

From the inside out: Building an effective employer brand

WHAT IS AN EMPLOYER BRAND?

According to a Yahoo! survey, more than 94 percent of people seeking jobs online said they must very closely or closely understand and believe in the work done by a potential employer in order to consider working for them. A strong employer brand benefits your organization at every level. It serves as a tool to recruit talent that best fits with your company's culture. It increases productivity by helping employees align with a shared set of values and view their contributions as part of the company's success. It promotes mobility by defining benchmarks for performance reviews and rewards — and encourages employees to take on leadership roles and share their ideas. And it supports retention by enhancing job satisfaction. But perhaps the most compelling reason to consider developing an employer brand is this: Your employees are your company's ambassadors, the front line that interacts with consumers and the general public every day. Why miss an opportunity to make them champions of your brand?

An employer brand is another face of a corporate brand — the face your employees and prospective employees see. It's the story your company tells in the marketplace for talent. It outlines why people want to work for you and why they stay. And it draws upon the defining elements of your corporate brand — the nuggets of authenticity that differentiate your company from any other — to create a message that resonates with existing employees and prospective candidates.

HOW IT'S DONE.

The process begins with rigorous analysis and in-depth research. This might take the form of interviews with

employees at every level, in every department. Find out why they joined your company, and what keeps them from leaving. Study perceptions of your company internally and in the industry. If possible, interview your customers too. Review competitors and observe what they're doing well. Take a hard look at your organization's strengths and challenges. By drilling down to the core of your company's personality, you will be able to uncover the heart of what drives your organization. This is the essence that does not change, whether you are targeting consumers, employees, shareholders, the media, or all of the above. These are the insights you'll use to craft messages that are meaningful to the people within your company — or to those considering it.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT ALONG THE WAY.

There's a big difference between a strategically grounded, compelling employer brand and a crate of unused coffee mugs with motivational slogans. Here's how to keep your process on track:

Be real. If your brand doesn't accurately reflect your employees' experiences with your company, it won't make that emotional connection. Every company has its own true story to tell. As you uncover challenges along the way, consider this — you're much more likely to overcome a negative perception by owning it and opening an internal channel for suggestions.

Be thorough. Employee satisfaction isn't just an HR issue. By gathering perspectives from all of the departments that drive your business, you'll be better prepared to craft a story that connects throughout your organization.

Be concise. Once you've identified your company's story, take your findings and distill them into short, impactful messages. Start by simplifying your mission statement down to a tagline that taps into the essence of your company's purpose and soul.

Be creative. Your company is like no other. It should look and sound distinctive. Find a voice and visual expression that go beyond words on paper, to explore the meanings of your values and connect with your internal audience.

Be targeted. Your employer brand will serve you best if it becomes enmeshed in the fabric of your daily operations. Consider ways to tailor your messaging to each of your internal audiences, divisions or departments. Support it with ongoing communications tools that will help your brand stay fresh.

Be sure. Want to know if your employer brand is really connecting? Ask your employees with an online survey.

WANT A STRONG EMPLOYER BRAND? ASK A BRANDING EXPERT.

At Baker, we draw upon a 25-year heritage of helping corporate brands achieve their market potential through compelling, strategically-grounded communications. From brand strategy to corporate communications, recruiting programs to annual reports, launch through maturity, we are familiar with every aspect of building a business brand. As a result, we've discovered some insights about creating employer brands. Whether you are targeting an external or internal audience, the process of uncovering your company's unique story is the same.

Baker is a brand and communication design firm.