

Branding the Workplace: Innovating the talent brand



Social media has erased whatever lines used to exist between the corporate brand and the talent brand. They're two sides of the same coin.

In a knowledge-based economy, skilled talent may be what most differentiates great companies from the rest of the pack. Skilled talent can help drive innovation and customer value, creates growth opportunities, and mitigates a growing river of risk. Organizations that do an extraordinary job managing their talent agendas have an opportunity to set themselves apart—in both the talent arena and in the broader marketplace.

Capitalizing on this opportunity requires creating distinctive talent capabilities, of course. But the next step—one that many companies overlook—is to actively promote and brand those capabilities.

In the past, it may have been possible for organizations to do this outside the influence of their external corporate brands. But those days are likely gone. In today's hyper-connected world, your corporate brand and your talent brand are two sides of the same coin.

As organizations begin to rely on talent that resides outside their four walls, alignment of the talent brand and corporate brand are expected to become even more important. Creating strong bonds that help retain critical talent—and attract the future talent you'll need—requires building leading talent practices and communicating them effectively and consistently. Get it right and the potential of brand convergence can work in your favor. Get it wrong and you may create more risk and confusion than you'll know what to do with.

Many leaders understand they should be stewards of their talent brands, just as they are stewards of their external brands.

What's driving this trend?

The worldwide economy is beginning to regain momentum. Innovation and market share growth are expected to fuel profitability and increased valuations. To capitalize on this momentum, companies are looking for new and more effective ways to retain and attract top talent. That includes tapping a broader open talent economy that extends beyond the traditional workforce to include freelancers, contractors, and other third-party suppliers of skilled talent.

At the same time, many top organizations now realize talent expects to control more of how, where, and when they work. By including mobility opportunities in their talent value proposition, many companies are able to connect to and derive value from a talent base that is increasingly global.

Regardless of the source and location of talent, however, organizations are benefitting from innovation in talent branding in three ways.

Costs in the cross-hairs. Companies with the “hottest” talent brands enjoy the ability to pick and choose from a large pool of qualified people for their open positions. They also reduce the need for expensive search firms, which can reduce costs related to both acquisition and turnover. When the talent brand reinforces the corporate brand and vice versa, organizations may enjoy a virtuous cycle that further sets them apart from the rest of the field.

Google has used this two-sided brand approach. Not only does the company use its corporate homepage as a recruiting vehicle, but that page is the primary source for announcing new positions. There potential candidates can easily learn about Google's strategy regarding work, opportunity, rewards, benefits, people, and organization—all delivered in the context of the broader corporate brand.

Increasing shareholder expectations for innovation and value creation. A bit harder to quantify, but nonetheless integral to a company's business model, is the innovation value skilled talent produces. If the best people aren't innovating for you, they're probably innovating for one of your competitors. So why not give them the time to innovate? Intuit encourages employees to spend 10% of their time pursuing other projects they're passionate about. And they are serious about it. Last year the company awarded its top innovator with \$1 million in cash and stock for developing a new product.¹

The shallow pool of critical talent. A third emerging area of business impact is the growing importance of the open talent economy in attracting hard-to-find talent, including contractors, alumni, subject matter experts, customers, and even suppliers. When these nontraditional workers affiliate with your organization, they can supplement value creation and can enhance your overall brand. Procter and Gamble's use of crowdsourcing for product development—the lifeblood of its brand—is an example of this phenomenon. Launched in 2001, the company's [Connect + Develop](#) program continues to provide innovation breakthroughs (including Tide PODS and the recently introduced Febreze® Stick & Refresh).

Practical implications

Many leaders in talent understand they should be stewards of their talent brands, just as they are stewards of their external brands. Doing that effectively requires careful communications and building a culture in which workers understand and embrace the organization's talent practices. Simply marketing those practices to new recruits is insufficient—and may actually backfire.

More important, talent should consistently experience the value of the intended practices. With the growing impact of social media and rating sites, the talent experience in your organization is the talent brand. Almost any person who comes into contact with your organization can influence your brand perception—from employees and contractors to unsuccessful applicants, unhappy customers, and more. You are responsible for ensuring that the real-world experience of working with your organization matches the competitive brand proposition you intend to convey.

Effective businesses have long been focused on delivering the very best possible customer value proposition—aligning market research on customer needs with all the business processes necessary to satisfy those needs at a competitive price. It's time to bring those same disciplines to building the talent side of your company's brand.

The value proposition. The talent brand is an outcome. The talent value proposition—the framing of the actual experiences of people who work for you—is the means to that end. Getting it right requires asking some tough questions. What does your talent value proposition say about your organization? How does it address the needs of different talent segments? What behaviors drive these segments to stay or go? What role will organization

leaders play in building your talent brand? Do your hiring managers and recruiting professionals understand your talent value proposition? Are they communicating it effectively to candidates?

Social media. Social media has changed the branding game, eliminating many of the boundaries, in some instances, between workers and customers, internal communications and external marketing. Organizations that want to effectively manage their talent brands have to take charge of their social media presence. If you don't do it, a disgruntled employee or competitor may. In practical terms, every person who works for your organization is a potential talent-brand ambassador. What message will they be carrying into the marketplace?

Engagement. There's a growing body of research that shows a driver for engaging with people is to provide meaningful work experiences that leverage their strengths. How is your organization identifying which work experiences matter most and determining how best to deliver them? Which of your talent development efforts are underperforming? Which should receive even more investment? Remember, the actual experiences of your employees and your extended talent pool define your talent brand—for better or for worse.

Open talent economy. Challenge your current thinking about the employment contract and embrace the freelance economy. How can you exploit an open talent economy and use your brand to attract the people you need—as resources, customers, advocates, and affiliates? Your brand is cultivated through all the relationships on your value chain.

Lessons from the frontlines

With the global economy on the rebound and the competition for critical talent growing more intense, talent branding is emerging as a critical discipline for organizations of all sizes and shapes. But it's not a discipline that materializes overnight. Companies that want to elevate their talent brands should build a strong foundation, which takes time.

While every HR organization should approach talent-branding with its own unique set of challenges, below are four action steps an organization should consider if it's serious about building its talent brand.

Engage in a crucial conversation with your Chief Marketing Officer today. What do your key talent segments perceive about your brand? What is the nature of their experience? What do they value? How quickly can you apply your organization's customer marketing and research skills to the talent marketplace? If you aren't using sophisticated workforce analytics yet, you're already lagging.

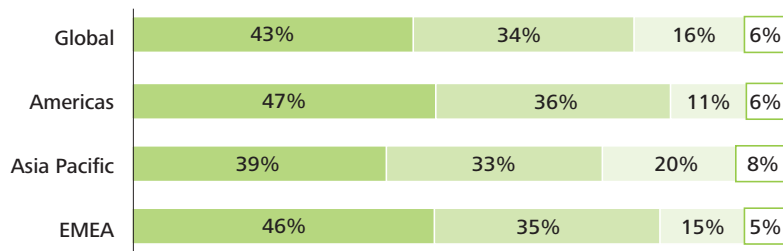
Adjust workforce practices so critical talent get to contribute, develop, and grow every day. Study after study identifies personal development as one of the top needs across all generations, so it's an easy target for early action. Indeed, researchers writing in the Harvard Business Review found that employers who invest more in training and development outperform the market by up to 35 percent. Even during the downturn in 2001, the authors recorded a 4.6 percent increase in stock value among companies with strong talent development budgets.² Many leading firms are expanding the concept of "development" to extend outside the classroom, incorporating on-the-job learning and access to just-in-time knowledge sharing.

Communicate, communicate, communicate—and listen. Having a great set of talent practices is only half the battle. Targeted talent should know and appreciate the advantage your company offers. That requires effective communication and careful listening. How is your organization engaging via social media? What can you do to make sure that engagement is as productive as possible for your talent brand? Are current talent resources engaged in helping to "sell" others on your value? Monitoring social media and career sites is essential to capture what people are saying about your organization and engage with them to clarify, correct, or accept responsibility.

Extend your talent brand to those who reside outside your organization. The open talent economy has the potential to provide a broad supply of specialized talent, including individuals who shun the traditional employment contract. Apply the same research and implementation practices to these talent segments that you apply to other parts of your company's value chain. For example, consider offering continuing professional education to contractors to help them build credentials. It can enhance the skills they use to support your company and, at the same time, deepen the affiliation they feel with you (instead of your competitors). Also, educate recruiting partners such as search firms, job boards, and university faculty so they understand your talent brand and can communicate it effectively.

Branding the Workplace: Survey highlights

Relevance by region



- Trend is highly relevant today
- Trend will be relevant in the next 1-3 years
- Trend will likely be relevant in 3 years and beyond
- Not applicable

Region	Total
Americas	315
Asia Pacific	582
EMEA	412
Total	1309

Digging deeper

- Across industries, 55% of Public Sector respondents rank this trend as highly relevant today (the highest); the lowest was Technology, Media and Telecommunications industry with 38%
- Organizations with strong business outlook for 2013 rank this trend higher (52%) than respondents with moderate to much slower outlook (42%)

Authors



Craig Gill
Chief Learning Officer
United States



Grant Luckey
Analyst
United States



Sarah Gretczko
Senior Manager
United States

Endnotes

¹ Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For, Fortune, <http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/best-companies/2013/snapshots/22.html>

² Bassi, Laurie and Daniel McMurrer, "How's Your Return on People?" Harvard Business Review, March, 2004.

Resetting horizons: Global human capital trends 2013

Looking beyond continued uncertainty, the world's leading organizations are raising their sights, and pivoting from the great recession to the new horizons of 2020 with a focus on talent, globalization, growth, and innovation. This report introduces 13 global trends that are driving critical business and human capital decisions. The report provides information on these trends across global markets through results of a survey of over 1,300 business and HR professionals from 59 countries. www.deloitte.com/hctrends2013

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