



7 Vital Facts You Should Know About Branding Your Workplace, But Don't

In a recent survey, 1,000 Australian CEO's were asked to list their major concerns for the immediate future. Their number one concern was not their ability to meet financial forecasts, nor was it terrorism or uncertainty in international markets. It wasn't change of Federal government, implications of greater legislation and market control, or even fiscal policy.

Australian CEO's are most concerned about attracting and retaining the best talent.

Extensive research, particularly amongst the infamous Gen Y, indicates that CEO's are right to be worried.

Despite the ongoing debate of whether or not Australia is in the midst of a skills shortage, evidence suggests that the labour market is changing globally, and the impact on the future workplace will be considerable. Indeed, the workplace is about to undergo the greatest seismic shift since the industrial revolution.

Attraction and retention is foremost in the minds of CEO's because employers are facing turnover figures higher than ever before. As Australia is enjoying the lowest level of unemployment in three decades, this is encouraging employees of all ages to reconsider their job options. Add to that the restless energy of Generation Y and you have a workforce that no longer finds it inspiring to put in the hard yards at the one company in order to achieve the gold watch at the thirty year mark.

So what can employers do to improve their chances of attracting and retaining the best talent?

They can **improve their workplace brand.**

For years, many companies have spent a lot of money ensuring that their external brand is well polished. They've worked to engage their target customer as strongly as possible in order to build loyalty to their product over competitors. Yet few employers maintain the same focus on their internal brand and their internal customer; the employee. While the marketing department spends considerable time and money fine-tuning the external brand in minute detail, the internal brand isn't afforded the same luxury.

As a consequence, employees are not as engaged with their employment brand as they are with the goods and services they are able to purchase as a direct result of that employment. Remember that the workplace is where many of us spend at least five days every week (often more time than we spend with our life partner). It is often the place to which our aspirations and ability to progress in life are linked. It is also where for many, our self-esteem and sense of self is determined. Should we not be as emotionally attached to that place as we are to our Nikes?

If we think about the skills shortage and the inevitable effect this has on attracting and retaining the best talent, then it stands to reason that a more engaged workforce will have a positive effect on turnover levels. Traditional marketers know that the value of a brand lies in the development of a loyal audience – one that isn't just attracted to a product for the functional benefits it offers. As legendary

social researcher Hugh Mackay says, 'A good brand is not one that makes consumers feel good about the brand. A good brand makes consumers feel good about themselves.' A brand that delivers on both functional attributes and emotional benefits stands to gain a long term loyal audience.

Why should a workplace be any different? Shouldn't employers *want* staff to be every bit as involved and engaged as their most loyal customers? Do employers honestly believe that merely applying a poster with the company mission statement in the foyer of the office is the most powerful way to achieve that engagement?

There's no reason why a workplace shouldn't be considered a brand. So here are seven vital facts you should know about building a more engaging workplace brand:

1. Jobs are dead

Understand that your workplace is not offering a job; you are offering an *experience*. And the best workplace brands reflect that experience...

Google just won the coveted best employer award in the US. Apart from the functional benefits one gets working at Google, employees enjoy an environment which allows them to pursue success on their own terms. This environment is underscored by free on site washers, dryers and detergent, the annual free ski trip, unlimited sick days, lap pool, volleyball courts, free snack stations, subsidised massages, climbing wall and 11 free cafes.

It is not just the functional benefits that make the employer brand strong. It is the emotional bonding employees feel as a result that enhances the workplace brand experience at Google.

2. The people in charge of internal branding need to know how to build engaging brands

Many companies' Marketing Departments are in charge of the all important external brand and have the Human Resources Department manage the internal brand. If you are in Human Resources and in charge of developing the internal brand, you're about to embark on a creative and exciting journey. But get some training on how to do it if you haven't done it before. It is possible your accomplished skill set may lie in such areas as policy and process. This can be a very different way of thinking from what is required to build an engaging workplace brand.

3. Don't try and please all of the people all of the time

If you go for the lowest common denominator and try to build a brand that will appeal to everyone, you will run the risk of being bland and uninspiring. It is better to stand for something than nothing at all.

4. The new loyalty is 'the people', not 'the company'

One of the number one aspects that Generation Y, for example are looking for, are great leaders and inspiration. You should actively hire inspirational leaders and good people to spread throughout your organisation. Sure, they have to be proficient at their functional role - but are they inspiring leaders that others will really want to work for? A great leader is an excellent employee retention tool.

5. Consider the 'under-employed' in an attraction strategy

There are opportunities to attract solid talent in typically underutilised demographics. Remember to consider the grey generation, people with disabilities, non-English speaking people, and young mums.

6. Shorten the distance between your external and internal brand

There's no point presenting an honest and inspiring external face but being regarded by your employees as shallow and uncaring to your internal audience. This merely reinforces the belief that your employees are thought of as an expendable bottom line cost, whilst external customers are seen as investments. Consider your employees as investments and see how it changes your perspective.

7. Force yourself to focus. People generally don't like to change unless they are forced to - including CEO's 😊

If you want to attract and retain the best people in the midst of a skills shortage, you have to focus on it as much as you would any other major organisational initiative. Force yourself and your senior management to focus on building a more engaging employee brand... or it will never happen.

These tips are drawn from the best selling book:

Forced Focus – the essence of attracting and retaining the best people.

Released in March 2007, it is the first in a series of **Forced Focus Books** by author **Penny Burke**, and provides a step by step guide to building an employer brand. You can purchase *Forced Focus* at all good bookstores, or simply by visiting:

<http://www.essencecomms.com.au>

Penny Burke also runs a series of workshop seminars on Building a More Engaging Employer Brand. If you need help with attracting and retaining talent in your business...

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