



**ROPELLA**  
GROWING GREAT COMPANIES

# SMART EMPLOYER BRANDING

*The Best Way To Win The War For Talent Is By Having A Strong Employer Brand*



## SMART EMPLOYER **BRANDING**

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Think back to when you were in school. Was there that one teacher that everyone knew of, for good or bad?

At my grade school, it was one of the fifth grade teachers. Near the end of fourth grade, all the students would whisper about him, hoping they didn't get placed in his class the next year. I didn't, so I can neither confirm nor deny the rumors, but it was said that he would yell at and demean his students, and even throw small objects across the room at them.

Then, when I was attending college, there was a revered business professor. The one that you had to line up hours before registration opened to ensure you could get into his section. The class you would put off semester after semester until you could finally take it under him.

Of course, students nowadays don't have to wait in line for registration - they can do it all online. They also don't have to rely on the grapevine to find out which teachers are the best or worst - they can go online to a site like [ratemyprofessor.com](http://ratemyprofessor.com).

What does this have to do with winning the war for talent?

Simple: Which educator do you want your organization to be like? The one people avoid at all costs, or the one people will wait in line to join?

The single most impactful strategy you can employ to ensure your organization succeeds at attracting, hiring, and training the best professionals in your industry is to strengthen your employer brand.





# EMPLOYER BRANDING 101

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## DEFINITION

What is employer branding? The employer brand – also known as the employment brand – is best described as the combination of the physical feelings, intellectual impressions, and emotional experiences of the employees who work in an organization along with the anticipated experience, impressions, and feelings of potential new hires. It is a tool to help candidates form a powerful, positive impression of your organization. When done successfully, the result is an organization as famous for talent as it is for its products or services.

Employer branding is also deeply entwined with your company culture; indeed, your brand is an extension of your internal culture and the way that culture is perceived by the outside world.

## FOUNDATION

Three dimensions make up a well-defined employer brand:

- 1. Reputation.** Your projected message is important, but it must be supported by evidence. It may be an informal grapevine as previous employees discuss your employer brand with new coworkers, aggregated employee reviews on a site like Glassdoor or media recognition.
- 2. Intangibles.** What abstract benefits do your employees receive? Examples include mission, pride, status, job satisfaction, companionship/collegiality, belonging to a “winning team” and so on.
- 3. Tangibles.** These are the concrete benefits you will often negotiate over during the hiring process, including salary, healthcare, a clean and safe workplace and a convenient location.

## AUDIT

What does your current employer brand say about your organization? Use the following questions to help you get a grip on your organization's employer brand. Ask yourself:

### Reputation

- Does the organization portray a clear and consistent message about its employer brand, or do those leading the charge seem confused, contradictory or vague?
- What is the buzz around the organization on review sites like Glassdoor, in the media and on social media?

### Intangibles

- What's it like working here? Is it high stress, over-critical, unrealistically challenging or downright unfair? Or is it fun, constructive, full of opportunity and very motivating?
- How do current and past employees feel about working here? Is it exciting and cutting edge, dull and boring or a pleasant and laid back place to work?
- How do prospective candidates feel as they progress through the hiring process? Enthusiastic or indifferent?

### Tangibles

- What benefits does my organization offer? Are there any drawbacks to employment here?
- Do employees get rewarded for meeting physical, learning and/or emotional challenges with recognition and/or compensation?
- Is the organization performing just okay, growing and expanding, or on a downward slope?

## PERSPECTIVES

There are four crucial perspectives to consider when developing, assessing, or improving employer brand:

**1. Current Employees.** Your current employees have a major part to play in developing and promoting your employer brand. They are your best Brand Ambassadors (more on this later), and they are perfectly poised to have a dramatic impact on many of the intangibles that define the brand.

**2. Past Employees.** Past employees can be make-or-break for your organization's reputation. Others are likely to elevate their opinions because, unlike current employees, they don't have any incentive for making your organization look better than it is. On the other hand, disgruntled past employees are far more likely to make noise than satisfied ones.

**3. Candidates.** I cannot overemphasize the importance of keeping your candidates happy. If a candidate turns into an employee, their candidate journey will set the tone for their entire employment. If they don't get hired for the position they first apply for, a good experience will greatly increase the odds that (a) they will continue or begin to be a loyal customer, and (b) they will be open to applying for a position with you again in the future.

**4. Prospective Candidates.** Prospective candidates are the ones who are most strongly influenced by your employer brand. They haven't applied for one of your positions, but some day they might – and whether or not they do can depend largely on the strength of your employer brand.

The strength of your employer brand can have far-reaching consequences, for good or bad. Here is an overview of the benefits that come with a strong employer brand.



# BENEFITS OF STRONG EMPLOYER BRANDS

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## CANDIDATES

- **An Increased Volume of Unsolicited Candidates.** A strong employer brand will significantly increase the number of applicants that your organization receives each year.
- **Higher Quality Candidates.** Not only will you get more applicants, but the quality of your candidates will improve dramatically. For example, an employer brand that highlights your organization's focus on innovation is necessary in order to attract game-changers, leaders, and innovators who demand it.
- **Greater Candidate Receptiveness.** If you employ internal or external recruiters, it will be much easier for them to turn cold calls into hot leads if the people they speak to already have a positive view of your workplace.
- **Increased Employee Referrals.** The percentage of hires from employee referrals will increase as a result of your employees' increased pride and knowledge about what makes their organization superior to competitors. Increasing the number of referrals has additional benefits, including an increase of employee ownership and reduction in recruiters' workloads.
- **Improved College Recruiting.** Because college students today are highly brand conscious, employer branding is especially effective for intern and new graduate recruiting.

## EMPLOYEES

- **Higher Offer Acceptance Rates.** As your image becomes better known and more powerful, your offer acceptance rates will improve dramatically.
- **Attract Top Recruiters.** It will be easier to attract, hire and retain top recruiters and HR experts when they know their jobs will be eased by a strong employer brand.
- **Improved Retention.** A compelling employer brand increases retention rates among current employees because they will better understand how working for your organization provides a superior opportunity, cementing a more loyal talent base. Their pride in the organization will continue to grow as colleagues and friends ask them about how it really is to work there, providing them with the opportunity to brag (and the social currency of admiration).
- **Increased Motivation.** Employee motivation is easier to maintain when employees have increased pride in the organization. This effect is compounded by the better management practices that are required in order to maintain Employer of Choice status.
- **Increased Satisfaction.** Pride in working for a great organization will boost employee satisfaction. Additionally, the resulting higher quality candidates and higher offer acceptance rate means that hiring managers and HR managers alike will be more satisfied with the overall recruiting function.



## ORGANIZATION

- **Competitive Advantage.** Because employer branding efforts include extensive metrics and side-by-side comparisons with talent competitors, you ensure that your talent management approaches are differentiated and continually superior. This superiority over competitors not only impresses senior managers, but it also improves your chances of winning over candidates who also apply for positions with your competitors.
- **Increased Knowledge and Competitive Intelligence.** By attracting more high quality employees from top competitors, your organization will benefit from their experience.
- **Increased Shareholder Value.** Publicly traded companies have demonstrated that being listed on any of the popular Best/Great Places to Work lists – and the resulting improved employer image – can positively impact a firm’s stock price. Google, for example, has noted in its SEC filing the important role that recruiting and retention play in its continued business growth.
- **Support for the Product/Service Brand.** An employer brand supports the corporate brand and related product and/or service brands because many consumers mentally make the link between attracting quality employees and producing a quality product or providing a quality service.
- **Information Ammunition.** Most employer branding efforts include elements that gather and centralize information on your firm’s best practices and its compelling stories. As a result of this effort, it is much easier to provide every employee with an arsenal of information and stories they can share with colleagues, candidates, and the media about what makes working for your organization the best possible opportunity.
- **Stronger Corporate Culture.** Because one of the goals of employer branding is to develop a consistent message about what it’s like to work at your firm, it can also help strengthen your corporate culture. The consistent message can reinforce corporate values and guide behaviors while a consensus develops across the enterprise among leaders and team members with regards to what it means to be a part of your organization.
- **Increased Media Exposure.** As a result of winning awards, being placed on “best places to work” lists and having managers give presentations at industry events, the amount of media exposure that your firm receives will increase dramatically. Having the media brag about your firm’s excellent people management practices adds a level of external credibility that no internally-funded advertising initiative can provide. As a result of initial exposure, the number of times that reports and benchmarking individuals will call you for future stories will also increase.
- **Long-Term Impact.** The best employer brands are cyclically influential: the strength of the brand attracts more quality talent, while the presence of high quality talent strengthens the brand.



# FORMALIZING YOUR **EMPLOYER BRAND**

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Employer brands are not created. They already exist. Your employer brand is felt and perceived by your prospective candidates, new hires, current employees and alumni from the first time they hear your organization's name until the day they retire from the workforce. Your organization's unique blend of environment, employer attributes, and everyday employee experiences combine to tell your employer brand story – so it's best if you take control of that story as soon as possible. Let the story speak for you, developing a rapport with potential candidates, showing them why your organization is more desirable than its competitors.

As you begin this process, remember that an employer brand, like art, is in the eye of the beholder. One employer brand will attract one personality type while another employer brand will attract a different personality type. The key is figuring out what is going to meet the interests of the types of people you most want to attract for each particular position at your organization. Then you must build a compelling message around those interests and find ways of displaying that specific brand where those who would be interested will see, hear and feel it. Keep in mind that people tend to make decisions based on their emotions and then justify and support those decisions with logic: appeal to each of those senses and you can reach your prospects on an emotional level.

## **TALK TO TOP PERFORMERS**

Remember, the point of developing your employer brand is to attract individuals with the personality and skills that best fit the position and your corporate culture. The best way to ensure your brand will speak to the right candidates is to meet with the “A” employees you already have on staff. Find out what the company would need to do to get their attention if they were not already working for you. Ask them to help steer you in the right direction and listen closely to their responses. Ask them:

- Where would you look for a job?
- What are the best places to reach people with the same work ethic as you?
- What headlines, graphics and/or colors would catch your attention?
- How should this company's employer brand be packaged so you would see it and be motivated by it?
- What sentiment should be included in employer branding messages in order to motivate people like you to respond?

## COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Keep in mind that candidates will always compare your company's reputation and their perception of your employer brand to that of their current and past employers – so you should do the same! If your company's reputation and employer brand aren't equal to or better than that of candidates' current and past employers, or if they feel they haven't received proper responses to their questions, often they won't take the recruiter's call or accept an invitation to interview.

**You should look at all competitors' career sites for two reasons:**

1. To better understand how the relevant competition for top talent is positioning themselves and to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their positioning; and
2. To see for yourself what the quality of their image/employer brand looks like.

You want to make sure your organization can at least match competitors' efforts, but, naturally, you should strive to do better with your own unique employer brand. As you look at others' employer brands, grade them as though you are a job candidate looking at their site because you are interested in working for them. Ask yourself, "Would I be impressed enough by this employer brand to pursue a job?"

You don't have to – and shouldn't – limit yourself to looking only at direct competitors. Also look at the best-in-class leaders from several industries or marketplaces. (Some global leaders are highlighted at the end of this eBook.) Make sure to look at the largest employers in your community. How are they presenting themselves and their community to the talent they're pursuing on their career sites? This research can help you find inspiration for great design, content and branding ideas for your own organization.

## UNIQUE SELLING POINTS

Once you have gathered internal and competitive intelligence, the next step in formalizing your employer brand is to identify your unique selling points. What is it that sets your organizations' work environment apart from your competitors?

The more you can highlight the environment and your current top talent, the better. Find a way to give prospective candidates an inside view into what makes your organization a great place to work. You may want to speak with your current employees again – or add some questions to your initial list. Find out what they

like about their job and why they would recommend it to others.

## CAREER PORTAL

Outside of the everyday reality of working at your organization, the career portal is the most crucial aspect of your employer brand strategy. This portal should be more than a few static pages of text and graphics. A career portal brings together in one place all of your organization's social networking links, job advertising and job promotion links, researchers and recruiters you partner with, and, most importantly, all of your talent – internal and external. For many candidates, the career portal will make the largest impact on their view of your employer brand. It can be the final piece that encourages them to – or discourages them from – applying for one of your open positions.

In addition to being a great "home base" for all of your recruiting efforts, a career portal allows you to collect valuable data from a wide variety of touch points in the form of resumes, forms, templates and information requests. Analytics gleaned from this data will be invaluable in refining your employer brand and overall talent acquisition strategy.

A great career portal will not just be useful to you, but useful to candidates. It's a good idea to include a lot of free articles, resume writing help, and career coaching. Additionally, it should offer free tools and assessments for job seekers to use on their own before seeking live help. For all other queries, a well-developed chatbot system can make candidates feel as though you are always available to help them along their candidate journey.

Remember: Special software is available for building these portals and can be a great resource for smaller companies that don't have the in-house capability to build a portal from the ground up.

## CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE

Take a virtual walk through a candidate's journey to employment from beginning to end. After all, your employer brand is primarily perceived through any given candidate's subjective point of view regarding his or her experiences with your company. This includes your website's ease of use, whether or not one can apply for jobs online, what it's like interviewing with HR and the selection team, how the receptionist and others in the hallways interact with each other and the candidate during site visits, his or her perceptions of your company's products, services or customer service people and even how your organization impacts the community.



Every step of a candidate's journey should be engaging, leaving the candidate with a positive impression of your employer brand. The job posting, the job description, the application, follow-up communications, face-to-face and phone interviews, and the offer stage. iCIMS' Candidate Experience Report found that 95% of all job seekers believe that how a prospective employer treats them as a candidate is a reflection of how they would treat them as an employee - so make sure you roll out the red carpet! Communicate with candidates, whether it's thanking them for sending in their application or informing them that you have selected another candidate but will reach back out if another opening arises.

One great way to boost the candidate experience is by preparing a prospective employee welcome kit. (A new hire welcome kit is also a great idea, though a bit beyond the scope of this eBook. More information is available in *The SMART Onboarding Handbook*.) You don't have to go too over the top with the prospective employee welcome kit; here is a list of items you may want to include:

- A presentation folder and/or custom printed envelope.
- Welcome letter signed by the hiring manager and/or president.
- Opportunity Marketing Piece that highlights the specific position the candidate applied for.
- Relevant business cards (hiring manager, HR representative, etc.).
- Directions to the site and instructions for whom to see on arrival for the face-to-face interview.
- An agenda with a list of people who are going to be on the interview team.
- A piece of branded "swag" such as a coffee cup or hat.

## BRAND AMBASSADORS

The quickest and easiest way to build credibility behind your employer brand is by having current employees who espouse the values of your workplace. Allow your employees to speak to the brand as often as possible. Record videos for your career portal in which employees discuss what they love about working for your organization. Give them the reins to your social media accounts to follow a "day in the life" in your workplace. Bring them to career fairs. Do anything and everything you can to give them the voice to speak for you.

## PROMOTION

The best organizations maximize their employer branding by making it an extension of their overall corporate marketing brand. They understand that advertising and promotion are just as important for attracting and retaining high performing employees as they are for growing the organization by attracting new customers.

Companies with this perspective treat their hiring managers and Human Resources department as extensions of their corporate marketing, promotion and branding efforts. They understand that talent sourcing has a direct connection to marketing. These organizations also understand that when marketing for talent they should focus just as much on their internal employees as they do on external candidates.

You may want to consider what type of talent you want and then look into the products, websites, TV shows, etc. that appeal to that type of candidate. You might find that a number of your best employees are really into a certain TV show or restaurant. Whatever that TV show or restaurant is doing to market to your employees must be working because they keep going back - so observe their marketing messages and you might find some ideas to use in your next position





description, or something you can add to your Opportunity Marketing Piece that will appeal to candidates similar to your highest performers.

In the same way that great music sounds best when the whole band is playing at once, advertising works better when all of your marketing opportunity elements - career portal, blogs, social media accounts, face-to-face networking, etc. - are working together to form a successful employee search campaign. Just as taking the drummer or bass guitarist out of a great song diminishes it, removing one element of your employee search campaign reduces the level of success the whole package could achieve.

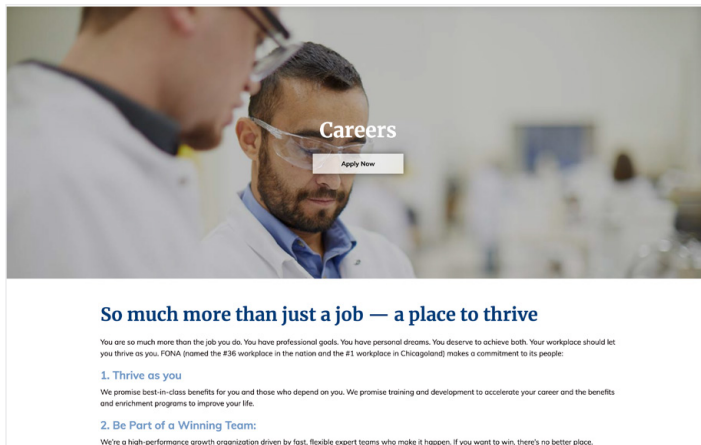
### **FOLLOW THROUGH**

The success or failure of any employer branding effort is a direct reflection of leadership and the culture of the organization - the brand is built from the inside out. Therefore, it is up to the leaders to create a great workplace that supports what the employer brand claims about it. No matter how much effort you put into promoting your employer brand, it will be constantly eroded if working at your organization is a never-ending headache. You won't be able to attract top talent no matter how well you spin your message; if you do attract a quality candidate, you'll be hard pressed to keep him or her.

Build the right culture, though, and the opposite will happen. You'll have an aligned and committed workforce that will drive your employer brand with their job and workplace satisfaction.



# BEST IN CLASS EXAMPLES

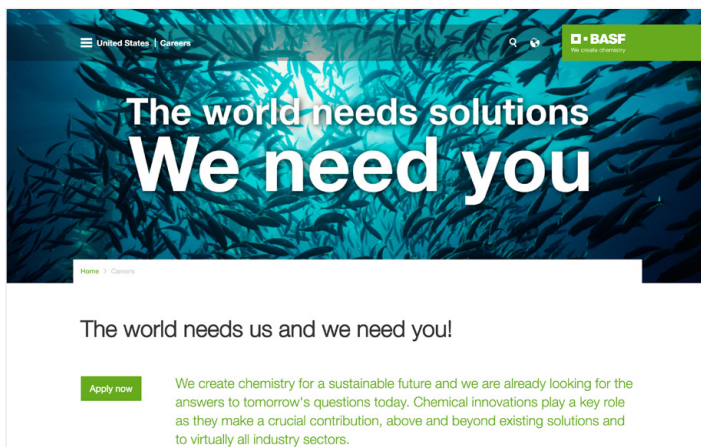


## FONA INTERNATIONAL

FONA is a flavors company based in Chicago that has consistently been named one of Chicago's Best & Brightest Companies to Work For since 2005. Their employer brand slogan is "So much more than just a job – a place to thrive". There are videos interspersed on their Careers site that highlight this culture of growth, including "Why is FONA a special place to work?" and "What 2x4 Growth Means to FONA".

FONA's focus on growth is an excellent example of connecting the corporate brand with the employer brand. One of FONA's organizational goals is 2x4 growth – doubling their growth every four years. They have expertly entwined their focus on growth into their employer brand strategy, as well, as they foster an environment where employees have the ability to thrive.

While most employers reserve benefits discussion for offer negotiation, FONA outlines their benefits clearly on their careers portal. These include 40 hours of free continuing education, automatic 401K contributions of 3%, and birthdays with the CEO. In fact, FONA is so committed to growth that they have developed their own Flavor University – and all of the classes are free to everyone (not just FONA employees).

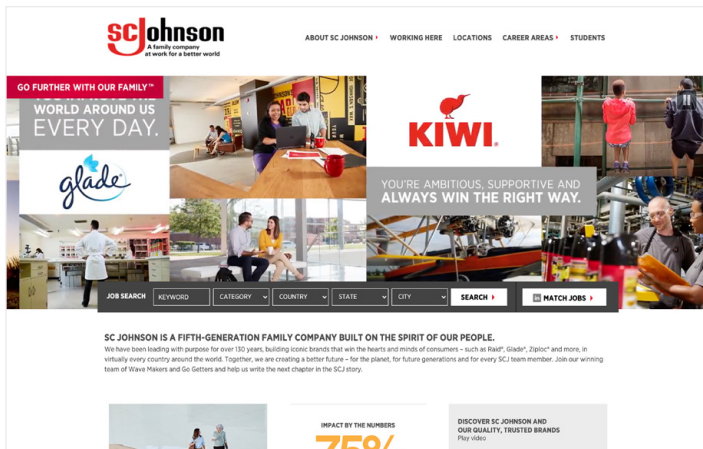


## BASF

BASF is the largest chemical company in the world, and it has won a number of accolades reflecting this, including five consecutive Candidate Experience Awards and being named one of the World's Most Attractive Employers by university students.

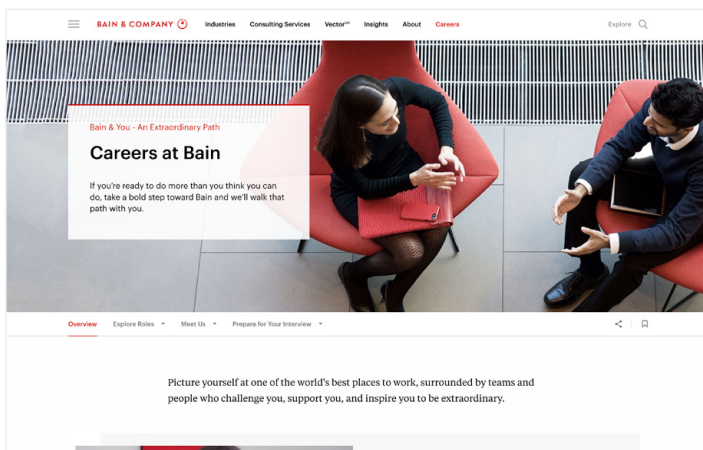
BASF's employer brand is centered around "The power of connected minds." From videos designed to allow candidates to experience specific BASF sites, to profiles highlighting employees at all levels from all over the world, to the you@BASF periodic table highlighting "what's in it for you: competitive compensation, comprehensive benefits, lifelong learning and development opportunities as well as a collaborative, reliable and safe work environment," BASF's career portal invites candidates to truly envision themselves as a member of the team.

# BEST IN CLASS EXAMPLES



## SC JOHNSON

SC Johnson is another company whose employer brand focuses heavily on community. Their slogan is “Go further with our family,” and they are proud to be “a fifth-generation family company built on the spirit of our people.” They have taken their commitment to community a big step farther, and also base their employer brand on the impact employees can make: they have been named one of the Most Reputable Companies and a Global Conservation Hero, as well as winning the Founders Force for Good Award and Corporate Affairs Leadership Award.



## BAIN & COMPANY

Since Glassdoor began their Best Places to Work list in 2009, Bain & Company has never been ranked lower than #4 (including three years at #1). According to their career portal, “...our formula for success has been simple – create a high-impact, supportive culture where immensely talented people are encouraged to be brilliant at what they do.”

Their portal includes information on Bain’s corporate culture and open roles, and it also outlines “What Bain looks for” in candidates and offers candidates “Interview preparation” tips in addition to an educational webinar series.

One of the best things about Bain’s portal is how they personalize it. In a section entitled “Your Bain consulting career”, potential candidates can explore possible career progressions and get a feel of what their day-to-day responsibilities at Bain might be, among other things. Much of it is written in second-person (i.e. “you” instead of “ideal candidates”) so as to connect with visitors on a personal level and to help them really connect with the corporate cultures.





## ABOUT ROPELLA

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*As the world's leading Executive Search Firm specializing in the chemical, consumer products and technology industries, we understand the challenges you face in trying to find the perfect fit for those highly specialized and complex executive positions.*

*Ropella excels at finding those select few executive candidates with the right skills, qualifications, background and management style, who fit your compensation parameters and are ready to relocate.*

*We believe nobody should have to waste time screening resumes of candidates who aren't qualified, don't fit your compensation parameters, aren't serious about the role or aren't ready to relocate. That's why we developed the SMART Search System® to provide our clients with precise and predictable hiring results, giving them a huge competitive advantage.*