

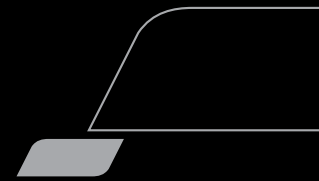
# YOUR BRAND MATTERS TO TALENT!

A GUIDE TO EMPLOYMENT BRANDING

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# INTRODUCTION

Most organisations today know that to convey a brand successfully in a rapidly expanding global marketplace, you need to know who your customers are and then provide them with a unique, attractive, and relevant message. But branding is not only an image you create to display to the world; it is also the emotional experience your customers associate with a product or service. If your corporate branding strategy is successful, your voice will be heard and remembered above the cacophony of your competitors' voices.

Having a solid brand that develops customer loyalty is only part of the equation. Your brand is not what you think it is, or simply want it to be, but rather what your audience—including employees—perceive it to be. A brand is defined not only by products, advertising, consumer reviews, awards, balance sheets, and accomplishments. It is also defined by the voice that answers the phone when customers call, and by how employees describe their employer. Your brand as an employer is not about attracting customers, but about attracting talent to the company. Your employees are living, breathing ambassadors of your employment brand.

So if your brand says one thing to the public, yet your talent acquisition and retention strategies don't give the same message to your employees and job applicants, the lack of congruence could significantly impact your success in attracting and acquiring top talent. A strong employment brand can provide important competitive advantage, and employees who reflect your brand to talented job seekers can be a true competitive differentiator. Engaging top talent through an attractive employer brand is just as important to your organisation's success as a solid corporate brand.

Employer branding is especially important to younger Gen X and Gen Y workers, who are looking for the passion and substance that makes your company different from the competition. Does your organisation have a strong social commitment or value set that younger workers can align to? How is your company different from the competition in the eyes of potential employees? Companies should purposely and proactively develop and manage strong employer brands as a key facet of their talent acquisition strategies.

# 01

## THE EMPLOYER'S PERSPECTIVE

Employers are competing fiercely for talent—the corporate resource that will be most important over the next 20 years. Because it's also the resource that's in the shortest supply, companies must continually rethink their recruitment strategies.



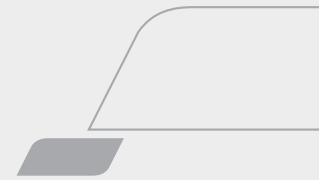
### The Reward of Employment Branding

Obviously, companies must be focused on selling a product or service in order to be competitive and prepare for future growth. Competitive strength always depends on the ability to attract and retain top talent, so employers need to be constantly focused on attracting the cream of the crop, regardless of the economy. Employers are competing fiercely for talent—the corporate resource that will be most important over the next 20 years. Because it's also the resource that's in the shortest supply, companies must continually rethink their recruitment strategies. Developing an engaged, committed, and talented workforce needs to start from the very beginning of the recruitment process. Job applicants and employees alike want to know what benefits they will realise from committing to your organisation.

Companies with a strong employment brand realise many benefits that can be useful for attracting top talent:

- Larger pools of interested job candidates who match job requirements and relate well to the company culture
- Greater success in attracting and hiring top-quality passive (sought-after) candidates
- More referrals from satisfied current employees and lower rates of offer rejection
- Higher levels of employee engagement and lower turnover

Anyone could be a job candidate or a customer in the future, so your brand should mean the same thing to everyone who experiences it.

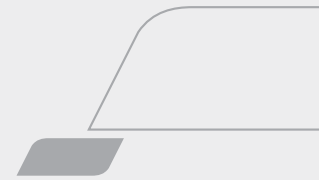


### **Consciously Cultivating Culture**

Every organisation develops its own company culture over time, rooted in the shared values, beliefs, and practices of its employees. Company cultures change as companies evolve and the workforce shifts, because new employees bring their own individual practices and values to the group. Changes to the environment in which a company operates, such as from regulatory or marketplace shifts, can also affect company culture, in both positive and negative ways. Culture changes may be minor or major; they may be intentional or unintentional. A company's culture is in a constant state of flux. It is important for decision-makers to pay attention to changes, so they can proactively keep the culture aligned with corporate goals and objectives.

Apple® is a good example of how culture can make or break a company. The culture at Apple was that of a second-place computer company that appealed to geeks, with no specific focus on design. The company made some serious missteps in the 1990s that dropped its market share into the low single-digits, and many expected the company to fade away entirely. When Steve Jobs returned to take the helm in 1996, he carefully created a new company culture focused on design innovation, secrecy, and control, which was decidedly different from the standard Silicon Valley culture of openness and sharing. In opposition to the touchy-feely employer philosophies of other IT giants including Microsoft® and Dell®, Jobs purposely crafted a culture of micromanagement, holding employees to exacting standards but rewarding them lavishly with his approval.

Apple employees were inspired by his messianic zeal and worked tirelessly to impress him with their creativity and astonishing effort. Within just a few years, Apple was well on its way toward re-establishing its dominance in the computer market, and today it is the largest technology company in the world.



The purposeful development of a company culture should go hand in hand with employer brand development. Otherwise, the company culture will develop itself according to the people you hire. Everyone wants to be part of an organisation that has a culture where they will thrive. People will generally be unhappy and frustrated if they are part of an organisation where their cultural norms do not fit with those of their employer. Efficiency and productivity suffer whenever there is a culture clash.

Hiring strategies should include processes to help determine whether a job candidate is going to be a good fit with your company culture and corporate strategy. If you try to fill in the holes during the on-boarding process, it is too late for both the employer and the employee. If all parties have the same value proposition in mind from the very beginning, retention rates will increase and employers will have reduced time-to-fill and cost-per-hire ratios.

# 02

## THE EMPLOYEE'S PERSPECTIVE

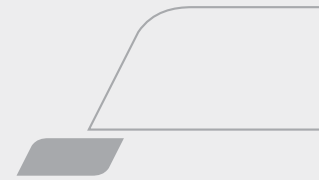
A staffing strategy will be more successful in attracting top talent if hiring managers recognise how a strong employment brand can motivate and engage job seekers.



### How Talent Sees Brand

Studies have shown that when considering employment opportunities, candidates consider a company's employment brand as being one of the most influential factors. In fact, a recent Kelly Global Workforce Index™ (KGWI) survey showed that in deciding where to work, 53 percent of employees in North America consider an organisation's reputation to be very important. Clearly, a staffing strategy will be more successful in attracting top talent if hiring managers recognise how a strong employment brand can motivate and engage job seekers.

- A professional, streamlined application and hiring process leaves applicants feeling positive about your employment brand, whether or not they are offered a job.
- The most skilled workers of all generations are attracted and engaged by an appealing employer brand.
- Younger workers are more cynical about corporate companies, so your employment brand has to be ready to address their needs during shifts in economic cycles. The KGWI survey showed that about a third of Gen X and Gen Y workers consider corporate reputation a critical factor in job choice and job retention, with all generations agreeing that one of the most important factors in a company's reputation is the quality of its management.



- Corporate social responsibility is especially important to younger employees, who want to align themselves with organisations that share their personal values. Almost half of the employees responding to the KGWI survey said they feel engaged in their jobs because they are confident in their employer's ability to act as a good corporate citizen.

To be effective in attracting top talent, an employer brand should be compelling and credible, and should connect with applicants in their own voice.

### **Positioning Your Brand**

From an internal perspective, your corporate strategy may look good, but you need to have an effective acquisition strategy as well—comprising the messaging, resources, branding, and advertising needed for a reputation that will attract the type of talent who will enable your corporate strategy. However, one critical mistake companies make is not realising that internal HR leaders responsible for human capital development and acquisition should be sitting at the table during the development of a corporate strategy.

There are a few important thoughts to keep in mind when courting top talent:

- Does your sourcing methodology target the correct cultural breeding grounds? Companies should target places where they can recruit specific skill sets and types of employees who are more likely to thrive in their culture and be aligned with corporate values and missions.
- The Internet is the most efficient way to find people in certain locations with specific skills. For example, Web sites of trade associations for your industry may have career sections that job seekers may register with to post their resumes. Large online communities such as Angelfire™, Tripod™, and GeoCities™ have millions of members and offer sophisticated search engines so that employers can find resumes of candidates with exactly the qualifications and experience they need.
- Global assimilation is more important than ever now, because the world is your marketplace. In the past, even global efforts were fragmented, but technology today has lowered walls and removed limitations to communication and collaboration.

- Sourcing strategies need to acknowledge that some cultural elements of your brand are not negotiable, because they're part of the brand. But some things must be negotiable because they are cultural norms based on workers' locations in the world. Sensitivity to cultural norms needs to be considered when developing global talent acquisition strategies.

Job candidates should experience your company message from the very beginning, during the interview process. On-boarding should begin the moment a company has any type of communication with a candidate. If candidates don't experience from the very beginning what they're going to experience culturally while working with you, then they may look elsewhere. Or when they come on board, the culture might be different from their expectations, and they won't feel encouraged to stay.

### **Tracking Trends to Optimise Staffing Strategies**

Because talent is in short supply, there is a great deal of competition in today's labor force. But companies who work hard to develop an appealing employer brand will fare better in the competition and be able to attract the best candidates. Employees are more mobile than ever before, and there are several generations in the workforce simultaneously. As a result, companies are realising that offering attractive employee benefits and perks can go a long way toward enticing and retaining high-performing workers.

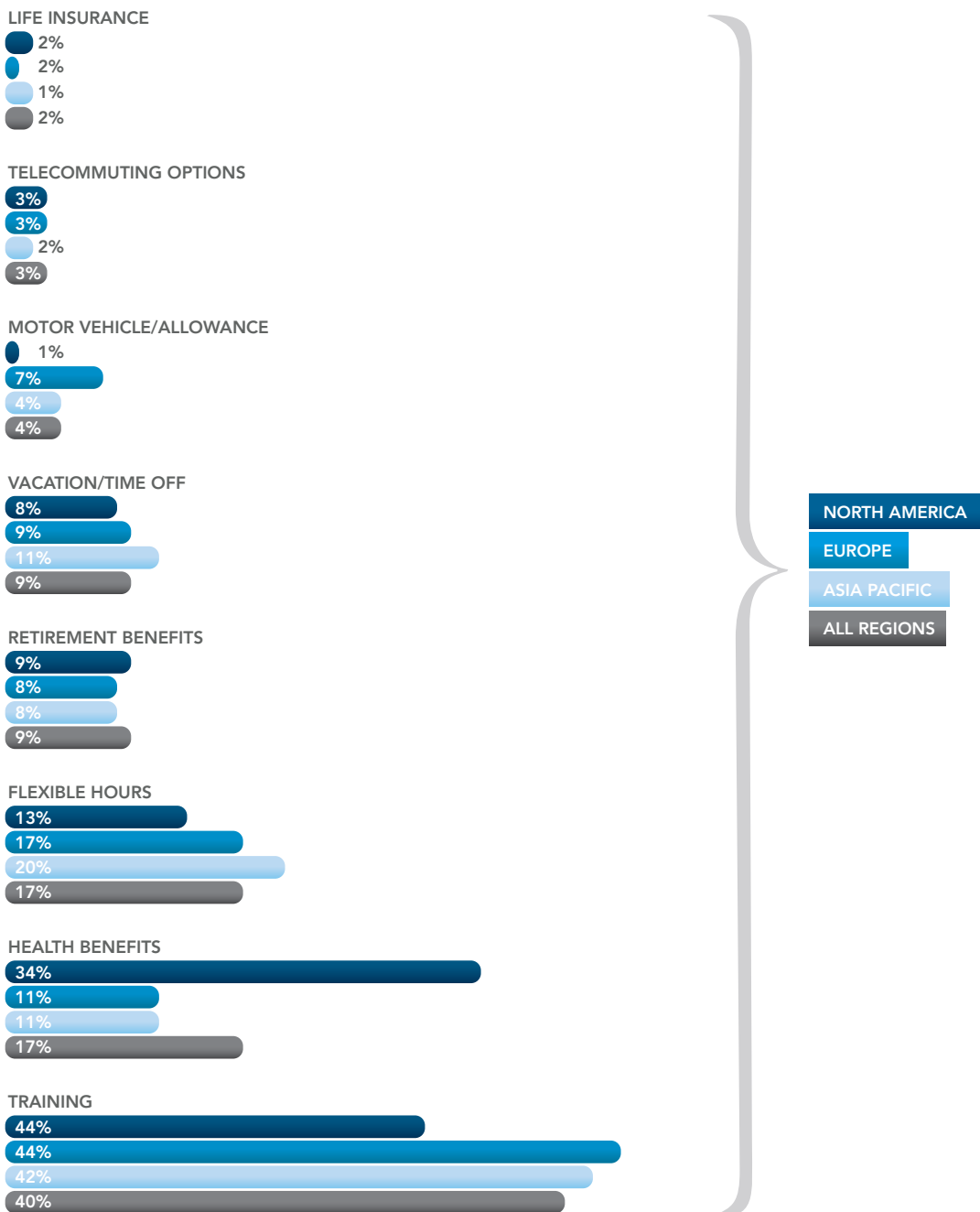
The 2010 KGWI survey examined attitudes and trends on the topic of employee benefits and perks, and found that workers who feel appreciated and valued are more motivated to be productive and committed to the company's success. Younger workers in particular are looking for "meaning" in their work, and many are willing to take less pay for a job if it provides them with more meaning. Across all generations, 40 percent of employees said that training is the most important benefit for employers to offer, because it is a valuable investment in their future. Workers also value health-related benefits, outcome-based rewards, and offering them a stake in the organisation's profitability, such as profit sharing. See Figure 1 and 2.

As these findings show, it is essential for employers to keep their finger on the pulse of what employees are looking for, if they want to optimise their employment brand to attract top talent. For more information about the KGWI, and to view archives of past surveys that can give you insight to help develop an engaging employer brand, visit [kellyservices.com/kgwi](http://kellyservices.com/kgwi).

**FIGURE 1:**  
Benefits that employees rate as being the most important outside of salary (by generation)



**FIGURE 2:**  
Benefits that employees rate as being the most important outside of salary (by region)



# 03

## GETTING THE WORD OUT

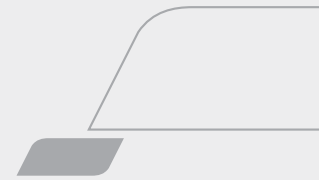
Contrary to what companies may believe, in large part employees have always owned the employer brand. They just haven't had the tools to spread their opinions as widely and quickly as they can today.



### Social Networking

Contrary to what companies may believe, in large part employees have always owned the employer brand. They just haven't had the tools to spread their opinions as widely and quickly as they can today. Social networking on sites such as LinkedIn™, MySpace™, Plaxo™, Facebook™, or Twitter™ has made the management of employer branding more complicated in some ways—but it has also made brand exposure faster and more cost-effective. To take advantage of these benefits, companies should develop social media guidelines for their employees, and create a corporate identity on popular social networking sites that will serve to strengthen their employer brand throughout public social networking communities.

- Listen to online conversations and actively contribute thought leadership content to target audiences so your name and corporate brand become familiar and recognisable.
- Share links and useful information with other social network users.
- Use site-specific features such as advertisements and apps to keep your profile visible.
- Create polls and surveys to learn more about your target audience and community.
- Tag product images with specific brand names and descriptions, so job seekers can learn more about your company.



The rapid-fire effectiveness of social media in getting the word out can be a double-edged sword. But if social media casts a negative light, being already involved in various social networks makes it easier for you to act quickly to work on the root cause and give employees less to complain about, or provide positives for them to talk about to control the damage to your reputation as an employer. No matter which social media or networking sites you participate in, interacting with and involving users can be a great way to position your employer brand as an attractive one. The Internet social media platform is growing exponentially. If your organisation doesn't have a voice in this channel, your employment brand is being left behind.

#### **Preventing Online Damage**

Some companies have learned the hard way about how social media can deal a harsh blow to their corporate brand, and ultimately their employer brand. About a year ago, an executive at Ketchum Public Relations® went on his Twitter account and posted several insulting comments about the city of Memphis. Yet in a few hours he was going to be pitching FedEx® to the city of Memphis to attract new business. When FedEx found out about the Twitter comments, they publicly denounced the Ketchum executive. A prestigious PR firm was put into the uncomfortable position of having to apologise for its own social networking gaffe, and it cost them money and serious damage to their corporate reputation, as well as to their status as a reputable employer.

Yet for every social media nightmare story, there are numerous examples of employees and companies using social media to improve the reputations and best practices of their company. Key to succeeding is being proactive and getting involved with social media, so you can spot trends and potential issues and address them before they become a problem for your company. But listening to what other people are saying is only half of the solution; you have to have your own voice. Your business must have some kind of online presence of its own, or you will not be able to counter any negative attention you may receive. If you aren't already actively involved in the conversation, your reputation will be left in the hands of what other people are saying about it. And a negative reputation online can seriously hamper your success in attracting top talent.

Peer-to-peer content publishing, blogs, online journals, search engine managers, industry forums, and online rating services have shifted much of the power away from organisations in being able to manage their employment brand. Peer-produced opinions are more credible to the masses. A personal statement someone makes about their employer is more trusted as fact than any generic corporate mission statement. This is especially true for today's younger workers, who don't trust corporate-speak or look for the brand message on a company Web site. They seek the truth via their peer networks.

However, there are plenty of tools available for companies to manage their online reputations and protect their employer brand:

- **Rapleaf.com** allows you to look up your reputation, give ratings about others, and then invite them to rate you in return.
- **ReputationDefender.com** is a service that can help you remove things others are saying about you online.
- **MonitorThis.com** allows you to track and monitor keywords throughout multiple search engines, so you can see what people are saying online about your company as an employer.
- **Naymz.com** allows you to invite people to write reviews about your company and your work.
- **Board tracking services** such as ForumFind.com, BoardTracker.com, BoardReader.com, and Yahoo® Message Boards can help you discover what employees may be saying about you on message boards and forums.
- **Your company's pages on public social sites** should be actively monitored to see what participants are saying about your brand. It's a grave mistake to create a company presence in an online channel and then never check back to read comments members have made about your company.

Real-time search is another useful tool for being proactive about protecting your employer brand. For example, a simple Google® search during the hiring process can reveal information about potential job candidates that may indicate they may be a liability.

Mahalo®, a human-powered search engine, learned this the hard way when they hired John Schiefer to work in their IT department. Their rigorous interviewing process involves several interviews and reference checks. Yet if their HR department had only Googled Schiefer's name, they would have discovered that just before they hired him, he had been convicted of infecting 250,000 computers with bots. A few months after he was hired, Schiefer was sentenced to four years in prison. Mahalo's CEO quickly posted an online letter assuring users that their information was not in any danger, but the incident stained the credibility of Mahalo to job seekers, who instantly shied away from associating with a company who would hire a felon. A simple real-time search during their talent acquisition process could have protected Mahalo's reputation.

### **An Effective Brand on Your Web Site**

According to a *Personnel Today* survey, more than 75 percent of companies plan to use company Web sites more for recruitment purposes, rather than local and national newspapers. Job seekers today are shifting away from traditional media and going to more online and social platforms to network, conduct specific searches, and find jobs.

Purposeful employment branding online should bring candidates to a place that clearly identifies the company's culture, mission, values, benefits information, and job listings. An informative, engaging recruitment section on your company's Web site can strengthen a candidate's perception of your brand and influence them to want to work for you. Innovative branding strategies such as video can make candidates feel excited about the possibility of working for you. A perfect example of how successful this strategy can be is the fact that "An Inside Look at Google" has been viewed more than 500,000 times online, and Google receives more than 3,000 applications a day. Smaller companies shouldn't try to compete with Google's approach, but they can set out to be the top brand in their vertical.

A viral-based approach using social media can be the most economical and successful branding strategy. If you have to pay to advertise your employer brand, it will not be credible to job seekers. "Word on the street" (e.g., online) will excite potential candidates to seek out your company as an employer, and it will be easier to attract and engage top talent.



## CONCLUSION

A corporate brand is much more than a means to achieve customer engagement. It's equally important as a powerful tool for talent acquisition and retention. Without alignment and intentional effort to maintain a competitive position with your employment brand, attracting today's pivotal talent is an uphill climb.

### **Achieving Employment Branding Success**

Establishing your employer brand to be a competitive differentiator requires important value propositions that everyone in the organisation is responsible for developing and engendering—including top management, Human Resources, Marketing, Finance, and others.

- Strong leadership motivates staff and creates a sense of belonging.
- Organisational values and a positive corporate culture encourage employees to want to contribute to a company's success.
- Contributions to the world and the community help employees feel that their work has meaning.
- Giving employees interesting and rewarding work will strengthen their emotional connection to their work.
- Providing opportunities for training and growth will help employees achieve their goals for career development.
- Offering attractive compensation and benefits will encourage top talent to seek out your company and want to work for you.
- Intangible rewards such as career prospects, work/life balance, and social interactions with co-workers will increase employee satisfaction and retention.

Employees today are behaving more like consumers when choosing to join a company or stay with an employer. A positive employer brand can help differentiate your company from others while creating an attractive identity that job seekers can align with their own values and ideals. Your employer brand is only as good as an employee's experience of that brand promise. It is essential to develop solid workforce policies and engaging employment experiences, and then communicate them externally and internally in order to attract today's best and brightest talent.

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This whitepaper is also available in summary format in the ebook *Your Brand Matters to Talent! A Guide to Employment Branding*

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PHILLIP SCIRO has spent the last twenty years in Sales, Sales Management and Executive Leadership roles with some of the very best in the staffing industry whom entrusted in him the responsibility of launching, growing, and managing multi-discipline practices in Asia, United Kingdom and the Americas. Phillip holds a Bachelors Degree in Business administration.



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