



Employer Brand 101

How to Win at Recruitment and Retention through Marketing and Communications

An Imaginasium E-Book



Part 1: Defining Your Employer Brand

Get Intentional about the Story You're Telling

The workforce perfect storm is here.

Record unemployment. Steady economic growth. Upward trending global GDP, U.S. tax policy changes, and ready access to capital. Boomers retiring and recent college graduates leaving the state. Fewer babies being born in the United States.

If you are responsible in any way for your company's growth, you know full well the impact of this perfect storm. And there's a good chance it's keeping you up at night. You see, gone are the days where you can post an open position, wait for a week or two, sift through a pile of applications, interview four or five candidates, and hire the very best person for the job. It's an employee's-choice world out there.

Unlike post-recession America, employees hold all the power. Prospects are shopping for jobs the same way they're shopping for a new smartphone—researching, comparing, and basing decisions on how they feel about the company offering the product. And current employees are evaluating their jobs not only on pay and benefits, but on how well the company aligns with their own beliefs or how proud they are to speak about where they work.

With that kind of shift in the recruitment and retention landscape, what's an employer to do?

Just like a brand selling smartphones to consumers, prospects and employees learn about you from what your organization does and how it acts. They get to know you by what you say and the experience they have when interacting with you. And that means communication is arguably the most important factor in employee recruitment and retention success. The companies that will thrive are the ones who are willing to step out of the traditional paradigm of how they hire and start thinking about how they communicate “what’s in it for you if you choose to work with us” to employees and prospects.

You can call that your employer brand—the perception of who you are as a company and how it will feel to work for you. You can call it your unique value proposition, or what you have to offer as an employer that no one else can match. Uncovering your unique value proposition for current employees and prospective recruits, then communicating that value, is key to positioning yourself as an employer of choice. That’s what we’ve created this e-book to help you do.

But first, let’s take a closer look at what’s going on.



Wisconsin's Workforce Outlook

By 2024, Wisconsin will have an estimated
45,000 open jobs
with no one to fill them*

88% of manufacturers are having trouble
filling open positions in 2018,
compared to 29% in 2011**

*Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development

**Northeast Wisconsin Manufacturing Alliance



The competition for talent is on.

Manufacturing is alive and well in Northeast Wisconsin and beyond. A 2018 study conducted by the Northeast Wisconsin Manufacturing Alliance (NEWMA) revealed that 99 percent of respondents expect their companies' financial health in the next 6–12 months to be healthy or quite healthy. Meaning business is good, and growth is on the horizon. There will be plenty of work. But there won't be enough people to do it. That optimism is overshadowed by the challenges of filling all those open positions. Over the next decade, we now expect to see about 2 million manufacturing jobs going unfilled nationally.

The impact of this workforce gap is real, and it is significant. In states like Wisconsin, where unemployment is extremely low (currently less than 3 percent), manufacturers will have to continue to focus on how to bring more skilled workers into the state from other areas. Which is a sizeable challenge of its own.



Here in Wisconsin, we're already feeling the crunch of that competitive candidate market. A lot of it has to do with the age of the workforce. Experts have been sounding the alarm bell for years on the incredible rate of retirement among baby boomers. Now we're right in the middle of it. The 65-and-older population is expected to increase by two-thirds between 2010 and 2025. We already mentioned Wisconsin's all-time-low unemployment, which was at only 2.9 percent as of August, 2018. Compounding the issue, Wisconsin is falling behind in our ability to keep or attract college grads and out-of-state workers. Frankly, we're losing our people. Since 2010, out-migration has outpaced natural births and out-of-state arrivals.


So what can we do?

What got you here (posting a job opening, then hiring one of the many applicants) won't get you there (keeping pace with the growth projected by 99 percent of manufacturers in Northeast Wisconsin). Technology and social media

make it even easier for employees to share and for job candidates to find information on employers. The way we recruit, attract, and retain employees has changed. In the same way as service, quality and price are simply the cost of doing business (not what differentiates you to your customers), salary, benefits and job security are the cost of employment (not what differentiates you to your employees).

Employees expect **their experience with an employer** to mirror their experiences with **favorite consumer brands**.

You see, the line between the employee experience and the customer experience is getting smaller and fuzzier. Employees are beginning to expect their experience with an employer to mirror the experiences they have with their favorite consumer brands. Those consumer brands work hard to set themselves apart from their competition, connect with their customers on a meaningful, emotional level, and give them a compelling reason to purchase (they offer a strong customer value proposition). In exactly the same way, employers need to work hard to set themselves apart from other employers, connect with candidates and employees on a meaningful, emotional level, and give job seekers and current staff a compelling reason to choose (or continue to choose) to work for them. That's the most powerful way to attract and retain not just a workforce, but a workforce that can give you a competitive advantage.



What is an employer brand?

An employer brand, simply put, is a company's reputation as an employer and the value it offers to its employees. It's how your own employees, candidates, and even the community around you perceive your company as a place to work. While branding has always been a crucial tool that marketers use to communicate and develop relationships with consumers, we are now seeing that branding is a crucial part of the talent attraction formula, too. Marketing is having a huge impact on recruiting, which is why now, more than ever, HR and marketing departments must be in lock-step when it comes to recruitment and retention communications.

An employer brand is an investment, not an expense.

It's important to remember that you're not just reaching out with a benevolent hand to offer employment. Anyone who comes to work for you is investing in you. They're giving you their own most valuable resource—their time. Employment is a two-way street. If your employees are going to invest in your organization, you must invest in them in return. It's the offer on which your entire employer brand is based.

And that doesn't just mean investing by offering competitive pay or good benefits. It means taking the time to develop the kind of culture people want to be part of. Creating the opportunity for advancement today's candidates and employees are looking for. Clearly standing for something your people can get behind and help you achieve. Developing that employer value proposition requires a time investment from every level of your organization, but when done properly, you'll reap great benefits.

86% of HR professionals agree that recruitment is becoming more like marketing.



An employer brand communicates who you really are.

Your employer brand is an important part of creating a great experience for both employees and candidates. It's how an organization communicates its identity to both potential and current employees. It encompasses your mission, values, culture and personality. A positive employer brand communicates that the organization is a good employer and a great place to work. It's how you position yourself as an employer of choice. And if you don't get intentional about what that employer brand is communicating (and make any necessary organizational changes to live up to it), everyone else will define it for you. Whether you like the outcome or not.

Employer brand affects recruitment of new employees, retention and engagement of current employees, and the overall perception of the organization in the market. And it doesn't stop there, because your employees are the creators and keepers of your customer experience. Ultimately, how customers perceive you will be affected by your employee experience.

Employer Brand by the Numbers

- According to Gallup, **36% of job seekers** said a company's employer brand is the most important consideration in a potential new job. That means your employer value proposition must be truly unique and compelling.
- According to Glassdoor, **69% of Americans** would not take a job with a company that had a bad reputation, even if they were unemployed.
- Also according to Glassdoor, **84% would consider leaving their current jobs** if offered another role with a company that had an excellent reputation. Most people would require less than a 10% salary increase to consider such a move.
- According to talentnow.com, when making a decision on where to apply for a job, **84% of job seekers** say the reputation of a company and employer is important.
- **9 out of 10 candidates** apply for a job when it's from an employer brand that is actively maintained, according to workable.com.



What makes a good
employer brand?

Employer Brand: Intentional or By Default?

Every company has an employer brand, whether they like it or not. It's the way employees and recruits perceive you as an employer.

- If you don't manage your brand, others will manage it for you.
 - What are you promising, and are you living up to those promises?
 - With more sharing avenues than ever before (social media, Glassdoor, word-of-mouth) it is easier than ever for employees to share and access information about employers. Are they sharing what you'd want them to share?
-

An effective employer brand lowers the cost to attract candidates, differentiates you from your competition, leads to retention, and trickles out to the customer experience. Successful employer brands are true, credible, relevant, distinctive, and aspirational. And they're built on strong employer value propositions.

So what goes into a strong employer value proposition?

An employer value proposition:

- Goes beyond salary and traditional benefits
- Includes culture, which is a little more intangible
- Is more than a pingpong table or beer tap in the lounge
- Describes what an organization stands for, requires, and offers as an employer
- Is what motivates and engages employees

Towers Watson research shows that organizations who use their employer value proposition most effectively are **five times more likely to report that their employees are highly engaged**. They're also **twice as likely to report achieving financial performance significantly above their peers** when compared to companies that use their employer value proposition less effectively.

Let's take a closer look at several characteristics of an effective employer brand.

1 It's authentic.

"Authentic" is a word that gets thrown around a lot in the marketing world. It's unfortunate that it's become such a buzzword. Because when we talk about authenticity, what we really mean is speaking the truth about who you are, what you stand for, and telling your own, unique story. When marketing is authentic, what someone hears about you should line up with their actual experience of you. In other words, don't say one thing to get people in the door, then show them the real you once they're in the door.

- Embrace who you are. Mine for insights into who your employees are and why they choose to work for you. Dig until you understand what values you're built upon and how they intersect with the people you want to hire.
- Understand your own culture and your own vision of who you want to be as a company, then connect with the people who believe what you believe. Who are passionate about what you're passionate about. Offer purpose and meaning and a future, because that's what jobseekers are really looking for.

Doing the soul-searching to find that authentic story is powerful. Because that's the stuff that really hits people where it counts.

Only 19% of the nearly 2,000 global employees surveyed **feel strongly that the work experience their employer promotes publicly is matched by reality.** In other words, what employees saw on a careers site, on the company's social channels, or what they heard from recruiters was **often inconsistent with what they experienced when they joined the company.**

— A study by Weber Shandwick, in partnership with KRC Research

2

It gains the positive impact of employee referrals.

- Referrals decrease time to hire and cost of hire
 - Hiring a referred candidate is always faster than posting the job on boards, receiving candidates, screening them and taking them through your entire process.
 - On average, it takes 29 days to hire a referred candidate, 39 days for a candidate who comes through job boards and 55 days to hire a candidate who comes through a careers site.
 - Referred candidates cost 40% less compared to job boards.
- Referrals make better candidates
 - There is a strong correlation between the performance of your top employees and their referred candidates. A high performer will attract other high performers to the team.
 - The chances of a referred candidate getting fired decrease by an average of 350%.
- Referrals increase employee retention
 - Referred candidates are highly interested in joining your company. 46% of referred hires are retained for at least one year after they were hired. In comparison, the same number stands at 33% for careers sites and 22% for hires made via job boards.
- Referrals increase employee engagement
 - Employees have stakes in the company's success, so if they are engaged and active in building out the team with top performers, they will feel more valued and appreciated.
 - Additionally, recognizing the actions of your employees, rewarding quality efforts, and creating friendly competition to achieve a team goal will also boost employee appreciation, which helps raise motivation.

3

It focuses on people.

Great employer brands are picky. They don't let just anyone join their team, but they make sure the recruit aligns with their values and culture (no matter how fancy or impressive their resume is or how badly they need to fill the position).

4 It's intentional about culture.

Great employers truly know who they are, why they exist, and what they want to accomplish in the future. They're able to effectively communicate this message to employees. And they mean it.

They use their core values to drive all internal branding decisions. The upside to this is protecting and prioritizing your culture. The downside is potentially turning down money (or clients) if they know that the opportunity goes against what they're trying to build. It's about consistency in both messaging and action. If you can't follow through with who you say you are (employer brand promise), you'll never earn complete buy-in from your employees.

To further protect their employer brand, organizations focused on maintaining a positive company culture make sure to onboard and educate new employees. They don't just throw them into the mix hoping that they'll "figure it out."

5 It empowers employees to learn.

Great employer brands not only provide training and development, but they actually advocate for it.

On top of developing talent and providing resources for their employees to learn, great employer brands set the vision and get out of the way. They teach the principles, but don't micromanage. They understand that it's important not only for their current internal brand but also for the future of their company to teach employees how to think and dynamically problem solve, which will never happen if they're constantly spoon-fed information.

How Manufacturers Can Develop an Employer Branding Strategy

Competition for talent is high, and it's not letting up any time soon. According to manufacturing.net, if current trends continue, by the year 2025, there might be as many as 3.5 million new jobs available in manufacturing — but we might still be short on qualified workers by 2 million or more. What can manufacturers do?

The first step, as in so many situations, is recognizing the issue. Realizing not just that there's a problem, but that there are steps you can take now to address it. Then understand the critical role a strong employer brand and effective communication can play in meeting the recruitment and retention challenge.

In the next chapter, we'll go in-depth on how to build your employer brand, step by step.



How to Create a Compelling Employer Brand

Putting the pieces in place

The easiest way to approach an employer brand is to think of it in similar terms as a customer-facing brand, only instead of selling someone your products, you're selling them a reason to commit their future to your company. Like any branding, it's all about getting into your customer's (employee's) head and seeing the world through their eyes. Speak to potential employees about the things they care about, not the things you care about, and help them visualize themselves working for you.

Another benefit of thinking of your employer brand in similar terms as your customer-facing brand is that it helps the two feel homogenous. If to customers you promise one thing and to employees you promise another, that dissonance will undermine both and make your company's overall public presence that much weaker. Therefore, step one will always be to make sure your customer-facing brand is well defined, consistent and working in the marketplace to build a platform for your employer brand to stand on. For the purposes of this book, we'll assume this is in place.

A three-step process

Here at Imaginasium, we use a well-defined three-step process for both customer and employer branding. In this chapter, we'll reveal and unpack that process for you, so you can begin to think about your employer brand in a new way—maybe even do the work to develop the employer brand you're aspiring to.

At a high level, this process follows the tried-and-true three steps of diagnosing the problem, defining a solution, then implementing that solution. We'll look at the phases briefly now, then go into what is included in each in detail.

Uncover

Like any complicated project, the first step is always to take a look at everything we have to work with and audit the current state of things. We call this phase of the process **Uncover**. It will include collecting any materials we might use for recruiting, trade-show graphics, job postings, web pages, social media platforms, etc., as well as conducting new research into employee perceptions and engagement levels.

Define

Once we know what we have to work with, we begin to define where we want to go. In the **Define Phase** we start at a very high level of figuring out what our company offers that either is unique or, if common, that we think we do well and employees appreciate. That last bit is key. We need to work from the employee's perspective through all of this. And, hint, pay and benefits are the table stakes, they're not going to tip the scale. At minimum, you have to pay competitively and offer the benefits employees in your field expect. But for a strong employer brand, you'll need to offer employees more than that.

Align

Rubber, meet road. This is when all of these weeks (sometimes months) of work begin to manifest themselves in the real world. The **Align Phase** often starts with a well-defined roll-out plan for how to introduce these pieces both publicly and internally. Again, don't skip that last part. Making sure that current employees are on board will be crucial. Some of your messaging may be aspirational and they may scratch their head at hearing you tout things they aren't (yet) experiencing.

And, like any project, iteration will be important. Don't be afraid to evolve your messaging as you receive feedback from the marketplace on how effective it is.

Let's get into the nitty gritty.



Uncover

As mentioned, we can't figure out how to get where we want to go without first figuring out where we are. The **Uncover Phase** is all about gathering data. We never want to make recommendations based solely on "gut" and assumptions.

There will be five main sub-phases within **Uncover**:

1. Data Collection (review current recruitment materials, internal communications, etc.)
2. Employee Engagement Surveys
3. Competitive Research
4. Discovery Session
5. Key Findings Report

Data Collection

Start by collecting everything you currently produce that might impact your employer brand. This will include physical samples as well as digital samples. Then audit your messaging throughout. What themes are presenting themselves? Are there repeated phrases or headlines you use? What single message would a job seeker in today's market come away with?

Your employer brand is spread across a slew of materials. Some you may not normally consider employer branding, but they're important nonetheless. The types of material you should collect could include:

- **Careers Page** of your website. Probably the single most important way of communicating your employer brand.
- **Sample Job Postings.** Read the copy. Does it offer a resounding “why” for working here?
- **Employer Event Graphics.** Trade show booths, brochures, videos, anything you might hand out at a show to recruit employees.
- **Employee Handbook.** This is part of that internal alignment step. How do you speak to and treat your current employees? Is there a gap between what you say to someone once they've started and what you tell them in the recruitment process?

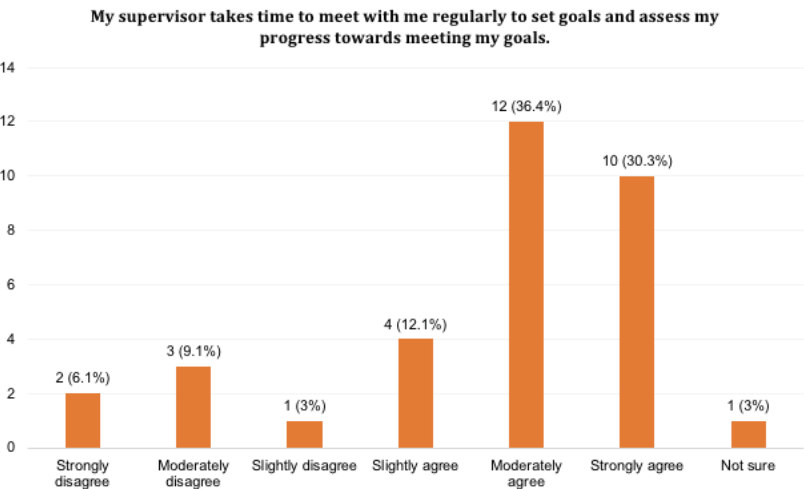




Employee Engagement Surveys

The next crucial element is to get a strong handle on how engaged your current employees are and what they are saying about working for you. We know that your employees are hands down your strongest source of referrals. Therefore, knowing what they think about working for you will be a fundamental step in defining a new employer brand.

This can be as complicated or as simple as it needs to be, from hiring an outside consultant to gather and analyze statistically significant data, to using simple Google survey forms and collecting it internally. We have done both successfully.

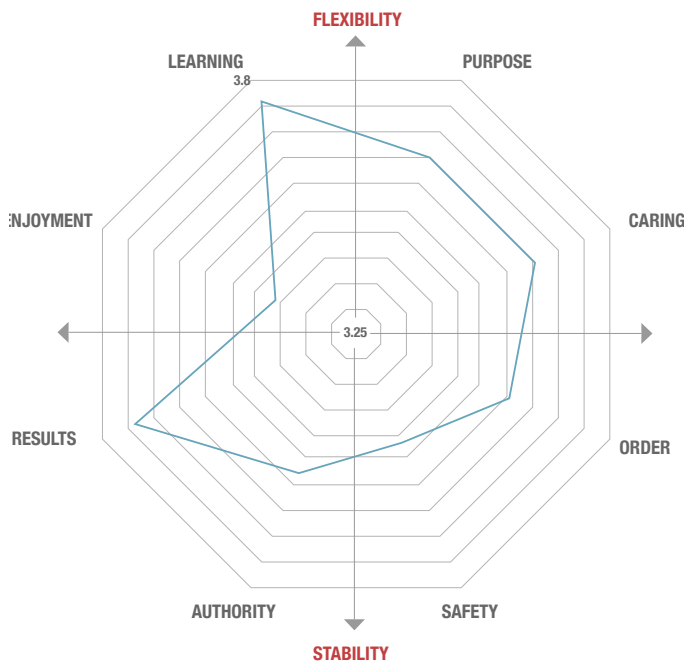


Example of an employee engagement survey question

Especially if you're doing this yourself, the survey should be short and easy to complete. Any type of incentive you can offer to get a more complete picture would help, too. And make sure you pick a solution that will be accessible to both wired and non-wired employees. Allow time during working hours to complete the survey and give a short and firm deadline for when it should be completed.

Often, sliding-scale questions give us better responses than open-ended questions and allow us to quantify the results. Some of the questions you may find useful to ask could include:

1. How would you rate your overall experience as a **Company** employee? Please select the numbered response that best represents your feelings. (1-10)
2. From what you know by talking with other employees, how do you think your co-workers would rate their overall experience as a **Company** employee? Please select the numbered response that best represents your feelings. (1-10)
3. In some organizations, employees can see their role as a job where they need to put in their standard time and take home a paycheck. In other organizations, employees feel that they are part of something more than their job or role and are invested in the company's overall vision, mission and values. Where would you fall between these two points? Please select the numbered response that best represents your feelings. (1-10)



A spider chart from a recent employee engagement survey.

Knowing what employees think about working for you will be a fundamental step in defining a new employer brand.

4. The following questions are rated on a scale of Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree and can then be graphed in a spider chart to show the health of the overall organization:

- a. I feel highly valued as a person beyond the work that I do.
- b. I am proud to tell others that I work at **Company**.
- c. My supervisor takes time to meet with me regularly to set goals and assess my progress towards meeting my goals.
- d. I feel that my individual work contributes significantly to the overall goals of **Company** as an organization.
- e. Etc.

With a clear picture of how your employees currently feel, you will have better insight into what you should tell others who might want to work with you. And you have something to test against what your competitors are doing.



Competitive Research

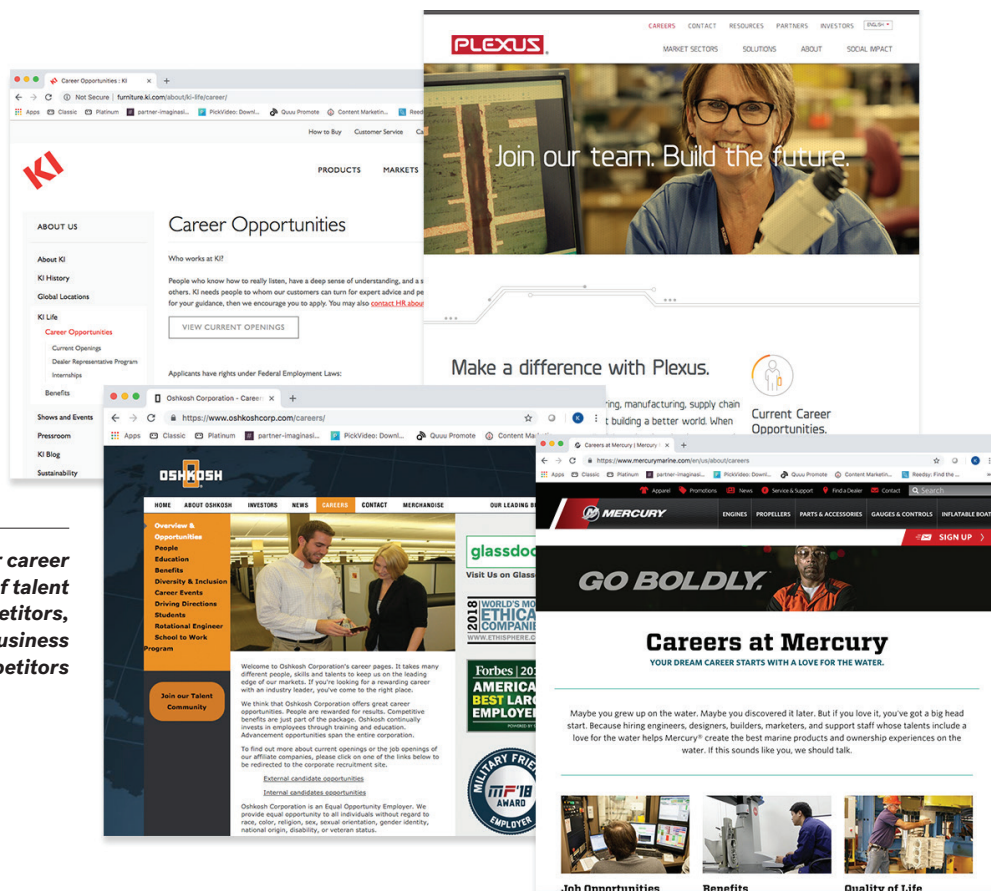
We've already covered how competitive it is finding good talent, so it shouldn't come as a surprise that you'll need to consider who your employee competitors are, just as you need to look at your customer competitors.

For competitive research, you'll need to consider things like geography and skill sets, as well as brand appeal. Who out there is trying to hire the same types of people as you (CNC machinists, engineers, welders, sales people, etc.), where are they located relative to your locations and, frankly, how "sexy" is it to work for them versus to work for you? Defining that appeal is the whole point of this process. All things being equal (pay, benefits, location, type of work), do you have a message and a reason for them to come to you rather than those other companies?

For this step of the process, list your top three to five competitors. Audit their websites. Don't just look at the careers pages, although do start there. Look at their customer-facing pages, too. How do they present themselves? A family-oriented company? A visionary company doing exciting work? A company that values growth and ongoing training and will invest in their employees? Why does the company even exist at all? How are they impacting the world or their communities? Do they look "cool?" Do they look "safe?" Do they look like a company you could be "proud" to work at?

Capture their essence in a single headline along with some brand elements and put them on individual boards side by side. Look for ways that they're similar and then, in there, you'll see where you have opportunity to be different and stand out.

Consider career pages of talent competitors, not business competitors





Discovery Session

This will often be the single most important element of uncovering your employer brand. A discovery session is a 3–4-hour (sometimes longer, rarely shorter) meeting that will pull together representatives from across the organization. The purpose is to begin discussing where your employer brand is currently and where it should go from here.

Frankly, this is a difficult session to run internally. Without an outsider's perspective, it's easy to get sucked into minutiae and lose sight of the bigger picture. That said, if you do decide to tackle this internally, here are some tricks to help it run smoothly:



Have an empowered moderator. This person will guide the conversation, plan the agenda, and determine the amount of time spent on each section. This person will also have the authority—nay, the mandate—to shut down any individuals who might be trying to dominate the conversation, including the CEO! (Again, why an outside consultant can often manage this better.) However, the moderator should not “lead” the conversation. They can help it stay on track, but they shouldn't force it into some preconceived notions.



Have a clear agenda (but don't share it with members). Know what you hope to get from the meeting. Often, this will start by identifying what challenges are going on both in the marketplace in general and within your organization. Move from status and challenges into identifying and agreeing on goals and what success looks like, then begin identifying specific strengths and messaging.



Have breaks often. Don't allow phones. Someone checking their messages in the middle of the session sends signals to everyone else that this isn't important. Have breaks often and remind people that they can conduct their business at those times.



Have snacks. Keeping participants' energy up is key to keeping them engaged.



The Discovery Session is often the single most important element of uncovering your employer brand.

Who is in the Discovery Session? That depends on your goals. Obviously, those who have the most insight into how to recruit and persuade people will want to be there. That often includes Human Resources and Marketing. We often ask for a couple of “front-line” employees who are doing the work and maybe have a pulse on what the company’s current employer brand looks like. From there, you may include one or two leadership members who have a strong grasp on the company’s vision for where they want to go and what kind of talent they’ll need to get there.

All told, we like to keep the total number of participants to 6–10. More than that, and it’ll be hard to manage all of the feedback. Less, you may not get a full picture.

Key Findings Report

Finally, with all of the information collected, compile a single deliverable that you can share internally that summarizes everything you’ve discovered. There will be sections in the report for each of the buckets you just filled.

This document is only as valuable as the insights you put into it. Therefore, it should not simply be all of your notes compiled. Take the results of your Employee Engagement Surveys, for example, and put them into charts and graphics that simplify the findings. Summarize your notes from the Discovery Session into bullets, then write an executive summary highlighting what you think are the most important pieces of information that will guide the next phase: **Define.**



Define

KEY
STRENGTHS

UNIQUE
SELLING
PROPOSITIONS

UNIQUE
BUYING
PROPOSITIONS


POSITION
STATEMENT

PERSONALITY
AND VOICE

Finally! That's often the feeling we have when we get to this phase. You'll have been chomping at the bit to start solving throughout the entire Uncover Phase. Well, guess what. Now you get to.

Define will begin to put into words everything you've been "feeling" up until now. Again, there's a specific process we use at Imaginasium for this and it breaks down into these main elements:

1. Define all of your Key Strengths.
2. Decide on the five strongest strengths. Those become your Unique Selling Propositions (USPs).
3. Define the emotion an employee/candidate will feel related to each of those USPs. These are called the Unique Buying Propositions (UBPs).
4. Put it all together into a Positioning Statement for your employer brand.
5. Begin defining Personality and Voice—the actual words and feelings your employees and candidates should hear and feel when considering working with you.



*Key strengths don't have
to be unique, just so long as
they're authentic.*

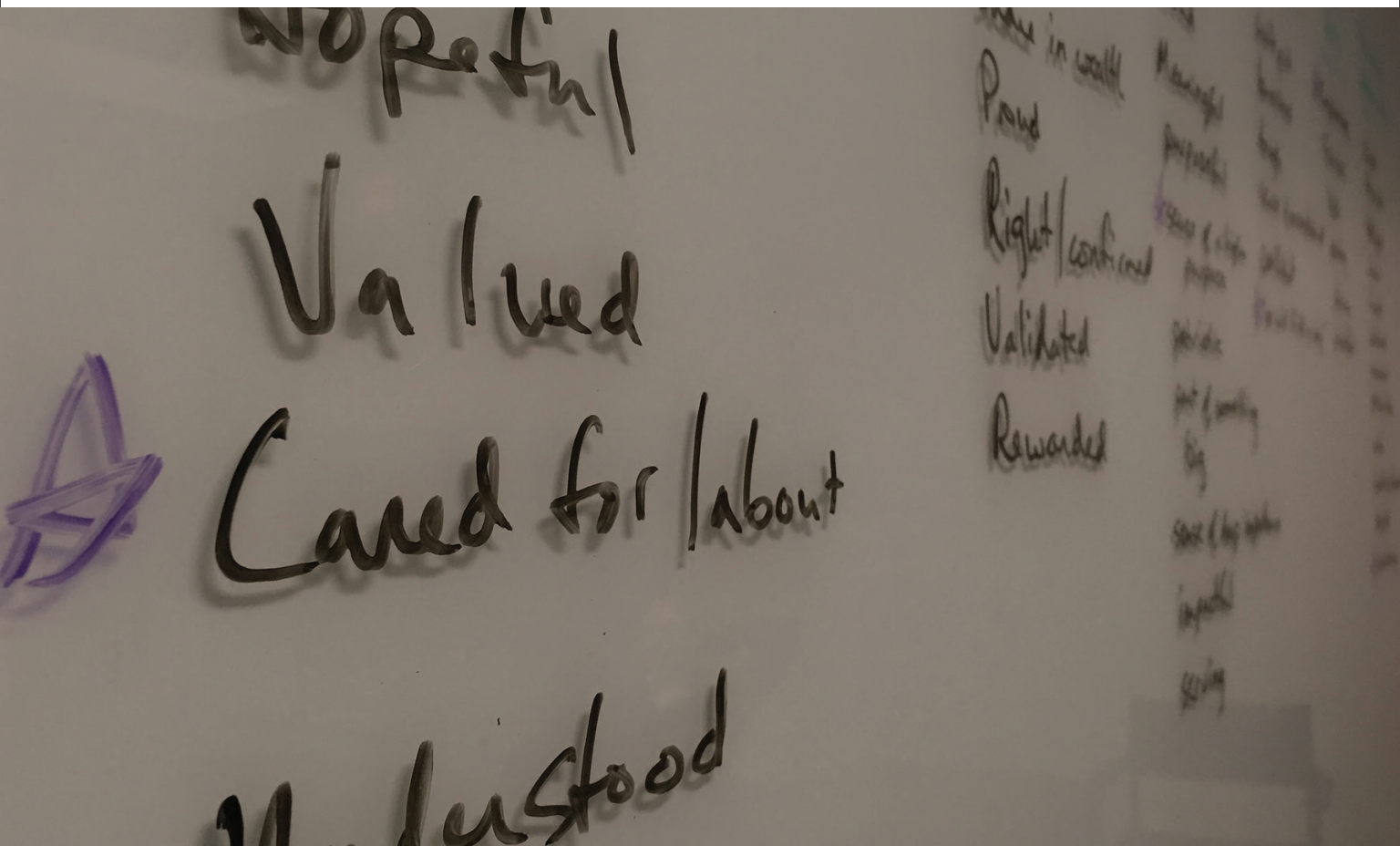
Key Strengths

With the information you've gathered, pull your team together and begin brainstorming all of the key strengths you feel your company can offer and stand behind. These don't have to be unique, just so long as they are authentic.

For example, if we were to do an employer brand for a large manufacturing employer in Northeast Wisconsin, let's call them Heavy Duty Equipment Corp. (or HDEC; apologies to any actual company named Heavy Duty Equipment Corp.), we might list things like:

- Hardworking (Midwest work ethic)
- Patriotic
- Proven
- Durable
- Strong market value, investing
- Approachable, real
- Saving lives
- Supporting heroes
- People-first culture
- Perseverance
- Grit
- Innovative spirit
- Ethical—clear definition of what ethical means, do the right thing
- Caring leadership
- Making a difference in people's lives
- Longevity/history
- Family of brands
- Resilient
- Problem-solver
- AND MANY MORE!

Do you see what we're doing? We'll throw out all of the possible things people might think of when they think of Heavy Duty Equipment Corp. We try to stay away from emotions and focus on facts at this stage. It's not uncommon to come out of this brainstorm with 40 or more Key Strengths.

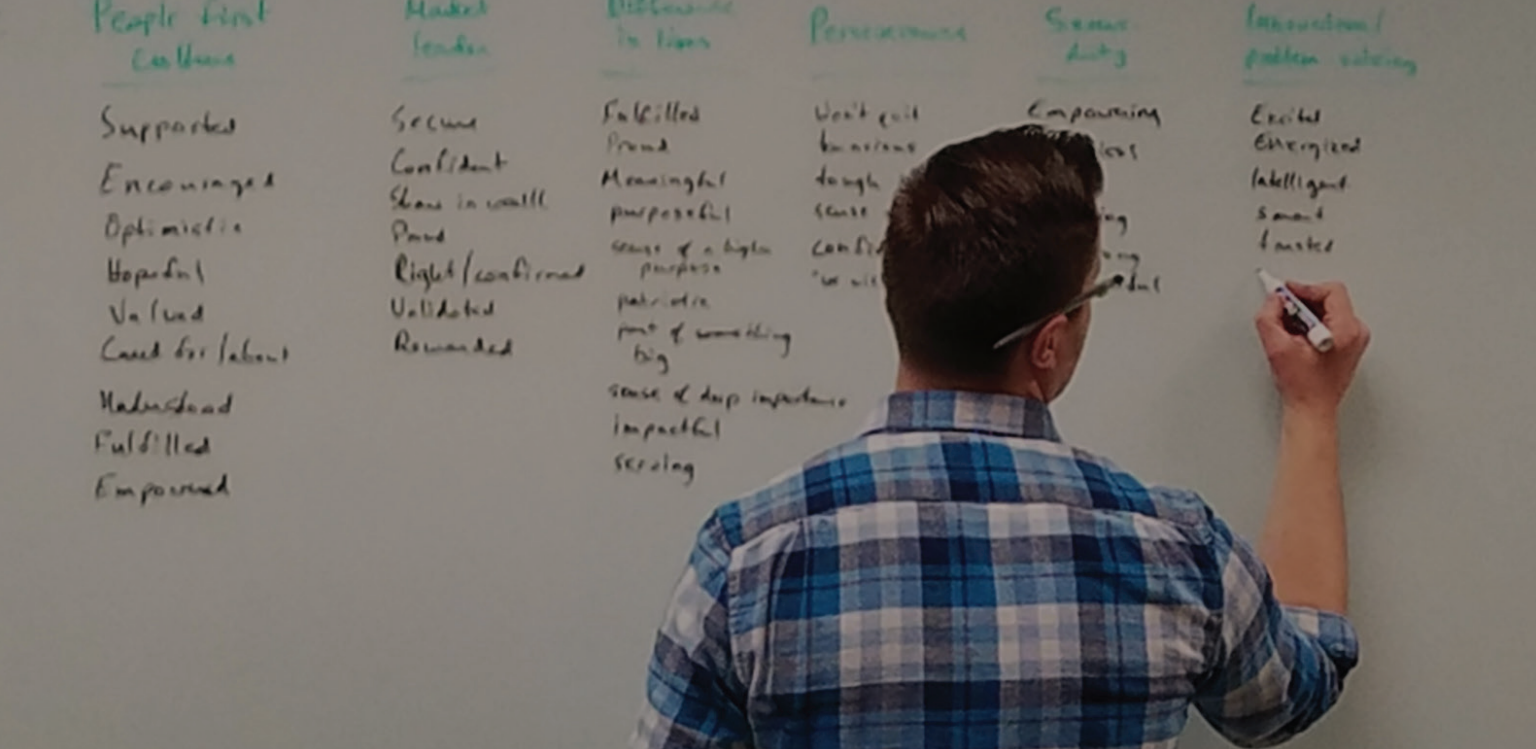


Unique Selling Propositions (USPs)

Nobody will listen to or care about 40 reasons they should work for your company, though. And not all of those reasons are of equal importance. That's why we then whittle down the list to the top five most powerful key strengths you offer.

Have your team take a minute to vote and select their own top five, then somehow designate what they are. Obviously, the ones with the most votes would seem to have the most resonance, but it doesn't always mean those are the right five. Have discussion around what you mean by a certain phrase or why you feel this Key Strength supersedes another Key Strength. Check your Key Strengths against the competition. Do they differentiate you? If not, is there another Key Strength that maybe didn't get as many votes, but would differentiate you? Consider replacing.

In the end, these become your USPs. They are the top five rational reasons someone should come work for you and dedicate their career to you. But we know nobody purchases based on reason and rational choice. They purchase (read: apply for work) based on emotion.



Unique Buying Propositions (UBPs)

That's why the next step in our process is to take your five USPs and, for each one, begin listing any emotions you think a person should feel when they first learn of that strength. What one or two words will best describe the feeling they'll get from that strength? For example, if one of the USPs we picked for HDEC were "a people-first culture," we might list possible emotions as:

A **people-first culture** makes me feel:

- Supported
- Encouraged
- Optimistic
- Hopeful
- Valued
- Cared for/about
- Understood
- Fulfilled
- Empowered

Oftentimes, what will happen is you'll end up with a number of synonyms for the same emotion. That's okay, because the next step is to select the single strongest emotion out of that list. Every phrase will have nuances of meaning. Shades that color it this way or that. Discuss those nuances and come to consensus on the single strongest one. Don't worry, you can keep the other words in that list. It's wise to, because they'll come in handy when you begin writing messaging. But for now, as an organization, we need to agree that this emotion is strategically aligned with how we want to be perceived in the employer marketplace.

For our example above, in case you were wondering, we would select "cared for/about" as what we want job candidates to feel it'll be like to work at HDEC. Remember, this is only one UBP. You'll do this for each of your USPs.



Positioning Statement

A positioning statement is a structured sentence that explains who your company is and who you're talking to, what sets you apart and why someone should care. It's a single sentence stating exactly what your position in the employer marketplace will be.

Often, it can feel clumsy and hard to fit into one sentence. That last part is intentional. If the sentence gets to be too long, a string of clauses linked together by commas and semicolons, you'll know you're not making the tough choices you need to make. A position is as much about what you aren't as what you are. You've done a lot of work up to this point. Make that work worth it by being bold and strategic.

There are plenty of templates you can use to create a positioning statement. We use the following format:

To (audience) ...

Company Name is (fact) ...

That (point of difference) ...

Because (reason why) ...

A position is as much about **what you aren't as what you are**. Make your work worth it by being **bold and strategic**.

Let's go ahead and keep using our make-believe client Heavy Duty Equipment Corp. as an example. With the key strengths, USPs and UBPs all defined, we might write a positioning statement for them like:

TO	➔	current and potential employees
Heavy Duty Equipment Corp IS	➔	a market-leading manufacturer of severe-duty vehicles and equipment
THAT	➔	invests in our people and in innovation that revolutionizes the way people work
BECAUSE	➔	every day people doing some of the toughest work on the planet put their faith in us—they don't quit, and we won't quit on them.

The first two fields are pretty straightforward. Facts. The differentiator field—the “that” field—can often be where positioning statements begin to fall apart. Too many times we see companies trying to force every USP or key strength they can into that block. Again, make the tough choices. Narrow in on the single one or two strengths that will help candidates understand what sets you apart.

Finally, the last field should be emotional. It needs to summarize WHY I would want to work there. What it'll feel like to go into work every day for a company like yours. No, not everyone will produce a product with as clear an impact in people's lives as the next company, but every organization exists for reasons bigger than simply “to make money.” Find that reason. Plant a flag there and then let everyone see it flying proud.





Personality and Voice

We're nearing the end. We've outlined everything we think there is that sets you apart. We've narrowed that list down to the top five powerful strengths called your USPs. We've assigned targeted emotions to each of those and called those your UBPs. We've condensed everything into a strategic position that you will hold in the employer marketplace. And now we get to put words to all of that.

Just as your customer-facing brand has a personality and a voice to how it speaks, so too should your employee-facing brand. They won't be exactly the same, though they should influence each other.

There are a number of ways to define your employer personality, but start by thinking of your company as a literal person. What do they look like? What choices do they make in how they present themselves to the world? Are they polite and formal? Casual and edgy? Do they like to laugh or are they all business? When they speak, do they use slang and simple language or do they use jargon-heavy, technical language?

Just as your
customer-facing
brand has a
personality and
a voice to how
it speaks, so
too should your
employee-facing
brand.

Think about it from an employee's perspective and choose phrases that will help them understand what working for you means. You might describe your culture as "fast-thinking, fast-working, fast-playing and fast-learning" or you might describe it as a company of "strategic and deep-thinking problem solvers."

Voice presents itself in every word choice, every phrase, the length of your sentences and grammar. A lot can be determined about a company based on how they phrase a job posting. Does it sound like someone with a law degree wrote it? Process and formal structure are probably important to that organization. Does it sound snappy or edgy (even using colorful language)? Then maybe it'll be the kind of place where titles are less important than ideas and results.

BRAND PERSONALITY

Think about personality and voice from an employee's perspective. Speak in a way that helps them understand what working for you means.

This isn't just for fun, either. Nobody wants to apply to or be hired into a position they're not a good fit for. It costs the company time and money to train then fire someone who isn't a good fit. And it costs the employee lost opportunities at other positions and self-confidence if they are thrust into a situation they can't succeed in. Voice matters. It helps pre-screen applicants.

By the end of the **Define Phase**, you will have a clear picture of what kind of company you want to be in the marketplace. You'll have written down your differentiators and why they matter. You'll know how you want to speak and present yourself to employees and candidates.

At this point, we recommend compiling all of the work you've done to date into an Employer Brand Language Manual. By having this documented, you can share it with any team members who might touch elements in the next phase—the **Align Phase**.



Align


It's been a lot of work, but you are now ready to roll this puppy out. This phase is harder to pin down, because it will vary for every company. Depending on resources (both time and money), as well as need, you'll want to consider how all of the thinking and planning you've just gone through makes its way into actual materials out in the marketplace.

It helps to break this into two primary considerations.

- 1. INTERNAL**— How will the new employer brand be presented to current employees?
- 2. EXTERNAL**— How will the new employer brand be presented to career candidates?

Internal

You need to first make sure everyone inside your own walls is on board and can stand behind what you want to put out in the public. If you try to position yourselves one way, but then all of your employees are secretly out there calling bunk on your claims, you will have a serious problem. Plus, as you fill positions with candidates who bought into one message, once they're on the job they'll be surrounded by people who feel completely opposite about your brand. No bueno.



You need to first make sure everyone inside your own walls is on board and can stand behind what you put out in the public.

Start by defining an internal roll-out plan. List any and all tactics you can think of for how this new employer brand should come to life inside your company. Some questions you might ask yourself could be:

- Will this be a “splash” event roll-out or will it be slow and quiet?
- If you have multiple locations and shifts, how will you make sure everyone has an equal chance to hear the message?
- If any elements of the new employer brand are aspirational, what action items do we have to define to get there? How do we make our dream a reality?
- What tools or processes do we already have available to roll this out?
 - Regular meetings
 - Intranet
 - Reporting structure
 - Etc.
 - Message boards
- Are there environmental changes (signage or other communication inside your physical space) we could make to help this internal brand feel real and keep it front and center in people’s daily work?
- Are there new programs or competitions we could create to gamify or incentivize our employer brand?
- How can we better use technology to get our message out internally?
- How can we make sure we have equal plans for wired and non-wired employees?



External

Everyone on board? Good, now we can (finally) get things rolling out in the marketplace. After all, this is why you even started this process. You need more and better candidates applying to your job openings. If your company is going to get to that next level, you need the right talent in place. Thus, a revised, powerful employer brand.

Remember how we said that your customer-facing brand influences your employer brand? Here's where you're going to really depend on that. Without a doubt, your strongest recruiting tool will be your website. It's the place everyone will go to when they're thinking about applying for work with you. It's where they'll go to check out if you're even a company worthy of their talents. They'll judge you on what you say it's like to work with you (careers, about, social responsibility pages, etc.) and they'll judge you on what you tell your customers it's like to work with you (everything else). Make sure both of them are singing in harmony.

Candidates will judge you on **what you say it's like to work with you and on what you tell customers it's like to work with you.** Make sure both are singing in harmony.

Again, we recommend drafting a plan for how you will roll out your brand externally. Then prioritize based on impact, cost and time to implement. Few companies can afford to redo everything at once. Updating your website to reflect the new brand will almost always be the most important and first step. However, you may be in an industry that depends heavily on recruiting at schools and trade shows. If that's the case, graphics, booth designs and handouts might be more important, or a close second.

As you're creating your roll-out strategy and materials, look for any opportunities to template or reuse messaging. Job postings will often have some boilerplate elements. Write those in the new voice and make them available to all departments that might need them.

Begin finding ways of putting your UBPs into your messaging everywhere you can. These are the five most powerful emotional reasons someone has to work for you. Write headlines and copy around those and remember to always focus on what's in it for the employee, not what's in it for you. Go beyond things like pay and benefits and help them see how they can be fulfilled working for you—how you'll help them find satisfaction and happiness in their career.

Where we work is easily one of the most important decisions we ever make. We'll spend more time at our jobs than we will with our own families. You need to earn employees' dedication. Show them a vision of a place where they can do meaningful work and be rewarded for it more than they will at "the other guys'" shop.

Do those things consistently, powerfully and fairly and you'll have an employer brand that'll be the envy of your competitors.



Part 2: Aligning HR and Marketing

Create an Authentic Experience, Inside and Out

An Imaginasium E-Book



You've defined your employer brand. Now what?

In the first section of this e-book we set the groundwork for your employer brand. You uncovered the true heart of your organization—what you stand for, why you do what you do, why it matters—and defined a way to communicate it to employees and candidates. You're all set to flood your company with high-octane internal communication. You're ready to build and reinforce a culture that drives your team to deliver the kind of authentic customer experience your brand is out there promising.

But is that it?

Your employer brand is not a one-and-done event. It's a constant. An employer brand is a living organism—you have to feed it, nurture it, check in on it, and pay attention to how it's changing. But who's responsible for that?

Who owns your employer brand?

The reality is, companies love to put initiatives under the direction of one department. In the case of employer branding, marketing might take the reins. They're the communication professionals, and besides, we do call this a "brand." But we've found that perhaps more often it falls to human resources. After all, they're the department that deals directly with the employee/employer relationship. We often think of marketing as responsible for the external/customer experience, and we think of HR as responsible for the internal/employee experience. So HR takes the lead, because it makes sense.

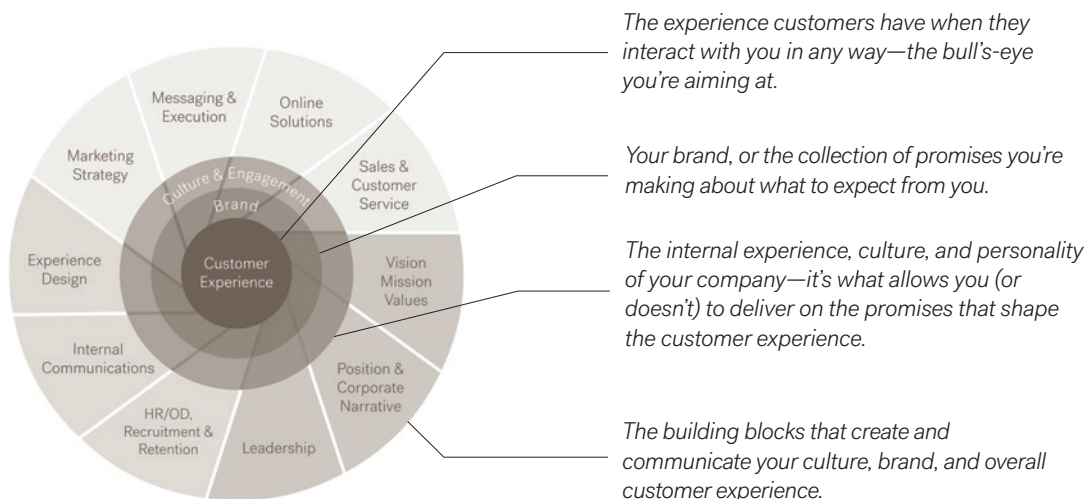
But it also creates a problem.

Here's where it probably helps to give you just a brief glimpse into where we're coming from. At Imaginasium, we're not HR consultants. We're a marketing communications firm. But we look at marketing a little differently.

When we defined your employer brand, we talked about figuring out your key strengths. Your unique selling propositions. The emotions your brand needs to speak to. How to position yourself as an employer. Those are all marketing things.

But they're also intrinsic to your brand as a whole. It's about the heart and soul of your company. That's why we don't believe marketing can live on its own. From our perspective, the entire point of marketing and branding is to create a great experience. The kind of experience internally that's all wrapped up in culture and personality and makes you an employer people want to work for. Which drives an external experience that customers can't get enough of. It allows you to do a better kind of marketing—you can simply tell the truth about who you are and what you believe, in a way that truly engages customers on a deep, emotional level.

The Customer Experience Ecosystem



That means everything you believe and do—whether it’s leadership setting the vision, HR building the team, sales or service teams interacting with customers, or marketing telling the story—it all has to be in alignment.



But when we keep those two sides of the employer branding story in separate boxes called “human resources” and “marketing,” give them separate budgets, separate objectives, and separate priorities—maybe even house them in separate buildings—the whole customer experience can fall apart.



HR and Marketing: Parts of a Whole

Here's another way to think about it. You may be familiar with the concept of the "say:do ratio." It's the degree to which what you say about your company matches what your company does. It's the reality of what people get out of an interaction with you. The whole point of the idea is to gauge whether what you're saying to customers (internal, external, or otherwise) matches the actual experience of buying or buying into what's been promised.

Everyone wants to say that what you'll experience with their company is great, better, the best you'll find. But if you say it, you have to live up to it. You have to *do* what you promised. Because if you don't, lost sales, hurt relationships, bad publicity, or damaging word of mouth are sure to follow. Especially these days, when everyone has a platform to publish their opinions and experiences sitting in their pocket at all times. A bad review is as far away as the time it takes to tap out a few sentences on a smartphone.

Say and *do* are joined at the hip. The doing is what makes the saying meaningful. And the saying plays a huge part in attracting people to benefit from the doing.

The interesting thing is, you can map your say:do ratio more or less directly to marketing and HR.

The Say:Do Ratio

Say

=

Marketing

Marketing publicly makes the promise
of what customers can expect.



Do

=

Human Resources

It's your people who deliver what
you're promising.

When you get right down to it, employer brand—any brand, really—is about two things. Who you are, and how you communicate it. Both internally and externally. That's why we need to get marketing and HR aligned with each other, aligned with the strategic vision of the company, and consistently collaborating in a way that strengthens your brand experience, inside and out.

Marketing used to be advertising. **Now, marketing is everything you do.** And what you do either adds to the experience or takes away from it.

— Seth Godin

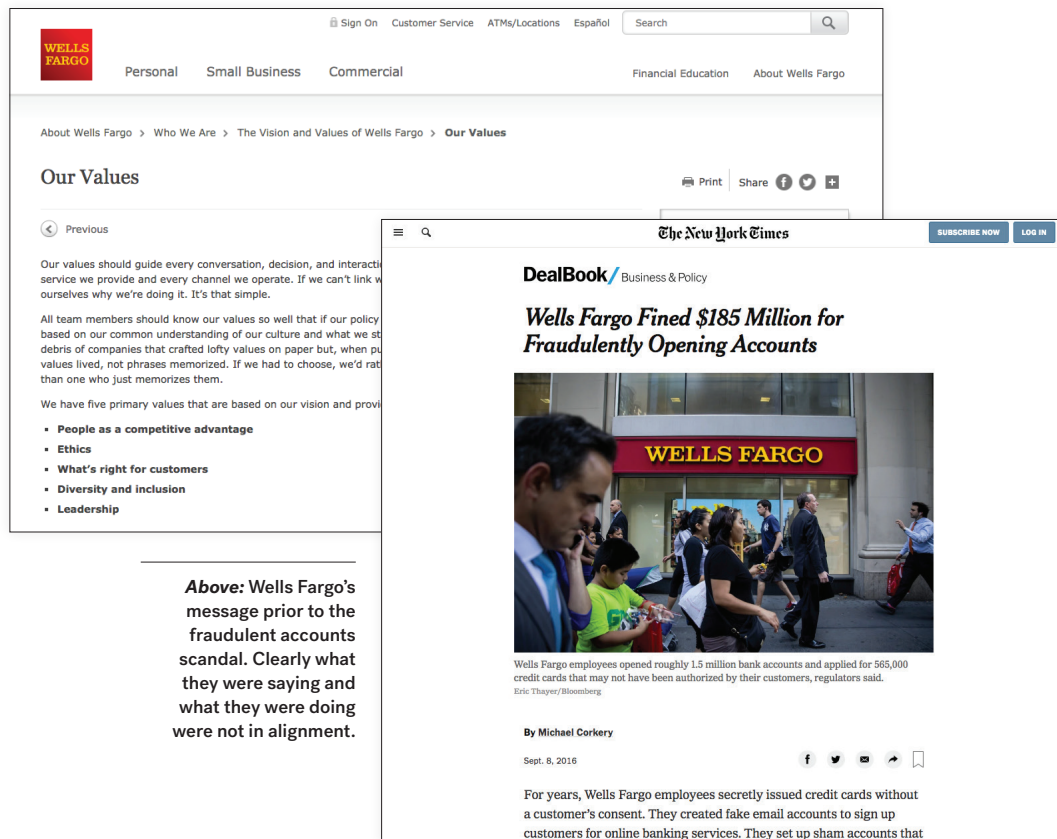


What's at stake?

It all sounds great in theory. It's logical. But what's the real, tangible value of getting HR and marketing working together?

For an extreme example, let's take a look at Wells Fargo. In late 2016, it became painfully apparent that their marketing and their HR were not telling the same story (among other things, of course). Their marketing painted a picture of a longstanding, trustworthy company focused on helping customers create a better life. On their website, they proudly proclaimed “ethics” and “what's right for customers” as two of their core values. Their advertising showed caring associates helping everyday people achieve their dreams, signing off with the tagline, “Together, we'll go far.”

But inside, their culture was a different story. A story of cutthroat competition, fear, and intimidation, all in the service of aggressive sales quotas. Which resulted in illegal practices throughout the company and the creation of more than a million and a half fraudulent accounts, just to hit sales goals. After the scandal became known, former employees said they lived in nearly constant fear of losing their jobs. Ironically, some who saw what was happening and called Wells Fargo's ethics hotline to report the activity did lose their jobs.



The image is a composite of two screenshots. The top-left screenshot shows the Wells Fargo website's "Our Values" page. The page header includes the Wells Fargo logo, navigation links for "Sign On", "Customer Service", "ATMs/Locations", "Español", and a search bar. Below the header, there are links for "Personal", "Small Business", "Commercial", "Financial Education", and "About Wells Fargo". The main content area is titled "Our Values" and includes a "Previous" link. The text on the page states: "Our values should guide every conversation, decision, and interaction we provide and every channel we operate. If we can't link it to our values, we're not doing it. It's that simple." It then lists five primary values: "People as a competitive advantage", "Ethics", "What's right for customers", "Diversity and inclusion", and "Leadership". The bottom-right screenshot shows a New York Times article titled "Wells Fargo Fined \$185 Million for Fraudulently Opening Accounts". The article is by Michael Corkery and dated September 8, 2016. The headline is "Wells Fargo Fined \$185 Million for Fraudulently Opening Accounts". The article text states: "Wells Fargo employees opened roughly 1.5 million bank accounts and applied for 565,000 credit cards that may not have been authorized by their customers, regulators said." The article also includes a photo of a Wells Fargo branch with people walking past.

Above: Wells Fargo's message prior to the fraudulent accounts scandal. Clearly what they were saying and what they were doing were not in alignment.

It's an oversimplification to say this was all the result of marketing and HR being out of alignment. But it is clear that what Wells Fargo said in their marketing and what they did in their people processes were two wildly different things. All from a company who claimed, "We value what's right for our customers in everything we do." And they're still struggling to dig themselves out of this mess of lost trust.

69% of Americans
would not take a job with
a company that has a bad
reputation, even if they were
unemployed.

— Glassdoor

The cost of misalignment is real.

But you're not Wells Fargo. You're not painting a rosy picture of perfect human caring for the outside world, while driving your people to commit fraud because of unreasonable expectations and a blatant focus on profits at all costs. (Right? Please say I'm right.)

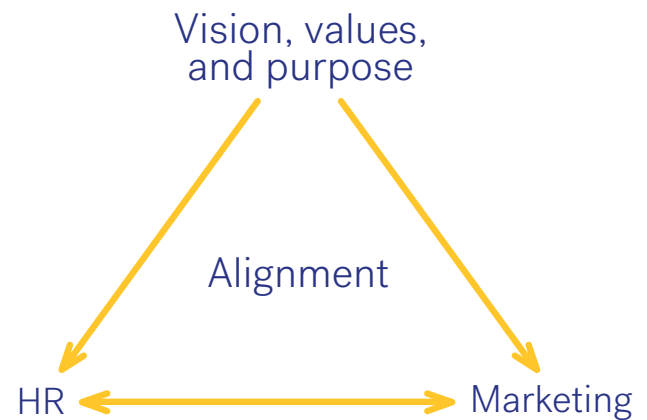
On a much smaller, less insidious scale, though, the same kind of thing can happen to you when marketing and HR aren't singing the same tune. The result may not show up as scandals and fines, but it may show up as employees who couldn't tell you what your organization really stands for. It could show up in marketing that sounds as though it's never stepped foot inside your actual building. It probably appears in the form of low productivity, high turnover, and slow or stagnant growth. You'll likely see it as confusion, apathy, low engagement, or active disengagement. And engagement is really what this is all about—engagement with your employees, and with your customers.

Only
41%

of employees strongly agree that they know what their company stands for and what makes it different from their competitors.

— Gallup

Some of the best research around this idea comes from Gallup. Their *State of the American Workplace* study, as well as the Q12® Meta-Analysis, point to clear benefits for organizations with high employee engagement. And that engagement, according to the information Gallup gathers, comes from employees knowing, understanding, and connecting with your company's purpose and their role in making it happen. It's the intersection of vision, brand, communication, and process. In other words, alignment between HR and marketing and alignment with the overall "why" of your company. That's what creates the strong emotional connection that yields engagement.



Alignment between HR and marketing, and alignment of both departments with the overall "why" of your company creates an environment where engagement can thrive.

And what are those benefits of high engagement? Businesses in the highest quartile for employee engagement (compared to those in the lowest quartile) show improvements like these:

41%
lower absenteeism

70%
fewer safety incidents

40%
fewer quality incidents

17%
higher productivity

20%
higher sales

21%
higher profitability

And that's just on the employee engagement side. When you're talking about customer engagement (even distributor engagement), the direct relationship to your bottom line is clear. If customers aren't engaging with you, they're not buying. Plain and simple. Or if they are buying, it's not because of the relationship—it's transactional. They're not the customers that become loyal, and they're probably not going to take the leap to advocating for you, telling their friends and professional networks, and building that word-of-mouth buzz we all know is so valuable.

As much as employee engagement affects the strength of the overall brand, the customer experience affects the strength of the employer brand. Lack of customer engagement can stifle profitability and snuff the energy out of an organization. That harms culture and morale, which can result in disengagement and negative word of mouth, making you look like a less desirable place to work. Which drags down the experience you're offering to customers, who then find they have less reason to choose you over anyone else. And the cycle continues.



“To be successful, organizations need to build a critical mass of emotionally engaged employees and emotionally engaged customers to outperform their peers. It is not a predictive tool for success if only one side of the equation has been tackled.”

— John Fisher, speaking about Gallup's Human Sigma (a single measure of employee and customer engagement combined) in his book *Strategic Brand Engagement*



How to Get HR and Marketing Working Together

So it's clear that HR and marketing need to be in alignment with each other, and with the vision and values of the company. Now we have to figure out how to physically work together.



Step One: Set the Stage

1

Get top leadership on board with thinking differently about HR and marketing.

We can't afford to continue to think about marketing and HR as two totally independent practices. They need to be interdependent. Which means leadership has to not only recognize that relationship between HR and marketing, but actively nurture it. If your organization's top leadership is unwilling to think about the customer experience—and all the areas of the business that create it—as one interdependent whole, getting HR and marketing to truly work together toward a common goal is going to be an uphill battle.

If you are the top leadership in your company, understand the critical role you have in setting the vision for a new and better way of working. If you're the HR or marketing professionals in this equation, be sure you make the case for HR and marketing alignment to top leadership. Show them the risks of leaving it undone. Show them the bottom-line benefits of getting your departments working together. It's the essential first domino that gives all of these other efforts their momentum.



2 Have meetings together.

Sounds so obvious. But this can be tough in practice. Sometimes it's just a matter of logistics. Other times it's a matter of breaking hard-to-break habits, changing behavior, or even taking on the company culture entirely. But it's hard to make headway if HR and marketing aren't having frequent, face-to-face conversations about what they're trying to achieve, in the context of the overall corporate vision and strategy.

Start small. Maybe just schedule a monthly or quarterly check-in, where you can sit at the table together, talk about major organizational goals, and fill each other in on your ideas and challenges around achieving them. Just sharing information will go a long way in aligning your departmental efforts.

And you'll probably find that it's energizing. You'll start hearing different perspectives on your own challenges. You'll get to shift your thoughts to new challenges and stretch your own thinking to help solve problems your counterparts are facing. You may even find you'd like to do more of these cross-departmental meetings. Which brings us to ...

3

If you can, create a cross-functional team focused on employee engagement, communication, and experience.

It's a natural progression. Once you begin to really dig into the areas where HR and marketing overlap, fill in gaps, or lend fresh insight for each other, you'll see how valuable it could be to formalize that relationship. It's kind of like when a successful TV show adds a guest star, only to find that audiences love that character so much that it makes sense to give them a show of their own. So they develop a spin-off, and everyone wins. We'll call it the Frasier Effect.

That's exactly what might make the most sense for you. And if you can swing it, we'd definitely recommend giving it a try. Create a new, cross-functional team that's dedicated to employee engagement for the purposes of creating a fantastic customer experience. It will need HR people and marketing people. And it will most definitely require strong support from top leadership.

It's an approach that's seen great success at companies like Southwest Airlines, or, closer to home, Breakthrough Fuel in Green Bay. In the case of Breakthrough, they don't have an HR or marketing department in the traditional sense at all. Their "Breakthrough Experience" team is responsible for nurturing the internal and external experience, resulting in a seamless, consistent feel between the brand and the culture. Breakthrough Fuel founder Craig Dickman put it this way:

There's so many times even, that I've walked into another company and ... you'd just tell from the look and the feel, and the way people acted, and the way people dressed, and the way people behaved, and the way the environment was, that they weren't who they were saying they were.

So we've created something we call the Breakthrough Experience. So the Breakthrough Experience for us is, what does it mean to interact with Breakthrough at any level, from the market back to the core company. And so we have one team that does all of the go-to-market, marketing work—anything that we're doing in the marketplace around the brand. And that same team brings the brand into the people process and kind of who we are, and it creates a real continual feel of who we are. And I think that alignment is so important and is one of the reasons why it's easy to connect the people with the work.

— "Coffee & CEOs" Video Series, Imaginasium

One look at the success Breakthrough Fuel has seen—both in the market and in drawing talent—is probably enough to make a similar approach to marketing and HR worth considering. But you don't have to restructure your company, create new departments, or invent new leadership positions to make your employer brand work. The heavy lifting is in shifting your mindset to one of shared responsibility for an internally and externally aligned experience.




Step Two: Get Strategic

Now things are humming. HR and marketing are running in lockstep and ready to take on the world. Let's activate that relationship. There's plenty of work to be done. We'll start on a strategic level.

1 Develop employee and candidate personas together.

In marketing, the more specific and relatable you can make your message, the better your chances of getting your ideal audience to take notice. In the last chapter, you created your employer brand positioning statement. The first field identified your audience, in a general way. Now we're going to take that further, using personas. Personas are a common marketing tool we use to describe, in as much detail as possible, who exactly we're trying to reach with messaging. The idea is to build out a description of the kind of person you need to connect with, so you can tailor your message to that person's interests, needs, and stage of life.

KELLY: RECENT COLLEGE GRADUATE



BIO

Kelly is a recent college graduate looking for a corporate marketing/communications position with a fast-paced, innovative company where she can make an impact. She doesn't want to be a number. She knows she doesn't have experience, but doesn't want to be treated like a newbie. When she feels like a valuable, trusted member of a team, she gives a level of energy and passion to her work that's hard to come by.

GOALS

- Express herself through meaningful work
- Begin her career somewhere with true potential for growth

ACTIVITIES

- Research
- Social networking
- In-person networking

OUTCOMES

- Sense of stability
- Work she can be proud of
- Feeling valued
- Sharing her wins
- Recognition/story

MOTIVATIONS

- Identity/meaning
- Satisfaction/accomplishment
- Personal connection to work
- Career advancement

DEMOGRAPHICS

Female, wide ranging ages and ethnicities. More of a psychographic target than demographic.

SKILLS

- Organizing
- Skilled in technology and sharing
- Design eye/vision
- Creative thinking
- Critical thinking

CHANNELS/ASSOCIATIONS

- LinkedIn
- Facebook
- Instagram
- Young Professionals Network
- Community support initiatives

VALUES

- Identity/sense of self
- Originality
- Aesthetics
- Work that makes a difference

PASSION

- Making things
- Recognition
- Learning new skills
- Social responsibility
- Discovering new things

PERSONA

Imagināsium

Example of a marketing persona. We're trying to build as clear and specific a picture as we can so we can create messaging that's more likely to speak to that person's needs.

You'll need to develop personas for each of your primary audiences. At the very least, that means creating a persona for the primary target on the recruitment side and a persona for the primary audience among your current employees. In practice, though, you should get more detailed than that. You might create separate recruitment personas for corporate office staff, plant or line employees, young talent that's new to the workforce, more seasoned talent looking for a new opportunity ... you'll have to work together to determine your key audiences based on your top needs and strategic priorities.

How to craft personas could be (and is) a book all on its own, but you'll likely need to do some research. It may be as simple as a few listening sessions with employees or one-on-one interviews on how they discovered you or it may be broader online surveys or research. Don't let this slow you down, though. With enough experience and awareness within your team, you probably understand many of the personas well enough already to get you 70% there. Documenting it is the most valuable part of this step.

This will be hard work, but the more complete a picture you have of the specific types of people you want to reach with your communication, the better you'll be able to create a message that connects with them on an emotional level. In some ways, this could be the most important joint HR/marketing time you spend together.

2 Map the employee journey together.

Once you've identified the specific kind of person you're intending to reach, it only makes sense to figure out where you can reach them. For marketing, that's the purpose of mapping out the customer journey. A customer journey map allows you to find ways to communicate with that target customer at every progressive stage in their relationship with your company. It starts with becoming aware of you, considering and evaluating a purchase, then purchasing, experiencing the product or service, becoming loyal, and even advocating for you.



Candidates and employees are a kind of customer too, and they go through a very similar journey. Which is why it's valuable to map the employee journey in exactly the same way.



Because this is the way marketing is used to thinking, this is a perfect exercise to work on together (and vice versa—HR can throw in on customer journey maps, too). Book some time, get in the same room, and whiteboard the journey. Ask lots of questions, but mostly focus on three things: what are candidates/employees seeing, hearing, and feeling at each of these points on the map.

The value of doing this comes in the opportunities you'll uncover to connect with your audience. For example, if you discover that Persona 1 spends much of their evaluation time posing questions about your company to their Facebook network, you'll know you need to think about how to get your employees advocating for you in social channels.

3 Create a communications plan together.



This is really the biggest part. It's one thing to understand why marketing and HR need to work together, but it's another thing entirely to turn that into actions that directly impact your company's reputation as an employer. HR is tasked with a lot of communications activity. Marketers are professional communicators. Join forces to take a fresh look at the ways your employer brand is communicating so you can align them with the style, personality, and story you've defined.

Within your communications plan, you'll need to address both sides of the employer brand equation—current employees and candidates. Start by agreeing on your objectives. Get out your personas so you can prioritize your ideas by audience. Cross-reference with your employee journey map. Consider getting additional input from employees to help shape the plan—talk to new employees and your more tenured people to get a good range of perspectives on what works and what doesn't. By the time you're done, you should have a comprehensive list of tactics you believe will be most effective at meeting the objectives you've identified.



Make it an omnichannel plan.

That is, use a diverse collection of media and tactics to create a campaign that meets your target audience in multiple places they're likely to be spending time. This applies to both current employees and candidates, but it can be especially helpful for recruiting.

- Brainstorm together with marketing. Stretch your thinking to find new or nontraditional ways of reaching both employees and job candidates. If you were creating a customer marketing campaign, how might you try to reach people? You'd probably consider more than just the few standbys (in the case of HR that might mean job boards, job postings on your website, or career fairs—or for current employees, bulletin boards and breakroom TV screens).
- Think about where else your candidates might be spending time. Places where you can really stand out, as opposed to blending in among all the other job postings on LinkedIn or Glassdoor. We once developed a marketing campaign for an energy company designed to remind people to call 811 before digging. We wanted to stop people in their tracks in a place where they had that exact task in mind. So we created floor graphics with the message to call before you dig and placed them at the hardware store, right in front of the shovels. We found a unique way to speak to the customer during a very specific part of their journey (awareness). That's exactly the kind of thing you can do with recruiting, too. Find places and ways to reach people that will set you apart.
- On the employee side, the same thing applies. They're out in the world, too. They're spending time on social media, reading articles online, seeing your billboards or ads, even seeing your company involved in the community. Look for those opportunities where you can meet current employees with messaging that reinforces your culture and reminds them why you're a great place to work.

4 Start using creative briefs.

Sometimes marketing and HR clash because they don't understand each other. Someone from HR will request materials from marketing, but what they get isn't really what they were hoping for. As you divide and conquer to execute on the tactics in your communications plan, it'll be important make sure everyone's working from the same set of clear expectations. One way to make sure you're on the same page—HR thinking like marketing, marketing providing what HR needs—is to collaborate on writing a creative brief.

It's important to keep in mind how a creative brief differs from the larger branding you've already accomplished through part one of our series. Creative briefs are used for smaller individual tactics or campaigns. Every creative brief will build on and draw from the overall brand you've already defined, but now it may focus on a specific need. For example, if your need were to fill your shop with temporary help for the busy summer season, we would use a creative brief as our backbone for any and all communications or tactics in that campaign—from job postings to career fair graphics and handouts, or anything else you decide to tackle.

At Imaginasium, we use a simple five-field creative brief. It's designed to be short, clear, and sequential, starting with an objective statement about a fact in the marketplace to which we can respond. That fact creates a problem for the customer. Based on this, we lay out a goal for how we want to influence the way the customer thinks about that problem. The strategic approach gets more specific—how will we present our product or service as a solution to the problem. And we wrap up with the “reason why,” the emotional heart of our solution, why we care, and why the customer can believe we're the right choice.



To make it practical, let's look at an example of a creative brief we might develop for that summer recruitment campaign. Let's say this is a campaign for a manufacturer of educational technologies. We need a name for this company, so we'll call them EduTech (apologies again to any actual company called EduTech; we didn't steal your name on purpose, honest). Because of the nature of their business, EduTech always needs to ramp up with summer help in their assembly plant. Every year it's a challenge finding people, let alone great people, and their demand this year is bigger than ever. So, summer assembly, competitive job market, and a need to convince an audience of primarily students (they've got their personas filled out) to spend their summer putting educational technology products together in EduTech's plant. Here's how we might approach this in a creative brief.



You can see that by the time we get to the “Reason Why” we're very close to actual messaging—you can just feel a headline trying to crawl out of there. Which is exactly what we want. As HR and marketing work together to create various types of messaging, a creative brief can help you in three ways. It can help elevate the quality of your messaging by driving more creativity and a focus on engaging on an emotional level. It forces you to focus in on one single action you want the employee or candidate to take, which keeps you from being pulled in too many directions at once. And, speaking of being pulled in different directions, the creative brief will help you make sure everyone's playing from the same playbook, even when you separate to execute on individual tactics.





3

Step Three: Design the Employee Experience

1

Collaborate on your engagement surveys.

There's a good chance many of you are already doing engagement surveys. If you're not one of those companies, we'd highly recommend you work engagement surveys into your operations. In fact, in the first part of this e-book we laid out engagement surveys as part of our Uncover Phase. It's an important method for gaining an understanding of where you stand as a company, and it's critical in giving yourself a baseline against which to track the effectiveness of your employer brand.

But now let's really make your engagement surveys work. Gathering data and seeing trends is great, but engagement surveys are only useful if you find ways to improve your experience based on what you're hearing.

So don't just gather data. Analyze for trends, gaps, and opportunities. Then communicate with employees about what you've learned, what you're going to address, and how you'll do it. When we do engagement surveys as a marketing firm, it's for the same reason—so we can find gaps in how you're communicating and how employees perceive the brand, then look for ways to wield marketing to close them. It's more about seeing areas where you can do something to make life better for your employees (and through them, your customers) than simply gathering and comparing raw data so you can say your engagement scores improved. The point isn't a change in numbers—studies have shown that just giving your survey on a sunny day can improve the numbers—it's a noticeable improvement in the culture and mood, the *feeling* within the organization, and the way it translates into a better-performing organization.

And don't stop at *employee* engagement. Measure *customer* engagement, too, and in similar terms. If they're really two sides of the same coin of your overall experience (they are), then your goal should be to track and analyze them together. Run your surveys on the same schedule, analyze them together, and plot them against each other. Seeing how trends in employee and customer engagement compare to each other will give both departments better insight into how their individual and collective efforts are faring. I'd even suggest plotting this against overall corporate performance measures, so you can see how and where employee and customer engagement are affecting profits and other strategic goals.



2 Put onboarding and training into the context of the brand.

When we wrapped up defining your employer brand, we encouraged you to gather everything you created into an Employer Brand Language Manual. This would be a single document containing a roadmap for understanding who you are and how to communicate your employer brand—your values, key strengths and differentiators, the emotions you need to connect with, your positioning, and your personality and voice. In other words, exactly the things you want employees to understand, believe, and use as a guide for how they act as representatives of your company. Which makes the brand language manual a powerful tool when you apply it to the onboarding process.

Only
12%

of employees strongly agree that
their organization does a great job of
onboarding.

— Gallup

Look at your onboarding process through the lens of story and brand. Revamp orientation materials. Maybe add new ones. Harness HR and marketing's combined talents to tell your company's story to new employees.

- Give new employees an introduction to what makes your company special. Help them understand what's different about you compared to other companies. Show them what kind of experience you're trying to create for customers and, perhaps most importantly, how their individual role plays a key part in delivering it.
- Use the brand language to guide all of your ongoing internal communication, so every last bit of messaging your employees hear stays in complete harmony with the overall brand experience you're promising to everyone who interacts with you.
- Train anyone involved in recruiting in the brand to ensure that candidates are getting a consistent message from first contact all the way through the hiring process.



Make your onboarding process less like a stack of papers and procedures and more like a VIP welcome package at a high-end resort. Make it something that communicates your culture and how happy you are to bring this new person into the family. This will allow you to start thinking of onboarding, training, and development more in terms of an experience you can design so that it fosters engagement. It's a great opportunity to tap into the storytelling strengths of marketing to start building emotional connections from the very beginning.

50% of recruiters
don't understand their own
employer brands.

— Glassdoor

3

Nurture internal customer relationships the way marketing or sales nurture leads.

Think about your employees as customers. Not in a selling sense, but in a relationship-building sense. They're people with whom you need to be constantly working to earn and keep trust. And because it is a relationship—probably your most important relationship—you can't assume that once they're on board they're on board. Create and maintain a plan for consistent communication so employees never feel forgotten. Think about "reach and frequency." How often are you connecting with employees, and how can you reach all of them, even the people out in the field or in the plant six states away?

Put the same kind of thought and effort into wooing your employees as sales and marketing would put into nurturing sales leads. In many sales processes, it takes an average of eight or more touches to get a meeting with a sales lead. Employees need that same persistence and frequent communication to keep them informed, aligned, and engaged.

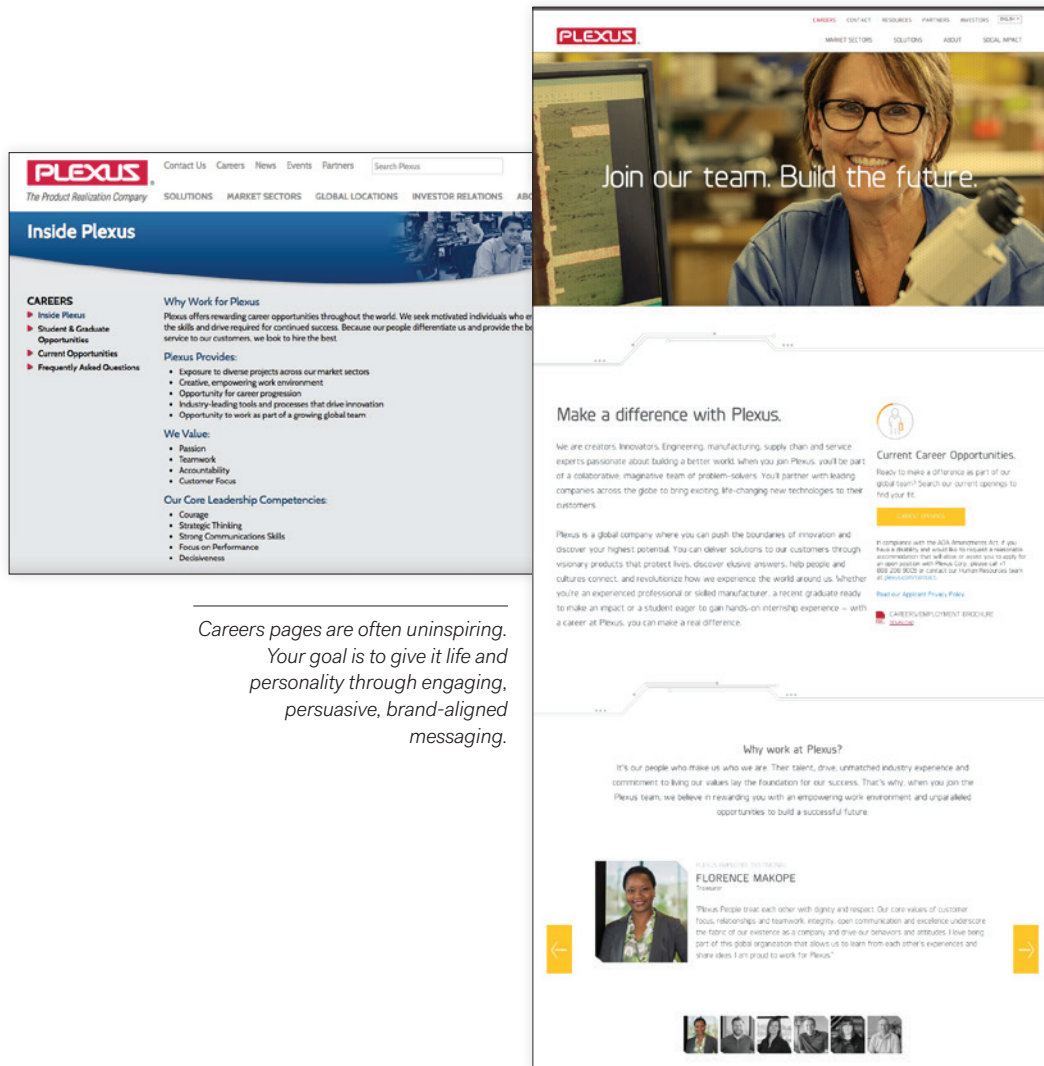


1

Update your website's careers page together.

The careers section of your website is one of your most important means of persuading people to come work for you. It's the home page for your employer brand. But far too many careers pages are sparse, utilitarian wastelands that do little or nothing to tell candidates what kind of culture they'll enter into. That's a huge missed opportunity.

Your careers page is where you get to invite candidates into your story. In a lot of ways, it's the perfect intersection of the needs of HR and the strengths of marketing. Using the personas you've created, work together to update your careers section so that it speaks to the candidate's hopes and fears and needs. They don't just want to see a list of jobs—they want to know what's in it for them, what you have to offer them as an employee that no one else can. Work on this together, looking through the storytelling lens of marketing.



Careers pages are often uninspiring.
Your goal is to give it life and
personality through engaging,
persuasive, brand-aligned
messaging.

While you're at updating your careers page, think about any other online "landing pages" you could optimize, like your company's LinkedIn profile page. Think about your LinkedIn profile as a kind of home page for your employer brand and make improvements to align it with your brand, personality, and voice.



Look at analytics like a marketer.

Then, when your new-and-improved careers page (or pages) is up and running, don't just leave it to its own devices. Pay attention to analytics the same way a marketing team would for the overall website. Three things in particular to track:

- **Bounce rate.** This measures how many visitors are visiting a single page on your site and then leaving entirely. You want your bounce rate to be low, meaning the people visiting your careers page are finding content that grabs them, then sticking around to learn more about your company by reading other pages. Of course, “low” is a relative term. The simplest starting point is to figure out where your bounce rate is now, then take steps to steadily reduce it. As an incredibly general rule, a bounce rate above 60 percent is probably higher than it should be. But set your own baseline, then work to improve it. You may also want to look at industry benchmarks to get a sense of where you want to be.
- **Page duration.** How long are people staying on your careers page? Longer stays indicate they're more engaged with the content.
- **Conversions.** How many visitors are taking the crucial step of contacting you, asking for more information, signing up to be notified of openings, or applying for a position? (Or another measurement that's meaningful, like clicking off to your LinkedIn or Glassdoor page.) Visits to the page are great, but getting qualified candidates to start the application process are your real measure of success.
- **Abandoned applications.** Getting candidates to finish the application is even better. Online retailers track how many people are abandoning their cart—leaving items in the cart but never completing the checkout process—to figure out where things might be going wrong and find opportunities to follow up with reminders to complete your purchase. If candidates are customers and applying for a position is one of your biggest purchase decisions, it will be extremely valuable to know how many people are backing out of the application process. Then you can draw conclusions about what might be stopping them. And you can decide if and how it might make sense to follow up with those candidates to remind them to finish applying.

When you see how your careers page is performing, you can begin to identify where things are working and where they could improve. Then you can make meaningful adjustments to the content and design based on the real-world performance of the page(s).



2 Rethink job postings.

Despite what many of them look like, job postings aren't an invitation for candidates to sell themselves to you. They're your opportunity to sell yourself to candidates. So think of them that way, and write them as ads that sell your culture. But just because we're thinking of job postings in marketing terms, that doesn't mean we're trying to make them clever or cute. The best marketing is clear, direct, understandable, and grounded in the unique selling propositions and positioning you've developed for your employer brand. Clever is a bonus, but don't sacrifice clarity for it.

- **Make sure your postings are more than information.** Refer to your personas to make sure you understand your audience and their concerns, then address them directly. Show your purpose and passion. Give candidates a reason to connect emotionally.
- **Think about entirely different ways to approach job postings.** Maybe the typical format of a wall of words about job requirements and expectations won't cut it. What if instead you tried video job postings? Where a friendly, engaging member of your team is not only briefly describing the opportunity, but talking about why someone would love working here? The key is, don't be afraid to break away from how it's always been done.

3 Consider content marketing.

Content marketing is a hot topic these days, but that's because it's a sound way to build your reputation as a helpful, authoritative voice in your field. The bonus is that well-produced content is also one of the most effective ways to increase your visibility and rankings on Google, which is likely to be the first place candidates go to begin their job search. This is a long-term tactic that requires some significant time investment, but it's highly effective at building your brand, showing your personality and culture, and getting you found.

- **Understand how people are searching for jobs.** They're online, following trails of content. That may be blog posts about how to find your dream job, information about industries, how-tos for interviewing, you name it. The point is, there's a problem they're trying to solve. Find a way to play a part in that research phase.
- **Remember that content doesn't only mean written words.** A web page or YouTube channel that's consistently maintained with quality video content can draw interest, too.
- **Give away free information.** Maybe you can be the company providing that content about how to interview or how to thrive in a manufacturing career. Write engaging content that tells candidates exactly what it takes to be successful on your team. Whether it results in a hire or not, you'll build your reputation as a company who cares about job seekers.



4 Reassess your application process.

Stop thinking of applying for a job as applying for a job. Start thinking about it as a buying decision—a huge buying decision, on par with the biggest purchases you'll ever make. The higher the level of consideration going into a purchase, the more you need to make sure the experience is the best it can be.

- Marketing can help HR think in terms of user experience. Designers know not to make website visitors click twice if you can get where you want to go by clicking once. If you're requiring candidates to wade through a poorly designed jobs portal or search every page of your website just to find the careers section, they're not likely to come away with a good impression. If your version of online application is downloading a PDF, printing it, filling it out, and mailing it back, candidates probably won't see you as a modern, well-run company.
- Think about it from the perspective of the candidate, rather than the perspective of your own requirements. What do they really want to know? How can you remove barriers that might cause them to leave before they apply?

This is your opportunity to sell your company to high-quality candidates. Make it as smooth and seamless a process as possible so you don't miss out on great hires because of a poor first impression.

The Power of Rethinking User Experience

Getting a mortgage isn't fun. The process takes a ton of time, there's a boatload of paperwork, and people don't generally consider it a great experience. Maybe they even see it as a "necessary evil." But then along came Rocket Mortgage from Quicken Loans. They took that long, cumbersome process and made it something you can do almost instantly. They reinvented the experience of getting a mortgage, making it as simple as ordering your Starbucks. And that innovation has made them, as of 2017, America's largest home lender

(even if Rocket Mortgage were a lender of its own, it would have ranked as one of the nation's 30 largest).

Quicken Loans disrupted a market by turning an idea around and looking at it through the eyes of today's consumer.

Think of your application process in the same terms. Today's job candidates are used to the ease and convenience of smartphones, apps, and online shopping. Make applying a more intuitive experience and you'll be better positioned to connect with the best candidates.



5

Step Five: Make Culture the Star

In a lot of ways, employer brand *is* culture. So as you're building and maintaining your employer brand, make your culture the star of the show.

Without a good culture, **you don't have a brand to sell.** Culture serves as a multiplier, **where if you have a bad culture,** it's a divisor.

— Kurt Voss, CEO, Amerilux



1 Generate employee content for marketing.

A great culture will help you do two things: win the best talent, and win more customers. When your culture is exceptional, the best candidates will want to come work for you. And the best candidates will elevate the level of what you offer. On top of that, catching a glimpse into your culture allows customers to see themselves in you—how they align with your beliefs, how well they'll be treated, or what it will really be like to work with you.

Great culture is a competitive advantage. So we want to find creative ways to get your team—and your customers—talking about it.

HR can help marketing showcase your culture by finding great stories from within the team. Then create content that gives voice to the people who are delivering your customer experience every day—whether it's customer-facing roles or not. It could take the form of employee testimonials that go on the careers page, blog posts spotlighting employees, or videos you can publish on your website or post to social media. It makes for engaging content in both recruiting and the sales process.

And internally it gives employees another way to feel connected to the success of the company. A manufacturing employee on the plant floor may never have direct contact with your customer. But sharing their story about what they do to make customers' lives better connects them all the way to the people who are benefiting from their work. It's a powerful thing to see how what you do every day makes a difference in the mission of the company. That's what engagement is all about.



2 Share ownership of social media content.

Social media is one of the first things job seekers turn to when they want to learn about your company. Yes, they want to know about your overall brand, but it also makes for a huge opportunity to give candidates an inside look at what it's like to work with you.

Create a plan to share ownership for the content you post to social media. A mix of customer-focused content and candidate-focused content will give candidates a clear picture of who you are, what you believe, and what kind of culture you have to offer. Social is the perfect place to let your brand personality really show through content that makes your people visible.

62% of job seekers visit social media channels to evaluate an employer's brand.

— careerarc.com

79% of job applicants use social media in their job search.

— Glassdoor

3

Foster brand advocacy among your employees.

Strong culture gives you an environment where employees become brand ambassadors. They love where they work and they're not shy about sharing it. And that advocacy pays massive dividends. According to Gallup:

- Employees with a strong connection to their organization's culture show higher levels of engagement.
- Engaged employees are more likely to refer friends to their organization.
- And 71% of workers say that they use referrals from current employees of an organization to learn about job opportunities.

Other research shows that employee referrals have the highest applicant-to-hire conversion rate, and 47% of referral hires have greater job satisfaction and stay longer at companies (Jobvite).

Content shared by employees **receives 8x more engagement** than content shared by brands.

— Social Media Today

All of the work you've been doing to build your employer brand has been fueling your ability to create brand ambassadors out of your employees. Now make sure you're equipping them with the tools to share your story in their own lives.

- Communicate often, with simple, powerful messages that are fully aligned with your employer brand. The more employees hear clear brand messages, the easier it will be to share them with others.
- If you're creating content, encourage your employees to share it. Highly engaged employees will. Content shared by employees receives eight times more engagement than content shared by a brand.
- Share employee success stories to foster an atmosphere of celebrating and talking about their wins.
- Create opportunities for employees to be seen and have conversations about your company. That could be community events, charitable drives, or just a fun company outing that employees will love to talk about.



And finally... iterate.

One last bit of advice. All of this is a journey. You won't get everything right from the start. You may find things aren't working as well as you'd like, or some tactics are performing better than expected and could use more attention. Iteration is absolutely your friend. Compare notes with marketing regularly to make sure you're staying consistent with each other. Bring in leadership as necessary to course correct or realign both departments with the overall vision. And always evaluate how your efforts are performing so you can make changes and improvements as you go along.

When you've gotten into a groove and you have a more refined understanding of your culture and employer brand, new opportunities are sure to present themselves. Be open and nimble—and confident in the strength of your well-aligned HR and marketing departments to seize them.

Now go be irresistible to employees.

If your customer experience is going to be a great one, everything that goes into creating it needs to be in alignment. Otherwise, the overall experience, the thing that creates loyalty and profitability and business success, will suffer. People will get mixed messages, which will create cognitive dissonance (“Wait, is this really the company I thought they were?”), and you’ll frankly leave money on the table. You’ll lose out on customers, and you’ll struggle to attract the people who will make you even better—the best employees around, the people who will not only help you carry out your mission and goals, but actually strengthen your values, culture, and brand because of their high level of engagement.

It all starts with getting that story straight. Both marketing and HR need to be dialed into the strategic vision and purpose of the organization. When your story is aligned across everything you do and you’re communicating a powerful, emotionally engaging employer brand message, you’ll be in a great position to draw high-quality applicants. They’ll join a team of highly engaged employees, who are on board with your purpose and excited to deliver on it. Those higher-quality applicants further strengthen the quality and engagement of your workforce overall. Your culture gets more vibrant and the level of service to customers improves right along with it. Now you’ve got a better, more memorable experience making you more desirable to customers, who find more compelling reason to buy and stay loyal to you. You grow more profitable, and your success helps you invest in the things that make you a better place to work.

And that makes you even more irresistible to high-quality employees.



Part 3: Reaching Wired and Non-Wired Employees

Build Culture and Deliver Important Communications to Your People in the Field or on the Plant Floor



Engagement is the heartbeat of your employer brand.

You've reached a critical point in your employer brand journey. You've focused the story you're telling, and your HR and marketing teams are laying the foundation for a great candidate experience that fully resonates with what employees actually experience on a day-to-day basis.

First of all, great job! This alone takes a ton of effort to gain such substantial progress.

What's next?

With very few exceptions, employees want to be engaged. Nobody wants to be at a job they don't like. But, too often, we fail to give those employees something to engage with—a strong, compelling “why.” The purpose for which your organization exists. And it's even more of a shame when you do have that defined, but it gets lost in translation—or not communicated at all.

Defining that “why” and how it ties to your story—then living it—that's the whole purpose of the employer brand exercises we've been doing throughout the first two installments of this e-book series. That's why we spent the time to define who you truly are (and want to be) as an employer. That's why we've done the important work of getting HR and marketing working together.

Now we need to make sure your employer brand message has the chance to reach, inspire and engage your people—all your people.

That can be especially challenging in manufacturing. Depending on your size, you'll often have a large percentage of your workforce who aren't nearly as easy to reach as others. The employees out in the field and on the plant floor. They're not sitting at a desk. You can't as easily just send a chat or an email. And if that's, let's say, 50-75% of your workforce, that's a lot of people whose engagement gets left to chance.

In fact, it's one of the biggest challenges we hear from our clients and prospects ... the struggle to communicate information to employees who aren't always tethered to a computer or digital device. When we dig deeper, though, this is part of a larger issue of general employee communication and engagement.

Reaching non-wired as well as wired employees is just a symptom of a larger challenge.



Does employee engagement really matter?

Is it just some fluffy, touchy-feely, corporate mumbo-jumbo that doesn't really make a difference to the bottom line?

We're glad you asked. Because it does matter, and it isn't just window dressing if done well. But before we talk about the costs associated with employee disengagement, let's discuss how common the problem is.

Are employees really that disengaged?

Yep, sadly they are, and in quite alarming numbers.

70% of Americans are
not engaged in the workplace.

—Gallup

What's worse is that employees often hear a lot of talk from leaders saying they are working to improve engagement through various initiatives. But that talk doesn't always translate to true engagement.

84% said **increasing employee engagement** was a **primary objective** of company leaders.

— Gallup

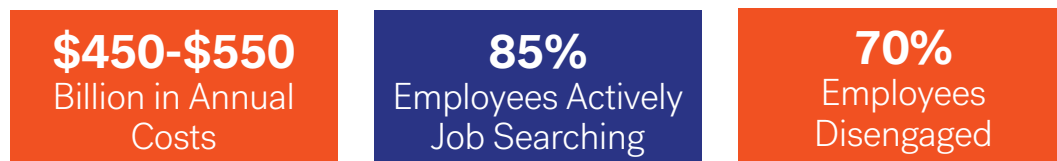
Why are many of those efforts not bearing fruit?

Obviously, something is wrong. And who wants to be part of a culture that is only *kind of* engaged? All employers want a vibrant, fully engaged group of employees, don't they?

And won't a fully engaged culture focused on key goals and objectives cause the organization to succeed in a way not seen before? And if so, what happens in a disengaged culture?

What is the cost of not reaching wired and non-wired employees?

The costs are quite enormous, and so is the scope and scale of the problem.



So where do these costs come from?

- **Absenteeism:** employees taking an unplanned day off by using an illegitimate excuse not to show up
- **Recruiting/hiring costs** to replace employees more often (higher turnover rate)
- **Higher training costs** to onboard those new employees

Now, let's look at the flip side.

What are the benefits of employee engagement?

Who wouldn't want these bennys from a fully engaged team?

41% Decrease in
Absenteeism

31% Less
Turnover

And for those of you reading this who might remain skeptics of the benefits, how about this:



**\$2,400 average
ROI per employee
as a result of high
engagement**

I don't know a single employer who would turn that down. You probably don't either.

If the pros of improving employee engagement are so strong, why isn't everyone doing it?

There are several reasons for sure. Perhaps the cost it takes to roll out an initiative like this. Or the struggle to gain buy-in from senior leadership. Maybe just the sheer size of an initiative like this can be overwhelming. Or internal politics may be too likely to derail something like this from ever getting off the ground.

Regardless of the reason, improving your internal communications to enhance employee engagement is more than worth it in the long run. And like many things, we need to have that long-term view in order to stomach the investment and work required to see it succeed.

When your teams seem so
out of touch with each other,
what do you do?



The Great Divide: Plant/Field Teams vs. Corporate Office

This is going to take investment. Because when you have teams of different kinds, in different places, with different ways of reaching them, things get more complicated.

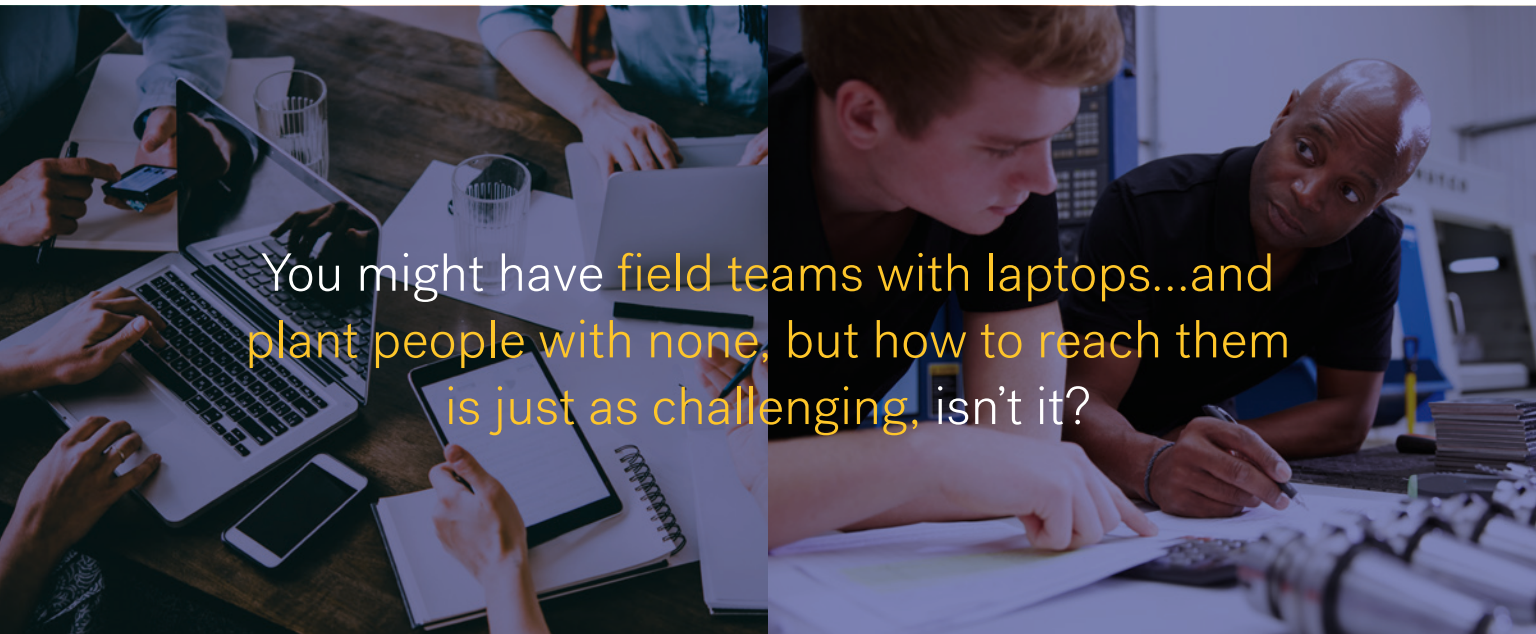
“74% of deskless employees say consistent messaging from senior management is important to them...but 84% agree they don’t get enough information from top management.”

— Tribe, inc.

What issues might you have in connecting with your field sales or service teams?

And are they fundamentally the same or different challenges?

We would argue that while there are some nuanced differences between plant and field team communication challenges, they are mostly about how to get the right messages in front of the employee no matter their location.



Far too often, we lament the fact that “those” plant or field employees just don’t get what is going on at the corporate office or vice versa. The reason it’s important to think of all of this as an engagement issue (because it is) is to get ourselves out of the “us vs. them” mentality that can emerge within teams that have an office and non-office contingent.

Without clear, consistent, brand-aligned communication to everyone, corporations often see a wedge driven between parts of their workforce. There can be a perception of inequality from office to plant. Manufacturing or production employees may feel they’re disconnected from leadership. Your far-flung facilities may begin just doing things their own way. That division alone can be a major drain on culture.

The truth is that we all could use better engagement to help us understand and get behind the values, mission, and strategies important for us all to succeed individually and as a company.



Why Should Leaders and Employees Care About Engagement?

It may be obvious to some leaders that they should care about engaging their teams to help them perform at peak productivity and capacity. But what are some other reasons leaders should care?

Check out these 4 ways a highly engaged culture benefits managers:

1. Gets the team pulling in the same direction, rather than against each other, as is often the case.
2. Often leads to “eureka moment” process improvements due to clear vision around what’s important and what’s not.
3. Achieving company sales and profit goals faster because of better alignment around key goals.
4. Positive momentum in team culture as people don’t need to be motivated, rather they are self-directed.

What about informal leaders?

These are the **most crucial people to get on board** when it comes to gaining traction with internal communication initiatives. They can have a greater positive or negative impact on progress than your average worker due to their outsized influence among the team. Ignore this group at your own peril. Some can be naysayers and undermine things, but even if they are positive influences, why not plug into their ability to put a positive spin on the latest corporate communicate?

Why should employees care?

If I’m an employee, I’m only doing work and getting a paycheck and benefits in return, right?

Compensation is only part of the equation that attracts and retains employees. To tease out other worker benefits, we need to dig deeper than surface level. Check out these 4 employee benefits:

1. Role, vision, and goal clarity provide mental stability for workers and a calm, reassuring sense that we know where we are going as a company.
2. Less frustration as teams get more in sync thanks to that role and goal clarity.
3. Work is more meaningful and purposeful because they understand the “why” behind their work.
4. Pay increases are more likely to happen, since employees are delivering on the company’s promises, knowing the organization cares for them and has their back.

As a leader, it’s our responsibility to guide our employees to the conclusion that it’s in their own self-interest, not just the company’s, to be fully engaged and aligned with the company’s goals and objectives.

What Does Effective Internal Communication Look Like?

Notably, it is all about quality AND quantity, not just the latter.

We can't just pump out more communication in more channels and expect to be more effective than before. We must start with our message and make sure that resonates with the company and employees. Then we can shift gears to strategically identify the best channels to reach our wired and non-wired employees.

There are five things internal communication must be if it's going to be successful:

1. It must be supported and led by all levels of management.
2. It must have a dedicated and fully separate budget from other initiatives.
3. It must be frequent and consistent in its messaging.
4. It must initiate two-way dialogue.
5. It must live in a multi-channel world and be fully integrated across those channels.



This can't just be led by a few mid-level managers, no matter how energetic they are.

Senior leadership must not only buy in, but champion these initiatives themselves. You've got to have a dedicated budget to ensure it isn't starved for lack of money. In addition, messaging needs to be consistent to break through the clutter of messages all employees are bombarded with throughout the day.

Plus, internal communication must be about receiving information as much as it is giving it out. Timely feedback from employees on how messaging can be improved will only amp up the level of engagement. And don't forget that in order to get people's attention, having a fully integrated approach across multiple digital and traditional channels is the only way to go.

Both reach and frequency matter.



Stop and Take Stock with an Internal Communications Audit

Before we jump too quickly into the execution of new tactics to reach wired and non-wired employees, we should start with a brief audit of the state of your internal communications.

1

Circle two metrics you want to improve in the next 12 months.

- Turnover rate
- Absenteeism
- Productivity
- Retention rate
- Quality
- Safety
- Online employer reviews (Glassdoor, Indeed, etc.)
- Recruitment costs per candidate
- Attendance at meetings and events
- Survey/research participation rate
- Employee satisfaction self-assessment
- Employee Net Promoter Score
- Participation and sharing on social media platforms
- Email open rate
- Video watch rate
- Awareness of strategic initiatives

2

What tactics are you currently using to reach **non-wired** employees?

3

Which of those are getting high levels of engagement?

4

Which of those are falling on deaf ears?

5

What tactics are you currently using to reach **wired** employees?

6

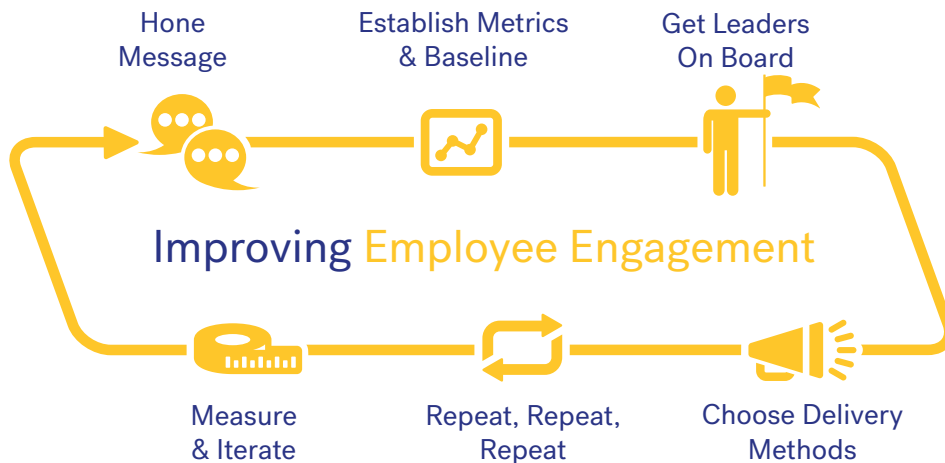
Which of those are getting high levels of engagement?

7

Which of those are falling on deaf ears?

Now that you have an idea about your key goals and where your organization is today, we're ready to look at 6 steps to better reach and engage employees.

6 Steps to Reach Internal Teams That Aren't Engaged



Since you've read this far and completed our audit worksheet, we're pretty sure engaging your employees is important to you. Perhaps you have employees who aren't really that engaged. Or you have engaged employees and you want to keep them that way.

Now we're ready to take the bull by the horns and jump into some execution of internal communications plans, aren't we?

Well, almost.

We'll get to the execution soon, we promise. But first we need to lay out a plan. We've developed this simple 6 step process to ensure your internal communication campaign doesn't go off half-cocked.

We promise that your patience with this process is going to be worth it!



1

Step One: Hone Your Messaging

Messaging matters to us ... we're not HR consultants per sé, but our perspective on marketing to your internal customers (employees) is that it doesn't exist in isolation. This is something we've built our whole perspective on. The bull's-eye is the customer experience, but hitting that simply won't happen unless your employees are having a stellar experience themselves. Your brand makes the promise of what to expect for both employees and customers.

You can't have authentic marketing unless your people are delivering what you're promising.

Your employees deliver on your brand promises either well or poorly every day. So make sure your message is totally in line with the experience you want to create. Make sure it helps your employees see the part they play in delivering it. If you can't connect what you're doing day to day with why it matters, it's pretty hard to be excited about it.

Now, that addresses your side of the fence. But, as we've mentioned before, it's important to make sure your messaging speaks to what matters to employees (not just the company). Obviously, company goals and strategy are important talking points, but try to put yourself in the employees' shoes when creating messaging intended to engage them.

If nothing is in the self-interest of the employee (or at least perceived that it is), will they really be as engaged as they could be?

Remember the "Say:Do" ratio from our previous session about aligning marketing and HR.



This is the degree to which what you say about yourself tracks with what you actually do. It's all about trust and authenticity. You can't separate the two. Make sure that your engagement messages are genuine and in line with the reality of an employee's daily experience.

Next up, it's time to snap a chalk line on your current performance as a baseline measurement.



2

Step Two: Establish Metrics and Baseline

Begin by reviewing the metrics you chose when you completed your audit worksheet earlier. Which of these are most important to your organization?

Prioritizing these is crucial. While you can monitor many metrics at once, it is hard to really move the needle on lots of them at the same time. It's best to focus on a couple that most need improvement first. Then, once you have a few wins under your belt, you can shift your focus to others.

Based on the ones you've chosen, what are your industry's averages for these metrics? And how do your stats measure up?


- Turnover rate
- Absenteeism rate
- Retention rate
- Online job board reviews
- Internal surveys
- Quality improvement
- Safety measures
- Engagement rate with internal messages

Most importantly, where are you today, good or bad?

Don't be discouraged if your numbers aren't that great. We all have to start somewhere. The important part is that you are starting your journey toward better employee engagement.

This process will help you establish your baseline and goal for each. Find out where you are and shoot for a reasonably stretching goal.

Now, what role should leaders play in this process?

A full moon is centered in the upper half of the image, set against a dark blue night sky filled with stars. A shooting star is visible in the upper left. Below the sky is a body of water with dark, choppy waves. In the foreground, a dark, textured rocky pier or breakwater extends from the bottom center towards the water.

Shoot for the moon, miss, and your team will
lose confidence in you. Aim too low,
and success will be hollow.



3

Step Three: Get Formal and Informal Leaders On Board

Informal leaders might be even more important than formal leaders because of their outsized influence within teams. But both need to be set up for success. So give them talking points they can use in their discussions with their direct reports. Don't leave anything to the imagination. Simply spell it out for them so it is more likely they communicate things as the company desires.

Remind them how engagement benefits them personally, their team, and the company as a whole. ***When an engagement initiative wins, we all win.*** It is absolutely crucial to get buy-in across the organization. If leaders don't buy in, the rest of your communications plan will likely fall flat. You may even need to scrap things and go back to the drawing board.

Provide some ways for managers or even peers to reward employees who support company initiatives. Celebrate these team wins both publicly and privately. It might seem like something small, but it will encourage continued behavior and showcase how employees are becoming more engaged.



4

Step Four: Choose the Right Delivery Methods

It's true that there are lots of options to reach both wired and non-wired employees. What works for your company may be different from what works with another.

So don't get overly focused on or enamored with certain methods or tactics. Instead, hone in on what will work for your organization. Don't be afraid to try a few new methods. You won't know until you try, and you might be surprised at what does work. At any rate, it's vital to track your experiments to determine what is performing optimally and what to tweak or discontinue.

Interestingly enough, the ideas we list (after step six) to reach non-wired employees are more numerous than you might expect considering the spotlight focus on digital ways to communicate these days. Just don't lose sight of the fact that you need a combination of wired and non-wired communication methods dispatched at the same time to effectively communicate with your teams.

What about the frequency of your messaging?

A background image showing three people (two men and one woman) in a meeting, looking at a laptop screen. The image is semi-transparent. In the center, there is a large orange square with the number '5' in white.

5

Step Five: Repeat, Repeat, Repeat

We are all inundated with hundreds, if not thousands, of messages daily. So we must over-communicate to break through the noise. Reach out via many methods and repeat that message within each channel more than once. **Remember that it takes 7-10 times for a person to see, hear, or read a message just to get their attention, let alone compel them to act.**

When you think you are starting to beat a dead horse, you are probably nearing the tipping point where people start to take notice. Just don't lose sight of the fact that your message must resonate with employees. Don't rush it or put out a half-baked message. ***That can be worse than not communicating at all.***

Focus on a singular topic for a particular campaign, rather than trying to cover everything at once. The more you layer multiple messages on top of one another, the more likely it is they'll all get lost. Research has shown that too many varied messages confuse and often lead to inaction.



6

Step Six: Measure Progress and Iterate

Now, the icing on the cake. What good is any campaign if we don't measure our performance?

We could guess at how well we did, but at best, that would be based on anecdotal evidence, likely skewed to the perceptions of a select few that don't have the best vantage point. Measuring progress takes forethought and planning. So don't wait until the end of your campaign to see how you did. This starts back at step 2 with selecting the metrics you are going to track.

Tracking isn't just about checking boxes or pushing out a certain quantity of messages and calling it a day. We can't be satisfied with merely checklisting our latest employee engagement initiative. Rather, we should ask ourselves if people are actually engaging with the volume of messages we are sending, and use reports to track our progress.

Some campaigns will be winners and some losers, but that's ok. The main focus should be on building off our successes and improving or pausing our poor performers. Improve messages or channels that underperform, and leverage winning campaigns for other initiatives.

Transplanting and cross-promoting successful ideas to other initiatives is an effective way to leverage the data from your reporting. **Plus, measurement tangibly demonstrates to company leaders the progress you are making and ties a direct ROI to what most people see as just an extra cost of the employee engagement campaign.**



You can begin to see that executing these 6 steps can build momentum, much like a flywheel, until it requires less substantial effort on the part of the HR and Marketing teams, to the point where it becomes almost self-sustaining.



36 Wired and Non-Wired Ideas: Improving Internal Employee Engagement

We know you've been patiently reading this e-book for this, so let's hop to some fresh ideas to reach wired and non-wired employees.

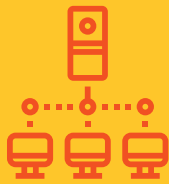
While this is far from an exhaustive list, we hope these ideas breathe some new life into your plans and, in turn, spark other related ideas to reach your employees more regularly. Some of these will apply to those in the plant, field, both, or your corporate office.

We encourage you to use an integrated approach where you send your clear, concise messaging via a number of channels at the same time in order to break through the noise of daily employee life. Just like with marketing to your potential customers, employees need to hear a message 7-10 times before they start to retain the information.

13 “Wired” Tactic Ideas

- 1 Hypertarget your locations:** Geofence your plant and/or corporate locations to deliver marketing messages via employees’ mobile devices. This will target everyone within a certain mile radius of a building, whether they are on a company or personal device, with whatever message you choose.
- 2 Employee newsletters via email:** This one might seem like old hat, but if used, it is often employed sporadically. Come up with a monthly content calendar and ensure it gets the consistency it should. People can sense if it is just an afterthought.
- 3 Brand inspiration video:** Create a brief, inspirational video that will introduce your brand’s key strategies to employees (and customers in the future). This can also be a non-wired tactic—managers can put this on an iPad and show it to their team during a break or out in the field.





4 Intranet:

Include employee testimonials about why they enjoy working at the company, along with important company initiatives, voiced by key employees. Let your teams hear from their peers as well as top leadership.



5 Social media:

As it turns out, many non-wired employees are connected outside of the job and will tune into social media on their own time.



6 Website:

Create (or beef up) the employer/career part of your site. Include key points of differentiation from competing employers. Showcase why your company should be a candidate's employer of choice. This can also generate pride in existing employees for why they should stay.

7 Group text messages: For employees with a company cell phone, you can reach them via group text messages about important announcements or upcoming changes. You can also incentivize people to opt-in to giving their personal number with permission to text them.

8 Mobile app: Create a smartphone app to showcase why you are an employer of choice.

9 Gamification of training: Rather than doing the same lecture-style training courses for employees, build a software game that engages your employees. Turn a drudgery for employees and managers into a delight with something that is fun, witty, and shows some of your company's personality.

10 Technology kiosks: Incorporate key strategy and brand messaging on iPads outside meeting rooms or around the plant. Reward people with points that they can redeem for company rewards, monetary or physical.

11 Meet employees where they already hang out: Make sure field personnel have access to files at home via a company-provided laptop and/or intranet. Place messages in areas where employees already have to go for digital info (paycheck stub, requesting time off, etc.).

12 Gain permission for personal contact: While non-wired employees don't always have company-assigned computers, they have personal email addresses and cell phone numbers. By offering them a financial incentive to opt-in with their personal info, you can stay in touch with them this way when they may not normally want this.

13 Steal your competitor's employees: Looking to steal some of your competitor's employees? You can geofence your competitor's plant or corporate locations with digital ads such that your competitor's employees see when they are surfing the web anytime they are physically at that location. The ads should clearly indicate the emotional reasons why they should come to work for your company, not just better pay/benefits.



23 “Non-Wired” Tactic Ideas

- 1** **Direct-mail marketing:** Believe it or not, paper marketing isn't dead. Put something directly in your employees' mailboxes, with their pay stubs (physical or electronic), or as a separate direct mail card or letter to their homes, addressed to their family.
- 2** **Family engagement events:** Invite all employees to a picnic and tour that is open to families. Not only is this a nice free meal and entertainment, it gets your employees to see their coworkers (and leaders) in a different light because of the relaxed atmosphere.
- 3** **Recognition programs:** Tie recognition to culture/brand actions with financial or other incentives to those who are exemplary proponents of culture or brand strategy.

4



Clothing/swag: Give away items that use your tagline or other brand elements in order to reinforce important company messages.

5



Batched voicemails: Send these to the entire company or a specific group/team within the company as an effective way to get a message out.

6



Letter from the CEO or other leader: This can be mailed to the employee's home address to reinforce messaging and talking points the company finds important.

7



Suggestion box: Place a physical suggestion box where employees know they can leave their comments anonymously so people can voice their concerns freely. Then act on these. Let people know what you did and that it was based on a specific person's feedback, keeping the suggester's name anonymous.

8



Environmental alignment: Incorporate elements important to your brand within your walls. Place decals on floors, windows, ladders, equipment, etc. to drive home important messaging.

9



Parking spot reward: Design and implement a graphic for a parking spot/reserved space to designate an employee of the month to reward behavior that aligns with the company's goals.

10



Audio messages: These are a great way to introduce timely information to your team over the public announcement (PA) system during scheduled breaks.



- 11 Advancement training courses:** Communicating advancement opportunities and how to get from where a person is now to where they want to be can go a long way toward retaining a stellar employee. Using one-on-ones that explain those steps specifically for each person will speak volumes about how much you care about their interests.
- 12 Talking points for team huddle/ops meetings (Toolbox Talks):** Managers can deliver 1-2 talking points during their regular daily stand-up shift meetings. Create a script for the managers so they can be consistent in what to say and how to say it.
- 13 Posters and other signage:** The key here is to have these in many locations to increase the frequency of the message hitting your employees. Put messages in break rooms, locker areas, onsite gym, near clock-in, warehouse doors, etc., and include a “remove by date” so people know when they are to be replaced. Surprisingly, bathroom stall posters/signs also get a lot of engagement.

14 Brand strategy books to managers: While more robust than a list of a few talking points, this can delve more deeply into a larger employee engagement strategy. Creating a physical book with key company strategy and specific messaging will empower managers with information they need to communicate with their teams and refer back to when they forget what is most important.

15 Launch event: If you are doing a large scale environmental change in your buildings, host a launch event as close to the rolled-out environment (maybe on a Monday after transforming the environment over a weekend as possible?) This allows you to reinforce messages they will see throughout their day and why they matter.

16 Promotional items: Tease key strategic messaging internally through banners, posters, mouse pads, window clings, screensavers, or other promotional items. This affords you the opportunity to follow your employees into their personal spaces with important information.



- 17** **Feedback via “old school” methods:** Solicit employee feedback the old fashioned way through the use of focus groups and printed employee surveys, in addition to the same feedback mechanisms via digital methods.



- 18** **Communication newspaper:** These can be installed at all clocking-in machines where employees can pick up a physical, paper copy to take with them to read. There is a surprising recent uptick in people wanting to read a physical book or paper after many years of favoring electronic methods. This can include informed, weekly news from a manager to talk about site activity, key dates, and updates for any announcements taking place.
- 19** **Digital screens:** These often already exist for other purposes on the shop floor in high-traffic areas. Putting them to use as an outlet for internal communication campaigns is a great way to maximize their value.



20

Wall of employees: By displaying all employee photos on a centrally located wall for a particular building, you can help your people learn other employees' names more quickly, fostering more connectedness among their team.

21

Mailing a “manager newsletter” to employees: As the physical mail to homes has declined over the last decade, it has provided a great opportunity to get in front of your employees. With less junk mail to compete with, your newsletter is more likely to get read by those who aren't in front of a computer every day.

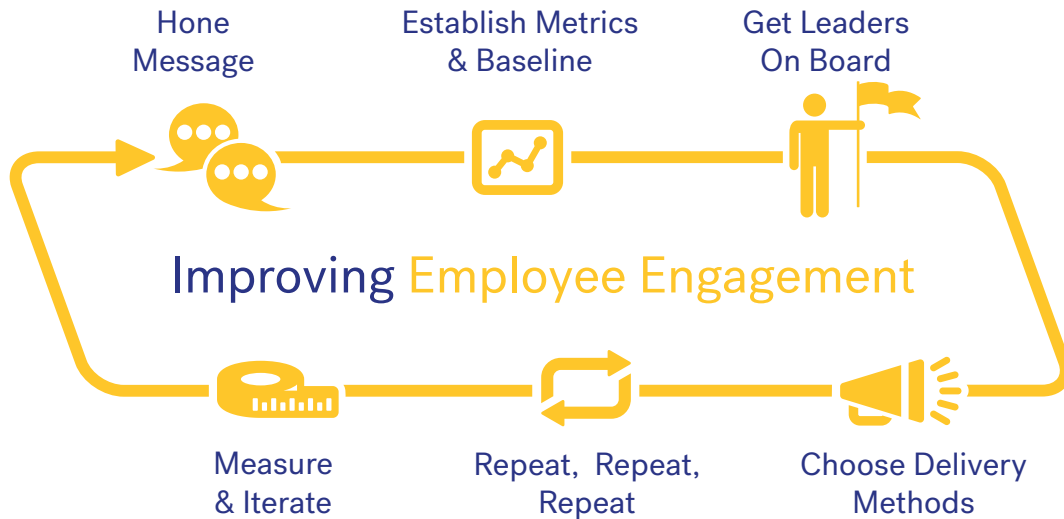
22

Reward coupons program: As an incentive to build momentum and generate buzz, provide employees with a deck of coupons, which coworkers can hand out to each other when someone has displayed an example of whatever behavior the company is trying to encourage. Offer rewards like gift cards for recognized employees. Having a peer-reward system engages employees and helps them start to own the brand. And it takes some pressure off the managers.

23

Create an internal brand advocate program: It's useful to designate an energetic group of employees from each department to share important brand information and combat skeptics or negativity around newer initiatives. Assemble/nominate a group consisting of people from each department who are passionate about the new initiative and delivering results, outside of corporate leaders. Have them vote for one employee who would be recognized and rewarded with items such as company apparel (golf shirt, fleece, etc.) or a gift card to a local restaurant.

Engage and inspire your teams to achieve new heights



Executing this 6 step virtuous cycle over and over will engage your employees like never before.

It all starts with getting your message straight. Without this first step, your campaign is likely to waste time, money or both. Establishing where you are in your journey is ***not an exercise in self-flagellation but rather an acknowledgment of where you are and how to improve those metrics moving forward.***

Getting all leaders on board, including the informal leaders, is key to disseminating your message to the team, thereby enhancing the other channels you're using to send out messages. Selecting the best delivery methods for your team and organization is also an important part of the planning process. Then once you do reach the execution phase, you must repeat your message over and over until you feel that you may have overdone it. That's usually about the time that it breaks through and sticks with your employees.

Finally, it doesn't end here, even if you have a rip-roaring success.

It's time to seek out what could have been done better and iterate for the next internal communications plan. With persistence, the proper planning, solid strategy, and execution, you are bound to learn how to succeed in more effectively engaging your employees.

Here's to your success!

Employer branding is a journey. Pack accordingly.

We put this e-book together with the express intention of spilling our secrets. Giving you our full recipe for creating, maintaining and living a strong employer brand. Of course, in practice, it's never quite a one-size-fits-all solution. When we work with our clients to develop their brands, we always tailor what we do to their specific challenges. The framework is solid, but it's also flexible enough to apply it in the best way for a given situation. So try it all, use what works, and build on our ideas until you find the right approach for your organization.

And remember ... if you choose to start down the road of creating a high-performing employer brand, you're signing up for more than a one-time project. We're challenging you to change your thinking entirely—looking at your brand not as one piece of the puzzle or a single marketing initiative, but the glue that holds your entire experience together. It's the whole ecosystem of words, meaning, action and interaction that makes you irresistible, inside and out. Those are the elements you need to bring along for the journey.

We wish you the best as you head down this new road.

And we'll be here when you need a guide.

Questions? Thoughts? Need guidance?

We haven't been sugarcoating it ... if you're going to do it right, employer branding (any branding) is a ton of work. It's a significant commitment. Even with a roadmap like this, you may not feel equipped. If all of this sounds a bit too daunting, get in touch with us. We're happy to discuss how we can help you develop the employer brand you're dreaming of.

For additional information or questions, please contact:

Melinda Morella-Olson
800-820-4624
mmorella@imagnasium.com

Imaginasium is a Green Bay-based marketing and communications firm that works with manufacturers to clarify their message, build a culture that believes and supports the company's vision, and create marketing that drives customers to action. We do that by creating understanding of who you are and what you stand for inside your own walls. Then, guided by our unique Customer Experience Ecosystem framework, we help align that story with internal actions and external communications, to help our clients build a complete and consistent customer experience—the kind that drives business growth and profitability, and generates loyalty with your customers.

320 N. Broadway, Suite 330
Green Bay, Wisconsin 54303

P 920.431.7872
800.820.4624

Imaginasium.com

© 2019 Imaginasium, Inc.

**Imagin
asium**