
Effective Employer Branding: Need for HR to Partner with Marketing

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Abstract

In contemporary times of today (volatile, uncertain, complex & ambiguous-VUCA environment), with all other resources being available affordable & accessible, it's the only talented human resources which could provide cutting edge services to the company. Hence every company would be striving for attracting & retaining the talented people. Needless to say an effective employer brand helps in attracting the talent and reduces the recruitment costs, apart from helping the company in retention of employee. Further, it also helps in improving the performance, through reduced absenteeism and improved work performance.

Purpose

This is an exploratory paper based on secondary resources looking at employer branding (EB), its need and importance. While looking at few instances of successful employer branding, we would like to make out a call for a partnership between HR and marketing in this crucial exercise.

Design /methodology

This study is exploratory which is based on literature and document review. It has covered empirical and theoretical research and various articles.

Contribution/ Originality

This paper looks at the concept of EB, its importance in terms of getting the talented workforce, reduced absenteeism, improved performance & retention of its employees. Hitherto, other than few companies, emphasis was on creating product or corporate brand with a view to improve sales and thereby revenue. But in the changed scenario, where all other resources are available; accessible & affordable, with talented human resource providing the much required cutting edge it's important to build employer brand on corporate brand for attracting Talented Human Resource(THR).

Practical Implications

The research will be useful for bolstering a strong partnership between the HR Department and Marketing Department so that there is a harmony between the two wings of the company which otherwise often find each other at loggerheads.

Keywords: Employer Branding, Marketing, HR, Talent Acquisition, Retention

2.1. Introduction

In contemporary times of today (volatile, uncertain, complex & ambiguous-VUCA environment), with all other resources being available, affordable & accessible, it's the only talented human resources which could provide cutting edge to the companies. Hence every company would be striving for attracting & retaining the talented people. Needless to say an effective employer brand helps in attracting the talent and reduces the recruitment costs, apart from helping the company in retention of employee. If the company has a strong employer brand, prospective employees will perceive it to be of an attractive place of work & will not look for another place to work. Companies who are only working on building corporate or product brand for maximizing sales and revenues, they can't get talented Human Resources. So, companies need to build their employer brand by communicating to their prospective and present employees about company's values, culture and how great is the workplace to work with etc., It's heartening to note that Conference Board report of 2001 (2) found that EB is connected to HRM and EB is on rise with companies focusing on it instead of solely working on corporate brand.

2.2 What is Employer Branding?

EB refers to people's perception about the workplace and how the company markets itself to prospective and present employees. When the company succeeds in building a strong EB, it not only attracts talented people but succeeds in retaining them as well. So, companies need to focus on building employer branding. People are to be told about its culture, values, the strong and vibrant work environment that exists in the company etc., In other words, company should walk the talk.

2.3 The Value of Employer Branding

The business case for employer branding lies in the attraction, selection, and retention of talented employees. Of late, it has become an important tool for attracting the talent and to retain the key employees. Employer Brand helps to get right kind of potential employees. It has a positive influence on organizational profitability.



Figure 1. Correlation Between Employer Branding and organizational Profitability.

According to Gaddam (2008), EB influences profitability of the company through increased commitment and Performance. Other benefits of Employer Branding include more internal recruitments, less time and cost to hire, lower absenteeism and better prospective employees (Beardwell and Claydon, 2010). Though the benefits of EB are so attractive, one must note that it's a complex discipline posing several challenges to the Organization in creating one. But it's worth it, as people who join as a result will become ambassadors of the company and after working for some time will start recommending it to their near and dear ones. (Watson and Reissner, 2010). Thereafter the company will be able to give its best and convey the right brand promise and measure the employee perceptions continuously (Watson and Reissner, 2010).

So, we can derive from aforementioned correlation that Employers stand to gain a lot from recruitments through referrals which may also lead to better talent retention and when talented human resources streamline their efforts, the Employer becomes a brand to reckon with in the eyes of both the employees and the customers

3.1 Literature Review

The concept of EB was first devised by Tim Ambler and Simon Barrow (1) in 1990. Earlier shortage of talent was felt as a result of prevalent economic boom & low employment rates. Attracting and retaining talent has become an issue with large chunk of employees retiring and

non-availability of skilled and talented workforce and there lies the importance of EB as a discipline. As we all know EB affects company as well as external stakeholders and how it essentially identifies organizations as future workplace to aspire for. (Davies, 2008; Gaddam, 2008; Foster et al., 2010) (10).

Moroko and Uncles (2008) emphasized that branding and EB are closely related as Ambler and Barrow (1) (1996)in their article named “The Employer Brand”, define EB as the package of benefits provided by employer to its employees. Backhaus and Tikoo (2) (2004) created a theoretical framework by describing EB as something that differentiates it from its competitors. Rosethorn, Backhaus and Tikoo viewed EB as an advantage company enjoys over its competitors. So, to conclude the argument, we can say that EB refers to how a firm differentiates it from others as an employer.

3.2 Why Employer Branding?

Three main benefits of employer branding relating to recruitment, retention and performance as advocated by Taylor (2010) (18).It attracts talent and reduces the recruitment costs. Further, it helps in retaining people. In other words, the company needs an effective Employer Branding and will be also seen as an attractive and desirable employer&it discourages them from looking elsewhere to work. A strong employer brand also helps in improving the performance, through reduced absenteeism and improved work performance. All this is fine, but how to go about in this regard is a bigger question to answer.

4.1 Employer Branding Strategy: How-to Go about?

A sound employer branding strategy allows changing the dialogue surrounding the company positively resulting in higher talent acquisition and retention. In other words, it is all about marketing the company to job seekers and employee’s perception about company workplace. Let’s list out the steps to be taken in this regard:

4.1.1 Company’s Needs & Talent Required

Company should identify first its business requirements and then work accordingly and match the type of talent. The companies are driven by motivated employees who look at their contribution in a symbiotic fashion. At all levels of the management (senior, middle or junior cadre) the employees should identify their goals with that of the goals of the company. The company that invests in Super-ordinate goal setting and communicates well with the employees also benefit with lesser conflicts within the companies that may arise because of Employer-employee mismatch of expectations.

4.1.2 Employer Brand Audit

Company should keep checking its employees' perception of the company for knowing the areas of improvement so that it can work on the same to build a strong employer brand.

4.1.3 Creating Employee Value Proposition (EVP)

Creating EVP is the primary step in building EB. And once the company is ready with a list of values and benefits it offers, it should send a marketing message and a promise to both present & prospective employees. Further, it should publicize the same & ensure it reaches all the concerned.

4.1.4 Word of Mouth

Job seekers eager to know about the company's culture would like to hear it from present employees. So encourage your current employees to share their experiences and post important events on their social media accounts, which is a powerful way to showcase the company's culture on their networks and display a sense of pride to be associated with the company.

4.1.5 On-boarding process

A strong brand image of the company gets the kick start at on boarding stage itself, as first impression is the last impression. It's important that fresh recruits are engaged right from the day one both for their role and also to be part of their desired functional areas and teams. For instance, CMD of AMCO Batteries spends three days with Management Trainees during on boarding. And this action of CMD helps in ensuring employee's belongingness and management's commitment to their wellbeing etc.

4.1.6 Learning & Development Opportunities

Providing learning & development opportunities helps in creating a strong EB, especially among the millennials, as they look forward to what's in Organization for them (WIFM-what is in it for me) in terms of investing in them.

4.1.7 Sharing Your Story

It is important for the companies to share its story through various mediums and channels as a part of an effective employer branding strategy and reaching out the talented prospective employees. Similarly, company should make use of high-quality videos, photos, and text to tell about the company story, its inception, vision, objectives, people practices and other highlighting it as a great place to work.

4.1.8 Academic Case Studies

The companies thrive on great case studies for Business and other schools as many times it has been seen that a case study written by an Academic or let us say well reputed scholar having great deal of expertise in that area often lends credence because it comes as an expert's critical examination from a scholar but it ends up in a good PR for the company. There are umpteen examples; cases on companies like GE, Intel and Unilever have made these organisms immortal.

4.1.9 Diversity & Inclusion(D&I) initiative

Diversity is the order of the day and with it comes the need to strive for inclusion. Diversity & Inclusion initiatives result in stronger workplace culture and better customer service.

4.1.10 Managing Public Relations

Managing great communication strategy with the diverse media platforms also forms a key strategy in making an employer a great employer brand. Participating in and performing better in contests like "India's best companies to work for" survey conducted by Economic Times (Part of the Bennett & Coleman Group). Managing to stake a competitive slot in these rankings gives the employer a great boost and becomes an aspirational brand to work with in the eyes of prospective employees.

4.2.1 Why We Need to Rethink About Employer Brand?

Some of us might be thinking that it's the CEO "Who owns employer brand?" and everyone has to follow suit. No, employer brand has to be owned by everyone, be it the employees, their friends etc., for instance, one good or bad experience that an employee shares will be heard by many others and it will impact the employer brand whether one likes it or not. Though, there are two sides to every story, mostly we are more inclined to believe someone whom we know or love.

Perception of the employer as a great place to work for becomes very important and hence an important reason why employers should constantly endeavour to create and manage to become a great employer brand.

4.2.2 Now let's talk of the Brand as an Employer

People join and work in a company for many reasons like challenging/exciting work, a sense of pride or belonging. Or simply because of the bills it pays perks & benefits it offers. Money does matter but not alone. Companies reputation and image also is very important. Every job seeker keeps looking for a great place of work which not only provides them the best amenities but also challenging opportunities. Companies spend a lot of time in creating a product brand; but doesn't pay much attention to creating & cultivating a powerful employer brand.

In today's world of corporate careers where employee life cycle at a particular company is dwindling, it is pertinent to say that employer brand becomes a much sought after USP for showcasing it in the employees' resume or CV. Many prospective employees take great pride in working for a great employer brand in the past and showcase it to leverage better deals with their prospective employers.

4.2.3 Any Evidence?

As per the research data released by Randstad US on 28th August, 2018 (12) there are two primary drivers of behavior:

- Pay, commute, paid time off and
- Personal experiences

And of these two, personal experiences matter a lot. Gallup long back established the fact that environment plays a key role in outstanding performance from its employees.

➤ **Impact on the Bottom Line**

It helps in attracting the best and retaining them as well. And thus reduces cost and improves bottom-line

➤ **Impact on Candidate Attraction**

A prospective employee loves to know what it's like to work at an organization. They also wish to hear from the existing employees more than what the company wants to convey. This can be very well seen that 75% (11) of the job seekers look at employer branding before applying for a job.

Now let's briefly look at few companies which successfully created Employer brand and reaping benefits of it as well

4.3.1 Starbucks: Starbucks (11) treats its present employees as partners thereby instilling a sense of pride in each of them. Further, it has created exclusive platforms for promoting their employer brand and interacting with job seekers. This was done primarily to demonstrate company's appreciation for its existing workforce and create trust in prospective employees. It doesn't simply post about the employees having fun but uses its social media accounts to share their company mission, policy and also give congratulatory messages and greetings to employees for their professional and personal growth.

4.3.2 HubSpot: HubSpot (11) on its webpage shares its vision and values. Here, people can know opportunities for learning and development. HubSpot, apprises the job seekers as to why they need to look at it, "a place where they are helped grow". So, this is a classic case of using social media to create a positive image of the company.

4.3.3 Eventbrite: In order to fulfill its promise of attracting talented employees company has created a webpage wherein job seekers could interact with recruitment team. Further, they designed it so well that it is exciting for the job seekers to visit and ensures fruitful interaction. It very much reflects their values, thereby inspiring job seekers to apply.

4.3.4 IHG: Intercontinental Hotels Group,(20) as part of its mission to become a preferred workplace, has introduced many innovative HR practices and policies to make its employees feel engaged and motivated. Some of the initiatives taken by the companies are counted as one of the best practices in the industry. Some of them are briefly discussed below.

4.3.4.1 Passion Wall

In order to welcome new colleagues and make them comfortable, IHG has dedicated passion walls at hotel, where in the passion of these colleagues is posted with a brief introduction. This ignites the conversations and new employees break the ice with older ones.

4.3.4.2 You Said It, We Did It

One very good way to keep the employees feel that the company really listens to them is that at IHG Hotels, based on the employee survey feedback, HR & management used to share updates on the feedback received as ‘You said it (Colleagues feedback), we did it (management actions on the feedback).

4.3.4.3 Power Kiosks

The Fridays during the evening tea break (4:00 pm - 4:30 pm), 1 HR representative is available at power kiosk in a heavy foot fall area with all the basic resources to handle any employee’s concerns. Generally, the complaints/suggestions and requests given are recorded in a dedicated register/file and turnaround time for every such request/query is 24 hours.

4.3.5 Mahindra & Mahindra

The employees of Mahindra & Mahindra Automotive & Farm Equipment Sectors enjoy ample freedom at work and get enough opportunity to innovate. Employees also get an opportunity to learn from the organizations’ diverse businesses.

4.3.5.1 School Donation Policy

In general, when employees get relocated due to transfer, what happens that the entire family has to relocate. In the entire scheme of all these things, one of the major disruption is the change in School of the kids of the employees which also costs the employees dearly, in terms of School Donation, Admission fees, etc. M&M ensured that it will bear the cost if their employees are transferred. This policy was rolled out keeping this concern in mind. The main objective of this policy is that it acts as an enabler for career mobility, which is necessary to groom talent.

5.1 Discussion and Analysis

5.1.1 Need for HR and Marketing Partnership

In contemporary times of today, where talented Human resources providing cutting edge, Employer Branding for attracting talent is a must. According to PwC Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC) 18th Annual CEO Survey, talent is the major concern of many CEO's (Chief Executive officers). They are getting worried about acquiring skilled high performing employees and also whether it is matching to the organization culture. With increasing competition, its bit tough for prospective employees to know whether they fit in and EB helps in appraising them suitably.

For creating an effective employer brand top management support is required. Other players too should understand the need for it. HR working in silos will not help and if it collaborates with marketing, it will benefit the organization immensely. Most of the companies agree that successfully building an employer brand can't be done in isolation and therefore support from all is highly required.

5.2 How to go about? Marketing and HR complement each other and can work wonders for the organization. If the culture of an organization is positive and happy, the marketing personnel will be able to promote and sell the brand better. And if the prospective talented people get to know of the company, right kind of people come in.

5.2.1 Let's see how we can apply Kotler's four principles of marketing to HR

5.2.1.1 Product

Product is the commodity for marketers to sell & create into a brand. And culture of the organization is the HR's product. If both come together they help in getting the most talented people who are very much sought for

5.2.1.2 Price

For HR, the price is the sacrifice they make and the skill and efforts put in by the employees in trying to serve the company. The packages given to the employees can be associated with the ROI (Return on Investment) the organization gets out of the employees

5.2.1.3 Place

The location and appearance of an office or place of work matters a lot, especially to the new-age employees. So HR, should create the workplace in such a way that the employees feel comfortable and relaxed

5.2.1.4 *Promotion*

It is required not only for a marketing person. Even HR need to promote the culture of an organization, by creating an employer brand for the company

5.3 *What More?*

- Ownership: CEO and other concerned should only empower HR and marketing suitably
- Aligning Employer with the Corporate Brand: Employer brand should be built on Corporate brand's foundation. Corporate brand has a brand promise & companies could use that as North Star. HR and marketing should work together in this regard
- Stakeholders Commitment: Since talented HR matters a lot all the other stakeholders concerned must be involved
- Build a Coalition: We need advocates teams both from HR and Marketing for this and dedicated team must be formed and strengthened in all aspects so that they could do the needful. HR knows what employees look for in an organization, Marketing could chip in to get the required attention of the prospective employees

6. Suggestions & Findings

In today's age where employees in general actively engage themselves in social media interactions then it becomes pertinent for companies to invest in this aspect so that when employees are happy and they post good things on social media, it increases the brand image of the employer as well as contributes to Marketing. In this way both the HR and Marketing teams should come together and create a robust social media strategy whereby they can also prevent or mitigate any unforeseen or untoward incidents due to some posts by some dissatisfied employees.

7. Conclusion

An employer brand is the presentation of company's culture and values to the future and current employees. The name that comes to everyone's mind, while talking about employer brand, is Google's "don't be evil" motto and amenity-filled. There are several things that that every company can do to build a Great Employer Branding through Employee Engagement, Transparent and trustworthy culture, Strong Leadership and by Involving Everyone. As we all know, talented employees have their choice of companies to work for. And by coordinating their efforts, HR and marketing can create a strong EB, whereby organization could get the best talent. And let's not forget that recruitment is marketing. Sooner HR realizes it better and starts collaborating with Marketing. We would like to conclude by saying that when we all stop competing with each other and start collaborating, there would be celebration. So, companies' HR and Marketing department need to work together and in tandem to achieve the goals of the organization with effective Employer Branding.

Limitations – This study is conceptual and analytical hence it relies on Secondary data and other related studies. It does not rely on Primary data collected by the authors.

Future Directions – We hope that this study will be helpful in furthering both the Academic's and Practitioner's perspectives and open new vistas for conceptual, empirical, critiques, meta-analyses, etc. kind of research outputs.

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