LITTLE
RED EVP
Read
BOOK

Stories relevant to the employee value proposition space

So, like, what's my Return on Involvement? App, Website or Occulus Rift? But first...Umbagoo. Workplace Passion. The Hiring Factor. The ethics of work ethic. Take out the snipers. The Disruptive Hive. What did we learn about these passionate types? The Employer Brand Impact - Freelancers and Contractors. Make Us Sexy! (please.) Even More Sexy Still. The sequel. Make Us Really Sexy! Are we sexy yet? So what is sexy anyway? On Resources, statistics and time. Why should organisations engage a specialist Employer Brand agency?

eBrands

Employer Brand specialists since 1999

choices are this step, team momento to

LITTLE RED EVP BOOK

Stories relevant to the employee value proposition space

eBrands

Contents

Foreword.

The condensed thoughts of some very bright specialists.

Over the past 3 years some pioneers, and newbies, in the Employee Value Proposition (EVP) space have been collaborating to build a framework of thoughts around " how to attract and retain a high number of high calibre employees" to your business.

The work is not exhaustive, but it is wide ranging. It draws on conversation with CEOs, business owners and Human Resource Directors from tiny start-ups to the 9th largest company on our little planet. It curates views and observations of specialists in the field of employer branding in the US, UK, China and Australia across a very wide range of business, charity and government organisations.

Our intention at eBrands was to capture, in no order of importance, our collaboratively curated thoughts in one place. A book for our clients; past, present and future. A source, if you will, of the current thinking around the creation and nurturing of the only true reason an employee, contractor, freelancer or volunteer in 2016 will come to a working environment and enjoy delivering their best work to the organisation. Their own view of the value of your brand to their employment needs.

The "Make us Sexy" series received a lot of feedback from execs in the banking, accounting and legal professions. The millennials focussed "Return on Involvement" series was a hit with the traditional product branded companies. "The Employer Brand Impact - Freelancers and Contractors" received most feedback from....freelancers and contractors. The forgotten ¼ of the workforce who CHOOSE to work outside the structure of a full time employment contract.

A message from the authors.

Read and enjoy.
If you like it pass this little
book on with the blessing of
our team at eBrands.

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Role: Mark has a helicopter-esque
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Mark Aitken *Creative Director*

Role: Mark leads the creative team, as
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ideas for employer brands to come to life.

Kevin Moore *Business Director and Chief of Operations*

Role: Kevins' forte includes business strategy and direction, leadership and corporate culture advisor at eBrands.

Marc Iannacone *Brand Strategy Director - USA*

Role: Marc's strategy expertise reinforces aligning messages and practices which ensure staff attraction, engagement and retention stays on a planned course.

Andrew Parker *Project Manager*

Role: Andrews' project management skillsets come to the fore while leading administrative and production teams liaising alongside designers, during idea generation,production and development of outputs.

[1]

So, like, what's my Return on Involvement?

Is your EVP ready to pass the new Millennial test?

Over a four part blog series, we explore the EVP challenge of the 'Millennial' and what it means for EVP builders and employment brands.

Summary

- *Millennials* pose challenges around the construction and communication of EVP

- Understanding *Millennials* further validates the value of EVP design

- *Millennials* represent an amazing opportunity for EVP builders and HR practitioners to flex their 'value' muscles

Ever been in a meeting when the utterance of one word has initiated a particularly sharp intake of breath and a roll of the eyes? Try saying "Millennials". It tends to work in most meetings. If the subject is EVP strategy - "what about Millennials?" elicits the full dynamic range, from overly animated shrugs and sighs and collective "Oh God's" augmented with the incredibly deliberate putting down of pens and the closing of notebooks.

So, like, I just had to write about it. Ok?

Every generation deals with sequentially complex challenges, and it is very convenient for incumbents to forget that each new generation has their table set by the one that preceded. Some quirks are head-scratching, yet Millennials have developed coping strategies to deal with things we have given them:

1. Onerous student debt

2. A society continually re-rationalising capitalism with ethics, environmentalism and social justice

3. The distancing of home ownership as a 'life achievement'

4. Constant unfiltered and un-curated media projecting the importance of 'personal image.'

5. Relentless and inescapable peer influences

6. Multiple competing 'lenses' to manage their identity on

7. Cultural erosion through globalisation

   * (shrug) Enough already.

There's nothing in that lot that "generation me" - as it has been unkindly called - that hasn't been gifted to them by "generation we".

Here's a research statistic.

"Millennials are 247% more likely to be influenced by blogs or social networking sites than other generations."

If I were asked to summarise the Millennial condition in one word, I'd pick exposed. They are exposed to information, data and choices. They are personally exposed because we've created many more ways in which they can be perceived and viewed, and "gawked on". Their personal data can be mined, leveraged and marketed to.

This constant exposure informs them that they are more accountable than any generation has been before. In return, they fairly expect everything to be accountable. This includes their parents, their boss, their mentors, the company they work for, and the brands they associate with. They are cool with the fact that everything they approve has the potential to impact their 'personal brand equity'.

So an **occupation** is not just a "source of income", or "I studied it at university and never got out of it" or "hey I hate it but it's a job", or "I've been with the same company for 20 years and the benefits are great and I can't leave anyway because of the pension" or "I am hanging out to be made redundant".

Occupation choice for a millennial is a defining personal attribute; it is open to inspection and part of the 'lens' through which Millennials view themselves; this extends to the brand that employs them.

Millennials represent an amazing opportunity for EVP practitioners and HR departments. Why? The idea we cling to about making businesses successful by hiring workers that share goals and beliefs...That textbook passage about the

effectiveness of cultural alignment...is finally manifest in the arrival of the generation that *expects it and demands it.*

A well-designed EVP embraces every stakeholder to be a part of an employment brands intrinsic value. Millennial strategy does not ostracize any incumbents if executed correctly and collaboratively (more on that in part three).

Gauging the corporate commitment to an EVP promise is critical to career opportunity evaluation by Millennial talent. Failure to deliver on EVP correctly will create cancerous corporate cultures, and the un-flushable cache's of google, facebook et al. will present permanent digital records. A millennial is accountable, yet still unafraid to comment publicly if they feel a promise has been broken.

[2]

So, like, what's my Return on Involvement?

The EVP challenge of the 'Millennial' and what it means for EVP builders...

In part two of a four part blog series, we continue exploring the EVP challenge of the 'Millennial' and what it means for EVP builders, HR practitioners and employment brands.

Summary

- What are organisations dealing with?

- Which typical Millennial traits are we encountering?

- Where's a good place to start the process of EVP refinement

Let's open with another piece of research.

"40% of Millennials are willing to **pay** extra for a brand that reflects the image they wish to convey about themselves. (Compared to 25% of non-Millennials.)"

I do not enjoy making a habit of tweaking research to suit findings, but if you substitute the word **pay** for **invest** – you obtain a sense of what eBrands and our clients encounter during the research phases of our EVP projects. Millennials feel a deeper sense of identity with the brands they associate with, and this unabashedly reflects in how passionately they talk about their work and career choices.

Some themes we are seeing regularly:

- Validation of millennial cultural origins as *digital natives*

- No hesitation in challenging workplace 'ceilings' and project obstacles

- The 'You only live once' mentality

- Social ties and approval routes back to the collective and consensus

- Responsibility and sense of duty borne of greater good

- An appreciation of dialogue, recognition and approval

Without dissecting the above further with the attention it merits, a useful summary for the purposes of this blog is to consider that the Millennial idea for employment give and get has shifted from Return on Investment to Return on Involvement.

Previously, what was:

"If I work hard, keep my head down, don't rock the boat, stay late and start early, I might get a promotion?"

Has become:

"If I was to be a part of this - what we are trying to achieve together - what does it mean and what do we stand for? How do I have input? Is what I am doing correct? What is stopping us and let's fix it? Will we have a good experience? Can I get the most out of today?"

Many corporates and organisations sport EVP's that are outmoded or are out of sync with the modern employment context, and the longer it continues, the greater the risks. Disconnects appear either with potential recruits (millennial's lacking clear perception on the EVP offer and by proxy their "reason to join") or with the new staff intake (millennial's perceiving the EVP externally on their terms, only to subsequently experience a reality that did not match their perception). The pace of employment brand erosion has a multiplier effect as new talent continually routes their views back to consensus.

The first thing to think about when refining the EVP in the light of the Millennial challenge?

The basic rubrics of the **Research** (planning, learning, and insights for effective use in strategy) do not change; but the very first step is for an organization to transparently acknowledge it's need for collaborative introspection and to clearly frame the benefits of the EVP process for the workplace population, opening the doors for input from Millennials, X'ers, Boomers and vitally, the tenured.

Cultural alignment does not happen by running a project as an island. Some thoughts on how to do this (focusing on the millennial context), next time.

[3]

So, like, what's my Return on Involvement?

Involving millennials in EVP project design and refinement.

Part three of our four-part blog, we pay closer attention to Millennial's and involving them in EVP project design and refinement.

Summary

- Directing attention to Millennial incumbents and employment potentials requires detailed focus on project framing and engagement

- Relying on surveys alone as a project information basis will not cut it

- EVP development is itself a great opportunity to generate inter-generation dialogue, which creates new and exciting outcomes

90% of new clients we meet face one of two scenarios - either needing to create and establish an organisation EVP, or assessing and refining an existing EVP and associate employer brand. Both scenarios can be due to 'change' events, shifts in overall organisation strategy, or perceived EVP ineffectiveness.

Millennials have an impact on the project footprints of both needs. eBrand's focus is on empowering the organisation from within to generate an owned EVP; over time this has given us some insights on Millennial engagement and participation.

At one of those notebook closing meetings we mentioned in Part One, we heard this - (but did not endorse it).

"Let's just throw a survey at them and get some insights – and then we're done".

Unfortunately, you won't be 'done,' although your project aspirations might be. Successful EVP rollouts share many characteristics, and a core one is not relying on survey's alone.

Surveys are not a dialogue; they are not an engagement tool - particularly in the eyes of the Millennial. (The potential roles a good survey can play in EVP strategy will be a blog topic later).

A successful EVP project *must be engaging from day one*, and Millennial tendencies make this even more important, as their demand for immediate understanding is paramount.

Framing an EVP project truthfully and effectively to stakeholders is a key step, and it proves that the organization is genuinely mature enough to support its own introspection. We find that Millennial stakeholders respond very receptively to transparency and to the effective engagement of broad consensus as it validates their involvement.

Effective integration of Millennial input into EVP design and development can give a project an incredibly valuable prism for perspective and evaluation. The typical challenges of internally steering an EVP project (workforce tenure fatigue / lack of faith in the organisation / belief of change / questioning of the need) benefit enormously from the channelled drive of Millennial participants, empowered by their belief in improvement for everyone's benefit.

Millennial abilities as digital natives makes them very effective sense-checkers, evaluating which EVP promises stand up as plausible, or highlighting those which are flawed. Their skills at crowd sourcing, establishing group communication and, in some instances I've seen, in mentoring these skills to stakeholders that might be less comfortable (a duty reinforced by their high valuation of consensus) makes Millennial's comfortable story tellers and effective protagonists for the external employment brand.

Their lack of hesitation in challenging workplace 'ceilings and obstacles' can be challenging to manage. I have also seen it provoke great internal 'questioning.'

I've tried to provide a few examples in this post to show why embracing the Millennial challenge can be a very rewarding part of new EVP development or EVP maintenance. Next time, I'll present a few practical ideas.

Author Note

Before I sign off - I'm quite conscious that this blog serialization cites 'common Millennial behaviours' and therefore it makes 'common assumptions'.

Developing a great EVP requires you to never take anything for granted, and I want it to be clear that while I do reference behaviours and project outcomes I have encountered first hand - that my generation (Generation X) in turn is guilty of a need to define 'groups'. Oversimplification of traits and behaviours is dangerous.

The best employment value propositions get *people who share common beliefs and values with each other, to work together.* Those people will span generations, and as I mentioned in the first blog, each generation that comes sets the table for the generation that follows.

[4]

So, like, what's my Return on Involvement?

The final part of our short blog series on millennial aware EVP project design.

Summary

- Capturing millennial perception means effort - push 'beyond the survey.'

- Ensure your EVP project steering committee has millennial representation

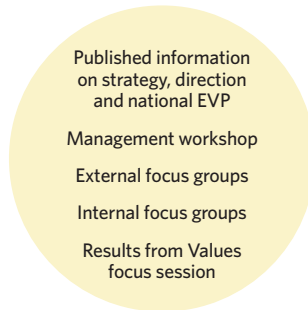- We provide a sample stimulus component for your research phase

To recap: **part one** of this series looked at the 'lot' of the millennial and how peers closely associate occupation choices to personal values. **Part Two** broached cited 'millennial traits', and potential project risks that can occur without due research consideration. **Part Three** identified ways to channel millennial contribution into an EVP project.

So to wrap up the series we'll investigate something that has worked. The example I am positing sits within the initiation and research phase according to eBrands EVP project methodology (see diagram).

A cornerstone of eBrands' difference as an employer brand agency is its ability to uncover valuable insights that lay buried within an organisation. To do this, we place heavy emphasis on interactive information gathering to supplement any quantitative data. In this first phase, much of our effort focuses on project design, project announcement and the creation of a trusting engagement. Research activities are much more effective when participants gain a real understanding of both their purpose and the opportunity that comes with it. This fits squarely into the millennial affinity for transparency.

As a result, we created the research component Empower your Voice. The goal of the component is enabling research participants to learn about the need for – and the opportunity

Immersion

Published information
on strategy, direction
and national EVP

Management workshop

External focus groups

Internal focus groups

Results from Values
focus session

Direction

Interpretation
and analysis

Action

**Brand
definition and
creation**

Subsidiary
propositions
or 'brand
muscles'

Brand
attributes
or values

Brand-based
overall creative
brief

Brand
proposition
or promise

Channel
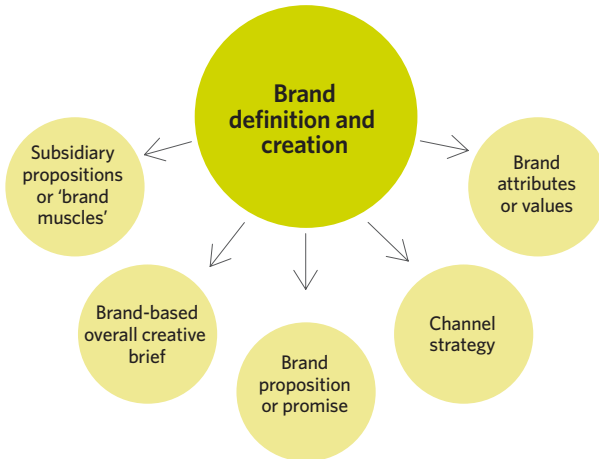strategy

that comes with - EVP thinking.

The material outcome (a video/videos in this instance) often surprises, with the result of uncovering. It is also fun.

Empower your Voice

We build teams of research participants (typically six). They are divided into recent workforce entrants (millennial & senior, less than one year) and 'tenured incumbents' (depending on the talent spread). Their goal is to create structured video material that gets them talking about their employer.

The teams receive a GoPro camera, a microphone, a set of encouraging parameters and a complete day's worth of time. The resulting footage and the team's briefing guidelines are then given to an independent editor to construct a video at the completion of the filming day.

The teams are encouraged to be as creative and lateral as possible; although their brief is to answer a particular question. We've used a range of different questions that include different tasks; from describing the soul of the employer, to imagining what ultimate success for the employer looks like, or to roleplay a survival guide.

One concept question we've found very successful during the research phase:

Q. We've guaranteed you three minutes of the CEO's time and he's going to spend it... watching the video you are about to make – it's a golden opportunity - what do you want to communicate?

The Result

I am amazed by the executions we receive. Material outcomes vary from reportage style crowdsourced videos, monologues, talent appeals, presentation of anonymous banners & diagrams with a voiceover, and virtual question and answer sessions. The net effect can be funny or serious, but always thought provoking, and they always speak to real issues.

P.S. We've always found the CEO to be a willing viewer.

Millennials with their skills are incredibly valuable assets in creating this type of dialogue and short-form content, which in turn garnishes EVP research with passion points. (eBrands consider the uncovering of passion points one of the major

factors of a successful research phase – and we'll talk further about this in future blogs.)

This exercise will also create an internal talent pool for the EVP project director - either to help populate the committee for the EVP/employer brand implementation phase with Millennial representation; or for simply sourcing creative talent. Committee members get the opportunity to portray the EVP accurately, and often receive a new experience by working with a creative agency.

In the project's I was lucky enough to run, I have found millennials are typically an invaluable source of energy. Their needs for openness and consensus when blended with appreciation of strategy and patience create very effective outcomes, given the right stimulus.

Thanks for reading this series!

[5]

App, Website or Occulus Rift? But first...Umbagoo.

Users are evolving their content habits at incredible speed. Marketers and branders face multiple challenges around audience extension and brand integrity in the race to keep up; they are issues that are affecting companies and organisations of all sizes and ability.

But first...

Australia. The year was 1997. I was busy convincing potential clients - who were often heralded as entrepreneurial types - to build their first website.

"Why on earth do I need one of those?" they would say while performing involuntary hand weights with an overstuffed Filofax.

Why on earth? I heard it so often that when one of these entrepreneurial types occasionally bucked the trend and agreed to do it I had to suppress questioning their terrestrial citizenship.

No university textbook prepared anyone for the Internet. Or for the websites it would bring, or for the client anguish caused by 404 screens. The **Internet** was a Big Kahuna of change.

But even more first...

I failed with something called DOS. MS-DOS. I remember (as I am effectively divorced from how a computer actually works and only compute the way Google and Apple want me to) typing /dir to see a list of folders and wondering if an AUTOEXEC.BAT lived in a TREE file. I remember calling my first hard drive 'GUANO'.

But even more first than that...

I plugged a Commodore 64 into my grandfather's 100lb CRT television via a coax socket. I sat with an open manual, peck typing BASIC commands onto a boxy two tone blue screen. I remember the immense joy of typing in the following lines of incredibly complex code.

```
10 PRINT "Poo."

20 GOTO 10

RUN
```

There is change, but not everything changes - as readers of my blogs for eBrands will testify.

Other Random Access Memory Lane highlights

PowerPoint and laser pointer pitching classified advertising online as the way of the future while CEO's of some of the largest recruitment businesses in Australia guffawed about the Internet. "Newspaper classified advertising will never be replaced," they said.

Junketing on the fumes of Internet media company start-ups. Cruising Sydney harbour while being massaged and straw fed booze before hitting a casino with some free money …to then see the NASDAQ fall off a cliff barely a month later.

Eyebrow-raising at business models being sold on the equivalent of gasoline fumes for billions of dollars. Sold before having a clear view on how to make money but with vague valuations attached to service value and user base monetization. Oh, that is still happening.

What is the point of all this reminiscing?

Change. We've changed how we view and consume change. We've whipsawed between suspicions of the future to fanatically over-consuming change, to hopefully developing better senses for evaluating it.

Marketing, branding, advertising; all of these disciplines have experienced digital maturation periods. Our jostle for competitive advantage has moved innovation from the evil expense to a necessary buzzword.

The future challenge. Enhancing brand integrity.

When viral marketing was still viral, it was accepted that brands could live tactical marketing that adopted the "rollout method". The approach, pioneered by Yahoo, still influences schools of technical development today (such as the "Agile" crowd). The premise is simply innovating, delivering, and fixing issues on the fly. This means forgoing thorough initial testing of digital product/content for the sake of speed to market.

My issue is that successful brands have never been able to do this. Why? It breaks the law. Brands are about trust; they are about revealing a promise and providing the proof. They are not about a vague whiff of hope.

"Chip away at that hope, and it's ok because we're cool, and you're cool and ok that's cool, and, by the way, your private information is on the Internet but that's ok because we're all cool...yeah?"

It often happens, and I've not purchased from a particular airline or renewed membership with a particular credit card company, or purchased from individual online stores because of it.

Let's take...'web site' or 'App' as an example

Briefly, because this blog has too many words in it already.

The App Store is not just a place for new app executions, it is also a graveyard for tens of thousands of ideas. Have a search yourself.

Organisations are writing "App or Web Site... or both?" on whiteboards while not giving their brand enough weight or consideration in the process. Users meanwhile continue to assess these efforts within their own personal context:

• Do I need another app?

• Do I have time to learn about an app?

• Will I remember that I have it?

• Does my device have the memory for it?

• Should I just use the website?

• Is it cool? (ok that's just me).

RUN.

PS.

Why was the first movie 'Tron' better than the second movie 'Tron'?

First Tron was about the impossible. Second Tron was also about the impossible - except that 30 years on, the impossible is not as impossible anymore.

[6]

App, website or Oculus Rift...

The impact of future technology on branding.

Part two of our blog series looking at the impact of future technology on branding, with a focus on the challenges of brand extension and integrity.

All this new technology, where to start?

First up, we recommend checking in with your company brand blueprint.

Brands now have to operate on multiple frontiers that bring new challenges and new opportunities. It is the reason why eBrands advocates revisiting your company (or organization) brand blueprint before marching boldly into new brand centric technology. The failure to recognise these challenges and opportunities almost always stems from either 'getting away' from the blueprint or following ideas or functions that are not synergistic to what a brand is capable of supporting.

eBrands looks to do this efficiently. Our version of the brand 'blueprint' is a one-page document that outlines the rationale for the brand, its capability via its controllable (internal) factors and its influencing (external) factors. The blueprint validates the brand's existence; we enhance this with a digital context.

Checking in with the blueprint can take the form of a recap or 'restatement' session, where the existing brand 'promise and proof' is re-iterated and rationalised. During this session (we typically recommend a small micro-community working session to begin with, with room to expand if required), we test how the brand works and operates during hypothetical situations that are brought by new technology. This essentially combines a brainstorm with a 'rigour' test.

For example:

What opportunities do we have with 'always-on' connectivity?

What customer functions or processes could be enhanced?

Are there competitive barriers we can create?

What could be better?

The conclusion of this session will provide a list of 'working ideas' that can form part of a scoping exercise or scope debate. An example of a result of such a session for one client was 'specific recognition of our unique content', which resulted in creating a branded format that could present very long-form content powerfully and effectively across all devices - (hence focus for improvement in that development project shifted to building a responsive website with clear reading options away from developing a series of apps).

This type of session is invaluable for seeing what can be part of a scope and is very effective at highlighting potential issues before they arise. It is not a feasibility study or a cost-benefit analysis, but it will save time, save money and minimise mistakes by providing the development process with a tangible brand presence to be adhered to.

[7]

Workplace Passion

Can it be created? Do you need it?

I'll put this out there. You know that feeling you get when you visit a workplace where there are high levels of passion?

Several years ago I was in the process of engagement with a new client undertaking an employment brand project. At the meeting was a member of the internal recruitment team, and a talent manager who'd recently been appointed to manage an outsourced recruitment model for the company.

The client had some budget to create an employer brand – problem was that they did not have the time to make an employment brand – they needed people through the door, and they needed them quickly. Could eBrands help?

So what was the driver, the overriding criteria?

"Passion. We need passionate people," he replied the talent manager.

"Passionate about what?"

"Just people with passion, we need more passion", he replied dispassionately.

You might guess this was not one of those places.

There is no turnkey solution to a complex issue. Despite this, we began at the beginning and explored solutions that might work given the limitations of the situation.

The point of the story? I want to focus on 'passion'. In 90% of the client work I've been a part of, passion will be mentioned. It is either asked for as a hopeful outcome - or proudly acclaimed with manic finger pointing as living breathing thing that we must divulge. Finding passion points is one of the things eBrands has become very good at.

Passion is linked to brand: they both deal in the trade of expression; one being a commodity (ouch), the other being a belief system. Employer brands that talk to the passion within

the business achieve a powerful return on investment. They create something that we call 'passion capital.' Instigating and celebrating passion capital is one of the areas that the employer brand can be most active in internally.

So I'll come back to our externally focused client scenario at the end of the series. First we'll explore the factors that I believe employers need to provide in order for workplace passion to exist so that a brand can be built on it.

[8]

Workplace Passion

The Hiring Factor

Part two of a six-part series on creating it, sustaining it, and building an employer brand with it. This instalment focuses on hiring and the need for a two-way street.

Hiring.

Hiring is the coalface - the 'doing it' end- of the lifecycle of employer branding; I am saying upfront that hiring is the key tactical element for HR seeking to build a passionate workplace culture.

Employer brand focused clients engage eBrands because they want to make their hiring easier. Hiring is usually at the implementation end of the lifecycle, so should I not be writing about the strategy elements first?

I start with hiring because an investment in creating passion capital is going to change the way your company hires people. It will probably also change the criteria your company uses to assess the candidates attracted to the employer brand, ultimately changing your hiring priorities. All this change is not going to sit well for every business.

So let us briefly review what a hiring tactic looks like before you embark on the 'passion journey'; it is a litmus test that may save your company from...heartbreak.

Hiring passionate people manifests passion. The change is what this means for your candidate profiling and selection. The organization that embraces passion has to be willing to hire talent based the following selection ladder:

•   Alignment of belief, passion, and commitment (first)

•   Experience (second)

•   Qualifications and credentials (third)

The companies that have this ladder flipped, face a vertical battle from day one. The emphasis has to be on knowing and agreeing with what a candidate believes.

Some companies may not have the right characteristics to pull this off. The passion profile may be a stretch that cannot underpin a brand built on truth. That is not to say that passion cannot be a part of your workplace; it simply won't be infectious.

Hiring passionate people means asking the right questions and being able to understand your candidate's belief system perfectly. Hence, and now we come back to the employment brand lifecycle, the only way to see if the beliefs between candidate and company match is *after the employer brand values are determined.*

The two-way street.

Passion requires reciprocation. Unreciprocated passion will only create the most Shakespearean of workplace tragedies. Claims, counterclaims, thickened plots and broken promises.

Beliefs need to be reinforced and nurtured; the hiring event mentioned above is only the beginning of a (hopefully) long-term relationship. Passionate workplaces feature listening, collaboration and communication.

Employers must abide by their tangible and intangible commitments to their employees as if they are employment brand 'shareholders'. Employees, who invest passion into the business, want returns; as their enthusiasm rewards your company's external stakeholders and customers, employees need to be paid in the same way. Honesty, openness, fair remuneration, freedom of dialogue and confirmation of beliefs support a give and give relationship. Passionate workplaces always feature a healthy sense of workplace justice.

Brand Impact

In summary, hiree's that talk about their company passionately due to a strong belief system match, give the employment brand an effective multiplier.

[9]

Workplace Passion

The ethics of work ethic

Part three of a six-part series on workplace passion: creating it, sustaining it, and building an employer brand with it. This instalment discusses the importance of a collegiate work ethic and managing horizons.

The ethics of work ethic.

Myth: Staff, that work longer hours, must be working harder.

Fact: The internet is free at work. And it is time consuming.

Back when I was Strategy Director at eBrands, (around Mad Men - Season One) I conducted a research interview with an incoming CEO of a large and storied Australian business. The interview is a standard part of eBrands employer brand engagement process. The CEO was very new to the company, and one of his comments to me has come to mind.

"I'm all for work-life balance but something has struck me since I started... I'm the first to arrive, and I'm the last to leave. Everyone arrives at precisely the allotted time, everyone leaves at the allotted time...no-one stays a moment later...or comes in a moment earlier. This is incredibly strange to me."

Unfortunately - this isn't strange when worker's lack engagement; nor is it strange in George Orwell novels.

A passionate workforce will reveal itself through an adherence to a common work ethic that displays real commitment. Working hard, being busy, staying longer, having an out of office hours phone call across time zones with Asia... Are things that are easier when you believe in your work, and it's one of those areas where an effective employer brand can deliver tantalizing ROI.

Unfortunately, some workplace culture's try to mimic this with the residual use of mantra's like "Work hard! Play hard!" Harking back to days that celebrated the 'dog eat dog', sleep at your desk, Michael Douglas is better than you... workplace.

Engaged workplaces are not 'blokey' and nor are they detrimental to your health.

The employer brand has an opportunity to set a healthy tone for work dynamics that can be illustrated using policy and recognition, and in turn create collegiate type effort.

The ethics of work ethic as we like to call it.

Horizons (they're broader than goals).

The passionate workplace has no quarrels or confusion with regards to the corporate 'purpose'. This lends the workforce a sense of steel and conviction.

Establishing a clear horizon and perspective on the company's place in the world is reliant on the effectiveness of its branding and its internal communication. It's difficult to imagine the Google's, Virgin's and the Medicin Sans Frontiers of the world's having water cooler existential discussions about their purpose in the pecking order of things - *even if Google's is simply to 'experiment' at the moment.*

Horizons should not be confused with goals; they represent an all-embracing vision and attitude that every employee has in common whatever their job specification; in other words, they go beyond measuring the immediate quarter. They're typically attached to the mission statement, and ergo to the core of the employer brand.

Brand Impact

One of the most efficient catalysts we've seen for reigniting passion in an incumbent workforce is strategy around restating the corporate purpose in inclusive ways. Done correctly, it can overcome the challenges of geographic spread, tribalism, hierarchy and generational diversity.

Next instalment - we'll talk further about diversity while dodging bullets from *snipers.*

[10]

Workplace Passion

Take out the snipers

Part four of a six-part series on workplace passion: creating it, sustaining it, and building an employer brand with it. This week, snipers and the joys of healthy diversity.

Snipers.

It only takes one person. That person is usually clandestine.

I lazily referred to the good old 'water-cooler conversation' cliché in an earlier post on this subject, but it's in those places that the sniper has a natural habitat. Unlucky for you if your refreshing glass of water comes with a dash of someone else's bitterness.

Encouraging critical thought in the workplace is not akin to hiring critics. Snipers can be created by a poor hiring process (ie they are simply not working for the right company), or it might be their chosen way of life. Perhaps the enterprise has evolved or shifted around the employee, which can often happen with long tenure. Unfortunately snipers are absolutely a black hole for your passion commodity.

On a personal note, recognising the balance between overzealous agreement and destructive negativity becomes quite easy once you have facilitated over two hundred employment experience workshops. Passionate workplaces amaze me because they let you leave your politics and brinkmanship at the door. This is a shame as being English I *pride* myself on those abilities.

We've all met workplace snipers. Mercifully they only point loaded biros, but they will typically moan and complain in the background. They will be surprisingly articulate when it comes to describing what is wrong with their employer, and have little to say about what is good. Yet they are still there. Being paid.

Passionate workplaces are devoid of snipers; whether they are driven away by the drone of colleague optimism or by smart

HR tactics is unclear; but if a shift to a passionate workplace brand is in the works, it will be undone by unfettered cynicism. So you need to show those snipers the door. (The one marked 'Out'.)

Diversity

Let's get back to encouraging critical thought.

Passionate workplaces will feature diversity. Differing backgrounds, experiences and interests create a powerful cocktail for idea generation, debate and frank purposeful discussion.

Passionista's seek diversity and broad approval. They are hungry for finding ways to enable the company to succeed. They welcome the perspective of others, and appreciate the differences they bring. This of course must be backed up commensurately with the personality of the employer brand.

Brand Impact

When people from different backgrounds unite with the same set of belief's it creates a more powerful proposition. Encouraging diversity enables a self-policing ecology which is incredibly effective at negating snipers.

Workplace Passion

The Disruptive Hive

Part five of a six-part series on workplace passion: creating it, sustaining it, and building an employer brand with it. This week, the disruptive hive and consistently being consistent.

The Disruptive Hive

Here's an admission. I'm 38 (cough). OK I am not. I know you're surprised. Now I am not sure if it is to do with my being a unique snowflake or if this is something that everybody feels, but I really believe that eBrands grew up in the era of the ridiculous workspace.

Perhaps because eBrands was already a few years old when dot com companies simply had too much money to spend. Maybe the desirable reclining leather ambassador chair of the 90's media agency really was just as ostentatious as the 2000's indoor tube slide into a ball pool that floats above an actual glass walled fresh water pool filled with koi carp, in a building that's already on a pier above an actual real body of Sydney Harbour sea water, with real sharks in it (maybe adjusted for inflation?).

OK. A culture may be defined by its space but it is positively influenced by its space. Passionate workforces can invariably be encouraged by building spaces that support high levels of productivity and that visually resonate with a brand and its beliefs. It's the structure for the hive mind.

A good space can:

1.   Encourage people to recognize each other
2.   Imply cross-functional participation
3.   Open 'layer' access
4.   Reinforce identity

For example, a passion base employer brand can be undone easily with a simple mis-step (I hate saying this but it's true):

having an uninspiring reception. If the gateway to and from the world is poor, the company has just revealed a level of commitment that undoes much of work.

Consistent Consistency

Leveraging a passionate culture at work creates an exciting opportunity for employment branding. It also sets a precedent and a standard for enterprise activity moving forward. HR and management strategy needs to continuously find constructive ways to sponsor and nurture passionate employees and much of that will be tied to workplace innovation.

A passionate culture also implies a set of consistent behaviour rules, one cited to me several times in client workshops I have facilitated was having the confidence to be heard and to contribute to decision-making was a direct result of passion for the business - basically doing what's best for the company first as opposed what to what might be best for yourself.

Now isn't that a great reason to create a passionate work culture?

Brand Impact

The connection between workspace and passion exists because it's the part of the employer brand with the most sensory contact. It is the visible, tangible part of the employer's investment.

Next up, the conclusion of this series evaluates whether 'passion' is a marketable employer brand asset.

$$\left[\ 12\ \right]$$

Workplace Passion

What did we learn about these passionate types?

The final instalment of a six-part blog series on workplace passion: creating it, sustaining it, and building an employer brand with it.

I'll wrap up this series with some simple success keys or 'crib notes' from each blog instalment. Then, I'll summarise my subjective views hopefully sans platitudes; about the lessons learned by the client referenced in the initial blog post in this series and by de facto, most of our clients.

Passion Keys

1. Workplace Passion cannot exist without known beliefs and a value system. Create this first.

2. Adjust hiring process and strategy to emphasize passion hiring to populate and bring beliefs to life.

3. Quickly and effectively reward those that display the right behaviours

4. Allow everyone in the organization a shared view and path of access to the success horizon for the business

5. Root out wasteful negativity, do not root out intelligence or critical thinking

6. Put the effort into diversity, it will improve intelligence and energy

7. Be real and objective about your physical surroundings; if it does not suit the organisation, make it part of the horizon plan

8. Stick with the value system created; do not shift it or 'chip away' at it to accommodate whimsy

Finding passionate people?

It comes down to identifying what the organization needs to be successful, and putting the parameters in place to empower

your talent to fulfill those needs. The route to achieving this is different every time, but the process framework is the same. You cannot recruit passion until the organization can define its soul.

I've spoken with thousands of workers.

Passionate workers share traits. They admire the ethos of their employer. They can understand their employer's language. They believe in the employer, and they easily align with the organisation point of view. They feel secure in holding that view and confident that it will stand up to inspection.

They sincerely believe the outcome they are pursuing is the best outcome for the organisation's customers.

There's plenty of passionate people, but there is no guarantee that those people will be *passionate workers*. That takes...work.

The Employer Brand Impact - Freelance & Contractors

In this first of a two-part blog post, Marc looks at how a secular shift to freelance work preferences may affect the management of employment brands.

During my prior work with eBrands, we maybe twice during a ten year span came across the rarest form of employment brand brief - tackling the existing perception problem of a company department.

This came back to me as I read Mary Meeker's Internet Trends Report for 2015, which you can read by following the link at Kleiner Perkins Caulfield and Byers. It's full of great information; the stimulus that prompted my thoughts were statistics presented on the growing trend towards freelance work, indicating that "3 to 4 people in the United States consider themselves an independent contractor".

The growth of freelancers is doing all sorts of things to confuse consensus thinking around the interpretation of employment statistics. Current debate rages in the US about how 'strong' existing employment data (i.e., continuing lower jobless claims) continues; despite the background of low levels of workforce participation and less full-time workers. Is there less work? Is there more work? Who benefits from the trend - employers, employees or both? We might explore that in a future post. However for now, let us deal particularly with the shift to freelance.

One known driver in the shift to freelance/contracting is that employees' desire increased personal choice and freedom. Freelancers can thrive through the ownership of niche employee skill-sets and an increase in flexible demand.

This may mean that companies are going to have to inspect their employer brands on a 'micro-level'. For example, a high-street bank might have pulling power due to a well-managed employer brand, but perhaps their mortgage business, foreign trade desk or their IT departments have trouble recruiting. The

'micro-environment' is key to freelancer attraction, as they will be more intimately familiar with their demand markets and their available choices, while being potentially less aligned with a long-term version.

This presents the freelance challenge. An employer brand manager has several options available to begin to tackle this, and frankly several factors that are potentially beyond their control. Do you shift strategy and resources to reinforce further the master brand to increase pull while risking disconnect with the micro-level employment experience? Alternatively, are there strategies available that can align the coalface experience of the freelancer with the organisation ethos?

The functionally ability that the employer brand manager needs, is to be able to report dissonant micro-environment experience back to people in the organisation that can make changes. This information can often be sourced from social media.

Freelancers & contractors exhibit traits that unify them as peers. They own advanced networking and connectivity skills, and behave with hivemind tendencies within their own peer groups (for example freelance/contract and niche skill employment sites contain many support systems that would typically be offered by a permanent employer). The increased levels of participation in online communities to do with their occupation are typically stark compared with long-tenured peers.

All of this adds up to good news. The information is there that can allow an employment brand manager to think about the departments of their organisation as parts of an overall 'portfolio', and to think of freelancers as 'customers' of the portfolio.

This presents interesting and real challenges. It is possible to deliver employment brand strategy that focuses on both the master brand and the portfolio, so now we have an opportunity to turn freelance employee data into improved micro-level strategy.

Sounds like a lot of work? I am guessing the shift towards freelance is not going to make this an optional concept.

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The Employer Brand Impact 2 - Freelance and Contractors

This second blog of a two-part series, We review the impact of the freelance shift, and what it might mean for employment brands and branders.

I cited some US based trends in the last post link the first post in this series! Let's take a look at Australia, while remembering there's always semantics regarding definitions and sources when striving for international comparison. The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines 'freelance' differently from the US equivalent, and it appears broader. For example, second job 'moonlighting' is considered 'freelance' - so there is some noise here (not in the study, but in the classifications).

I've extracted this from an Elance-ODesk survey, which is interesting reading. The survey estimates 30% of the Australian workforce engages in a freelance activity. Interestingly, 58% of that group claim to operate as freelancers out of choice rather than necessity.

The survey cites the top drivers for becoming freelance are:

1. Earning extra money

2. Having a flexible schedule

3. Having the freedom to choose which projects to work on

The drivers are incredibly desirable to many and match well with some of the millennial traits I have discussed in a previous blog.

In Australia, reduced rates of home-ownership and poor levels of first home affordability are just some of the many casual reasons as to why the permanency and security of tenured employment is not as attractive or necessary as it used to be.

If the shift toward the freelancing trend continues (as it may well if the US trend is a reliable signifier), it will require organisations to change. Functionally, companies will need to develop the management, technology and compliance systems

that enable freelance hiring. Ideologically, they will have to appraise how freelancers fit within the employment branding ecosystem.

Consider the 'freelancers' skills discussed in the last blog post. Not only are they a valuable source of plug and play niche skills, they are also typically active and savvy communicators. The micro-level experience of Freelancer engagement at the 'portfolio level' will need to be consistent with the promises made by the master brand. The upside is you create incredibly active advocates - the downside is the motivation of incredibly active critics. I know what I'd prefer.

One alternative tactic might be to create a freelance charter - adopting a facsimile of the employment brand 'portfolio approach' I alluded to previously. A charter structure could be either departmental or hierarchical. Charter's enable a desperate company to have a cohesively managed employment brand. They also create good engagement platforms around targeted social media - which is key for the niche inhabiting freelance community.

At least in this business cycle, as vacancy numbers rise in unison with quit rates, employer branders are going to have their work cut-out marketing to a more confident and assured freelance community, and they will earn their money. Some of those employer branders might actually be freelance themselves.

Makes Us Sexy! (please)

Thoughts from a secure and un-sexy coffee shop about sexy employment branding.

We've written a **series recently about the cultural architecture** of 'passionate' workplaces. We're pleased to say we received lovely feedback (and not just from our mother's). All the talk about passion made someone drop a cup of tea, so we thought we might as well tackle 'sexy branding' while we're in the sensationalised neighbourhood.

There are client organisations we meet who point to their 'work' is uninteresting or formulaic, and, as a result, they feel they cannot attract talent. This attitude once fostered spores easily from one thing to the next. "Dull work, dull building, dull reception, dull uniform, dull brand, dull company".

"Oh! We've been dull for years. In fact, we're rather good at it."

Now I might prefer to use another word like 'grey' instead of 'dull', but since we've had this 50 shades phenomenon even grey has become sexy. In these modern, sexy times even the dull don't have a colour palette to call their own anymore.

50 Shades of Grey does, however, hold a clue to how an organisation can go about fixing a dullness problem, suggesting a process that when applied correctly can make anything sexy. Intrigued? The secret is to strip.

"I mean, we're accountants". Said a client, once.

"Yes, yes you are. Let's begin with that".

We're all something, and we all share the enormous potential to be dull. Even sexy design companies with their sexy teams of sexy young dreamers within; working on sexy brands - they won't tell you about the time sheets. They won't tell you about the monotonous WIP meetings given by leadership, the amount of time they spend compressing files, the hours spent flicking through photo libraries and portfolios, the legal compliance...they get their sexiness through loose

association(s).

Accountancy can be sexy. Accountants can do your tax return. They can solve complex problems, they help people in difficulty, and they can be the engine of an organisation by helping to make the right decisions to deploy capital. Yes, accountants help you spend money. That might be sexy.

So strip it back. Look at everything from the mission statement onwards, through nature of the work to the end benefits of the work that you really do. If dullness really does pervade, we need to get in there and shake up the mindset to find the core of the problem.

Sexy is accuracy.

We've learned that when it comes to employment branding 'sexy' is not a magic brush that you can use to paint over workplace cracks.

There is a magic brush though. It's more important than sexy. It's...accuracy. Unfortunately, it's also the truth. Plain, simple, powerful and itself very sexy. Employers who are willing to confront and listen to the truth from their employees, will get something to build their employer brand on that is better than sex(y).

Employer brands do not need to appeal at all costs in spite of morals. The goal is to appeal accurately with the truth, and then work on the rules of attraction.

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Even More Sexy Still. The Sequel.

A follow-up post to Make Us Sexy!

We received some positive notes for the original post - thanks to those people! Sexy does sell.

Subsequent conversations, since that post was published, have encouraged me to expand much further on the difficulties of achieving employment brand 'accuracy' (and my belief in 'sexy truth'). As such if you have not done so, I would recommend reading that post before engaging with this one. Following **eBrands on LinkedIN** is a good way to stay in the loop with regards to future blog updates.

I'll start getting into some 'how to's' of achieving accuracy next week, but let me quickly illustrate and discuss some personal views with regards to good and bad employment brand programme design:

1. Employer brands are created using standard marketing/ EVP frameworks - yet I feel it is a mistake to believe there is a standard process that guarantees success

2. Any organisation that does not operate with insidious motives can achieve an effective employer brand outcome. Any! I believe it!

3. An employer brand 100% fails without accuracy; because the long game always unravels in the face of a corner cutting quick win

4. An employer brand will only be as strong as the weakest part of its project process, which means emphasis should be placed on project process design

These views look suspiciously like throw at the wall tack so let me have a go at backing up these convictions succinctly.

There's too much soulless vanilla crap in employment branding. The job market looks like an incongruous blob, and most internal communication has no brand resonance.

I think this is primarily due to the 'curse of the common employment brand process'. The biggest mistake - is the belief that a collection of numerical scales and checkboxes can deliver employment brand nirvana.

Beware of 'soulless vanilla' as it can creep up on you at the very beginning. Your employment brand 'provider', 'agency'- or what you will - should exhibit strong 'project framework' capabilities, but they should never be married at all costs to their standard project process. The only thing they should be in love with is the client's end goal - and their wits should be about them from the start to engineer that journey.

Ask your agency one question - how are they going to uncover our truth? Moreover, if you have compiled your organisation's story already, either via writing a brief or summarising research, how are they going to challenge or corroborate it? How are they going to think and respond to your organization context?

Dear client, please roll your eyes when the account manager responds 'our online climate survey will generate all we need for research'. Another black flag would be hearing the words "our research phase for underpinning your brand is a standard priced package". This in itself implies too many massive and risky assumptions.

The value of any research findings dwindle as the agency forces your employee's insights into a digital checkbox consensus - the same jam jar they have used to squeeze other clients - and then try to sell you creative based on that.

Employer branding is demanding. The platform for accuracy requires a comprehensive scoping and design process that generates sensitivity to the unique organisation context; and then applies that learning for the prioritisation of uncovering the truth. Let's be clear - that work is not part of the research phase. This dictates the employer brand process design; your primary research phase is part of that overall design.

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Makes Us Really Sexy!

This week; designing employer brand programmes for accuracy.

The **last post** encapsulated some of my personal dogma around accuracy. In a nutshell, I think every organisation challenge requires 'some' bespoke employment brand process to get the best results.

How to design that bespoke process?

Impossible to say in a five-hundred-word blog post (a blog post that also touches on some of our core intellectual property and eBrands divine reason for being). eBrands applies thinking that inherits traits from several disciplines including Human Resources, Organisation Psychology, Brand Management and Marketing.

We investigate the following:

Dimension - *Organisation & Project, Internal & External*

Context - *Historical, Cultural, Anthropological, Behavioural*

Evolution - *Goals, Vision, Journey, Challenges*

So, before the employment brand project is announced - before there is "engagement' with the broad organisation, and regardless of if a brief is already floating around, we identify risks to accuracy and design our employment brand process accordingly. By learning about the organisation, we can hone an accuracy- focused process.

One example of something we do at the project design phase is a CEO interview; the vision and verification of business leadership is an invaluable tone setter. Another thing we do is avoid survey's at initial phases if the organisation is survey fatigued while focusing on insight generation strategies that encourage energetic participation.

Can these 'pre-cursor' steps have the opposite effect and instigate bias?

The fact is that we do this as a tactic to 'seek the bias', so

that we can be alert to where it potentially exists and how we can account for it. We want to challenge it. Remember we're seeking truth - and we've found both instances where bias has distorted the truth, or where bias has been symptomatic of the truth.

So our checkpoints in process design provide some guidance as to what eBrands finds important:

Trust - stakeholders must believe that the project will do the task it is created for, that it has leadership endorsement, that it has backing and that it values truth

Sanctity - the process and its data are paramount, and where privacy is concerned there is visible and actual commitment, and where transparency is concerned it is published and available

Value - stakeholders are educated on and understand the impact of a well-executed project and what it can mean for the health of the organisation

Empowerment - stakeholders own the opportunity. It's provided; they're actively encouraged to participate and the project provides visibility of stakeholder impact

We boil this down to - the employment brand is owned by the employees - therefore they also own the process.

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Are We Sexy Yet?

Part four of eBrands' series documenting the journey towards an accurate employer brand.

Our prior post identified key things we look for in the project process design of an employment brand project, and it discussed why a bespoke process typically has better upside.

Some pointers now on project engagement strategy; to make it clear, we're talking about introducing and engaging organisation stakeholders to be participants in an employment brand project.

Firstly, it is folly to disregard what the organisation knows already. No agency or project committee can sell to an organisation that this is a brand new, spur of the moment process created to make things better. Maybe there is an obvious talent shortage? Has the organisation been through trying times? Has reputation suffered? Has there been a change of leadership? Did the last project to attempt this fail or succeed? Any baggage needs to be known and recognised to create an honest engagement. Do not anticipate your peers simply giving you a clean slate because you feel it is deserved.

Taking just one of those scenarios as an example - change of leadership - how might this have an impact on engagement style?

To us, this would underpin the opportunity of a new employment brand - change of leadership can be unsettling, it can rattle the 'tenured' cages – to counter this, why not focus engagement as an opportunity for employees to have meaningful dialogue with someone fresh to the organisation?

Using a recent example from one of our most successful projects, we were able to frame a key part of the engagement as a wholesale opportunity for employees to provide the new leader with their opinions. We used simply:

"I love….. I would change…. I would hope for…."

We gave employees a creative way to express this and an absolute guarantee that it would be presented. Participants were rewarded through acknowledgement and response. Pretty amazing grounds for a successful project and the theme of open dialogue set the tone for all of our insight work with the focus groups.

Unfortunately, agencies can often overlook the initial 'framing' of an employer brand project. I'd say it's the most important interaction of the whole project. eBrands will give a project a mission statement and a brand. The agency is truthful, non-partisan and a cohort to everyone. We simply cannot run a great project if our mere presence in a room creates suspicion; we too need to earn the participants trust.

This focus has enabled our clients to enjoy our real strength - which is undoubtedly our insight sessions. It's a great feeling when you meet someone in the street four years after a session, and they mention how rewarding it was to be a part of an inclusive and genuine collaboration.

We'd take that compliment every time.

So What is Sexy Anyway?

Part five of our blog series that provides pointers on the employer brand journey. This edition discusses the role of quantitative and qualitative research, especially the importance of the latter.

Our last post highlighted the key importance of great organisation engagement and the importance of finding the right way to 'frame' an employment brand project.

The next process step is a continuance of the learning (we call it *Immersion*), and it manifests the bulk of the research phase. This is when we want to hear from stakeholders outside of those who have given us the brief. The question that we ask ourselves together with the client is:

What is the utmost we can do to encourage stakeholder input?

We want attitudes, we want opinions, we want stories. We are exhaustive; we are open and we love minutiae.

Formalising the Immersion phase of a project with a client is a fun exercise. Opinions often vary on the role and veracity of quantitative and qualitative research. Our perspective is they are both important and we encourage clients to see it the same way. There's often a fear of 'fatiguing' an organisation when it comes to HR projects.

We find it to be the opposite; when encouraged by parties who want to listen to their experiences, workers typically love talking about their jobs. Healthy participation requires stakeholders who feel like a valued part of a project. If they see they are part of the project business case, they are far more likely to have a vested interest in the return.

Quantitative research alone is not a stable foundation for an employment brand project. It is a platform for *benchmarking*, it does provide a sense of *climate*, and it can identify issues that need exploration to crystallise employee value proposition development. However, quantitative research alone does not open the human dimensions that we feel the best brands are built upon.

The success of an organisation culture is gauged by the how well the organisation fulfils its potential, and how well matched that culture is to the value proposition and competitive advantage. Example elements of 'misfire' that we've seen uncovered by qualitative research include:

1. Lack of knowledge/agreement around core values

2. Perception of unequal playing fields

3. Lack of confidence in leadership (for example fairness, or competency)

4. Non-constructive internal tension

5. Poignant legacy events that cannot be shaken or remain suppressed

6. Lack of meritocracy

There should be no fear in discussing the issues that exist. Insight sessions do not focus on the negative but they will probe issues constructively. Discussion around existing examples like the above make the employer brand process less prescriptive and more inclusive - and they highlight the truth. They stop an organisation making promises it cannot keep. These discussions always provide plenty of information to assist in other organisation decision-making.

eBrands is incredibly wary of appointment with clients who resist insight sessions because of this. Don't be tempted to patch holes, acknowledge them and show a response to their existence will encourage stakeholders to honour the organisational strengths.

That is when strategy formulation begins. Pretty sexy.

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On Resources, Statistics and Time

Looking at the impact of future technology on branding, with a focus on the challenges of brand extension and integrity.

It's good to share. I'm told.

I'm writing this blog to answer a question that was posed to me on an email from an old client and good friend last week.

The question was…

"Hey, if it's no secret, how do you keep up with what is going on in employment brand? Where do you get new ideas and thinking from?"

The context of the question was that my friend knew I have other work interests outside of EVP and digital brand/culture psychology that I am incredibly lucky to be able to pursue. Due to that, I am unashamed to admit that I am not someone who buries their head in every text, web site or published periodical about HR, Human Capital Management, Digital, Marketing and items of that ilk. Not looking to return to the treatise on Millennial thinking, but I suffer no FOMO.

So to share! I've got one method for content filtering that I use (which could actually apply to any subject you want to keep up to date with), and one web-site that I go to for background reading, and finally a research method that I use. The first method helps me filter the web as a whole, the second method is a great way to be exposed to new thinking.

1. Filtering and safeguarding

I use three tools.

FEEDLY.com –

Collates subjects I am interested in by keyword, across all my interests. Time invested in setting up FEEDLY correctly is saved a million times over in what it pulls back for me. For instance - "EVP statistics" is one of the subjects I have delivered to FEEDLY. And I go into FEEDLY once a week. I don't have it in

every device, just on a desktop mac, because sitting at the computer (say after a writing session) puts me in the frame of mind for skimming content.

POCKET -

I don't read in FEEDLY. I skim in FEEDLY, and harshly filter content by sending it to POCKET. Why? POCKET lets you read anything any device that you have saved...even if you have no Internet connection at the time. Train, plane, in the country, in a tunnel, in a cave. POCKET has the stuff I need. One 15 minute session on FEEDLY once a week, gives me about 7 hours of things to read on POCKET, once a week. Now if I read something on POCKET that I think is awesome...EVERNOTE.

EVERNOTE –

Keyword tag and search any document, spreadsheet, PDF, photograph, map location, infographic...anything I've deemed worthy of keeping. Again, it syncs wirelessly in the background, meaning of got 5 years worth of research on my phone, without needing an internet connection to read it. You can even share stacks of notes on it with other users.

2. Original Sources

My favourite web-site for new thinking or just plain interesting stuff to read to challenge your own thoughts.

SSRN.com -

So much to discover there, on any subject - and if the full work is not available, you have the contact details required to get hold of the work. What a great resource.

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Why should organisations engage a specialist Employer Brand agency?

Well, why? We consider the value proposition compared to alternative 'make-do' strategies.

'Organisation A' (let's call them Org A) needs work to be done to either create, build, change or refine an existing employer brand. Org A considers the following alternate pathways:

1. Use a standard marketing agency; stretching the consumer/external brand research and material to 'cover-off' perceived internal needs as discovered

2. Use their incumbent design agency to build template style, master brand derivative work that you populate with different content for employment brand purposes

3. Develop the employer brand completely from within. No external assistance, repurposing existing material with different messages

The above solutions sound appealing and have merits, at least on the surface. The project manager at Org A may be budget compromised or lack resources; the employer brand might not be considered a priority by Org A leadership; and it is simply less work to stick with a brand template approach. Sometimes pathways like this are thrust upon you.

Unfortunately, I'd say 80% of eBrands toughest projects (and some of our most intellectually rewarding truth be told) have arisen through helping clients who have previously made these types of choices and need to recover. Here are some of the potential caveats of those pathways:

Being serious and *showing commitment requires more than a cosmetic approach*. Populating a master brand template with stock shots of someone enjoying work life balance with kids in the park takes you into the same morass where 80% of other businesses live. This solution does not testify to the company/ employee relationship and what it means. The evidence of a lack of commitment creates all sorts of symptoms, the most

common being the loss of any message effectiveness due to a lack of resonance.

Employer brand projects require specialised skill sets. When done properly, the research - insight generation - engagement and project development patterns demanded by a successful project need deep organisational interaction. The navigation of internal stakeholder networks demands a sensitivity that's not native to the 'brief, and respond to brief' dogma of a normal marketing agency.

The value of external perspective. Group thinking and unchallenged consensus can be the employer brand's worst enemies. It can be hard to learn at the end of the process that the most cynical of all brand stakeholders is your fellow unengaged employee. This places demands on relationship management and insight capture skills that the majority of marketing agencies cannot deal with. A skilled employer brand agency will relish facing the contrary insights.

The project ownership structure is different. Our fundamental approach is that the employer brand is essentially the employees' version of the truth. It creates a great platform for employee participation in the project - so the agency must have a collaborative and knowledge sharing mind-set that many design firms are simply not exposed too.

The large *gap between traditional brand design knowledge, and HR and organisational psychology.* At a base level, knowledge of language and the environment and how it relates to project outcomes. At an advanced level, knowing how internal values relate to behaviours, and how employment brand outcomes relate to human resource metrics, is something that 'the creatives that know photoshop' won't have much time to understand.

Employment brands, like *any brands, do not do well with short-term fixes.* Sincerity, Transparency and Clarity are not things that you can gamble with; and patchwork solutions that touch on your 'reason for being' do nothing but devalue emotional capital investment.

Employment branding is a distinct discipline that requires its own craftsmen and women and it deserves real respect. If the employment brand & the employer/employee relationship is not a core organisational priority - that in itself speaks of issues that 'Org A' will have to face now and in the future.

THE RED END

This little book embodies the condensed thoughts of some very bright experts in the Employee Value Proposition space. Blogs are written with a sense of humour while remaining integral and respectful to the matters at hand. Anecdotes include experiences with start-ups, CEO's, Business owners and HR Directors and the 9th largest company on this planet today. Brilliant thoughts that have been captured touching on current thinking around the creation and nurturing of the only true reason an employee, contractor, freelancer or volunteer today will come to a working environment and enjoy delivering their best work to the organisation. This is a highly relevant read about the EVP space. It's worth the pick up, especially if you are interested in this 'space'.

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