Trends in Talent Management

A collection of articles from thought leader Ryan Estis on Branding for Talent, Talent Acquisition, Sales oriented Recruiting and Performance Management.
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About Ryan Estis

A recognized Professional Speaker/Trainer, Sales Evangelist, Talent Management Consultant, and Agent of Change, Ryan has developed a series of powerful keynote, seminar and workshop events that deliver specific, actionable content to drive sustained performance and process improvement.

As the former Senior Vice President of Sales for the $50 million People Marketing division of McCann-Erickson World Group Advertising, Ryan’s unique, value based sales and marketing methodology served as the catalyst to move an entire organization from a transactional to consultative/solutions based client acquisition platform, leading to more enterprise account wins and strategic client partnerships. His 30 Steps and Peak Performance Selling Principles serve as the foundation for high energy, high engagement, and actionable outcomes in customized sales training/coaching and process improvement consulting. Ryan’s interactive style and in market examples create a powerful atmosphere for learning and the impetus for change to beat the competition to the close time and time again.

His message and Sales/Marketing acumen have been concurrently embraced on the Human Resources speaker platform where he leverages best practices to help organizations win by Branding for Talent and delivers Sales Skills Training customized for Corporate Recruiting Teams.

Ryan’s 17 years of business experience include Talent Management Consulting with specific expertise in Employee Acquisition, Engagement and Employment Brand Architecture/Strategy. He’s consulted with leading employers across diverse industry segments to help organizations discover and define their unique employment value proposition and deploy strategic initiatives to achieve a competitive business advantage through Human Capital.

His work has been featured in Electronic Recruiting Exchange, Workforce Management Magazine, HR Professional Magazine, SHRM, Business News Network, Crain’s Business, Staffing Management Magazine, and the books Your Employer Brand, Employer of Choice and University Means Business. Ryan serves as a Senior Associate with the Employer Brand Institute and is a professional member of the National Speakers’ Association. He now resides in Minneapolis, Minnesota.
Testimonials for Ryan Estis

“Your presentation to us that day was by far the most useful and content-rich session of the day. I appreciated your high energy, professionalism and the fact that you outlined a clear process-based strategy that we can take with us and populate as our environments demand. Excellent presentation and delivery!”

Leona Wilson  
Manager, Human Resources  
YSL Beaute Canada, Inc.

“I have been recruiting for a very long time but am always interested in new information. Ryan provided some interesting insight and some new ideas that I had not thought of. I am especially interested in the generational differences and enjoyed hearing more about that and how we must adjust our management styles to accommodate the up-and-coming generations and the expectation that they have been, or risk being, left behind in recruiting and retention efforts. Ryan provided a high-energy presentation that captured and maintained our interest.”

LeeAnn Laddler, PHR  
Vice President, Resources Manager  
Gulfstream Business Bank

“I am so glad that I attended your Employment Branding session—and actually, it was the best session I attended at the national SHRM conference! You kept the meeting (and the topic) interesting and fun and your passion for what you do definitely showed! I left the meeting energized and with plenty of fresh ideas to share at my workplace.”

Patti Martin  
AVP, Human Resources Manager  
Union National Community Bank

“The session ‘Closing the Candidate, Sales Skills for the New Recruiter’ was the highlight of the SHRM conference for me. I sat through many informative sessions during the conference, staring at PowerPoint slides and taking notes hoping to go back and apply some of what I was learning at work. It’s two months later and I’ve yet to review those notes. I was very fortunate to have chosen the session with Ryan Estis. I was on the edge of my seat and laughing throughout the entire session. I didn’t take notes, nor did I need to because I was fully engaged and came back to the workplace inspired to be a better recruiter.”

Nicole Serridge  
Senior Staffing Representative  
Behr America, Inc.
“Ryan has a terrific command of the Employment Brand Strategy topic and provided outstanding take-away ideas for the audience. As the first of three speakers, Ryan set the tone for the event and energized the audience with interactive, fun and relevant activities. Ryan also provided a solid foundation for the two case studies following his presentation, by utilizing his signature Brand Architecture methodology and referencing thought-provoking examples. His engaging rapport with the audience invited numerous questions, to which he responded very succinctly and articulately. The program feedback survey indicated the Brand Strategy Program was very well received.”

Mina Ozturk
SPHR, MA-HRIR

“Ryan delivers a fast-paced, high-intensity, high-content meeting. Big company or small, if you think you are up-to-speed on the latest thinking on employment branding, you probably aren’t—until you meet Ryan. He buzz-saws through accepted wisdom and makes.... you want to get back to your company, your CEO and your marketing department and rethink everything you’re doing about your recruitment strategy!”

Susan Melvin
Director of Human Resources
B A R Architects

“This was my 20th EMA and yours must have been the 200th breakout session that I have attended. Your presentation was at the very top of all those that I have witnessed. You were engaging, dynamic and informative and you had the 300-plus HR directors busily taking notes. Our profession has long undervalued the Employer Brand. I believe that your presentation goes a long way toward raising it to the level of intention that it needs to make an impact (obtain a budget) in the C suite.”

Bruce Dorskind
The Dorskind Group

“Your presentation was a big hit. You brought some excitement and enthusiasm to what is usually a dull meeting. We all enjoyed the vigor with which you presented your material. Several people commented that the workbook was an excellent idea. It gave us a way to follow along with the presentation and keep notes. It was also a way to reinforce what you were presenting. The audio-visual portion was a good way to break up the time and give some visual evidence on the points you were making. I want to thank you for taking the time to come down from Minnesota to share your knowledge and excitement regarding employment branding. I think you have motivated us to move to dead center and start the process.”

Ed Hines
Director, Follett Corporation
HR 101:
Sales Effectiveness:
10 Steps to Successful Corporate Recruiting

by Ryan Estis
Professional selling is not unlike the practice of law or accounting. It includes a set of core competencies that, if understood, developed and mastered, will lead to tremendous success. Sales success is the culmination of extreme effort, developed subject matter expertise and a passionate belief that you can help someone do something better. The same principles apply to effective corporate recruiting. The best and brightest are highly coveted and, in turn, have an abundance of options. The best recruiters understand that in the people business, you have to earn the opportunity to hire the very best candidates.

I. Be likable
People prefer to do business with, work around and for people they like and trust. Often, before they come to work for you, they need to like you.

II. Respect and serve
Where selling once was likened to persuasion and even manipulation tactics, today it's simply about helping people or companies improve. Recruiting is no different. Helping people determine fit, providing feedback, guidance, insights and support through the process demonstrates sincere interest and respect for candidates who are making a critical life decision.

III. Follow-up and -through
Treating candidates like customers creates a sense of urgency. A-level talent is on the marketplace for a short period of time, so immediate follow-up is critical to successful conversions. Coveted candidates have lessening patience for long delays and limited feedback and communication.

IV. You are the company
Every touchpoint is an opportunity to enhance the candidate experience and extend the relationship. Recruiters become the ultimate extension of the employment brand. Having a clearly defined, authentic employment value proposition extended through an employment branding strategy is essential to attracting A-level talent. In the eyes of the candidate, you are the company.

V. Do your homework
Make sure hiring managers are thoroughly prepared with all the background, notes, details and relevant nuances to ensure a successful meeting. Preparation helps demonstrate keen interest in the candidate as a potential contributor and builds a positive relationship. Quality candidates are beginning to expect you’ve done your research up front, and with tools like Google and Zoom Info at the ready, it's easy to accomplish.
VI. Earn the talent

Customer relationships are often cultivated through years of development and interface before finally being solidified. A recruiting culture that approaches engaging talent competitively has an advantage every time. You have to earn the opportunity to employ A-players.

VII. Be number 1

When recruiting passive candidates, strive to become the organization candidates think of first when they begin contemplating a career change. Maintain the relationship with the notion that eventually this candidate will join your organization. Work to stay relevant and top of mind to the talent you desire and aspire to be the first person they call when the timing is right.

VIII. Keep it simple

Make it easy for candidates to connect with your organization, understand career opportunities and apply for a job. Review your career site. How compelling is the first impression you make? Are you being competitive in your space? Is it simple and painless to search and apply for a job? Can a candidate leave their e-mail address to get communication on the status of their application and updates on careers?

IX. After the yes

Critical to engagement and retention is the experience a candidate has in the first 12 months on the job. Acceptance of the offer is just the beginning of the relationship. Put a program in place that extends beyond orientation and make sure it includes relevant training, support in acclimation, consistent communication and the opportunity for new hires to offer opinions about what could be better. The company should do everything it can to fulfill expectations extended during the recruitment process.

X. Live and learn

Enhance recruiting effectiveness by understanding lost opportunities and implement process improvements. Sales organizations thoroughly analyze and inspect every detail around a customer loss or defeat in a competitive selling situation in order to ensure it doesn’t happen again. Develop a mechanism for obtaining feedback from candidates who turn down offers. Make a plan to shore up any gaps and remove barriers that impede the acquisition of more stars.
Employment Brand Architecture
Eight Steps to Becoming an Employer of Choice

by Ryan Estis
While attending the National EMA Conference in Dallas recently, I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to deliver two breakout sessions entitled “Employment Branding: Branding Your Organization to Attract and Retain A-Level Talent.” I was pleased to see the enthusiastic interest emerge around this strategic initiative, and throughout the week I was encouraged by the obvious commitment of so many of our fellow recruiting practitioners to elevate the recruiting function inside their organizations.

It was evident to me, however, in both the content of the conference and the collaboration going on outside of the business sessions, that we are on the cusp of significant challenges with respect to attracting and retaining talent. The well-publicized, demographically driven labor shortage is quickly headed our way, and the notion that this will coincide with increasing dissatisfaction in the workplace—along with unprecedented turnover (estimates that 40% of the workforce are prepared to find a new job are alarming)—creates the landscape for a perfect storm.

Companies that are not prepared to combat these challenges—and that fail to understand the importance of an increased investment allocation in talent management—will almost certainly see diminished performance possibilities in the future. The time to start preparing to compete in this challenging environment is now, and employment branding is a long-term strategy that will offer any organization who commits to the process a real advantage.

An employment branding initiative will help perpetuate the right image around your employment experience, and engage the talent necessary to accomplish key business objectives in the future. Elevating the exposure of your organization as an employer of choice is necessary to succeed in an environment that is increasingly more employee-favorable—where A-players are coveted, gainfully employed and have multiple opportunities should they desire a change.

Wherever your organization is on the continuum of brand development, implementation and strategy, the following eight concepts will help guide your efforts in branding your organization as an employer of choice:

1. Understand your business objectives.

What is leadership’s vision for the future direction of your organization? What is the commitment to growth, new markets and business development? To the extent that it is possible, you need to engage C-level leadership in supporting the employment branding initiative and encourage dialogue to help close any knowledge gaps with respect to near- and long-term organizational objectives. The more top-down buy-in you can achieve at the onset of your employment brand development, the more likely you are to succeed.
2. Identify your talent needs.

Determine the talent needed to accomplish key business objectives in the future. Engage in workforce planning to clearly define the strategy necessary to align the needs for talent acquisition with the future direction of the business. Determine which skills are most critical to support the evolution of your organization, and assess where gaps exist among the present workforce. You’ll need to have a firm grasp of these key steps, and you’ll need to present a talent acquisition plan, in real numbers, based on current trends with respect to openings, attrition, growth/transition projections, the percentage of the workforce trending toward retirement and new critical skills required by the organization. A well-organized talent acquisition plan is essential for achieving consensus buy-in and the appropriate financial support.

3. Determine the employment brand attributes.

Determine those key attributes that define the employment experience with the organization. Take into consideration the things that shape your organization, like mission, vision and values. Consider the role of the employment brand as a promise to candidates about the employment experience you offer, and make certain that the messaging is indeed accurate. At this stage in the process, it’s often useful to conduct employee population focus groups to best ascertain what attributes are legitimate and resonate most powerfully with your contributing talent. There are tools available to obtain feedback online, or you can hold moderated roundtable sessions to encourage open dialogue around the employment experience among quality performers. Both are very useful in developing an accurate understanding of the employment experience. As a benchmark, encourage the participation of leadership in a related survey mechanism. Additional interviews with leadership around the employment offering will help you develop a gap analysis, which will allow you to determine whether the leadership perception of the quality of the employment experience is consistent with reality. Creating the awareness and working toward bridging any existing gaps are truly important steps in the effort to brand your organization as a true employer of choice.

4. Look for synergy with the corporate brand.

Many organizations have made great efforts to perpetuate an image of the product or service offerings that define their brand. It is important to consider how to best incorporate this messaging into the context of recruitment communications. The role of marketing and corporate communications is often essential in the employment brand development process, to the point where we now see hybrid HR/marketing roles emerging within leading organizations (with job titles like “employment brand manager” or “employment marketing manager”). Regardless of whether the hybrid role exists at your organization, you need to be certain to interface with a liaison from marketing or corporate communications as part of the process, in order to understand your current brand positioning and how to best leverage the existing concepts to fit the purposes of talent engagement. Consistency in all external communications can be achieved by working cooperatively with marketing, and the advantage is that much of the heavy lifting will often have already been accomplished.
5. Develop a communications plan.

This action outlines the talent engagement strategy and defines important considerations like budget, timing, markets, media and project priority. Perform some competitive intelligence gathering to benchmark your organization against leading firms and industry best practices. Based on your own internal due diligence, determine what high-impact areas need to be addressed first. Is the candidate interface on your website compelling? Does your firm have enough name recognition in the local marketplace? What percentage of hires are generated through internal referrals? What is your commitment to attracting diverse candidates? What is the perception among leading candidates about your firm as a potential employer? Make a case for the appropriate investment allocation and, through planning, shape your efforts and timeline toward process improvement.

6. Develop the messaging and creative content.

A strong employment brand is synthesized through a theme designed to resonate with the target hiring demographic. The strongest themes introduce the organization and allow for the opportunity to develop messaging that will engage the right candidates. Extend the messaging to focus on what you offer that is unique, different or better in the context of your career opportunities. Strive to achieve consistency in communication through all external channels and consider focus group testing (internally and externally) prior to execution, to ensure the message is on-target and the employment brand achieves the desired impact. The ongoing interface with your marketing liaison will ensure synergy with corporate communications while achieving the ultimate objective of presenting your employment experience in the most compelling way. Achieve consensus buy-in on the theme and its accompanying visuals.

7. Establish metrics.

The adage that you cannot improve what you don’t measure certainly applies here. At the onset, metrics based on desired outcomes should be established. Determinations based on your own unique challenges will guide your objectives, and it’s likely that you are already measuring efforts to favorably impact cost, quality and speed. A well-developed employment branding strategy will contribute to gains in each important area and deliver improved quality lead generation as the marketplace grows increasingly more competitive. Employment branding is as much an internal process as it is an external one. That’s why it’s important to carry the “employment brand” experience beyond engagement, through on-boarding, and ultimately into support of your retention initiatives. To determine if you are living the “employment brand” as an employer, solicit feedback from recent hires and those employees whose contributions you want to replicate. Equally important is obtaining feedback from those desired candidates who turned down an offer of employment, and developing improvements to address those issues.
8. Execute and evaluate.

Once you are ready for marketplace execution, you need to develop a platform of internal communications with a target launch date for the new employment brand. Give employees multiple touch points with the new employment brand by leveraging technology and appropriate internal communication channels. Unveil the new theme, visuals and supporting strategy to engage new talent. This will create the necessary awareness and support among key employee stakeholders, who can leverage the new employment brand strategy to further perpetuate the right image around your organization as an employer of choice. Engaged employees, who are resolved to share in the challenge of attracting more like-minded talent to an organization where they believe one can exceed one’s own potential, are the pinnacle achievement of any employment brand.

Keep in mind that employment branding is an ongoing process. Evaluate your success regularly, and don’t be afraid to update, adjust and change direction as your needs dictate. Committing to the process and investing in the tools to deliver the employment brand messaging in a meaningful way will help define your unique employment value proposition in the minds of your target audience. The differentiation established through employment branding will improve your opportunity to engage the RIGHT talent in even the most competitive labor market.

The best part of a successful employment branding initiative is that your talent will increasingly prove to be your organization’s most distinct competitive business advantage!

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Nine Best Practices for Gen Y:
They’re always preparing for the next job

by Ryan Estis
Gen Y. Echo-Boomers. Millennials. Call them what you will and take notice. This burgeoning
generation (70 million; born between 1977 and 2002) is coming of age and arriving in the
workplace with new ideas about the employment experience. Namely, “why should I work for
you?” and “what are you going to offer me?”

Self-assured, tech-savvy and idealistic, they arrive at work with an evolved set of expectations
for employment and their opportunity to have an impact from day one. The achievement
orientation and natural impatience of this plugged-in, multi-tasking generation inevitably
creates conflict for many employers and coincides with a time where the pool of skilled talent
is shrinking.

As Boomers approach retirement and employers confront the talent exodus resulting from
this natural attrition, many will find it necessary to adjust to the nuances of the new workforce
in an effort to attract, engage and retain a generation that is projected to be increasingly
mobile and interested in seeking the next assignment. This may be in the context of the
current employment relationship or often, in their readiness to jump to the next gig.

Labels like “high-maintenance” or “unrealistic” may tag the Millennials at the onset of their
entrance into the workforce. However, this educated, increasingly diverse (one in three is a
minority) generation is also anticipated to be both quick to contribute and deeply coveted in
a job market that includes a projected talent shortage between four and 10 million by 2010.
As your organization competes to attract the very best among Generation Y and integrate
them into the workforce, these nine best practices are important to consider in
demonstrating a compelling employment opportunity that ultimately can help you both
acquire and retain the new talent you need to accomplish key business objectives into the
future:

1. **Relationship recruiting.** While technology has improved recruitment process and
efficiency, it is expressly important to remember that recruiting is still a people business.
Over-reliance on automation can be a clear sign to candidates they may not be valued at
the onset. This generation expects interface, contact, respect, consideration and prompt
response. The most talented among them will have options and need to be sold on the
benefit of one opportunity in direct comparison to multiple options. High self-worth is a
Gen Y characteristic and candidates need to feel valued during the recruiting process.

2. **Employment branding.** Critical to supporting a quality recruiting function, the
employment brand should extend to candidates the unique opportunity and express
benefit of employment with your organization. Millennials are image-oriented and expect
to be associated with the best. They also want to clearly understand what they will be
doing on a day-to-day basis specific to their job. A quality employment brand should
demonstrate your compelling employment value proposition and give candidates an
opportunity to self-select based on the notion that their skill-set, education and
experience are the right fit for your organization.

3. **Candidate experience.** Make the initial interaction and touch points with your
organization a great experience for the candidate. Quality website? Simple application
mechanism? Immediate recruiter interface? This tech-savvy generation can be instantly impressed with a great initial experience with your organization or can quickly move on to the next opportunity if the process is frustrating or inadequate.

4. **Offer.** The employment offer should be competitive and compelling. And with this group, it isn’t just about the compensation. They value work-life balance and do expect some time away (not time away with so much work hanging over their heads that it doesn’t end up being a real vacation). They’re also financially astute and will be interested in the benefit package that includes a sound 401(k) and/or profit-sharing plan. Moreover, they want to contribute. Make the offer and opportunity to do meaningful work part of the equation.

5. **Onboarding.** With a group that is quick to change, the assimilation into the organization during the first 12 months is critical to ensure engagement and retention. Make sure there is a program that extends beyond orientation and includes relevant training, multiple touch points, consistent communication and the opportunity to offer opinions about what could be improved upon. Make new employees feel welcome and like part of the team before they even start.

6. **Mentoring.** As an extension of onboarding, offer a mentoring program. New employees should be paired with someone who has an express interest in their success. Pairing candidates from different generations or across segments of the business is a great way to bridge gaps and build understanding throughout the workplace.

7. **Feedback.** The annual review will no longer suffice. This generation expects feedback and validation more often. This may involve some manager training to help bring about the appropriate level of performance review criteria and recognition to keep the new workforce motivated to achieve. Although a recognized virtue, patience is not noted among the group’s core character traits.

8. **Flexibility.** Happy to be held accountable to results, this generation brings some evolved thinking into the workplace with regard to when and how they go about doing their work. They live in a virtual world and respond well to the notion of autonomy around work schedules, telecommuting, home-office arrangements and understanding that they desire true balance in their lives. If jeans and flip-flops are considered appropriate office attire, that’s a bonus!

9. **Career-pathing.** Upward mobility is a hallmark desire among Millennials. They want to not only understand what is expected in their present capacity, but even more important, what will be required to move into the next opportunity. They anticipate changing employers to advance their career, and are always preparing to do exactly that. The employer that can demonstrate expeditious career-pathing has an advantage and opportunity to retain A-level talent among this group longer.
Generation Y, ready to make a meaningful impact, brings a bevy of unique attributes and talent into the workplace. The organization that is sensitive to their needs will have a distinct advantage and opportunity to capture their contributions in this increasingly competitive marketplace.

Originally published via the Electronic Recruiting Exchange
The Brand Promise:
Specific employment brand strategies that will help your organization gain a competitive advantage

by Ryan Estis
“Begin with the end in mind.”

This is one of the seven habits of highly effective people promoted by thought leader Steven Covey, and it provides an excellent insight into organizational effectiveness. If the “end” in recruiting is to deliver the right person for the job—right now—it becomes imperative to create a meaningful connection with talent. The ability to connect (or even better, to develop relationships) and offer meaningful and accurate insights into your unique employment value proposition will provide a real competitive advantage in what promises to be an increasingly difficult labor market.

Employment branding is a long-term strategy that helps create the right perception of your unique employment experience and cultivate meaningful connections with talent. While the focus of employment branding is often external communications (as was the focus of my previous article on this topic), employment brand strategy is most effective when it connects with talent consistently, at every phase of the employee life cycle. While the trend toward an increasingly competitive labor market creates challenges in attracting quality talent, it also means new opportunities for the best players on our current roster. And that makes engagement and retention mission-critical to the future success of the enterprise.

The truth is that there is no replacement for offering great career opportunities and working really hard to make sure your best people are more than satisfied in their employment. But even great career opportunities and high employee engagement don’t automatically translate into an immediate pool of quality talent to help sustain growth, accommodate attrition or add new skills to the organization. Often, the best careers (just like products) need to be marketed and sold.

So, with the end goal of attracting, engaging and retaining quality talent in mind, here are some actions you can take to ensure your employment brand strategy becomes a distinct competitive advantage:

- **Partner with marketing.** While achieving brand synergy is critical to the success of an employment brand, the relationship with marketing can prove beneficial far beyond simply following communications guidelines and/or ensuring that the employment brand alignments with corporate brand initiatives (not to underestimate the importance of this). Spending real time around marketing pros will provide you with a better understanding of effective employment brand management strategy. You will discover how important it is to not overlook critical elements like research, integrity, consistency, satisfaction and feedback. Marketers understand that customers have choices and that a customer today doesn’t translate into a customer for life. That is why category leaders are obsessed with delivering a quality “brand experience” and creating meaningful customer connections. Top talent is the corporate recruiter’s most important customer—so consider the quality of your employment brand experience in conjunction with your marketing department.
• **Conduct executive interviews.** Attracting and retaining skilled staff ranked highest on executive agendas for 2005, according to a global study recently released by Accenture. Knowing that talent is top-of-mind makes this an ideal time to involve C-level leadership in contributing to the employment brand strategy. By developing a deeper understanding of the leadership perception of the current and desired employment experience, you will begin to establish the “Employment Value Proposition Aspiration”—the pinnacle of achievement with respect to the employment experience in your organization. You will also become more aware of leadership expectations as they pertain to attracting new talent into the organization, and ensuring your current employees are engaged. These discovery interviews help shape the strategy that will enable you to achieve desired outcomes. And the time spent engaging leadership creates additional organizational support for your talent management strategy.

• **Conduct employee population focus groups.** Current employee input is critical to discovering realities that will ensure employment brand messaging is on-target. It is imperative to avoid any disconnect between the employment brand and the actual employment experience your people live every day in the workplace. Understanding what your best employees believe is unique, different or better about your career opportunities goes a long way toward shaping or evolving your employment brand strategy. This is also a great opportunity to understand what you can do better. A comparison of executive and employee insights serves as a useful “gap analysis,” where a sizable difference in opinion or perception should raise a red flag. Efforts to bridge any measurable gap will positively impact employee engagement.

• **Conduct “target talent” focus groups.** As important as it is to understand and accurately position your true employment experience, it is just as critical to define the key drivers that are determined most significant by your external target audience. Knowing what is likely to resonate most powerfully with the talent you need, and determining what existing perceptions or misconceptions exist about your organization’s employment experience, will positively impact your employment brand messaging and talent acquisition efforts. Every recruiting organization covets more of the right talent. Determining what can motivate the right talent to respond and consider a change are key insights necessary to building an effective engagement strategy. Challenge yourself to consider whether you have a compelling enough opportunity to impact your target audience. If you have a great story to tell, does that awareness exist in the marketplace?

• **Institute recruiter effectiveness training.** When most effective, employment brand strategy is consistent at every employee touch point. As such, those charged with talent acquisition inside the organization need to be true employment brand ambassadors, create meaningful connections with talent and provide each candidate with a special experience specific to the interface with your organization. A recent ERE article series extolled the benefits of great recruiters and offered ideas on how to attract them. But most people who are great at anything are committed to or require ongoing skill development. It goes without saying that better recruiters have more talent connections (or relationships with talent, and spend more time cultivating them) and understand that, increasingly, the candidate is the customer.
The best recruiting teams lead organizations in cultivating relationships with talent and creating memorable candidate experiences. Opportunities for training are in abundance, but for some organizations, none may prove to have more impact and be more readily available (and free) as the next tip.

- **Partner with sales.** A great “recruiting development” initiative is to partner with the sales organization, and model or transition best practices for customer attraction, engagement and retention in sales as they apply to talent management. The parallels for achievement in both endeavors are increasingly being discussed, and they are many. Inviting a top producer or leader from the sales organization to serve as a liaison to the recruiting team, or share success stories around customer engagement and managing relationships, is useful in challenging even skilled and tenured recruiters to embrace a more dynamic approach to talent acquisition. The obsession a quality sales organization has around activity (quality lead generation), engagement, measurement and results, all lends itself to assisting the recruiting organization gain a competitive advantage in the quest for the best new employees. In many instances (especially in a service organization), the obsession a sales organization has with customer engagement and satisfaction begins at the point of commitment. Shouldn’t it be the same in recruiting?

- **Improve the user experience on the careers section of your website.** While there continues to be a focus on the career site application process and reliance on a developed ATS solution, this isn’t why candidates end up on your career section or apply for jobs. Steven Rothberg has provided a great series on improving corporate career sites, so I won’t belabor the point here. Suffice it to say, though, this is simply the best and most important place to extend your unique employment value proposition. Make sure you are providing candidates with a quality employment brand experience on your careers section, and leave them with an image and real understanding of what is special about working for your organization. Consider video streaming, career-pathing and “a day in the life of” features to serve as a demonstration of what you offer. Develop content that’s specific to key audience members (college students, RNs, diversity applicants, etc.), and then deliver a user experience online that makes people want to apply for a job. This is often the first interface you have with talent. Make it memorable.

- **Focus on onboarding.** The transition from commitment (acceptance of the offer) to employment is important in order to ensure a quality start to the relationship. You never get a second chance to make a good first impression, and if the impression you create during the hiring process is markedly different from the employee’s first day on the job, you’ve taken the first step toward disengagement. Basic orientation is no longer enough to ensure that a meaningful connection lasts beyond acceptance and throughout the first year of employment, the most significant period as it pertains to long-term retention.

Onboarding is a developed strategy, with the appropriate investment and resource allocation, designed to ensure that talent assimilation into the organization is an extension of the employment brand experience, a validation of the candidate’s decision to join your organization and an evolution of meaningful connection into a fulfilling engagement.
• **Engage with employees.** You have to do a lot of things really well in order to keep your best people on board and deeply engaged in their work. Beyond great opportunities and dynamic work, improving internal communications can significantly impact engagement. Effectively crafted internal communication builds trust, establishes clearly defined expectations, helps rally people around a compelling or unifying mission and reinforces the valued contributions of the employee population. Employment branding is equally important internally in upholding the organization’s ongoing commitment to delivering a rewarding career experience. Remind people what you are doing really well. The grass isn’t always greener on the other side, and sometimes we can forget how good we have it. Although it isn’t the focus of this article, when it pertains to engagement, nothing is more important than great leadership. Increasingly, people leave managers (not necessarily the organization), and the relationship with the direct supervisor may have the most significant impact on retention and engagement. Develop great leaders and make sure they live the employment brand in principle and practice every day.

An employment brand is a promise that creates expectations about an experience. To ensure success, make certain your organization can deliver the employment experience your employment brand perpetuates. Remember, expectations of the career experience begin at commitment and continue throughout the entire employment relationship. In the “end,” talent will prove to be your organization’s most significant competitive advantage!

*Originally published via the Electronic Recruiting Exchange*
Employment Branding 2.0
The 8 C’s of My Web My Way

by Ryan Estis
Employment Branding 1.0 was a monologue. Employment Branding 2.0 is a conversation. And the conversation is happening real time with smart organizations participating proactively to create connections, conversations and relationships to begin building a sustainable talent advantage. The choice to participate is an option. The choice around how participation (or lack of) impacts the external perception of your work experience among skilled professionals, employee assimilation/engagement and retention of the right critical skills isn't optional. And culture and reputation are key drivers in any company's ability to get and keep the right people. Your employer brand is no longer just what you say about you. It's what everyone says about you. And what everyone says travel's fast.

We are on the cusp of transformation and recruiting will look very different coming out of this recession than it did going in. As new tools and technology become refined for our practice and reach mainstream adoption the game will forever change to the benefit of the early adopters and visionary HR leaders who consider and deploy strategy upgrades today. But tools and technology aren't enough and early indications are that isn't where the sustainable advantage will be captured. Obviously, with everyone adopting a similar set of tools the playing field can be leveled quickly. The sustainable advantage will be captured in the blend, where tools, technology and refined data management meet advanced relational and networking skills that combined foster more immediate and impactful relationships.

The new web tools flooding the market create increasing options and awesome opportunities to create more compelling introductions that can lead to new relationships. More sophisticated tools/techniques (those leveraged in professional selling and consumer marketing practices) are being deployed to pipeline and manage candidate relationships. And in this universe the expectations around a better experience are being elevated.

Attention spans have shortened. Response and feedback occur immediately. And people expect to participate more openly in the process. Communications strategy in the digital age is about positive interactions that create a very personalized experience. The mandate is ‘My Web, My Way’ and the following 8 C’s are important for every organization to consider:

**Consume**

The Web is the ultimate on-demand information device. From its inception, it's been a place where people go to actively consume media rather than passively receive it as it's delivered. And the options and immediacy with which content is consumed is limitless. Increasing consumers want the most relevant information delivered now and the mobile web and smart phones only elevate the personalized consumption habits and desire for real time content delivered wherever I am, whenever I want it.

**Connect**

The share of adult internet users who have a profile on an online social network site has more than quadrupled in the past four years. Among the professional set proactively managing their career progression fostering quality connections is a mandate and the smart recruiting organization is powering up the tools to drive more immediate and personal connections across multi channel platforms – wherever the talent is.
Converse
The increased connectivity is the gateway to more meaningful conversations that drive candidate relationship development and management. And this is part of the core and fundamental expectation that demands participation, human interaction and relational skills that support managing conversations in a way that leads to more positive outcomes. An RSS feed of an open requisition into Twitter isn’t reflective of a meaningful conversation and while it may drive some interest, alone it isn’t fostering the core relational expectations commonplace online today. Some level of precision targeting and very immediate and elevated interaction is also required.

Create
Nearly one-half of U.S. media consumers are frequently creating online content for others to see, according to a soon-to-be released survey commissioned by Deloitte & Touche USA LLP. Candidates are increasingly able to elevate their presence, establish their personal value proposition and present themselves in more expanded and compelling fashion. They expect the same of organizations and desire more participation in the process of relationship building. More information is available to everyone around fostering the right fit relationships that create win-win outcomes.

Collaborate
The exchange of information and working together has evolved the experience beyond a read only or submit/wait process. Tools like Skype, Slide Share, Google Docs have made knowledge transfer and virtual collaboration seamless and in many respects streamline project management, expedite work product and offer necessary cost containment. And these basic tools of exchange and partnering offer a relational component to the process, creating more opportunity for participation in an open forum environment.

Community
People are increasingly interested in joining among those with common interests, and ideas, to share and contribute opinions, thoughts and feelings in active forums. These dynamic groupings serve to create a more meaningful experience and expanded networks among those who desire a voice and active participation. Networks of large communities are broken down into small communities. My friends. My fan pages. My groups. My niche interests. And what I send, share and receive is optional and changes as my needs and interests evolve.

Customization
People now have the independence to enjoy what they want, when they want it, and where they want it and can also create content themselves, or adjust other people’s content accordingly. It’s an opt in, self controlled and increasingly personal and specific experience. It’s my web, my way.
Competition

With expanding options and evolving and elevated tools and technology the expectations around experience are elevated and the competition for time and attention extreme. Organizations should consider how this will impact talent management and candidate connections and relationships into the future and make the necessary strategy adjustments to participate accordingly today.

Savvy Recruiter’s are expanding their own digital footprint and building stronger networks while concurrently elevating their organization’s employment brand through quality ambassadorship. Think a compelling candidate would rather read the sanitized content on your web site or the blog post or twitter stream from the leader in the area of the business they are considering? Transparency equals trust. Participation adds value.

And a closing thought: If your organization still bans access to social networks at work you are falling behind.

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The W.I.N. Philosophy of Recruiting:
Why you don’t need an avatar to be successful

by Ryan Estis
Successful recruiting today requires a philosophy, approach and mindset to WIN talent.

Different from the notion of simply hiring, winning talent implies emerging victorious after what is often a rigorous and hard-fought battle for the best and brightest. To further differentiate, hiring people is something companies do. Winning talent is something companies must earn. While many recruiters seemingly have the will to win, many companies still lack the will to prepare to win in the increasingly competitive arena for A-level talent.

An old sports adage cites the notion that “most games are won or lost before they are ever played,” underscoring the idea that preparation is the key determining factor to success (that is why athletes competing at the highest levels spend about 90% of the time practicing and 10% of the time actually playing the game).

Certainly, you won’t emerge victorious without execution, but having the right game plan simplifies execution at the professional level and provides a distinct competitive advantage.

Good workforce planning will identify the skills/talent necessary for an organization to compete, grow and accomplish core business objectives into the future. Having a sourcing strategy (game plan) to WIN the requisite talent will also mandate some significant preparation.

The W.I.N. Philosophy of Recruiting dictates a focus on the following:

- **W: What's**
- **I: Important**
- **N: Now**

Seemingly simple, but often overlooked, is having the business discipline to align resources and investment allocation to provide the very best opportunity for success in a competitive environment. A myriad of variables distract attention from focusing on the fundamentals that provide the foundation for championship-caliber performance. The distractions relative to recruitment strategy are ever-increasing.

I’ll offer five key elements to a sound corporate recruiting game plan for 2008. Here is What’s Important Now:

1. **Recruiter effectiveness.** Build a great internal, outbound sourcing team with req. loads reasonable enough that enable recruiters to recruit. As the critical first impression and key corporate liaison to talent, recruiters must embody the proactive, candidate-centric mindset necessary to compete to win. And those skills should be embraced and developed.

2. **Employment branding.** Proactively perpetuating the image of your organization as a great place to work in the minds of your target talent demographic is critical to ensure quality lead generation. Define your unique employment value proposition and build a brand strategy that engages and resonates with the talent you covet. Be authentic. And close the gap on what it takes to be a place where people want to come to work and apply their talent.
3. **The recruitment-oriented corporate culture.** Foster the notion that recruiting is a shared responsibility throughout the organization and that it’s incumbent upon everyone to share in the challenge of winning new talent. Make certain the employment brand resonates internally first, promote the shared benefits of referring quality talent into the organization, and then reward/recognize it when it happens.

4. **The corporate career site.** The hub of your talent acquisition initiative and very best opportunity to engage and encourage external candidates to learn more about working for your organization. That doesn’t mean having an applicant tracking system. It does mean providing a compelling enough experience when candidates connect through you from whatever external source (job board, search engine, campus event, referral) that they will take action and complete a transaction (some estimates indicate that 90% of candidates drop off without doing anything)

5. **The candidate experience.** The first four recommendations funnel into the concept of making the recruitment process an awesome experience for your candidate! For the most part, looking for a job is a grueling experience and often includes minimal communication, little or no feedback/acknowledgement, and even less guidance, counsel and support. It doesn’t have to be that way. Build the case to invest and create an outstanding introduction into a fulfilling career experience and you are on your way to more talent wins than losses!

When you have achieved mastery with this foundation, it presents a great opportunity to expand and move further along the continuum of evolution in corporate recruitment strategy that exists today.

Although What’s Important Now will vary based on your unique needs and situations, these core fundamentals shouldn’t be overlooked. It’s important to investigate, understand and incorporate leading-edge ideas, technology and solutions into your practice (thoughts on approaching this may be found in the article Doctrine of Discipline.). Yet it’s even more critical to shore up weaknesses in the fundamentals first.

While you need a solid, well-developed game plan, you won’t need an avatar to be successful recruiting in 2008.

Identify What’s Important Now for your organization. Build a recruitment game plan. Master the fundamentals. And compete to WIN more talent!

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Doctrine of Discipline: Tips for incorporating new technology into the recruiting platform

by Ryan Estis
While updating my MySpace profile and debating the merits of whether Facebook was better, I was reminded to download my buddy list to my PDA. I then realized that I had multiple LinkedIn invitations that still needed a response.

Since I don’t have an abundance of free time to research what my friends are doing, it dawned on me—do I really need to manage a Second Life when I am completely overwhelmed keeping up with my first?

Many of us who aspire to stay current on what’s new in relation to talent acquisition struggle to find the right balance. How do we incorporate new ideas into our recruitment strategy platform and still find time to do the work it takes to demonstrate immediate results?

I understand that technology is the preferred medium for connecting candidates to careers, and innovation is paramount to succeed in a competitive recruiting environment. But it’s becoming increasingly necessary to adopt a doctrine of discipline relative to researching and determining the right introduction of technology to support an effective and efficient corporate staffing function.

While Web 2.0 offers the savvy recruiter a competitive advantage and exciting new tools for making meaningful and multiple connections via the Web, it also offers anyone and everyone an increasing abundance of opportunity to waste time, money and sacrifice real results.

How fast you need to change, technologically, depends on a variety of factors unique to every staffing organization. This criteria includes your budget, resources, staff, target audience, open requisitions, industry, growth, competency, competition and so on.

You have to channel your effort, activity and investment allocation toward what’s most relevant to the desired business outcome. In professional sales, we develop competencies consistent with the needs of the marketplace, and spend time understanding what’s most important to the clients we serve.

Recruiting is no different. We develop solid relationships and business insights to partner effectively with our hiring managers. We determine what’s most important to the candidates we covet, helping us improve our chances of converting A-players at other companies into our new employees.

The issues of professionalism, privacy and the right associations on the Web will be ongoing topics of debate. It’s abundantly clear that, quite often, candidates don’t connect the concept of “social” networking with career management, and more are learning to remove those pictures of the last few indiscretions during senior year off of their profile page.

Nobody can argue with the increasing growth, popularity and preference among the Gen Y crowd, and in increasing numbers across all demographics, in extending relationships and spending time connecting online.
But it's important to approach corporate positioning and relationship recruiting (where to have a corporate presence externally and then connect with candidates to begin to develop a dialogue/relationship about career opportunities) carefully.

While profiling the user experience and virtual community by taking a test run through Second Life, writing correspondent Marshall Sella concluded that:

“Most of what people first notice in Second Life is the sex and gambling. This is the Electronic Amsterdam. And for novices, that's really the heart of Second Life, no matter how much talk there is of SL's technology as the way of the future. That's what it's all about.”

Every organization will ultimately have to determine the if/what/when/where with respect to having a corporate presence for the purpose of attracting new talent, understanding that what may fit or appear as leading-edge strategy for a few large employers may not work for everyone.

Evaluating the opportunity cost of investing in emerging technology for talent acquisition is no easy task. The doctrine of discipline necessitates a healthy amount of research and willingness to take some managed risk while closely monitoring ROI.

Assign team members the task of due diligence and devote the time necessary to evaluate and analyze trends and new technology. This will help the staffing organization stay current and competitive.

Minimize risk by piloting a new initiative with a “test” job family or trial-period agreement to evaluate effectiveness before going all-out. Incorporate employee and candidate feedback regarding usage trends, behavior and preferences to help understand how to most effectively integrate new tools and technology specific to your organization's unique staffing needs and objectives.

Finally, have good competitive recruiting intelligence to rely upon, so you can ensure that you’re moving at a pace consistent with, or a step ahead of, your direct competitors. No doubt the competitive advantage goes to the early adopter set. Well-informed, closely inspected and carefully managed adoption is the way to go.

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6 Steps to an Employer Brand Strategy

by Ryan Estis
Having a clearly defined strategy is the most important factor in achieving employer branding objectives.

That’s the takeaway from the Employer Brand Institute’s Global Research Study of more than 2,000 companies.

Engaging the CEO and senior management in the benefits of employer branding also ranks highly. Surprisingly, conducting internal and external market research ranked the lowest in importance, suggesting companies are rushing into employer branding without a clear direction of where they are heading.

The results of the global study should be a concern for CEOs where money invested in employer branding initiatives may be misdirected and/or misaligned with the business strategy. Most companies are in the early stages of developing an employer brand strategy that builds competitive advantage (globally only 16% have a clearly defined strategy), so the survey results provide some important guidance for leaders to ensure their investments are focused on priority areas.

Figure 1: How important are the following to you in achieving your employer branding objectives? (rank in order from 1 to 7 (1=least important, 7 equals most important)

![Bar chart showing the importance of various employer branding objectives]

The survey also found while 31% have a strategy, it can be developed further. Importantly, 37% of companies have already begun work on developing their employer brand strategy. A small percentage of respondents (13%) said their company does not have an employer branding strategy (see Figure 2). These companies may be in the early stages of developing a business case for investment or the department responsible for managing the employer brand may be having difficulty engaging the CEO and senior managers to allocate resources toward the strategy.
Has your company developed a clear employer branding strategy?

Getting it Right the First Time

We suggest six key areas to focus on to ensure you develop an employer brand strategy that will assist you achieve your program objectives.

**Determine how employer branding is viewed inside your company**

You should define what employer branding means to your company.

Your employer brand is “the image of your organization as a ‘great place to work’ in the mind of current employees and key stakeholders in the external market (active and passive candidates, clients, customers, and other key stakeholders).” Employer branding is therefore concerned with the attraction, engagement, and retention initiatives targeted at enhancing your company’s employer brand.

If you take too narrow a focus on employer branding, it is likely to end up as a departmental project that’s not aligned with the overall business strategy. For example, if you believe employer branding is only about recruitment, it is likely your organization will have already closed up shop on employer branding as a result of the economic downturn while competitors who understand the concept are continuing to invest resources as part of a long-term employer branding strategy to attract and retain talent.
Define employer brand objectives and project scope
Defining your objectives up front will save you time and money in the long run and keep your program on time and on budget. Companies have different lifecycle stages and therefore will have different objectives at various stages. Your objectives may be related to the whole employer brand program or a specific employer brand project (e.g. establishing an alumni program or employee referral program). Your objectives may include integrating the cultures of two companies during a merger, decreasing staff turnover rates, increasing volume of hires for a summer recruiting campaign, improving candidate quality, or reviewing and updating your career website to appeal to graduates.

The relationship between HR, marketing, and communications
Ownership of the employer brand strategy is often a gray area that should be clearly defined so all key stakeholders achieve consensus and are united in the objectives. To obtain both budget and buy-in, human resources often has to drive employer branding through internal education and awareness building.

While some level of oversight or standards adherence is natural and may vary depending on the organization, the employer brand is a long-term, strategic talent management endeavor. The strategy and messaging are designed to attract/engage/retain talent, which clearly sets up a strong case for collaboration between human resources, marketing, and communications (e.g. marketing/communications can offer some compelling strategic support such as website analytics and target-market segmentation).

In instances where there is a lack of collaboration, power struggles ensue, projects can be delayed, and creativity/strategy minimized to the detriment of the outcome.

Discovering your employer brand
The key to developing your employer brand strategy is to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the organizational culture, work experience, key talent drivers (engagement factors), external perceptions, leadership vision, and management practices. Operating from this position of intelligence supports the construct of a message platform that is authentic, compelling, differentiated, and that will be internally embraced, appropriately received in the external market and consistently delivered upon by the organization.

This can be supported through quantitative research (e.g. survey mechanisms) and qualitative research (e.g. focus groups, leadership interviews, roundtable meetings). It’s also an ideal phase to do some competitive intelligence gathering and benchmark against available insights. In this era of increasing transparency, the organization’s external reputation can be considered through both external focus groups and/or some level of online reputation audit to determine ‘what is being said’ about the organization via web channels (blogs, social networks, and corporate rating sites such as JobVent).
CEOs and senior management engagement

It pays to have conversations about your employer brand with the CEO and senior managers in the early stages of developing your strategy. The Employer Brand Institute’s global survey found engaging with these key stakeholders is very important in achieving employer branding objectives (see figure 1) and could be conducted using a roundtable forum on employer branding. Areas for discussion could include:

1. How will a stronger employer brand support our business strategy — M&A’s, growth, consolidation?
2. What kind of culture do we have? How consistent is it across geographical and divisional boundaries?
3. What behaviors are felt to be most characteristic of the organization? What are the moments of truth when your organization is at its best (and worse?)
4. What is the most useful way of segmenting the employee population in terms of their cultural characteristics and distinctive needs?
5. How consistent are the messages we are communicating internally and externally about our organization as a place to work? How do we inform our vendors?
6. What are the most effective channels of employee communication, both top-down and bottom-up?
7. Which positions are most critical to our success and what are we currently doing/need to do to attract, engage, and retain them?

Communications planning

There is a plethora of offline and online media channels available to communicate your employer value proposition to your target audience, including web, print, social networks, events, PR, alumni events, etc. The rate of growth of these channels can be mind-boggling and while their use may not fit the stereotype of a conservative company that has been around for 100 years, it pays to test these sites for benefits or risk losing ground to your competitors. Who would have thought three years ago a micro-blogging platform where only 140 characters can be used in communicating a message would be used successfully by companies such as Zappos (the CEO has over 590,000 followers!) to communicate with their target audience. Taking a strategic approach toward your employer brand will ensure your team is able to assess these innovations as they appear while maintaining focus on the longer-term objectives.

The key is to test and trial these channels and arrive at a communications strategy that provides maximum impact and efficiency for minimum investment. There is no point building a presence on Facebook if you don’t allocate the resources to respond to messages from the community that has joined your fan base!
Companies like Standard Chartered Bank and Phillips ensure a consistent brand is communicated globally through recruitment communications with changes for local nuances such as language. This not only ensures clarity in brand positioning; it saves on design costs and increases campaign speed to market.

Have a solid understanding of cultural diversity in communicating your brand to your target audience. Just because the messages were tried, tested, and validated by your U.S. workforce doesn’t mean you’ll get the same level of buy-in when suggesting to regional offices they use the same set of communication collateral. Your own workforce can be helpful in determining what works best in their region and the assistance from a local vendor may also add value.

**Some final thoughts**

In the absence of a clearly defined strategy your employer brand strategy is likely to fall flat. Taking a strategic approach to your employer brand program is likely to result in CEO/senior management engagement and allocation of the resources required to effectively build competitive advantage like companies such as Google, PwC, and McKinsey & Co have consistently achieved over time and that regularly rank highly as ‘best places to work.’

*Originally published via the [Electronic Recruiting Exchange](#)*
Hire Ryan Estis Now

Let Ryan provide your organization with the tools and methodologies you need to attract top talent and retain the best personnel you have now. An engaging, enthusiastic speaker, he can energize your business meeting or present an entire seminar on employment brand architecture and best practices in talent management.

To find out more about Ryan’s availability, go to ryanestis.com

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