Employer branding – also out again?

EMPLOYER BRANDING
≙
WAR FOR TALENTS
≙
DISAPPOINTMENT PREPROGRAMMED?

When there is talk of a "war for talents", of "employer branding", of the "employer brand", it is all about coping with the increasing shortage of managers and specialists. Companies have reacted. In the fight for qualified applicants, they are increasingly making money available to position themselves as attractive employers. Some are satisfied with the result - but many are not.

Cause research has begun. New questions line up with old ones: „What do others do better? Have they taken the better measures? Which ones? Should we differentiate more clearly from the competition? Would it be better to think about which channels to use to address young people in particular?"

If you're lucky, you might get the right answers this way. But if you want to systematically search for solutions, you have to start on a different level.

Target: effectiveness of the company

Employer branding strategies often scratch on the surface because with questions similar to those above, they quickly set actionist traps. And they are often less oriented towards the company itself, its peculiarities and specific goals, but rather towards individual aspects or individual measures or even current hypes - according to the motto "we must also do this now". Thus, commonplaces are elevated to the status of corporate goals - a requirement that they cannot meet.

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In other words, and this is where the good old management loop comes in: strategies that start right away with the search for (better) measures and channels, rather than with a realistic analysis and company-specific objectives, try to put the cart before the horse.

Because building an employer brand is a process. It is not a matter of looking for personnel in a one-off campaign via hip channels, but of optimising employee recruitment in the medium and long term and thus ultimately optimising the overall identity and effectiveness of the company.

Employer branding, like PR, advertising and marketing in general, is a strategic management task as well as an operational communication task. With them, the company pursues its own strategic goals. It invests time and money. And it positions itself very specifically in public.

Employer branding strategies, like many communication concepts in general, easily miss the point of success, if they are imposing blanket concepts, perhaps following the pulse of the times, but do not take the heartbeat of their own company into account. That often burns money.

Tactical reset

Therefore, it may be worthwhile to press the virtual reset button in a first approach and to check all parameters again in comparison with previous experience: Who are we? Where are we going? Who do we want to reach - managers? Apprentices? Qualified personnel? Then there are other questions to be answered: How do we want to present ourselves, what messages do we want to convey, etc.?

Only then does the search for suitable measures and channels take place. Metaphorically speaking: If I don't know exactly where the gondolier should take me to, I won't be able to tell him which channels to use.

In search of the perfect employer brand, it often turns out that it is necessary to go to totally different levels.

Completely repositioned

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All those company managers who have faced up to the times and thus , more recently, to digitization and the Big Data, are unanimous in saying analogously : "We quickly realised that it was not enough to replace the technical systems: We had to get the staff on board. Actually, we changed everything and completely reorganized ourselves. We started with us in the executive suite and had to lead by example."

Exactly the same has been stated by the forefathers of customer orientation.

And so were those who, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, devoted themselves to their corporate and management culture. Because they realized that not only concentrating on the customer and keeping up with the times generate their success, but also their most valuable asset, their own employees. This seems to have fallen into oblivion today: Although efforts are made to present a shining image to applicants, "rumour has it" that

there are companies that not only do little for their culture, but also send people to seminars where they learn to diss others even more successfully. This also burns a lot of money.

Forming a good employer brand can also mean that you first have to reposition yourself.

Culture cannot be locked up

A good corporate culture is the linchpin for any kind of effective internal and external communication. It must be lived and communicated "top-down" - authentic, comprehensible, credible, sustainable. This is also the prerequisite for a functioning employer branding.

We cannot lock up the real culture of a company. It always somehow leaks out to the outside world - from the head office, over to field service, branches, dealers, suppliers and service providers. Ideally, employees are committed brand ambassadors. In reality, they are always ambassadors for the company - whatever messages they spread, whether positive or negative. Therefore, even an otherwise strategically successful employer brand can quickly stand on shaky feet if, for example, the leadership culture is not right.

Support is better than resistance

Interested applicants quickly become brand ambassadors. If and how long they'll be – this depends on what they experience after submitting their application. Experiences influence attitudes more than arguments. Negative experiences work fast and can make people turn from friend to enemy. Feigning false facts is extremely counterproductive. Employees who have been lured this way will also quit quickly - in fact or internally.

Be it employer branding, customer orientation, corporate culture or corporate communication: it's always a question of coordinating people and companies, of initiating and keeping a process going that is based on an authentic and comprehensible corporate culture. It's about professional communication and interaction, not about proselytizing or disguising tactics.

Whoever realizes this connection, positions himself accordingly and even communicates professionally, has a clear advantage. Those who succeed in getting prospects, customers, employees and other stakeholders to identify at least in part with the company, can count on their support rather than resistance.

How does an employer brand work?

This may explain why some employer brands do not "work": Maybe a product brand can be built independently of the realities in the company, maybe a bad company can offer a good product and give it a good brand image. But what happens if this company is weak inside and still sells itself as a good employer? This will tend to lead to disappointments internally as well as externally.

Both small and large companies, which are successful in the long term, keep showing it: They do not only wish for, but actually implement and maintain a balance between contemporary thinking and acting, visions and clear corporate goals, strong customer orientation, a management culture that takes employees seriously, and communication that is geared to these things and supports them.

Employer branding is a process, not a project with a defined end. Anyone, who is now faced with the question of what went wrong, is in the management control

loop, namely at the supposed endpoint of "control" - and thus just before a promising new start.

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10 tips for an Employer Branding reset

Employer branding is a process, not a project with a defined end. Anyone who is now faced with the question of what has "gone wrong" is in management's control loop, namely at the supposed endpoint of "control"- and thus just before a promising new start. Here are some tips:

1.   **Restart with the loop.**

2.   **Analyse whether you have assumed the right conditions, e.g. with regard to corporate and management culture.**

3.   **Analyze if and what needs to be changed here.**

4.   **Determine whether the right people were involved in the process, both internally and externally.**

5.   **Ask yourself whether internal responsibilities have to be shifted or whether those responsible (PR, human resources, marketing/advertising) need to pull together and work more closely together.**

6.   **Check - only after having thoroughly analyzed these things - if and how goals need to be redefined.**

7.   **Only afterwards, deal with the planning and implementation of measures.**

8.   **Perhaps at the first attempt it had been forgotten to bring about a clear and comprehensible decision as to what measures would be taken.**
    Don't forget this important point - in order to avoid subsequent ambiguities .

9.   **Start implementing only after that.**

10. **Determine at what intervals and how you will monitor the further progress of your employer branding process.**