR to build a business case for employer branding and to demonstrate a return on investment. HR personnel must understand the future needs of the organisation and enhance the company's employer brand to attract and retain talent and build an engaged workforce, notes international speaker, author and co-founder of the Employer Brand Institute, *Brett Minchington*

By Ananya Mukherjee



Companies need to ensure that the employment experience across the employee's lifecycle matches with the perception of the experience from the outside. The employer brand promise communicated through integrated communicated initiatives must, therefore, provide a realistic view of what a new hire can expect from the employment experience, feels international speaker, author and co-founder of the Employer Brand Institute, Brett Minchington.

Organisations need to ensure they have a fully-integrated online and offline communication plan using channels that deliver compelling and relevant messages about the employment offering to the target audience, he says. For instance, Phillips career website provides an excellent example of a company that has a clear talent acquisition strategy supported by online communication initiatives. "The site provides excellent insights into what it's like to work at Philips. Companies need to nurture a culture that leads to an engaged workforce in order to build brand ambassadors from the inside. A word of mouth referral by an existing employee is a true source of competitive advantage not to mention the savings in recruitment and turnover costs.

BIO BRIEF

HR Summit speaker Brett Minchington is the managing director of Collective Learning Australia and co-founding partner of the Employer Brand Institute. He is widely recognised as an International Employer Brand strategist who has delivered keynote addresses and masterclass events to executives in 11 countries and has been published in over 10 countries. His book *Your Employer Brand: attract-engage-retain* is the international employer brand book of choice and has been sold in over 20 countries.

"We conducted benchmark studies in Australia and New Zealand earlier this year using the *Minchington/Thorne Employer Brand Global Index* and found that a lot more work needs to be done on building leadership capability to improve their organisation's desirability as an employer. Leadership ranked as one of the lowest influences on the employer brand in Australian and New Zealand companies," Minchington observes.

HR's role in employer branding

The first step is to realise that it takes time to build an employer brand. HR and other line managers need to be tuned into the current culture of the organisation and have a clear vision for their employer brand image, he says. Communication channels that resonate with the target audience should be researched for success. "For example the growth of e-newsletters that are heavy on text and content have lost their appeal. I consult to the Australian practice of PwC, and the HR team there is addressing these challenges through an integrated strategy that is open and consultative and includes input from the executive team, line managers and employees. A combination of online and offline initiatives are being used to communicate these changes at PwC," he shares.

Furthermore, the CEO and leadership team must be engaged in the process and/or briefed on the business benefits, says Minchington. "This is where HR can play a very important role whilst demonstrating the strategic value of HR to the organisation. I recommend to organisations that research be undertaken with a sample of current employers, active and passive candidates and a sample of key stakeholders in the external market."

Companies that overlook the research and go straight into design and integration initiatives risk building an employer brand that is not aligned with the aspirations of leaders or reflective of the culture and values of the organisation, he notes. "Virgin Blue Airlines in Australia is renowned for their ability to attract a consistent cultural

fit and when I fly with Virgin I ask the staff what they like most about working for Virgin – 9 out of 10 say 'the people I work with.'"

Research shows that HR is pivotal to supporting the recommendations made to organisations to enhance their employer brand. This is because, in practice, HR is usually responsible for employer branding strategy and implementation initiatives, explains Minchington. "Although this is changing with top companies now forming teams of HR, marketing, communications and PR personnel to develop and roll out the employer brand strategy. In the early 1990s, HR was the logical choice to drive the employer brand strategy. Consistent with

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the rise in acceptance that companies with a strong employer brand attract and retain talent better than their competitors, research has shown that CEOs and/or the executive are now leading employer brand programmes in an increasing number of organisations," he elaborates.

Biggest glitch for HR

The biggest obstacles HR often face when trying to implement changes include clarity, resources and capability, says Minchington. Employer brand projects can be very complex – more so if a company has a globally-dispersed workforce that operates across diverse cultures, he feels. "There's a need for an understanding at the board and shareholder levels that the labour market is only going to get tougher and that an increased level of investment must

FIVE BIGGEST EMPLOYER BRANDING MISTAKES

Companies fail to undertake employee and stakeholder research upfront and think that by updating their logos, symbols, websites and press ads they have built a stronger employer brand.

HR managers fail to engage other line managers in the employer branding process until they are ready to roll out activities that usually end up as a HR project and have little impact on the perception of the organisation as a great place to work in the mind of current employees and external market.

Recruitment advertising agencies have undertaken the majority of employer branding projects in the past but this is changing fast. Leaders are demanding a more strategic approach to developing a stronger employer brand. What we are seeing now is more detailed internal and external research to better understand the organisation's key employer brand drivers.

Failing to take a long-term view on employer branding. Building an employer brand that creates competitive advantage takes time as does building leading consumer brands. Resources must be allocated that enable employer branding investment activities to impact with the target audience over time.

Failure to effectively manage channel partners including talent acquisition partners, talent engagement and development partners, recruitment advertising partners and corporate reputation partners. "I find this error concerns me the most as too many directors spend too much time and effort managing conflicting objectives and priorities amongst the channel partners, resulting in inefficiencies and high levels of bureaucracy. This lack of cohesion diverts the focus from the main priority of leveraging their employer brand to attract and retain the best," says Minchington.

be allocated towards employer branding initiatives. There's also a need for an increased capability for HR to build a business case for employer branding and to demonstrate a return on investment. HR personnel must understand the future needs of the organisation and put forward a compelling business case for enhancing the company's employer brand to attract and retain talent and build an engaged workforce."

'Employers of Choice' or just market perception?

Amongst many other benefits, the status as an Employer of Choice is one outcome of having a strong employer brand. However, often the phrase is misused or incorrectly perceived, warns Minchington. "From my experience the term 'Employer of Choice' has been overused and in many countries such as Australia, the USA and the UK, where the term is now avoided. This is a result of having too many organisations over promising and under delivering," Minchington shares.

"I attribute this change in mindset to an evolution of the employer brand concept in these countries. Where once 'Employer of Choice' was the term used to describe a company that talent wanted to work for, research and my experience has shown that it's unrealistic for an organisation to be all things to all employees.

"There's a shift in acceptance that a reputation as an 'Employer of Choice' is an outcome of a strategy to a specific target audience and is primarily policy driven. For example a company may strive to become an 'Employer of Choice' for diversity if it relies on a multicultural workforce for sustainability such as the hospitality industry in London."

Where the organisation's perception in the marketplace does not match with the reality of the employment experience, "The feedback should be used to align or re-position the image

WHAT CAN ATTENDEES AT HR SUMMIT 08 SINGAPORE LEARN FROM BRETT MINCHINGTON?

Attendees will learn how, globally, more companies are embracing the employer brand concept in response to changes in the business environment which will impact on organisations for many years to come as a result of the ageing population, increasing mobility of workers, the impact of globalisation, advances in technology changing the way we communicate and the declining fertility rates. The session will provide insights into authentic employer branding and takes a holistic view of the HR, marketing and communication systems and practices influencing an organisation's competitiveness in the market for talent. Delegates will learn how to define the key drivers of their employer brand and how to focus on the drivers that matter most. Case studies of global best practice will be shared along with an Employer Brand Excellence Framework and audit methodology that will assist to guide and provide clarity to their company's employer brand strategy.

the organisation wants to portray to its target audience. These changes take time and must be carefully managed with a strong mandate from the CEO to ensure policies, systems and practices align with the image the organisation wants to project to the marketplace," he adds.

For example, if a company wants to be seen as innovative, dynamic and having a leading edge, it would be advisable to align recruitment, induction and on boarding initiatives accordingly, says Minchington. "This vision will also need to be communicated internally and training undertaken for staff to enable them to deliver the brand promise." **HRM**

WHAT MAKES YOUR EMPLOYER BRANDING WORK?

