

Suddenly, a New Way to Rethink HR: Becoming Your Own Brand Manager

By Tim Geisert, Kenexa

Branding is just as important today in attracting and retaining employees as it is for attracting and retaining customers. Yet Employment Branding strategies have not refined or applied consumer branding techniques for recruiting and retention purposes. In order for HR practitioners to rethink and elevate the value of their departments, a strategic business case needs to link Employment Branding to the bottom line. But are there mechanisms that can be applied from consumer branding to do this? Examining HR through the branding lens provides the answer.

As HR professionals learn to think like brand managers, they can leverage the control levers of product, price, place and promotion through an HR perspective. Adding a fifth 'P' to this mix—people—helps establish the commonality between marketing communications and HR. By thinking and acting like a brand manager, you can apply tried and true consumer branding methods to your Employment Branding approach to utilize your true cultural identity and drive internal and external recruiting and retention success for your company. Because branding is storytelling, you can begin telling the story of your organization's culture.

Brand Management 101

Before examining the marketing control levers through the HR perspective, we need to take a moment to identify the three elements of a brand. For years, HR's marketing counterparts have identified the elements that are used in branding products or services. These elements include rational facts, or logical reasons as to why individuals buy particular products or services; emotional truths, or intangible feelings and an affinity that people have for specific brands; and personality, or the attraction that individuals have toward products or brands.

From an HR perspective, rational facts, emotional truths and personality are at the core of an organization's cultural brand. Rational facts are typically found in the company handbook, such

as the mission statement, company history, policies and procedures. Rational facts are important because they offer the reasons for existing and prospective employees to believe in the organization. Emotional truths are intangible elements of an organization that stir imagination, drive employee engagement and compel people to go beyond the call of duty. Personality is the magical attraction toward something or someone—charisma. Personality envelops organizational truths and facts to express an organizational brand.

Consumer Insight is Critical

Good brand managers understand that research into consumer insight is crucial in understanding how to best market products and services. As an HR manager, one must also recognize that knowing candidate and employee perceptions assists in the recruiting and retention process. For example, how much do you think about employee satisfaction and trust in your organization?

Consider the numbers in Figure 1. Sixty-nine percent of Americans ranked corporate leaders among the least trustworthy individuals. These scores for corporate leaders were similar to the distrust for the President and Congress.

Figure 1: Trust in Corporate Leaders

	High (4+5)	Medium (3)	Low (1+2)	Not Sure
Friends and Co-Workers	75%	21%	4%	1%
Corporate Leaders	7%	23%	69%	1%
The Media	11%	31%	58%	--
The President	24%	7%	69%	--
The Courts	29%	38%	33%	1%
Congress	3%	20%	76%	--

Corporate leaders rank among the least trusted individuals, according to Zogby International, 2006.

Further information reveals overall job satisfaction in the U.S. and abroad. For example, 65 percent of Americans reported that they were happy with their jobs. That means 35 percent are likely dissatisfied. How does this report for the United States compared to other countries? Employees in Denmark, Mexico and Sweden all have satisfaction rates of more than 70 percent, while individuals in Hungary, Russia and Turkey report being less happy with their jobs ranging between 44 percent and 49 percent, according to Kelly Services Global Workforce Index in 2006.

With the potential for a considerable portion of the workforce to be unhappy, it is clear that employee trust may be an issue for HR managers. Need more proof? American employees ranked their bosses only 7.3 out of 10, demonstrating considerable room for improvement. And on average, only 58 percent of U.S. workers said they are rewarded versus 29 percent who say they are not. Perhaps most convincing, a recent Kenexa Research Institute study indicated that 33.6 percent of employees—more than one-third of the workforce—are considering a job move.

What does all of this mean? It means that if you are attempting to promote your organizational culture, you are likely fighting negative opinions and perceptions before you even begin. With more than one-third of the workforce at any time dissatisfied, unrewarded or actively searching for a new job, we must employ new thinking to overcome the distrust barrier. We need to elevate the value of HR through strategic marketing communications tools.

The Control Levers

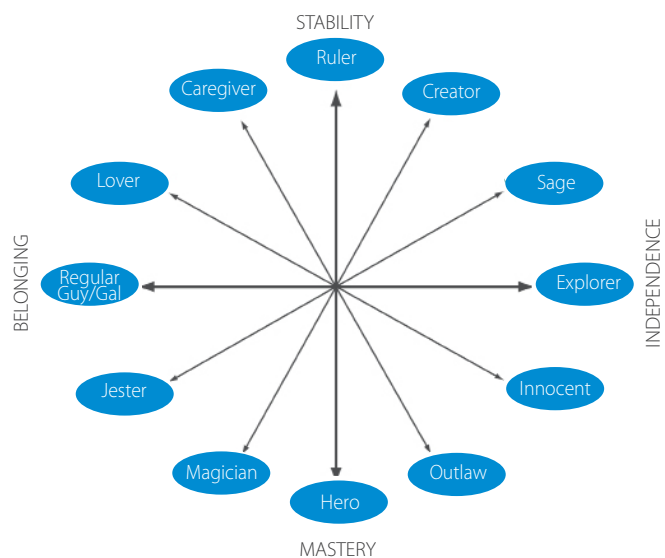
Thinking like your marketing counterparts, let's examine these control levers more carefully based on the HR perspective. We've identified the four P's of marketing as product, place, price and promotion. Now let's investigate these elements to discover their deeper meaning.

Product

Typically, when we think of a product, we think of consumer goods or items sold on the shelf. But what if we looked at products through the HR lens? What if we thought of the HR product as the organizational brand or culture? Based on a July 2007 OfficeTeam Survey, in collaboration with International Association of Administrative Professionals and HR.com, 38 percent of employees strongly agreed and 47 percent somewhat agreed that their company had lost a staff member because he or she wasn't a good fit with the company's work environment. More than 59 percent of hiring managers either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that they had misjudged a candidate's fit for the company in the past, according to the same study. What does this mean? It means that many of us are living in a corporate identity crisis.

How do we solve this identity crisis? The answer again can be found by thinking like a brand manager. When archetypes are applied to articulate corporate charisma, we can identify the personality of your cultural brand to help tell your company's story. There are 12 archetypes or personalities that can express a company's cultural brand (see figure 2). These 12 characterize varying degrees of stability, independence, mastery and belonging. Organizations most often embody one particular archetype, but may also score reasonably high in other areas. For example, Organization X may score highest on the Ruler archetype, but also have high marks for the Hero archetype as well. Generally, company goals and values align well with the most dominant organizational archetype (Mark & Pearson, 2001).

Figure 2: Archetypes Articulate Charisma



The 12 archetypes that characterize organizations and their varying degrees of stability, independence, mastery or belonging

Place

While place or placement through the marketing communications perspective is generally where products or services are exchanged, this concept is slightly altered for the HR professional. Place, through the HR lens, is the work environment that exists in and characterizes the organization. More specifically, place is the culture that is created and resides in each company. To better understand the significance of place as the work environment, the same OfficeTeam Survey from July 2007 examined how many employees had misjudged their own work environment. Out of all respondents, 46 percent strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that they had misjudged work environments in the past. With nearly one-half of individuals reporting that they have

incorrectly evaluated the situation or atmosphere at work, the role of place from the HR perspective becomes crucial. How can HR managers address the culture in their organization? The answer is by engaging in the cultural discovery process. Understanding your organizational brand elements allows you to better manage your work environment and leverages the strength of your organizational brand.

Price

To brand managers, price is a key component of the marketing mix. The price is the value a company places on a product or service. But how can we apply price as a control lever to HR? The answer is simple. Price equates to the reward and recognition we use to attract top talent and retain employees. In other words, how can we appeal to the head and heart of each employee? HR managers must ask themselves, "How much do I value my people and good talent?" According to Forbes.com, 65 percent of Americans "receive no recognition in the workplace, a number that undoubtedly would be much, much lower if your boss, every once in a blue moon would just say, 'Nice work, Johnson.'"

Thinking and acting like brand managers, we must make sure that employees feel recognized for their achievements and accomplishments. We must also ensure that employee referral programs make it easy and enticing for existing employees to refer other good candidates. By using the price mechanism to reward and recognize employees and to appeal to their heads and hearts, we emphasize the value that employees have in creating and maintaining organizational culture.

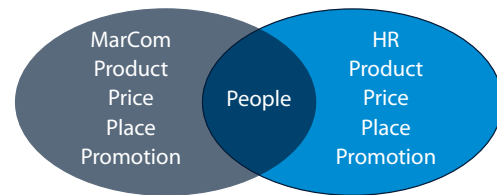
Promotion

The promotional aspect of marketing allows companies to showcase their products and services through creative expression and through traditional or non-traditional media outlets. The same is true for HR managers. Articulating and expressing communication messages that reflect the organization's culture are crucial for successful recruitment and retention processes. For example, creative sourcing is a short-term approach that utilizes creative thinking for targeted recruitment of specific job families or for communicating internally to garner and immediate response. Tactical development of recruitment advertising, career portals, such as a jobs site, or college recruitment materials aid in the expression of these promotional efforts. As marketing brand managers know, all roads and communication messages lead to the company website. Understanding this is crucial in developing an effective career portal that appeals to potential candidates. Ultimately, promotion from an HR perspective can enhance the recognition and strength of your cultural brand and make the entire recruitment process more efficient and cost-effective.

Four + One

By examining the four P's of marketing through the HR lens (see figure 3), we have seen that when HR managers view their organizational culture, work environment, reward and recognition programs and recruitment and retention materials as brand managers, they can use the power of their practice more fully. This new way of thinking also creates a commonality between marketing communications and HR departments. What is this connection? People.

Figure 3: The Four P's of Marketing



People represent the common thread between marketing communications and HR departments.

In any organization, marketing communications and HR typically operate with relatively separate purposes. Yet when the common vision of these departments centers on people, the value of HR as a strategic branding tool is significantly enhanced. Because thinking like a brand manager is crucial for HR professionals in attracting and retaining employees, cultural branding that emphasizes the people in your company can reveal the essence of your organizational brand. That means you can attract and retain talent that represents a cultural best fit. Most importantly, it means that you can begin to think about HR in a way that elevates the value of what you provide and what you can do for your company's strategic recruiting and retention efforts. ■

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