



## **Employer branding – it's all about the culture!**

by Bernhard Pompej

There are many ways to develop a powerful employer brand. Unfortunately, the potential inherent in employer branding is currently either largely or entirely ignored – a judgment that is confirmed by a recent study published by the German Design Council (Monitor Markenführung, November 2011, German Design Council).

The manner in which these opportunities to decisively raise one's profile and thus secure a competitive edge are not being exploited borders on the negligent. This is all the more serious in view of the fact that many SMBs and international companies are more or less willing players in the so-called war of talents, to use a somewhat belligerent yet not entirely inappropriate term to describe the situation.

To take the martial analogy a step further, companies have little choice but to participate in this arms race, especially in the current unsettled situation that is defined by an enduring economic, financial and globalization crisis. And the best way to do so is to bring to bear those weapons that make you unique and unbeatable: your well-trained, highly productive and loyal workforce. A worthy common cause calls for worthy comrades-in-arms.

This is by no means a novel idea. It used to be called personnel development, then human resources came into fashion, a label that would seem to place the emphasis more on the material than on the human aspect. And now we have added employer branding to the list, a term that reflects the realization that employees can be seen as brand builders and brand drivers, as brand ambassadors even.

It should be noted, however, that hiring new talents is not the only goal. Retaining the services and loyalties of one's current employees is at least of equal importance – and this is a process that requires far more than the usual financial and other incentives. The value of these classic team-building “fun” events and monetary motivators, which are controversially discussed both within and outside of the companies, is limited both in respect of duration and results. The most decisive factors are the work environment, the atmosphere, the degree to which personal interests can be satisfied. And all this has to be convincingly anchored in the corporate culture.

Why do my employees enjoy working for me? How can I motivate my people to subscribe wholeheartedly to a common cause? How can I create a good atmosphere, in and beyond our everyday business activities? And how can I do justice to all the different personalities in my team? It all boils down to culture, personal and professional. Collaboration means understanding and being understood. Clear and transparent communication, within and to the outside.

Corporate culture can be seen as the source of inspiration for employer branding, and thus for brand behavior too. This insight is as banal as it is old. So why is it not put into practice? Workforce size and lack of time to develop an appropriate culture, and to subsequently cultivate it, are the main obstacles that have to be eliminated. But it has to be done, as emphasized also by the 2008 study published by the Swiss Link Institute for Market and Social Research. “In most cases, the amount on the paycheck is not the cause of discontent.” So-called “soft factors such as the culture of the company, the information and communication policy, the line manager and the team” have a decisive influence on whether or not an employee decides to stay with the company for the long haul.

Especially in sectors that have a high fluctuation rate it can be helpful to communicate strategic decisions clearly, and to thus anchor them firmly throughout the company. This can be achieved in many different ways. This kind of communication has nonetheless to be well-targeted and geared to the individual situation. The main aspect must be to create an authentic and positive corporate culture, one that is backed and nourished by the employees.

One of the two guaranteed “spin-offs” of employer branding is positive PR generated by the employees themselves. The most credible and in particular lowest-cost image building is provided by one’s own people – word-of-mouth endorsement, so to speak.

As a further major benefit, the image of the company is enhanced also in the eyes of investors and partners. Who would not prefer to work with a company that cultivates a successful and admired culture?

In this spirit: dare to invest more in your culture. It will be well worth it!

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Born 1977 in Würzburg. Studied graphic design in Freiburg (1999-2004).

Founded design agency “p2design” in Freiburg (2001).

Concurrently started economics studies at Freiburg University, major subject marketing (2003).

Founded the design conference Designforum Freiburg, Founded design network “Haus3”.

Worked as designer in design agencies in Heidelberg and Mannheim, graduated Master of Arts with honors from Hochschule Mannheim University of Applied Sciences.

Staff member and assistant lecturer for project management and PR, responsible for various projects including the 1st Editorial Day Germany.

Conducted workshops in Haifa, Israel and Moscow, Russia. Appointed royal adviser to Togbui Ngoryifia Céphas Kosi Bansah, King of Hohoe Gbi Traditional Ghana (2010).

Brand strategy consultant with the Peter Schmidt Group, Frankfurt (2010).

Appointed as visiting professor at Bauhaus Universität Weimar, Art & Design faculty.

Since 2011: brand consultant at Hotz Brand Consultants in Zug, Switzerland.

He has won a number of awards for his work, including DDC, IF and RedDot as well as the Lucky Strike Junior Design Award.

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