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Attracting & Retaining Talent: Yes, it needs Marketing Skills!



Ana Maria Santos, Partner & Operating Board Director at BRAND LEARNING shares some thought provoking ideas on how the use of Marketing processes, tools and techniques can help HR with more effectively managing their Talent Strategy.

What the HR function can learn from the Marketing profession

For the past decade, the “War for Talent” has been a reality faced by all employers, in all parts of the world, and in all economies.

In countries like India and China, the pressures to attract and retain talent have been even more severe. Their higher than global average economic growth has led to an “employee market”, where the best candidates are targeted by many organisations and choice of employer is abundant. Mobility is high, and talent retention low.

As we move through this recession, evidence from our global clients suggests that despite reductions in headcounts, the challenge of recruiting, attracting and retaining the best talent and future leaders is as crucial as ever. Skills are in short supply, new skills requirements are emerging and there is huge pressure for people that are able not just to manage today but to lead future organisational direction. This all adds significant pressure on companies and on their HR directors to ‘get it right’ and to build the teams and the capabilities needed to compete more effectively in the future.

In this context, the HR function assumes greater strategic importance and has to find more efficient and differentiated ways to attract and to retain ‘the best’ people.

HR needs to become more ‘Candidate and Employee-Centric’

In simple terms, Marketing helps drive profitable, demand-led business growth by attracting and retaining customers through active brand building activities that provide better customer value than competitors. The same is true of recruiting and retaining great talent.

HR needs to create and manage an employer brand that is relevant and differentiated in attracting its target candidates as well as connecting with existing employees to meet their needs. Organisations must find more innovative channels to engage with their target candidates as both graduates and experienced professionals are using conventional media less and less. The employer brand must stand out from the competitors, must have clear candidate benefits and must be kept fresh and competitive over time.

These are the same challenges faced by marketers and very much what effective marketing is all about.

For 10 years, BRAND LEARNING has been helping some of the most successful global companies to build their internal marketing capabilities. We have worked extensively with both Marketing and HR



departments to uncover powerful insights into the similar challenges they face – in attracting and retaining their different ‘customers’.

There are many parallels between Marketing and HR and many practical approaches that HR functions can learn from Marketing to help lead the way and gain competitive advantage.

‘Employer Marketing’ – applying best practice Marketing techniques in HR

Despite the recession, Talent Strategy and Management remains a significant challenge for many HR professionals, demanding ever more effective ways of engaging with corporate long term strategies, in order to determine and develop the skills required by the business to deliver those business strategies.

Talent Pipeline Management includes many specialist processes such as Talent Planning, Attraction & Recruitment, Reward & Remuneration, Learning & Development, Engagement & Retention, Performance Management, Resource Deployment and Exiting often managed by separate specialist teams and just as in consumer organisations this specialisation has one big flaw – no one owns the employees’ overall viewpoint and there is a big gap in the holistic skills needed.

We believe that the time has come to push the boundaries in the way organisations connect with one of their most important stakeholder groups: the people working for them and those they need to recruit, across all ‘touch points’.

In order to identify these ‘touch points’, BRAND LEARNING transported a very valuable marketing tool, the ‘Purchase Ladder’ into the HR Talent Management area, and created what we call the ‘Candidate Journey’ (illustrated below), indicating all the stages a candidate might go through from ‘Not Really Looking For A Job’ through to ‘I Want To Work For This Company’ and ‘I Love Working Here’.

The Candidate Journey



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The ‘Candidate Journey’ is a powerful tool to help organisations become more candidate – centric, and to ensure all candidate facing activities, messages and propositions are more efficient, so the organisation can be more successful in attracting and retaining the best talent.

Just some of the Marketing capabilities we have successfully introduced to the HR function include effective processes, practical tools and measurable skill development initiatives to build ‘employee-centric’ capabilities in:



1. **Information to Insight:** this covers the generation and application of insights that inspire actionable ideas to drive competitive advantage. HR needs to understand the insight process, the differences between data, information and insight and how to focus on building a much deeper understanding of employees' and candidates' wants and motivations. As a result, HR can develop activities that are more relevant to all employees from new hires to experienced staff, engage with them better, and have higher impact.

2. **Segmentation:** the capabilities needed to identify distinct groups of candidates or employees, with different needs and behaviours, and how to attract them more precisely with tailored Employee Value Propositions, leading to better recruitment and employee investment decisions.

Important questions can be answered by rigorous segmentation: How can we address graduates and experienced professionals in the most relevant way? Which segments have the most propensity to join or remain in our company? What is our current performance per segment and what can we do to improve it? How can we increase the relevance of our proposition for our key target segments in order to meet our People Plan etc.?

3. **Employee Value Proposition (EVP):** the selection of the optimal set of benefits the company should offer its target candidates and employees in order to attract them to want to work for the organisation. Tried and tested marketing approaches like Brand Positioning and Proposition development are hugely relevant here helping HR to focus down to the set of benefits that are most relevant and credible for all employees and most unique to the organisation. This enhances differentiation of the organisation against competitors and improves attraction and conversion rates.

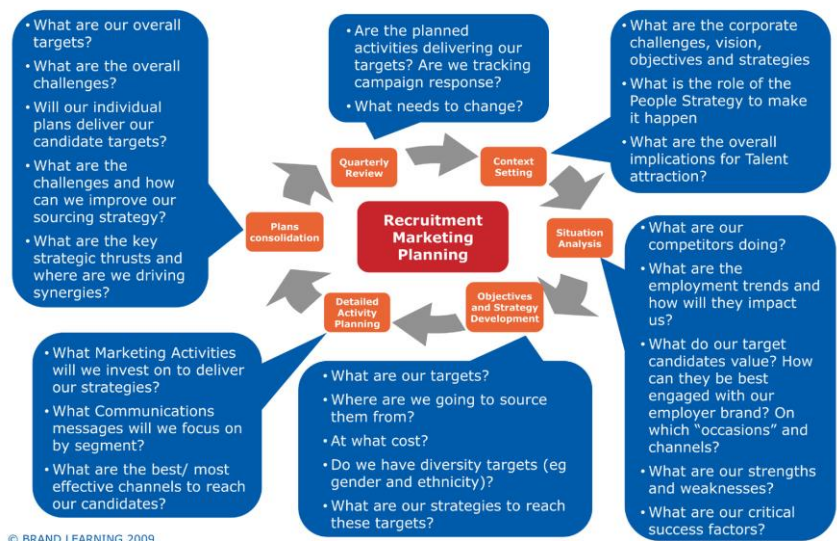
Once created, the EVP can be used to drive the communication at all candidate and employee touch points (including interviews), as well as internal activities that enhance the company as a great place to work, providing an excellent platform to drive culture change.

4. HR Marketing Strategy & Planning:

this is a critical process to enable HR professionals to better connect with the corporate strategy and identified skill gaps, analyse the employer brand's strengths and weaknesses versus competitors, gain

deeper candidate understanding and insight and define the appropriate strategies to deliver the talent goals at the lowest possible cost (see diagram to the right).

The Power of Marketing Planning: some questions it helps us answer





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5. HR Marketing Activation: this covers how to put Marketing Strategy into action and connect with candidates and employees at the desired ‘touch points’ to influence their decisions. HR has become highly reliant on traditional media like printed and specialised press, head hunters and recruitment agencies, campus events for graduates and most recently online job search sites. With the digital revolution, employees’ attitudes and habits are changing significantly, and HR needs to maximise the ways it connects with potential candidates and employees with more efficient use of resources.

6. Employee Brand Engagement: finally, this highlights how to use Marketing Communications approaches to ensure that all employees relate to and live the brand values by demonstrating the behaviours and performance that drives the corporate strategies.

Award Winning HR/Marketing Initiative

BRAND LEARNING’s successful transfer of Marketing capability development of effective processes, practical tools and skill development programmes and initiatives into HR has recently attracted the attention of Marketing’s premier professional body in the UK – The Marketing Society . The pioneering work BRAND LEARNING has done with Shell global recruitment has been awarded the Marketing Society Award for Excellence 2009 in the Marketing Capabilities/Organisational change category ([click here](#) to review the winning paper – some confidential details removed).

Perhaps the management functions of HR and Marketing have far more in common than they have differences and the strategic focus by marketers on ‘customer-centric’ capability development might start to catch on in HR applied to employees.

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