

EMPLOYER BRANDING SURVEY 2014



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A brand is a promise, whether a promise to consumers of quality goods or services, or a promise to employees and candidates of a desirable company culture. Promises, however, are easy to make, and even easier to make without thinking through the consequences. Companies pour resources into creating great products and marketing them in engaging and effective ways, but all too often neglect to give the same treatment to their employer brand.

That isn't to say that employer branding doesn't get attention. According to a recent study by the Corporate Executive Board¹, 78% of companies worldwide have engaged in an employer branding initiative in the past three years. But the CEB goes on to warn that these initiatives are not having the right effect, especially when "employer branding" comes to mean portraying the company as the best place to work for everyone.

"Employers simply cannot carry on doing what they've always done," says Jean Martin, Executive Director at the Corporate Executive Board. "Branding for universal appeal just results in more headache for the HR team who have to sift through a greater volume of low-grade candidates. Companies have to stop chasing universal popularity and adapt a 'lure the best, deflect the rest' mindset to employment branding".

"You know you have succeeded when your customers, employees and business partners all share a core belief in your brand."

*— Jody Ordioni,
Chief Branding Officer, Brandemix*

¹ "The Growing Value of Brands and Their Contribution to Worldwide Economic Growth," July 2014

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

There is a great deal of variety in the ways employers plan, execute, and assess their employer branding. In order to gain a better understanding of the latest practices in the field, Brandemix, a leading brand marketing agency, surveyed over one hundred professionals, from a number of different levels and specialties. Respondents represent companies in a wide variety of industries and sizes. The average company size represented is over 3,700 employees. (See “Respondent Profile” table for details.)

Respondent Profile			
Top Titles	%	Employees	%
Director	25	<100	16
Manager	21	100-500	10
Consultant	7	501-1,000	12
C-suite (net)	7	1,001-5,000	23
CEO	2	5001+	39
Top Specialties	%	Top Industries	%
Talent Acquisition	15	Service	14
Branding	14	Healthcare	13
Recruiting	9	Business & Financial	13
HR	9	High Tech/IT	11
Communications	3	Manufacturing	10
Actively involved in branding initiative			73



A Note on Segment Comparisons

This white paper will point out relevant areas of statistically significant differences (at the 95% confidence interval) between larger companies (1000+ employees) and smaller companies (fewer than 1000 employees), and between higher-spend companies (branding budget of over \$20,000) and lower-spend companies (under \$20,000). In addition, some differences that are not statistically significant will also be called out for comparison purposes.

KEY FINDINGS

A majority of respondents (59%) have an “Articulated Employer Brand.”

One fifth (22%) plan to start such a project in the next six to twelve months and the rest don't have a brand or a plan to start one soon (16%) or don't know (3%). Only those with an employer brand in place continued on with the survey.

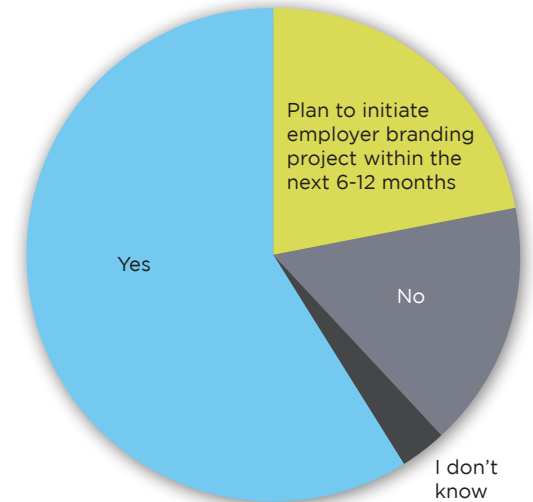
On average, companies conducted their most recent branding initiative fourteen months ago.

In today's economic climate of organizational restructuring and changing talent needs, a good brand cannot afford to stagnate. That isn't to say that the employer brand should change every year or two, but some recurring assessment should be in place to determine whether the established brand and communication are still truthful and effective.

Global Scope

Three fifths (61%) of these branding initiatives encompassed countries outside of the U.S. (One quarter (27%) only operate in the U.S.)

Does Your Company Have an Articulated Employer Brand?



Last Conducted Employer Branding Initiative

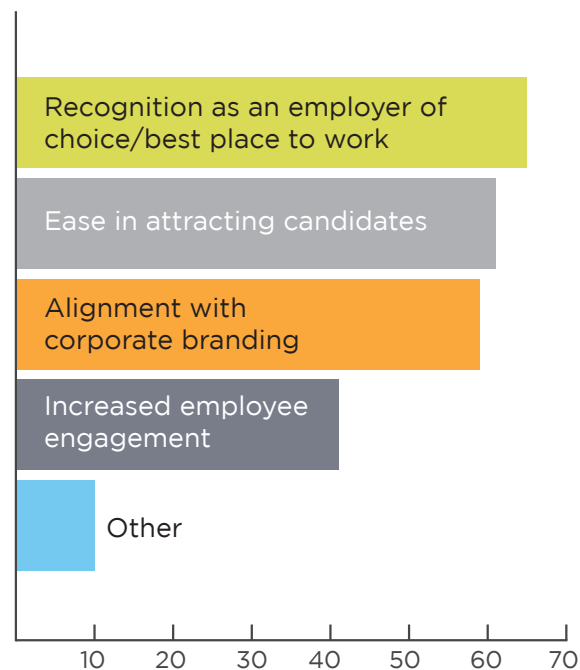


Average (months) = 14

PRIMARY GOALS

OF EMPLOYER BRANDING EFFORTS

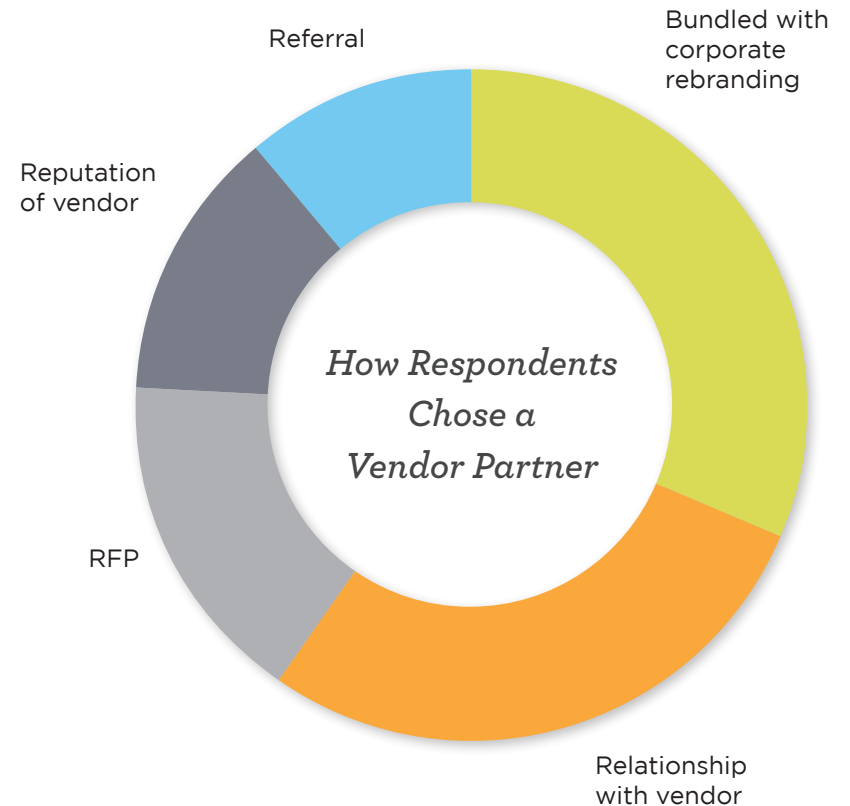
The top-mentioned goals for these employer branding efforts were gaining recognition as an employer of choice/best place to work (65%), followed by ease in attracting candidates (61%) and alignment with corporate branding (59%).



Bigger companies are significantly more likely to view branding as primarily a means of attracting new talent (81% of larger companies vs. 30% of smaller companies).

CHOOSING A VENDOR PARTNER

An employer branding initiative is by no means simple, and experience, guidance, and a neutral perspective can be crucial. Not surprisingly, three fifths (61%) of respondents partnered with an outside vendor on their branding initiative. **Higher-spend respondents are more likely to partner with an outside vendor (85% vs. 50%).** Keeping the initiative wholly in-house can cut costs, but can jeopardize the project for lack of branding expertise and an outside perspective. Larger companies were more likely than smaller companies to partner with an outside vendor on the branding initiative, but the difference was not statistically significant (71% vs. 45%). For more than a third (37%), the vendor partner was selected as part of an overall corporate rebranding. Larger companies were significantly more likely to select a vendor via RFP (request for proposal).



THE RESEARCH TOOLBOX



Effective research comes in many forms and is often divided into two categories. Quantitative research, such as online surveys, provides the “big data” in the form of “X% of employees feel Y” or “group A is more likely than group B to agree with Y.” The bigger the respondent pool (often called the sample size) the more accurately a study’s findings reflect the total population or “universe” (e.g. all of a company’s employees, or all of their applicants). Given the need for larger sample sizes to imbue the data with relevance, quantitative research usually avoids in-depth questioning, which would require a great deal of additional time to analyze. On the other hand, qualitative research, such as focus groups, offers deeper insight, but on a smaller scale. In a focus group, the moderator may ask general questions, but then, depending on participants’ answers, can follow up, or probe, for more detail. This kind of research isn’t meant to project onto a larger population, but can give a clearer “story” that data alone cannot.

Another type of research is secondary research. When organizations conduct studies they are doing primary research to answer some question or test a hypothesis. When those findings are published, they can be used as secondary research by a different group who is curious about the same questions. Since employer brands are unique to their companies, most branding research is primary. However, reading this white paper and applying the findings to your own brand strategy is secondary research.

One common method for combining these approaches is a four step process: first, see what research has been done on employer branding in your industry and how your company compares to industry best practices; then, conduct one-on-one interviews with key executives to understand what they view as the company’s brand; next, conduct several employee focus groups (make sure to get representatives from a mix of fields and levels) and gauge their feelings on the brand, their experiences, and, if communication materials have been developed, their reactions to the branding; last, after developing a few specific formulations on the branding verbiage and materials, conduct a company-wide survey presenting these approaches to the employees and having them select their preferences.

While it is tempting to conduct focus groups in-house, led by HR or marketing, research best practices recommend bringing in an outside moderator. Having a neutral party leading the group can help employees speak more openly about their feelings. An experienced moderator will also be able to manage the group optimally: getting quieter participants to open up and more dominating members to share the stage.

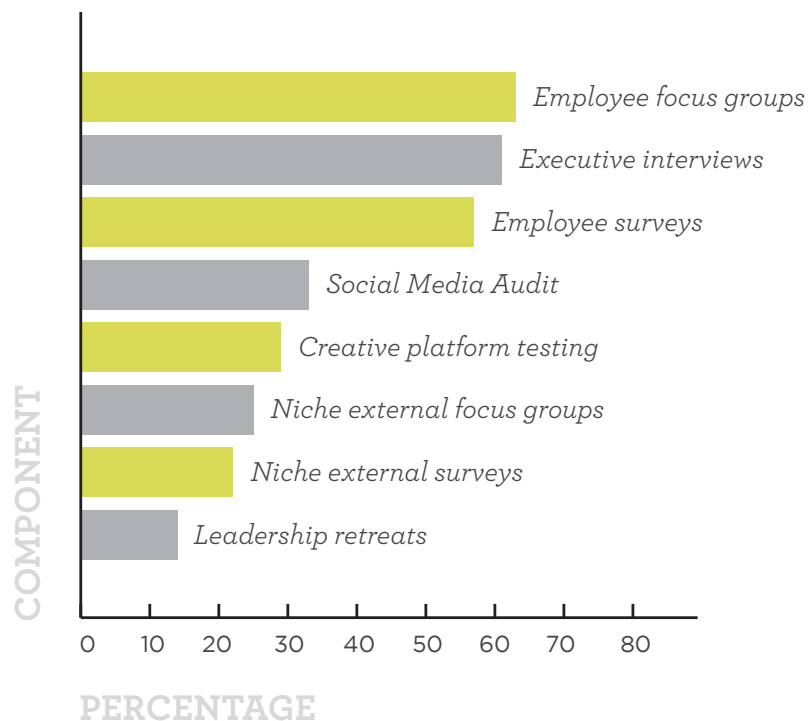
THE RESEARCH TOOLBOX

(CONTINUED)

After establishing goals and partnerships, the next step toward developing a new employer brand, or even improving an existing one, is to understand how the company, and the employer brand itself, is perceived.

In depth research is the key to this first step, but research can take many forms. The most commonly used research components among respondents are employee focus groups (63%), executive interviews (61%), and employee surveys (57%).

Bigger companies are significantly more likely to include employee surveys in their branding initiative (71% vs. 35%). Surveys provide quantitative data on employees (see 'Research' sidebar below) and allow for an exploration of a greater number of employees' feelings than focus groups or interviews do. This is especially important for larger companies, as it can be misleading to base a branding initiative meant to connect with thousands of workers on focus group among a dozen. Larger companies will have an easier time getting a large enough sample for their surveys, but the ease of distributing online surveys means that any company should be able to successfully conduct such a study.

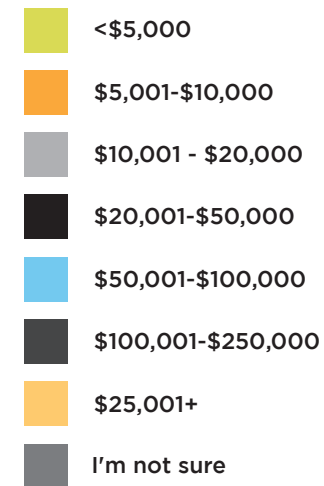
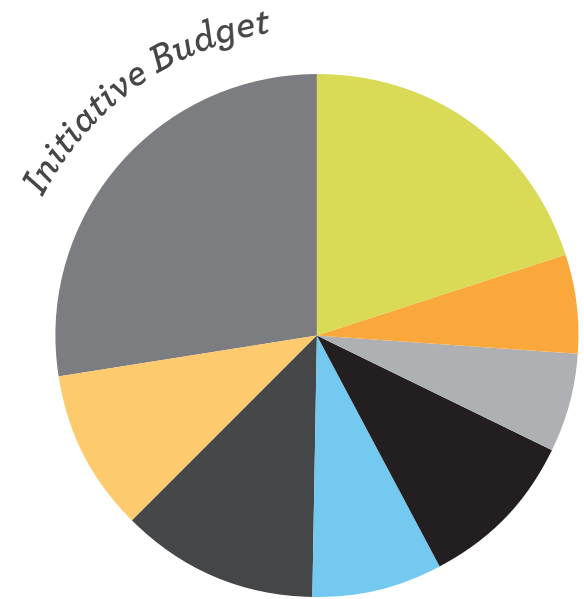


The research components significantly more likely to be included by higher-spend respondents are employee focus groups (85% vs. 36%), employee surveys (65% vs. 25%), and social media audits (45% vs. 13%).

This is unsurprising as good research does require a budget. Tempting as it is to conduct all research in-house, bringing in experienced talent researchers will result in a smoother process with more reliable findings (see 'Research Toolbox' on the next page for more details).

EMPLOYER BRANDING BUDGETS

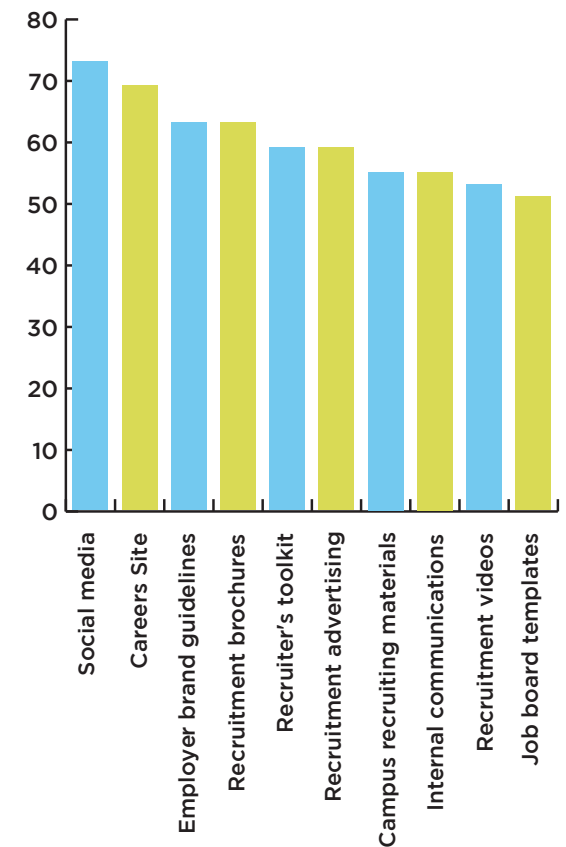
Among those who could approximate their budget for employer branding initiatives, the average was over \$86,000. Interestingly, more than one quarter (27%) were not sure of the budget, often because the employer branding budget was tied up in another, larger project. Big and small companies differed significantly at only two budget ranges: under \$5,000 (45% of smaller companies vs. 3% of larger companies) and \$100,001 to \$250,000 (19% of larger companies vs. 0% for smaller companies). For all other ranges there was no statistically significant difference (even at the \$250,000+ range).



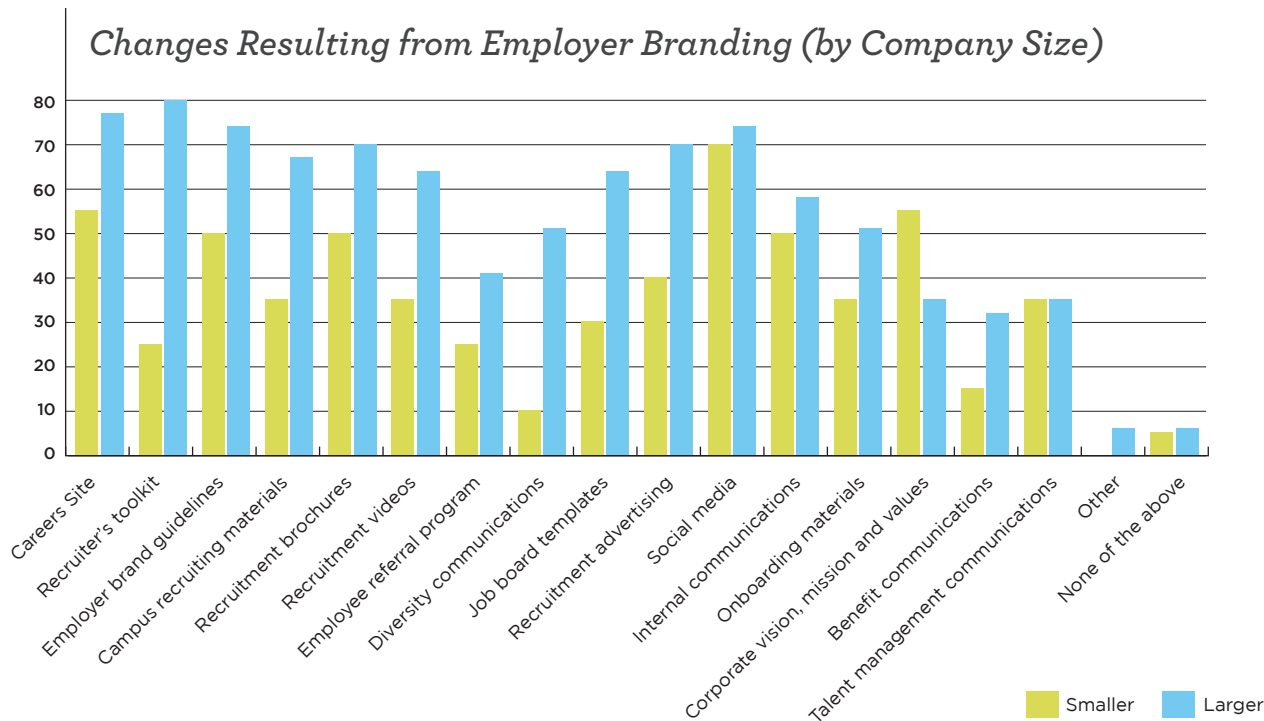
EMPLOYER BRANDING TOP CHANGES

As a result of research and subsequent planning, adjustments are likely to be made to existing communications materials. **The top-mentioned materials that have changed or will change based on recent branding initiatives are social media (73%) and career site (69%).** It may seem surprising that Web materials would be most likely to change, since they are often perceived as the most “cutting edge,” but many companies plunge into the deep end developing a Web presence without considering how it reflects the employer brand. Web and social media, even for recruitment and employer branding, all too often fall under the purview of marketing, communications, or another group with a larger focus than the employer brand. These factors can lead to materials that are “out of sync” with the brand. **Overall, larger companies (and higher-spending companies) are more likely to change tactics and tools as a result of branding initiatives.** (Smaller companies were more likely to change their corporate mission, vision, and values (55% vs. 35%), but this was not statistically significant). Top changes for larger companies are: recruiter’s toolkit (81% vs. only 25% for smaller companies), career site (77%), employer brand guidelines (74%), social media (74%), recruitment advertising (71%), and recruitment brochures (71%). Other areas of change, where there is significant difference between larger and smaller companies, are for diversity communications (52% vs. only 10% for smaller companies) and campus recruiting materials (68% vs. 35% for smaller companies).

Conducting research and developing a clear brand message are all well and good, but if internal and external materials aren’t changed to communicate the new, stronger brand, then they will have no impact, regardless of company size.



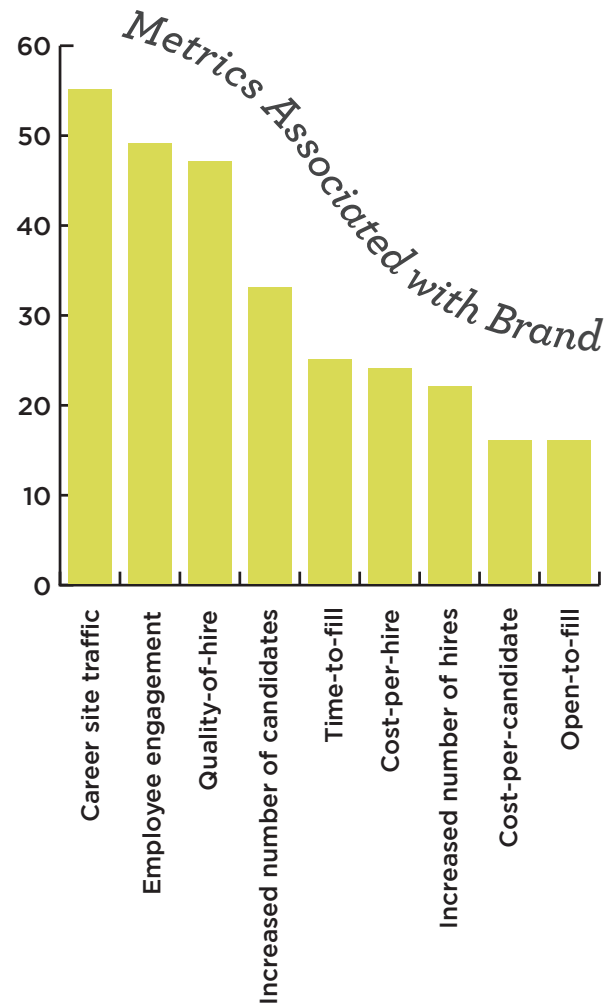
TOP CHANGES (CONTINUED)



Four fifths (80%) consider their employer branding initiative to have been successful. Only 2% do not consider it to have been successful. The rest aren't sure yet. **Smaller companies were significantly more likely than larger ones to consider their initiative successful (95% vs. 71%).** Respondents from larger companies were more likely to be unsure (23% vs. 5%). **Higher-spend companies were more likely to report success with their employer brand initiatives, but the difference was not statistically significant (95% vs. 81%).**

METRICS

Half of respondents (55%) associate career site traffic and employee engagement levels (49%) with their employer branding initiative; 47% selected quality of hire. Larger companies are significantly more likely to associate increased applicants with their branding initiative (45% vs. 15%), which was also a top goal. Higher engagement levels and increased quality of hires are two of the most important benefits of a clear, strong employer value proposition, though they are less easy to measure than site traffic and applicant flow.



Employer-of-choice recognition and ease in attracting candidates have the advantage of being easy metrics to track; HR reports on applicant trends and external reviewers rank best places to work. But the temptation for straightforward metrics (which allow for a clearer calculation of Return on Investment) can lead to less impactful results. Consider instead the following goals: increase in **quality** candidates, or recognition as an employer of choice for **key talent populations**. More difficult to assess, true, but more worthwhile in the long run. Though none of these top goals contribute directly to the bottom line, if a business is too short-sighted to invest in talent, the bottom line will suffer quite quickly.

SUCCESS SPEAKS

Below are a few quotes from our respondents about the success of their branding projects.

“ It was more than the pay and benefits and more about the emotional connection to the brand and we were able to finally find that.”

- Retail (5001+ employees)

“ We received a company-wide Innovation Award for the Employer Branding.”

- Construction (5001+ employees)

“ We won numerous Best Place to Work Awards and increased job applications by 54%.”

- Biotech/pharma (5001+ employees)

“ Candidates are able to clearly articulate our value proposition, employees overall agree with the messaging and promises made, and there’s a “sticky factor” in the marketplace.”

- Technology (5001+ employees)

“ It is now very well aligned to our corporate brand messaging and truly resonates what our employees really feel.”

- Technology (1,001-5000 employees)

“ We had no way to articulate our culture other than the company values and mission. After the initiative we had a communication plan and a visual identity that we could go to market with.”

- Technology (1,001-5000 employees)

IN CONCLUSION

It goes without saying that this white paper alone should not determine your future branding efforts, but it should provide food for thought. The differences between company types outlined above highlight the need for targeted approaches based on an employer's needs; what's right for one company, even if it's a best-in-class employer-of-choice, isn't necessarily right for every company. What's important is setting the right goals, with a focus on the long term and not quick fixes; understanding your employees, not trying to create a one-size-fits-all culture; finding the right partners, internal and external, who possess the skills to discover, understand, and express your brand; and being prepared to adapt strategies and materials as a result of the branding initiative.

Remember, a good employer brand is a promise worth making.

ABOUT BRANDEMIX

Brandemix is a leading brand marketing agency, strategically connecting employer brands to talent through recruitment marketing, internal communications, and PR across all print and digital channels, including social media. In short, we make brands come to life.

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THANK YOU

Please mention this white paper when you contact us to receive a FREE 30-minute consultation with our Chief Employer Branding Officer.

To create or enhance your employer brand, or for information about social recruiting, internal communications, or other Brandemix services, please contact us at branding@brandemix.com. You can find us on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, Google Plus, and our weekly BrandeBlog.

Our Capabilities



EMPLOYER BRANDING

- Career Sites
- Employee Engagement
- Employer Brand Activation
- Employer Brand Architecture
- Employer Brand Positioning
- Employer Brand Research/Analysis
- Employer Value Proposition
- Identity Development
- Market Research
- Onboarding Programs
- Strategy
- Videos



RECRUITMENT ADVERTISING

- Campaign Development
- College Recruiting
- Creative Development
- Diversity Recruitment
- Employee Referral Programs
- Media Planning & Placement
- Recruitment Videos
- SEO/SEM/PPC
- Social Recruiting
- Strategy



SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

- Interactive Promotions



CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

- Benefit Communications
- Change Management
- Corporate Identity/Naming
- Corporate Social Responsibility
- Creative Development
- E-Learning
- Identity Development
- Internal Communications
- Investor Relations
- Training Materials
- Training Videos
- Wellness Programs



DIGITAL & INTERACTIVE

- Apps Development
- Augmented Reality
- Content Management Systems
- Interactive Communications
- Interactive Promotions
- Mobile Marketing
- SEO/SEM/PPC
- Sweepstakes
- Videos
- Website Development