

Employee Branding – Becoming a New Mantra for Employee Engagement

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Abstract: *Branding has become an integral element in our daily lives. From deciding which brand of soft drink to purchase, to which restaurant to visit, or sports shoes to buy branding plays a very vital role in our decision making. Thus with the power of branding being so persuasive, it is no surprise that it also plays an important role in which company we choose to work. Employee branding is an indirect branding effect in which communication of the company employees serves to characterize their company's employee brand. "Employee branding may be understood to include the process of promoting the image of an employer through his/her employee". Thus employee branding is considered as the "new mantra to build brand loyalty". If we justify the topic in a simple term then, employee branding means what an employee projects about himself and the organization culture. He/she should be able to serve as a brand ambassador for his/her organization. A strong sense of affiliation is seen of the employee towards his/her organization. Thus the factors like – reason for joining the organization, long term stay of the employee, his/her expertise or skills for the assigned work, enthusiasm for achieving his roles and responsibilities, his consideration at managerial level decisions, importance of his ideas at the organizational levels, able to co-ordinate organization and individual goals, maintaining ethics while working, delivering 100% etc. helps to shape more the employee branding.*

Keywords: Employee Branding, New Mantra, loyalty ethical working and roles and responsibilities of employees.

1. Introduction To Employee Branding

Branding has become an integral element in our daily lives. From deciding which brand of soft drink to purchase, to which restaurant to visit, or sports shoes to buy branding plays a very vital role in our decision making. Thus with the power of branding being so persuasive, it is no surprise that it also plays an important role in which company we choose to work.

Thus the strength of the corporate/ product brand has an immediate effect on the employee branding. An organization with a weaker employee branding will have to do a lot more work on its employee brand so as to attract and retain key talent.

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"Employee branding is the image projected by employees through their behaviors, attitudes and actions. This image is impacted on by employee's attitude and engagement towards the employer brand image promoted through the culture of the organization."

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2. Need of Employee Branding

"An unsatisfied customer tells ten people about his experience while an unsatisfied employee tells a hundred."

D K Srivastav, VP HR at HCL Comnet.

Thus employee branding helps to attract the employees and to retain the current number of employees by increasing their satisfaction level, attracting job candidates and motivating employees in their work, which leads to excellent business gains. This can also be considered as the great initiative been taken by the organization to make the workplace more employer- friendly and implement the development.

Some examples of the industry practicing the employee branding importance are-

- SATYAM : "Every satyamite is a leader"
- CTS : "Celebration at work"
- ACCENTURE : "Best Place for women to work"
- LG : "Best Employee Bonus"
- MARUTI : "Collective vacation Scheme"

Thus if the organization are able to maintain the employee branding that increases the reputation of the organization by

increasing dedication and motivation in the employees at workplace. Thus it is said-

“Employee branding is the central concept of HR marketing.”

Employee branding is relatively new approach borrowed from marketing. It constitutes the soul of HR Marketing. This emerging area provides great opportunity for employee premise development and organizations positioning as employer brand. Employer brand is the packet of functional, financial, emotional and psychological benefits provided by the employing company (Ambler & Barrow, 2006).

Bhutani Manmohan (2010) proposed that “employer brand is about capturing the essence of the organization in a way that engages current and prospective talent. It expresses an organization’s ‘value proposition’- the entirety of its culture, system, attitudes and employees relationships, providing a new focal point for the company.”

Employee branding helps organizations position themselves as the employer of current workforce, potential employer in prospective recruits and as a partner to vendors and customers (Harding, 2003). It is a persona & an image of the organization as a company brand for being a great place to work, learn and grow. Employment branding utilizes all necessary tools of marketing, branding and marketing research to create a selling image of the organization hence applicants aspire to buy in the contract with the organization (Sullivan, 1999). Minchington (2010) argued that employer branding is the half art and half science that involves attracting, engaging and retaining efforts aimed at enhancing overall company image. Dr. Sullivan (1999) postulated the goals of successful employment branding.

- It creates a sense of ownership and employees feel pleasure and contacts tell what it feels like to be the member of the firm.
- The public persona of the company, its culture, its management style, work practices and the growth opportunity is created.
- Help in alignment with corporate brand product and employment brand.
- Continually review the external environment and ensures the maintenance of healthy employment brand.
- Attracts best pool of applicants for employment with the company. (Dr. Sullivan 1999).

3. Internal View of Employee branding

One must be able to define the meaning of employee branding to the company. It must be remembered that employee branding is actually the image of an organization for the people working in the organization. It is this reputation that the companies make of themselves inside their premises that are also carried outside to the passive candidates, the customers, the clients and also the others who are affected by the proceedings of the company. Hence, we can say that within the company, ***employee branding is done to attract the employees, and also for their subsequent retention in times to come so as to improve the company's image of employee branding.***

The management of every country has to understand a very simple fact that it can't lay a narrow focus on the employee branding. If this is done, it would only be a departmental project and would not have been entitled to be a part of the overall business strategy of the company. One must keep another fact clear that if employee branding is only considered to be a part of the recruitment process and then given the back seat, there will be too many cases of absenteeism resulting in subsequent resignations at frequent intervals.

Employee Branding is the strategy the companies uses to appeal to desired current and future ideal talent. In other words, employee branding is to convey to the “employees that matters” and why an employer’s workplace is appealing and unique. The purpose is to make it easier for the employer to attract good workers or even more importantly to get the top talent it needs from the job market. It provides the potential employees with information on business, culture and benefits of working for the enterprise. For e.g. If the company wants to attract potential employees who have 10 years of experience, they may want to promote the fact that they have a great family health insurance and paid time off.

4. Meaning of Employee Branding

Brands are among a firm most valuable assets and as a result the brand management is the key activity in many organizations. Brand is what the company is and what it does. It is more than the mission statement and the essence of any organization. Although the firms commonly focus their branding efforts on developing product and corporate brands, branding is also used in the Human Resource Management (HRM). The application of branding principles, with a little variation to HRM, is termed as HR branding.

The sequence of HR branding starts with employment branding, which is the brand an organization holds in the minds of future employees, and the reason why people yearn to get associated with these organizations.

Subsequently when they become employees, the way that employer and employee relations get established in the organizations is known as employer branding. This makes the employee to understand and absorb the organization culture. Thus when these employees communicate with people outside the organization, the manner in which they project the image of the organization is termed as employee branding. Hence it is a continuous HRM process of establishing these brands.

4.1. Definition of Employee Branding:

Customers differentiate firms by their products (Product branding). Marketers have repeatedly used the 4P’s (Product, Price, Place and Promotions) to sell the products of their firm in the market. Similarly, the employees differentiate their jobs by the HR branding. As the function of HR starts spreading across the organization, the services rendered by the HR department to the employees can be

treated to be the same as selling the goods or services to the external customers.

In today's competitive and knowledge driven economy, HR plays a strategic role in bringing in the right kind of people in the organization. In a sense, HR is the first face of an organization for a prospective employee. For a company to be successful, it has to attract, motivate and retain the best and the brightest, making itself competitive in the race. As organizations are becoming complex, the regular routine practices are not enough. The best organizations have compelling people strategies that are perfectly aligned with the organizations business strategies, and as a result the organization becomes a "great place to work with".

5. How to achieve employee branding- leading to positive behavior employee

Employee branding can be achieved through recruiting selectively, communicating vision, and mission, values of the organization, effective training programmers, and work culture. Once employees understand brand and objectives, they'll be in better positions to act as ambassadors for the brand.

6. Miles and Mangolds 6 step process for Employee Branding

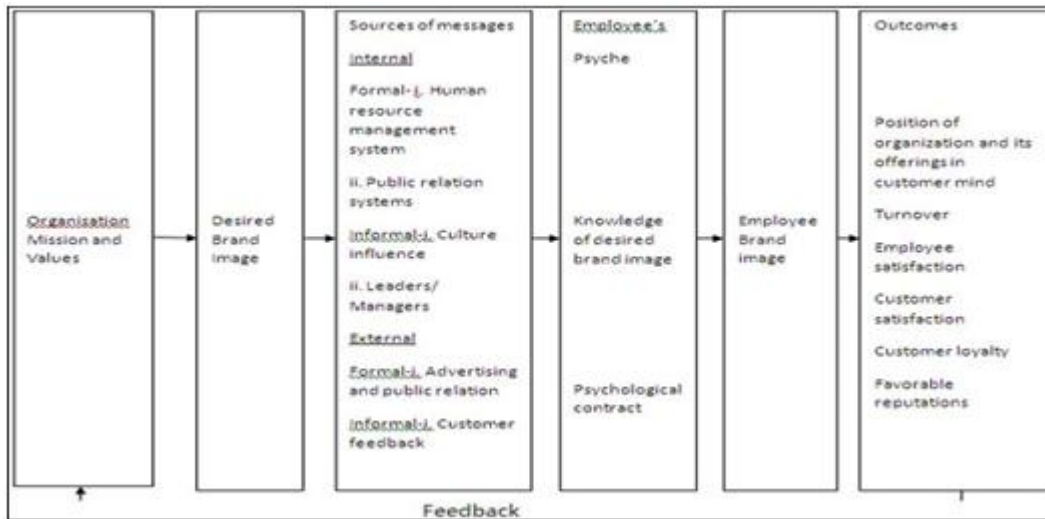


Figure 1: shows Employee Branding Process

The employee branding process as shown in figure 1 enables the organization to consistently deliver its desired brand image to customers, thereby solidifying a clear position in the minds of customers and employees alike. When done well, it provides a competitive advantage that is achieved through employees, who have internalized the desired brand image and are motivated to project that image to customers and other organizational constituents. The feedback loop is a critical component of the employee branding process. It allows organizations to monitor the consequences of the process and to identify areas for improvement. Failure to achieve desired consequences suggests that the process be re-examined for deficiencies in message design and delivery

7. Frame work of Employee Branding

This identifies benchmarks in relation to brand management practices in the creative industry. Based on the findings of three case studies it is proposed that an empirical framework is needed for explaining the interrelationships among five employee management practices, individual/team creativity and corporate brand building. We conclude that creative organizations need to recognize their employees' creative output as their key asset towards successful brand building and hence should aim to provide their employees with the appropriate environment for enhancing creativity in their work.

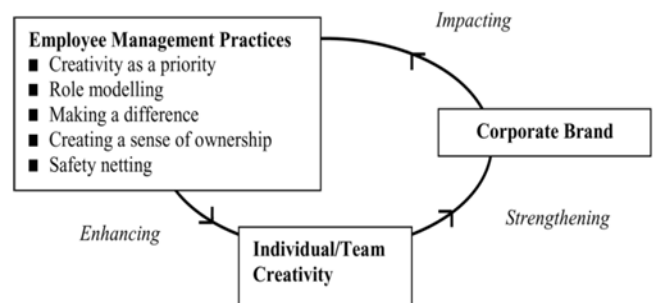


Figure 2: shows Employee Branding Frame work

Thus from the figure 2 showing the frame work we can make an analysis that if the employee is enhanced and if the creative team is working continuously in the enterprise then there is a great impact on the corporate brand as well as the employees are also satisfied.

8. Importance of Employee Branding

As defined by Universe, "Employer branding is the strategy companies use to appeal to desired current and future ideal talent". In other words, employer branding is to convey to the "employees that matter", why an employer's workplace is appealing and unique. The purpose is to make it easier for the employer to attract good workers, or even more importantly to get the top talent it needs from the job market. According to Universe, employer branding has definitely become a critical management tool. Working with over

1,200 companies and organizations worldwide, many being Fortune 500 companies, Universe can show that employer branding is a management priority.

In fact, 47 % of all employers say that the promotion of their employer brand will be higher this year, compared to only 6 % that said lower. Maybe not yet common place, but it's definitely an activity that businesses are starting to adopt to stay ahead of those employers who gobble up and keep the best people for the jobs. Universe gives five reasons why employee branding should be a vital management tool for every organization and company today.

8.1 Shortage of skilled labour

With the emergence of China, Russia, India and Brazil as economic powers, and due to the aging population in the U.S., European Union and Japan, the competition for skilled workers has or will continue to increase. Adding to this trend, there is also a clear shift in students' preferences moving from technical degrees to non-technical degrees. Companies or organizations that are perceived to be attractive employers will have an easier time to recruit top talent.

8.2 More with less

A mantra coined during this economic downturn, there is high pressure to cut costs and increase productivity, which has made the need to get the right people in the right jobs even more crucial. Employer branding results in more successful recruitment and retention of top talent. Moreover, by properly communicating the reality of the work environment, companies are more likely to attract talent that fits their organizational culture, thus increasing the number of people with the right skills in the correct positions.

8.3 Growth & profitability

Hiring and retaining top performers is essential for growth and to maintain a competitive edge. Employees who have the right skills, experience and knowledge, in relation to the critical areas of a business to drive growth, are strategically important. In addition, as developed economies move more towards the tertiary/service sectors, people become the primary asset. Employer branding increases your profit margin.

8.4 Popularity

Research on the talent market reveals that graduates and professionals want to work for companies with great reputations; they often turn to family members, friends or colleagues for advice and approval when making a decision about which employers to consider. Moreover, the consumer/corporate/employer brands are intertwined: If a company is viewed as being an unpopular employer, it will consequently affect everything else and cause disequilibrium in the corporate ecosystem.

8.5 Strength

Being an attractive employer provides a company or organization more bargaining power, as employees will want to work for them more than anyone else, even those that have rare or most in demand skills—irrespective of salary levels. An attractive employer can create for employees an illusion that their choices are limited outside of the organization, constantly maintaining an image of being the most desirable employer, giving the right reasons or incentives for their top performers to stay.

9. Action steps For Achieving Employee Branding

Now that the importance of employer branding has been explained, the next step is for companies or organizations to start their employer branding. Universe has created an employer branding model that identifies key processes that will work for any organization or company. This model can be useful for those that are new to employer branding and are not sure where to start.

The five step process:

9.1. Research

To understand where an employee is positioned in the employment market and to determine the appropriate action plan is fundamental. The four important factors, both internally and externally, are:

- Know how the target group perceives the employer
- Learn what the target group wants and needs from the employer
- Discover where the employer is positioned in relation to its competition
- Ensure that the research is updated regularly.

9.2. Employer Value Proposition (EVP)

The company or organization needs a unique employer offer. The EVP gives current and future employees a reason to work for an employer and reflects the company's competitive advantage. Employers that manage their EVP effectively benefit from an increase in their talent pool and employee engagement, as well as a potential decrease in salary costs. Typically, less attractive employers need to pay a wage premium to get top talent whereas attractive employers do not. By analyzing the factors influencing the employer brand, and by defining a strong and true EVP, the employer will be able to deliver sound and consistent communications during the communication phase and develop an attractive, as well as unique, employer brand.

9.3. Communication strategy

The development of a communication strategy is always based on research findings and a well-defined EVP. The EVP is a useful tool used by HR, Marketing or Communications to be able to emphasize the most attractive factors and be consistent in the employer communications. Once an employer knows who they want to talk to and what to communicate, the employer then has to choose the most

efficient and effective channels for reaching them. Choosing the right channels and understanding how best to target various groups is also based on research.

9.4. Communication Solutions

The aim at this step is to express the employer value proposition (EVP) by using the right words and images, so it becomes consistent with the corporate identity and branding efforts. The communication material should have the same look and feel irrespective of communication channel. Since organizations use many different channels, it is vital that the target groups recognize the organization and relate to the employer offer, no matter if they are being reached via the corporate website, reading an advertisement in the newspaper or taking part in an event. Employers should strive to develop consistency throughout their communication material.

9.5. Action

Implementing all the steps and monitoring closely what works and needs to be adjusted along the way is the final stage. It is of great importance at this point that the organization sets targets on what they want to achieve with the planned activities in a clear and measurable way.

10. Employee Brand Evaluation – A way of Building a Brand:

Asking around or simply doing an employee satisfaction survey alone will not give us all the information which we need to assess our employer brand - though can be a great start. To know exactly where our organisation currently stand with employees, stakeholders and the public, we need to conduct in-depth, integrated research projects that will give you a good cross section of feedback and opinions, and paint a clear and accurate picture.

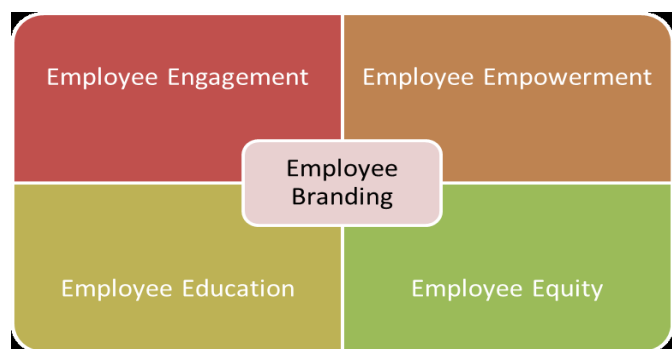


Figure 3: shows the 4 E's of Employee Branding

Engaged Employees featured at:

- Believes in the values of Business
- Passionate to work to make things better
- Cognizant about overall business & understands the “Bigger Picture”
- Believes in decorum of respectful work environment
- Is ready to go “Extra mile”
- Is aware of developments in his/her field

Employee Education features:

- Strong brands need people with a clear point of view and the passion to express
- Educate for all involved process i.e. pronunciation to selling

Employee Empowerment features:

- Empowerment is positively correlated with performance, effectiveness, innovation and commitment
- Highly skillful employees when not empowered become de-energized
- Managers and employees must objectively discuss tasks, roles and define boundary for decisions

Employee's equity features at:

- A company should invest in employee benefit programs and must develop employees as real assets
- Key drivers that can be used to gauge an employee's performance, optimum intensity and worth to the business.
 - Profitability
 - Efficient use of resources
 - Team Work
 - Learning and innovation
 - Orientation towards society (Corporate social responsibility)

11. Conclusion

The prospect ways to improve employee branding within the organisation includes mission, vision and value statement of the organisation, recruiting the right people, providing effective training to the employees, identifying the employees, proper internal communication must be there, proper feedback system has to be developed, reinforcement, let the employees ask and do the work and finally give employees the authority along with responsibilities so that they can achieve the given work in proper and satisfying manner. Thus it reveals that employee branding is becoming the mantra of achieving Competitive Advantage in today's business world. Employee branding helps the companies to have better perspective of their consumers and motivate the employees as well. The brand interpretation in the mind of customer is very important and is a result of strong internal Branding Process followed by any organization.

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