
SUCCESSFUL BRANDS – THE KEY TO THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF A COMPANY

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Abstract:

“People are the active resources of the organization because their potential, experience and passion, their initiatives and development actively contribute to the increase in efficiency and effectiveness of the organization” (Manolescu, 2007), having the ability to boost the results of the engaging of the other resources. This is beyond doubt the reason for which organizations are constantly preoccupied with finding the ideal employee – competent and loyal, capable of performance. How can organizations keep hold of valuable employees? How can they win their employees loyalty? How can they determine them to adhere to the organization’s values? These are questions that employers are asking themselves more and more often. A possible answer to this could be the employer brand.

Keywords: *retaining “talent” employees, employer brand, key-employees, employer of choice*

1. Current context

In this extremely difficult period for all economies, when in most organizations the budgets are smaller and the pressure to successfully surpass all the crisis situations is higher, employers are looking for talents, valuable employees that would contribute to accomplishing the organization’s objectives and to attaining performances. Reality has proven that human assets that are loyal, involved, motivated to make efforts in order to support the objectives of the company, and in order to apply the strategies constitute a competitive edge and can become the asset that makes the difference between those who survive and those who fail. One of the organizations’ biggest challenges in these times is without any doubt that of attracting and retaining “*talent*” employees.

In Romania, attracting and retaining talents has represented and continues to represent a real problem for all organizations, regardless of size or business field, even more so that in the past 20 years they have been confronted with a serious workforce migration to other countries in which the offer on the labour market is much more appealing than the domestic offer.

Human Resources specialists (HR Romania, **Brandul de angajator - definitie si acceptiuni**, www.hr-romania/comunitate/articole/strategie) believe that an answer to the problems Romanian organizations are confronted with is the employer brand. The concept lies, in the opinion of the same HR specialists, at the boundary between human resource management, public relations and marketing, being synonymous not only to a good organizational reputation, but also implying the reflection of this reputation at the level of the intra-organizational reality.

Nowadays, employer brand has earned a significant importance generated by the need of the organizations to have a strong, positive image, in order to attract talented people and to more easily overcome this extremely difficult period in their existence. The main benefits of the employer brand *“are concerned with an increasing the rate of employee retention and commitment, particularly through recruitment facilitation. In the competition for the best employees, only those companies that can implement retention plans for the key employees and that have a strong brand, that is attracting talents can win.”* (J.McEwen, W., **Forta brandului**, Ed. ALLFA, Bucuresti, 2008) Organizations have realized that in order to succeed in attracting those employees able to perform, they must promote their image appropriately, just like any other product, and try to sell it as well as possible on the labour market. This is how the “employer branding” concept took shape.

Experience has shown that organizations must take care of the key-employees, because they represent the image of the employer in the market and have a significant importance over how the employer brand is perceived.

2. Employer brand

Specialists claim that the concept of “*employer brand*” was initially introduced in Great Britain and afterwards knew a rapid development in all the other countries. A border concept, employer brand requires the harmonized efforts of all the services in the company. *“Just like any other brand, it refers to perception, it implies product marketing strategies; in our case, the product is the “person”, and the employees or candidates are the consumers. A rather innovative and recently employed method for creating an employer brand is PR for HR,”* (Gheorghe, C., **Profesionistii in recrutare despre brandul de angajator**) believes Cristina Gheorghe, consulting partner at Crescent, a HR management company.

Eliza Rogalski, PR manager at Tempo Advertising defines the concept as being *“the planned effort of a company to attract and retain the most popular talents, by using the same techniques as those for building and supporting a brand”* (Rogalski, E., **Intre brandul de angajator si performanta**). According to her *“The employer brand is like a trusted brand, which makes the organization and its personality unique for every employee. The employer brand conveys the company’s promise and the benefits of the employee who is part of this partnership-type relation. It captures the essence of an organization in such a way that it enhances significantly the employees’ level of involvement. It conveys the so-called value proposition: why should I come*

work here? And why should I stay here?” (Rogalski, E. ***Intre brandul de angajator si performanta***).

Theoreticians define employer brand as being “a set of attributes and qualities – often intangible – which individualize and organization, promises a certain type of work experience and appeals to those who will strive and act as well as possible in its organizational culture.” (J.McEwen, W., ***Forta brandului***, Ed. ALLFA, Bucuresti, 2008). It is essential that before popularizing a brand, it must be very well conveyed, understood and implemented within the organization.

The employer brand, just like any other brand, requires an investment, requires efforts and, furthermore, it takes time to build it. Generally, multinationals or large companies with a rapid growth and a comparable budget are preoccupied with developing a strong employer brand. It is a strategy, specialists claim, of “going from a motivation based only on the salary to one based on values and shared vision, on loyalty and mutual support. It is a way of building through people on the long term” (J.McEwen, W., ***Forta brandului***, Ed.ALLFA, Bucuresti, 2008).

Practice has shown that there is no general formula that every organization can apply in order to create a strong brand with an organizational culture. In case of the employer brand, the degree in which a brand is genuine in itself is important, which means it has to be built on a basis of truth. Also very important as well in the creation of the brand are the internal communication policies. Branding is, as we have emphasized, an investment in time, in people, but, especially in reputation. Even if, in these times of recessions, the supply of labour is much higher than the demand, the employees, and we refer in particular to the “talents” that every organization needs, are those who will select their favourite company.

As for the employer brand, HR specialists claim that:

“Firstly, the employer brand makes the difference – it is the way in which one company can compare to another company. **Secondly**, a brand is free to compete on grounds other than price. While very many companies offer higher salaries than the competition in order to attract the best candidates, a real brand offers the possibility to work for the company as an attraction. Many employees will take into consideration the fact that working for a particular company will matter very much in the long run. **The third** valuable asset of branding is the loyalty it inspires. Once the client is satisfied right from the first purchase of the product, that client is very likely to choose the same brand again when he buys other products. This is a much more efficient and much harder promotion to accomplish than advertising or marketing. Satisfied clients will most likely recommend the brand to the others. Similarly, satisfied employees become attached to the company, wishing to outdo themselves and prove their loyalty towards the employer. They will be proud of the company they work for and will plan their future in this respect. Moreover, they can help by urging their friends to apply for the vacant positions within the company.” (J.McEwen , W., ***Forta brandului***, Ed.ALLFA, Bucuresti, 2008.)

The built-in character of the brand as a marketing instrument means that HR can efficiently create a brand; the department of human resources will have to reunite forces with that of marketing, PR and communication.

Specialists believe that an interesting aspect concerning the employer brand is the fact that this approach cannot be controlled and defined in its complexity by the company. “*A brand is a series of perceptions in the consumer’s mind*” (Bates, C., **How to Build Your Total Brand**, www.buildingbrands.com), declares the Building Brands’ marketing strategist Colin Bates. This means that the public is the one that defines the employer brand, starting from the way it is perceived as a company, employer and corporate citizen. The employer brand refers to the image that a company has on the labour market and, in many cases, it is the essential information that candidates rely on when they have to make a choice between employment opportunities. The brand speaks before the management, being the beginning of the relationship with potential candidates and being a valuable support in the battle for talents.

3. The need for an employer brand

Oana Tanislav, HR Learning & Communication specialist at Orange, believes that at an organizational level, “*all activities that take place, from employee recruitment, selection and integration procedures, to career development, internal and external communication, employee performance appraisal, encouraging innovation, social responsibility programs and benefits packages for employees – all these represent elements that create the general image of an employer*” (Alexandrescu, L., **Brandul de angajator, magnet de talente**).

HR specialists believe that the decision to build an employer brand is not influenced by the size of the organization. The competitiveness of the companies is radically influenced by the talented people, regardless of the size of the company, and the effort is proportional to the results that each company aspires to. Nowadays, due to its great potential from the point of view of sustainable development, competitiveness, and strictly in the field of resource management, decreased labour force migration and personnel fluctuations, the employer brand, unexploited to its true value, is considered indispensable as instrument for organization’s survival and development.

The recruitment system, the aspects regarding the possibility of promotion, of continuous professional development, the insurance of a satisfying and recomforting informal environment, the reward system are extremely important aspects for the employee, aspects that are part of the employer brand. It is well proven that once the employer brand is developed, it can optimize the recruitment process in itself, as well as the motivation and retention of employees. A derived concepts starts to emerge, one that is more and more frequently used by all HR specialists, that of “*employer of choice*” (EOC in short) or favourite employer, that the Americans define as being “*an employer, in the public, private or not for profit sector, that attracts and holds talent for long tenure, because employees deliberately choose to stay in the organization*” (Szekely, A., **Branding personal**, Audiosfera, Bucuresti, 2008)

Becoming an EOC is an investment, therefore requires time, material resources, an innovative strategy and consistency. All these demand a quality management and total involvement from the human resources department and from the management at all levels. The results, measured by the stability of the personnel at the workplace, are not immediate, but the efforts prove their utility in time, become quantifiable.

We can safely say that, based on the experience we have gathered, the investment in the employer image will be returned through reducing the effort in the talent recruitment and retention process – a safe way to increase the general level of performance and competitiveness of the organization. An American study attempted to determine the image elements that influence present and potential employees – the result was that 49% of the economically active persons take the decision to apply to a certain company based on the company's image, the essential elements of which are (Boston Consulting Group and The European Association for People Management, and the one from HR Club and Daedalus Milward Brown):

1. **Organizational culture** – with defining elements regarding the way in which work is organized, authority is exercised and distributed, regarding work rewards and values considered essential, freedom of the employees to express their opinions and to take risks, rules and expectations regarding the work attire, informal relationships, importance attributed to procedures, individual or team accomplishments.

2. **Products and services** offered by the company, as well as keeping promises made to consumers – their reputation and quality influences the employer's image.

3. **Corporate social responsibility**, respecting the environment, respecting social norms and the competition.

4. **A complete and correct HR policy**: integrating the human resources management in the general organization management; creating a climate that capitalizes on the potential of every employee; rewarding and motivating all employees that perform, stimulating the wish of every employee to continuously improve their own activity; involving in the decision making process those who prove professional competence, and the examples do not end here.

5. **The reputation and size of the organization**. The reality is that small enterprises find it difficult to develop their employer brand. It is a classical psychological effect that influences present and potential employees, as well as consumers: the bigger the number of employees, the more stable the company is. Also, the more intense the advertising is, the better the products/services of the company are.

The new conditions in the past years have shown, to employees and organizations alike, that it can be worse, that during a crisis talents are needed, that we have to be competitive, that we have to care, that the future is not always bright, that even more in this period **the management of key employees is of extreme importance**. This is why a good employer reputation can determine, like in a domino effect, the improvement of the relations with the clients and a higher turnover. By hiring

valuable specialists, the so-called *talents* that any organization needs, the quality of the work increases this leading to attracting more and more specialists. The continuity and stability of the employees in the organization can ensure more accurate long term predictions and resource allocation. The stability in the company offers a feeling of trust sought after by long term partners.

In our country employee retention in organizations has become a crucial problem and a constant challenge, under the conditions that it has been proven that a company that has the ability to attract, retain and develop human capital can create a positive image for itself on the human resource market, image that can thrust it to the top of the ranking charts. An important part of this ranking is attracting talents that will contribute, through their activity to the success of the organization. In the continuous battle for talents, building a well-known employer brand proves a great advantage for the companies. Organizations that rely on marketing strategies that have already proved they can build successful brands are the best placed ones in order to attract and retain talent.

In the present context, organizations must continue to develop their employer brand, even during a financial crisis, such as the one we are currently experiencing, in order specifically to stimulate the development of their own business and surpass difficult periods with as little loss as possible.

The employer brand is a concept of crucial importance for a high ranking company or one that aims to hold this position. Externally, a strong employer brand can support the organization in the battle for talents, while internally it can contribute to their employee retention. A strong employer brand is not created over night and is not a process that can end (at least not separately from the *end* of the company itself).

4. Conclusions

Very few organizations are currently pursuing employer brand consolidation activities, although HR specialists claim it is the best time to do so. *"The employer brand must be continuously developed. To a great extent, it depends on the company. Those who are in a rather stable situation are focused on HR actions"* (Ionescu, M.A., "Calitate prin responsabilitate sociala corporatista si branding de angajator. Cazul Nokia", Calitatea, no. 1-2, 2009) says HR specialists.

The results of two studies (one from the Boston Consulting Group and The European Association for People Management, and the one from HR Club and Daedalus Milward Brown) confirm this tendency: HR managers give an average attention to improving the employer brand, its main preoccupations during the crisis being to develop leadership abilities, talent management and to assess employee performances.

"Apparently, it may seem acceptable to have a least visible employer brand, but, in reality the one that maintains the focus on this area has a lot to earn in the long run" (J.McEwen, W., **Forta brandului**, Ed.ALLFA, Bucuresti, 2008), says HR specialists . *"They do not have to ruin their image as employers just because*

employees will accept now some cost reduction measures which affect them directly, just because they have nowhere else to go to or because they hesitate to make a change in their career.“(J.McEwen, W., **Forta brandului**, Ed.ALLFA , Bucuresti, 2008)

Anca Podoleanu is just one of the people connected to the business environment that validates this possibility. *“When we have exited from the crises, whether it will be in three months or a year, the employees who are unhappy to the decisions that the company is taking at present will leave. Once you have ruined your employer image it is difficult to repair it. I have been in the situation when the company I was working for had a weak image on the market and have worked almost three years to repair it”*, (Alexandrescu, L., **Brandul de angajator, magnet de talente**) says Anca Podoleanu.

Developing a strong employer brand can represent a long term strategy for organizations, one that will allow them to respond to the difficulties generated by the talent crisis and to the challenges concerning employee retention.

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