

4 Questions and Answers About The State of Employer Branding

1. B: There is an increased focus on the connection between a company's purpose and its employer brand. What's your take on this?

D: The research on Millennials, who are the largest and most sought-after employment audience, shows they value a sense of purpose not only in their lives but in their work. So, employers whose work contributes to improving society — and who can clearly articulate that purpose through their employer brand — have a competitive edge.

An employer that offers purpose-driven work doesn't necessarily have to be in the nonprofit sector. They don't have to push forward a grand philanthropic agenda. Employers everywhere, in every industry, are making our lives better...are offering careers that have purpose. For employers, it means looking at themselves introspectively and finding what makes their culture, their organization and their work — special.

What if a plumbing supply company, for instance, had a purchasing program that made it easier for local governments to replace their aging water systems. And what if that company also offered lead-testing services at a reduced rate for communities in need. Those are the types of stories that infuse purpose into a company's brand and into its workplace culture.

Employers should ask some questions of themselves. Does your company sponsor charitable organizations or events? Do you encourage employees to volunteer? What principles and values do you bring to your industry?

Companies should take the time to discover their purpose beyond just 'being in business.' They will be pleasantly surprised by what they find.

For employers, it's about going back to the basics...discovering why your company was founded in the first place and for what purpose...learning how your operations, products and/or services are contributing to consumers and the world. The next step, of course, involves communicating those 'discoveries' in a way that is attractive to employment candidates and motivates them to action.

This process of discovering a company's purpose and its purpose-driven work can be fun and highly collaborative. The result can provide a greatly effective framework for an organization's workforce and recruitment messaging going forward.

The bottom line? Every company has a purpose beyond its products or services. The trick is finding it, and then properly packaging it for job candidate consumption.

2. B: Why do you think so many companies have trouble defining and communicating their purpose?

D: Most companies are used to defining themselves by business metrics. How many locations do we have? How many new outlets should we build? What were 3rd quarter sales? What product extensions should we roll out? It takes a different type of curiosity for a company to discover its true purpose.

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The questions that must be asked are based on character and a belief in certain principles, more than solely on economic performance. In fact, research

shows companies of purpose (character, ethics, focus on people) often outperform the mean measures of economic success in their industry.

I would suspect that some companies believe they may not have a purpose beyond being profitable. I don't believe that's true. If a company didn't contribute positively to the lives of its customers and by extension, to society at large — chances are it wouldn't be in business.

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3. B: What about the issue of alignment between a company's external and employer brand. How important is that alignment?

D: The alignment is essential. Let's say I'm a job candidate. I look at a company's career website. I learn about who they are, what they do, what they believe in and what they stand for. I like what I see. Then, I visit the same company's corporate site. It's as if I'm looking at a completely different organization. The message may be as equally compelling as the career website, but the two simply don't match up.

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My question as a job candidate is:
"Which company am I joining?"

Having non-alignment of a company's corporate and employer brand raises other critical questions in the minds of prospective hires:

Why is HR not talking to the CEO?

If a company isn't coordinating its consumer and workforce messaging, what else is it not coordinating?

Why shouldn't I opt out and join an employer that knows exactly who it is, what its purpose is and what it stands for?

It's like a bad buying experience. You see an ad for the ultimate, triple-chocolate cream-filled cupcake. You go to the bakery and it's the size of a postage stamp. A disconnect is bad, whether we're talking cupcakes or employers.

4. B: What aspect of employer branding excites you the most?

D: I think it's the greater visibility that employer branding has gained in the last several years. CEO's and CFO's have made the vital connection that shows companies that recruit and retain talent well, and who are viewed as 'best places to work,' perform better for their stockholders and other constituents.

HR increasingly has a center seat at the table where critical business decisions are being made. Conversely, CMO's and other 'non-HR' executive decision-makers are seated at the table when employment decisions are being developed.

A company's employer brand and business brand are inherently linked. They are made of the same DNA. So, a company's employment performance and its economic performance are naturally connected. The C-suite has not only recognized this fact over the last several years, they continue to embrace it more pragmatically by applying greater resources to employer branding.

Placing an emphasis on people (i.e., employees) has always been a strategy that has paid dividends for forward-thinking companies.

About the authors.



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