

What is employer branding? How does it help with hiring?

Shortly after her college graduation, Sophia lined up two job interviews. Eager for any information that might provide an edge, she scoured each employer's career site and social media channels. Seeing pictures of employees at Company ABC helping out at a food bank caught her attention. She also noticed that the people in the photos represented a wide range of ages and ethnicities. These observations made her feel good, as social responsibility and a diverse work environment ranked high among things she desired. Nothing she saw about the other employer, XYZ Ltd., gave her any reservations, but nothing moved her either.

Sophia took matters further by throwing out a question to her LinkedIn network. She asked connections to tell her anything they knew about Company ABC and XYZ Ltd. Respondents gave a variety of interesting responses, but two in particular caught her eye.

An alum from her university wrote that she recently celebrated her one year anniversary at Company ABC. Human resources put a small bouquet of flowers on her desk that morning, and many colleagues posted congratulatory Slack messages. Best yet, she now was eligible for a variety of company-paid career development opportunities.

A message from a different person simply said, "XYZ Ltd. ghosted me late in the recruitment process, so be careful." This led Sophia to check out Glassdoor and other online sources of information about employers. Seems that quite a few job seekers had a negative candidate experience. Likewise, many new hires expressed frustration that a lack of organized onboarding left them feeling helpless for months. And current employees complained about the company's employee retention problems translating into more work for those who stayed.

Needless to say, Sophia gained a very clear preference as to her employer of choice.

What is employer branding?

Many companies make a deliberate effort to get consumers to think of them in a certain way. For instance, one organization may cultivate a reputation for releasing cutting-edge products. Another may try to lure customers by positioning itself as high-end, while a competitor may instead tout affordability. These images create a public perception known as the corporate brand.

Potential employees may first become acquainted with your organization through your company brand. Job candidates may look into you because they like your products, services, or public image. However, possible future employees are interested in more than just how society views you. They want to work for a good employer.

Enter the concept of a strong employer brand. Your employer brand is how you are viewed as an employer. It is your company's reputation among the workforce – potential candidates, existing employees, and former workers.

The importance of a strong employer brand

Possessing a positive employer brand can help you attract and retain workers. Especially in times of low unemployment when securing top talent proves difficult for many organizations, a great employer brand can provide a much-needed edge for talent acquisition.

For starters, satisfied employees make wonderful brand ambassadors! When people hear information from their friends or family, they tend to listen closer and put greater trust in the message. Genuine enthusiasm about working at your company speaks volumes. Instead of spending more money and time advertising open roles, you may have a supply of quality applicants simply from word of mouth and employee referrals.

While salary always has some role in people's job decisions, the playing field is often quite level among similar employers. The current demand for workers necessitates fair compensation for a company to even enter the conversation. An attractive employer brand takes on great significance as a tie-breaker. It conveys how choosing you over a competitor has certain advantages, from greater choice over work arrangements to an appreciation-centered company culture.

And if your employer brand is not so hot, you might need to ante up to even stand a chance of luring top talent. Glassdoor notes that a [negative employer brand](#) necessitates offering at least a 10 percent pay increase above competitors in order for candidates to consider working there.

As you take measures to build up your company's reputation in the eyes of job seekers, another great thing happens. Efforts to improve your position as an employer of choice among qualified candidates also boost the satisfaction level of current workers. When they are content with things such as, say, your increased emphasis on work-life balance or your diversity initiatives, they are more likely to stay. With a better retention rate among existing employees, you face fewer labor challenges and less need to even go out and recruit new employees.

Developing an employer branding strategy

Getting others excited about your employer brand takes effort. Successful employer brands are carefully crafted, not tossed together. At a small company, the owner may take on the task of figuring out what makes his or her business a great place to work. Larger companies often rely on their HR team, communications department, and/or marketing professionals to assemble an employer branding strategy.

A vital part of employer branding efforts is creating an employee value proposition (EVP). The Society for Human Resource Management defines an [EVP](#) as "part of an employer's branding strategy that represents everything of value that the employer has to offer its employees. Items such as pay, benefits and career development are common, but employers also highlight offerings that are currently in demand – like technology, remote work and flexible scheduling."

Put another way, an EVP answers questions such as "Why should someone work for your company instead of somewhere else?" and "What can prospective workers expect from you as an employer in exchange for their talent?"

Responses, of course, will vary considerably but often include a mixture of factors such as:

- Better compensation
- Excellent benefits

- Outstanding or unlimited PTO
- Unique perks (anything from on-site yoga to on-site childcare)
- Opportunities for career development
- Heart-felt company values
- An inclusive environment
- Diversity
- Commitment to work-life balance
- Telecommuting and/or hybrid opportunities
- Flextime
- Mental health initiatives
- Desirable or convenient location
- An interesting, energetic, or otherwise positive company culture
- Supportive management
- Cutting-edge technology
- Quality coworkers
- A clear, admirable company mission
- Travel opportunities

A smart way to generate ideas for the employee value proposition is to seek input from outstanding or long-term employees. Ask them why they like working at your business, how they would describe company culture, and what makes the organization different from other places. Using their responses when forming an EVP gives the proposition authenticity and a worker-focused perspective. And when prospective employees or other stakeholders question them about your employer brand, their answers will align with your message – adding to

your credibility.

Managing your employer brand

Once you know the message you want to deliver to the workforce, it becomes important to get it out there. Consistency drives home your points and solidifies your employer brand. Actions both large and small count when eyes are watching.

Consider the importance of [crafting a good job description](#). Why would that be something to which to pay attention? Many times, it serves as the first occasion on which a person hears of your organization. The job description introduces your company culture and values. It also starts generating impressions of how you might fare as an employer. Your ad provides some answers to the “What’s in it for me?” question that all candidates have on their mind. Plus, it gives you the opportunity to distinguish yourself from others in the industry by showing what makes your organization different or special.

Similarly, your company’s careers page and social media channels serve as places to thoughtfully promote your employer brand. Consider posting employee profiles, Q and A, and testimonials that generate interest and build trust through their “real worker” credibility. If one of your organizational perks is time off to volunteer, post pictures and stories of employees in action. If your EVP includes attention to work-life balance, do a story on a remote worker and how the company helps with juggling personal and professional obligations.

Realize, though, that companies do not have total control over their employer brand, as Sophia’s case in the opening demonstrated. Disgruntled past and present employees or even unhappy job applicants may post negative comments on websites or otherwise speak ill of you as an employer. And Glassdoor notes that 86 percent of job seekers research company reviews and ratings to decide on where to apply for a job. What can you do to limit damage?

First, do not ignore what is being said. Take a good look at comments on popular job review sites. Analyze whether or not the postings have merit. If they do, figure out how the company can change its behavior or procedures to rectify the problems stated. A thoughtful response demonstrates that your organization listens and responds to employee concerns. While the criticism is still out there, presenting your side or showing how your company grew from the knowledge raises your credibility in the eyes of readers. In fact, 7 out of 10 people surveyed by Glassdoor indicated they had changed their opinion about a brand after seeing the company reply to a review.

Lastly, respect every person at every stage of their employment relationship with you. Respond in a timely manner to job applicants. Let rejected candidates down easy. Demonstrate a fair playing field in the hiring process. Handle employee layoffs with honesty and tact. Operate a transparent, inclusive workplace in which all employees feel they have a voice and a hand in organizational success. The actions you take today can come back to help or hurt your employer brand tomorrow.