



EMPLOYER BRAND STRATEGY

Best practices for long-term sustainable results

A progressive, human-centered design approach to employer branding

It wasn't that long ago when the concept of employer branding was conceived, evolving from a recruitment marketing product to being at the centre of people and culture strategies. As the practice of human resources has moved from a highly administrative to a strategic business function, managing an organization's employer brand reputation from attraction to retention and offboarding has become even more sophisticated. Today, the focus on talent has the attention of CEOs, shareholders and investors. Between 2010 and 2017, **Gartner research found that the number of companies talking about talent in earnings calls increased from 52% to 69%**. Employer brand and people-focused management strategies are often referenced in annual reports. More and more, companies are recognizing their people are more than just resources, but humans with needs and desires, who put emphasis on values, culture and career.

Every company has an employer brand – a collection of images, perceptions and feelings about the workplace based on interactions and word-of-mouth, in the minds of employees and external stakeholders like job seekers and passive candidates. The employer brand conveys the organization's culture – “*how things are done around here*” – and humanizes the brand personality, reflecting the common purpose and core values. HR, communications (internal and external) and marketing, in conjunction with leadership and the business, have important roles to play to lead the employer brand narrative and shape perception, manage reputation and influence behaviour. When not managed correctly, the narrative can be controlled by unfulfilled employees, with negative rants traveling faster than positive, good news stories. The rise of employer review sites illustrates people's desire to rate and comment on their employment experience, both good and bad, no different than reviewing their latest purchase or customer service experience.

What are the most trusted resources for learning about an employer brand? A Glassdoor study revealed that

- **52% of people cited family and friends**
- **14% cited feedback and reviews by people who work at the company**

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Functionally, employees work to create, sell, problem solve, support and deliver on the products and services offered, both on the frontlines and behind the scenes, in return for some form of compensation, benefits and rewards. Emotionally, a job provides economical, social and psychological benefits – ability to provide for one’s family, become self-sufficient, fulfill a dream, create social status, contribute to society, provide intellectual stimulation, etc. Generally, people want to work for more than a pay cheque. If employees feel a sense of belonging, have a high level of commitment, they become more engaged, leading to higher job satisfaction and retention. “To continue increasing engagement levels among their employees, organizations need to invest in and deliver a strong employee value proposition (EVP),” says Brian Kropp, group vice president for human resources at Gartner.

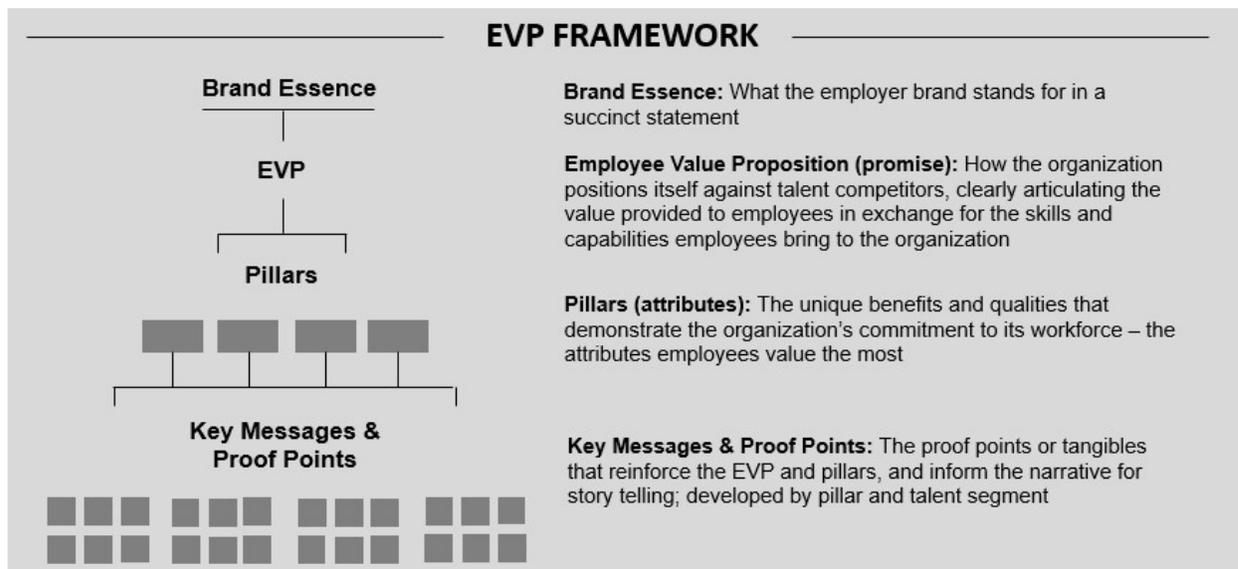
What is Employer Branding?

There are **two primary aspects of employer branding** – 1. The creation of the strategy including the employee value proposition (EVP) and 2. On-going management of the strategy, meaning activation, listening, measuring and evolving.

1. EVP and Strategy Creation

One of the most valuable exercises to inform the EVP is research, a mix of qualitative and quantitative, to uncover employee drivers and motivators about why they joined your company and why they stay. Understanding what employees value the most about working at your company will inform the EVP pillars, and when combined with the brand promise, conveys the unique working environment of your company. Research will inform perceptions, satisfaction and engagement, provide gaps in internal communications or organizational effectiveness, uncover key moments of truth in employees’ journeys and aid in the creation of target audience personas. Competitor and labour market research provide insights to external trends and need to be combined with internal research to complete the strategy. While research may take some time, it is a wise investment of time. Creating the brand strategy based on assumptions or guessing can lead to a narrative that is disconnected and inauthentic, leading to poor people and business metrics – increased cost per hire, higher attrition, lost productivity or lower engagement, poor customer service, lost revenue, to name a few.

What are all these terms? To help illustrate the output of the strategy creation, here’s a typical high-level EVP framework:



2. Employer Brand Management

Once the strategy is defined, the real work begins. Active management of the employer brand requires annual planning based on high level goals and objectives, from launch/re-launch, internally and externally, to on-going communications delivered through multiple channels. People consume content in different ways and key messages need to be delivered through campaigns, events, townhalls, intranets, social media, email, presentations, in physical spaces, across HR administration, and all aspects of recruitment and talent management. Both print and digital tactics form the marketing communications mix. With four generations now in the workforce and multiple job families, consideration of segmented messages and tactics for specific audiences also forms part of the plan. Reinforcing the overall benefits of the workplace can remind employees why they joined and attract key talent to apply, or in some cases, not apply if the perceived fit isn't right, optimizing the talent funnel and recruiter efficiency. Setting key performance indicators, testing, piloting and measuring against objectives are key elements of brand management to demonstrate improvements to people and business metrics, and that goes beyond clicks and likes, to engagement, satisfaction, retention and revenue.

More than Recruitment

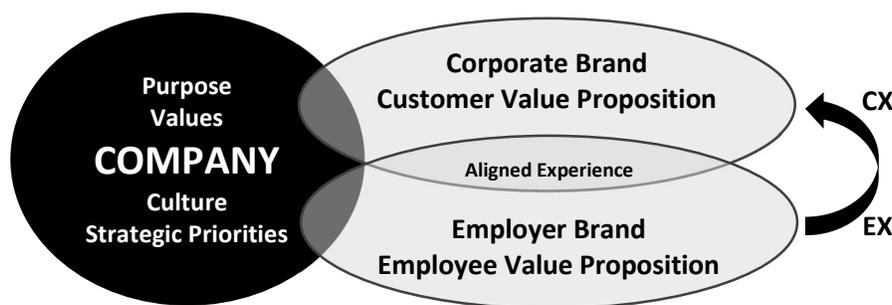
In the past, many organizations focused on employer branding to primarily support recruitment. While that may have helped attract great people who were excited to leave their past employer behind for a new shiny promise, it doesn't support building a phenomenal place to work if the promise falls flat after the contract is signed. The employer brand promise needs to be deliberately managed through key moments of truth across the employee lifecycle, from attraction to exit. If the first weeks on the job don't reflect the pre-hire promise, employees may feel let down, confused or inadequate, second guessing their decision and planning their exit strategy. Reversing those sentiments is challenging as poor first impressions can take more effort to fix, wasting valuable time and resources that could've been directed back to the business.

"The number of new hires who regret their decision has risen nearly 50% since 2008," says Alexia Cambon, senior principal, research, at Gartner.

Connecting Corporate & Employer Brand

The relationship between corporate brand and employer brand, customer experience (CX) and employee experience (EX), also needs to be considered. Organizations that get the co-dependency between the two are much further ahead, ensuring values are demonstrated and brand promise experienced, not just stated, during the employment lifecycle. This sets the foundation for positive employee experiences and in turn, enhances customer service delivery, which can result in higher customer satisfaction, and employee and customer retention. That sounds like a win-win-win!

In the late 1990s, Gallup conducted a workplace survey for a group of US retail companies and found that *"the top quartile stores for employee satisfaction were associated with 39% above-average customer satisfaction scores."*



Follow these 6 *best practices* to create and implement a highly relevant and beneficial employer brand strategy for long-term, sustainable success:



1. The process is as important as the outcome.

Engage employees in discussion to uncover what they value the most about working at your organization and where improvements need to be made. Involving them to inform and validate the EVP or the creative expression will keep assumptions at bay and make them feel important and included. A company wouldn't enhance an existing product for its customers without customer research. It's no different internally.



2. One company. One purpose. Same core values.

Align employer brand with customer brand. Employees deliver on the external brand promise. They require an intimate understanding of what that means to develop a true service culture. When employees rally behind the common purpose with behaviours that reflect the company values, positive employee experiences lead to high quality customer service experiences, creating stronger emotional connections and loyalty.



3. Employee experience can become a competitive advantage.

Employees expect a consumer-grade experience, to be provided clear expectations and human-centred policies. Demonstrate empathy, practice servant leadership, active listening, provide clear expectations and policies, recognize often and provide quality employer brand service consistently across the employment lifecycle. Small gestures make a huge difference. Make it easy for employees to work for you.

"The level of employer brand credibility is less than ideal, with just 19% of employees globally perceiving a strong alignment between what their employer says about itself and their experience working there."

– Weber Shandwick Employer Brand Credibility Gap



4. 365 days/year approach is necessary to demonstrate ROI.

Employer brand management requires commitment as a strategic imperative with internal executive alignment, dedicated resources and on-going measurement. What it's not: a one and done, "set it and forget it" exercise, crafty creative concepts that inflate the brand image, or a poster on the wall. It's a key component of the business strategy that requires an "always on" approach related back to business performance.



5. Cultivate a positive word-of-mouth culture (eNPS).

We are in the era of virtual worlds, social sharing, ratings and reviews. Your people are going to share knowledge, opinions, interests and stories. Rather than implementing policy-rich practices, allow your people to work for you. They can become your #1 fans. Enable ambassadors and advocacy internally and externally by sharing the vision, aligning on goals, demonstrating values, hosting open forums and reducing governance.



6. Leverage evidence-based data in decision making.

HR and marketing metrics have progressed greatly in recent years, with better ability to track and report on key performance indicators with some level of immediacy. Set aside budget for testing. Piloting a program, campaign or new platform with a small group or region can help work out the kinks and provide valuable learnings prior to rolling out across the organization or market.

EMPLOYER BRAND STRATEGY – THE LITMUS TEST

- ✓ Aligned to Business Strategy
- ✓ Authentic & True Representation of Your Company Culture
- ✓ Relevant & Inspirational for all Stakeholders
- ✓ Unique & Differentiated from Talent Competitors
- ✓ Aspirational to Reflect Vision for Future
- ✓ Stand the Test of Time for at least 5 Years Out

The Business of Employer Brand

When employer branding is a strategic business imperative, the metrics speak for themselves:

↓ 43%

**DECREASE IN
HIRING COST**
(Source: LinkedIn)

↓ 28%

**LOWER ATTRITION
RATE**
(Source: LinkedIn)

↑ 50%

**MORE QUALITY
APPLICATIONS**
(Source: LinkedIn)

↑ 30%

**INCREASE IN NEW HIRE
COMMITMENT**
(Source: Gartner TalentNeuron)

↑ 22%

**INCREASE IN EMPLOYEE
RECOMMENDATIONS**
(Source: Weber Shandwick)

3X

**MORE ENGAGED
EMPLOYEES**
(Source: Willis Towers Watson)

In a Willis Towers Watson research study, *“EVP best practice employers reported their organizations were 93% more likely to report significantly outperforming their industry peers financially.”*



ABOUT ML6

ML6 is a talent advisory and recruitment firm providing customized talent solutions to help build **extraordinary employer communities**. We help our clients manage change and drive growth through people – from advising on people processes and practices to hiring. **Our services include:**

Advisory

- Employer Branding
- Talent Acquisition Optimization
- Onboarding

Search

- Executive
- Contingency
- Contract



Pique your interest? If you would like to schedule a meeting to discuss an audit of your current employer brand and metrics, or would like more information on building or evolving your employer brand strategy, contact:

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