7 Deadly Sins of Employment Branding
Introduction

Heads up: If you’re planning to hire competitively at any point in the next decade, you’d better be creating one heck of an employment brand.

You know what an employment brand is—it’s the “image” you send into the world that tells prospective job candidates what your company is all about, what it’s like to work for you, and why they should join your team. In one recent survey, 56% of professionals said a company’s reputation as an employer was the most important factor to consider when contemplating a job offer.¹ Another study showed that 94% of people would apply for a job if a company “actively manages their employer brand.”²

Yet while this image is vital to your ability to attract talent, getting it right isn’t easy. Consider this: 32% of companies admit they don’t have a clear employment brand strategy, but they’re “working on it.” And although 35% of companies do have a clear strategy, they still think it needs further development to be truly effective.³

The problem is—what does that mean? How do you “work on” or “further develop” your employment brand? And how do you know if you’re even taking the right steps? What if you’re actually making things worse? (Because that’s possible, too.)

Before you give up all hope, however, remember that you’re not the only one asking serious questions about the effectiveness of your employment brand strategy (or lack thereof). In fact, 38% of companies in 2014 said they planned to increase their investment in this area. They, like you, know it’s critical. So the fact that you’re curious shows that you’re open to identifying possible blunders and correcting your course.

Here’s a look at seven of the top employment brand “sins” companies commit today, along with important insight for fixing those mistakes fast.

¹ http://talent.linkedin.com/blog/index.php/2014/04/employer-brand-stats
² http://employers.glassdoor.com/statistical-citations/
Mistake 1. You tend to “embellish” things.

Naturally, you want your employment brand to be one that draws people in—one that tells an awesome story about awesome people working for an awesome company. But today’s highly skilled candidates are smart. They want transparency from their leaders, and they want to work for authentic businesses. They want to be a part of something real. So when you stretch the truth, fluff things up, and ultimately present a story that—though outwardly compelling—isn’t honest, you’re only hurting yourself. Remember: Sites like Glassdoor and LinkedIn enable your employees to paint a truthful picture of what it’s like to work for you. The brand you present to the world has to align with their stories. If it doesn’t, you’ll earn the reputation of being fake.

- **Start with what you know.** Assuming you actually do work for an awesome company, craft your employment brand around the real things that make your work culture attractive to employees and prospective applicants. It doesn’t have to be a trumped up image of some hipster-heavy game room stocked with nachos and beer. Maybe it’s just young colleagues laughing during a moment of inspiration and collaboration. Authentic work satisfaction will sell itself.

- **Tell a consistent story.** If your employment brand is a story, and you want people to carry that story for you out into the world accurately and honestly, you have to tell it the same way every time. This means having standards in place and getting complete buy-in across every department and every communication channel, so the message is the same throughout the business. Your employment brand is not just a recruiting issue. It’s a total company issue.

- **Communicate on platforms where people feel most “at home.”** Social media is an ideal way to convey your employment brand authentically. Networks like Facebook and Twitter are today’s virtual water coolers, where people congregate together online, pick up news in easily digestible formats, and easily share what they learn.
Mistake 2. You’re short-sighted.

As business continues along at breakneck pace, it can be hard to think of anything as truly long-term. Products come and go now; innovation is everywhere. So you might be tempted to think of your employment brand as a short-term strategy that you’ll use in conjunction with a new recruiting campaign. You can build it, change it, and keep it dynamic, right?

Not exactly. Think of your employment brand as a living reputation, and then consider how hard it can be to shake negative reputations in our socially connected world. When it comes to an employment brand, understand that you’re making a long-term investment in an image that can be very hard to change down the road.

- **Keep a big-picture perspective based on clear standards.** Ensure that everyone in your organization collectively understands the most important things you want to convey through the brand. Give employees key points that aren’t likely to change over time—things like trusted leadership or a commitment to customers—and help them feel invested in sharing those points with their networks.

- **Be flexible. Of course your company will change.** Management will shift, products will adapt and grow—so have a communication strategy designed to accommodate these business changes without seriously impacting the employment brand’s progress. Social media is good for this because it allows you to keep a constant flow of communication with your audience, unlike larger scale campaigns that tend to go in bursts.

- **Metrics are key.** Sustaining a successful brand for the long haul requires that you have the ability to measure your success frequently. Tools and applications are available that let you easily track things like candidate conversion rates, career site interactions, applicant engagement, and social media interest.

Mistake 3. You sweat the small stuff.

A huge part of creating a successful employment brand involves understanding who you are communicating that brand to—and, in this day and age, you can bet that the people you’re targeting don’t decide where to work based on what year you were founded or how many widgets you sold over the past decade. Wherever possible, leave the minutiae out of your brand—and certainly don’t make it a central element of your career site.

• **Reframe the question.** If you’re trying to let interested candidates know that your business is solid, you can do that without revenue tables for the past 15 years. Instead, tell them you’re solid by showing them the kind of people who work for you, what those people think about you, why they choose to stay with you, and how they mesh with the things your company stands for. The ability to see what makes your workplace an attractive option is the *single most important thing* candidates want to learn from you.4

• **Think visually.** Plain facts and figures aren’t enticing to prospects, but research repeatedly shows they respond well to companies that provide relevant information through visually appealing methods—such as infographics, images, or video testimonials. Maybe it’s important that you show some numbers related to compensation (after all, it’s the second most important thing candidates look for on your career site), but do so in a rich, compelling way.

• **Show high-impact details with emotional resonance.** If you’re itching to convey something beyond big-picture ideas, show vibrant details about your employees’ daily life on the job, or about your culture. Share images or videos from team outings, or have employees record regular 30-second blurbs about what makes their job unique.
Mistake 4. You target qualifications instead of people.

Sure, you want qualified employees—and your brand is meant to attract people who can get the job done well. But skill doesn’t necessarily equate with a culture fit—and employees who assimilate well into your work culture are more likely to stay with you longer. It’s a mistake, therefore, to build a brand around your need or desire for particular qualifications, such as Ivy League educations or a decade of tech experience. Build your brand for the people you want to hire.

- **Know the culture fit requirements for your company.** While these may vary by team—marketing folks might want a different type of individual than, say, engineering—there are likely some common areas as well. Do ample research within the company so you know exactly the sort of personality traits that will best fit with your company’s values and work styles. These should be the core elements of your employment brand.

- **Go where the people are.** Communicate your brand in the places and on the platforms where people who are culturally suited for your company might be, rather than on skill-specific job boards.

- **Start culture discussions.** Social networks and groups on LinkedIn are perfect avenues for keeping your message about workplace culture flowing and consistent. Use these as a gauge for whether your culture needs align well with what your candidate demographic is looking for in a job. And of course, if you start a discussion—be sure you tend to it.
Mistake 5. You mistake clichés for core values.

If you don’t do adequate research and planning to devise a good set of brand messages, you might find your company settling into overused platitudes when it comes to describing its mission and work culture. Don’t let your company’s core beliefs turn into a motivational wall poster. Seriously: What company doesn’t want to foster teamwork and collaboration? Your employment brand is supposed to help you stand out in the crowd, not blend into it.

- **Dig deep for the specifics of your company’s beliefs.** What has helped your company beat its competitors? Where does your company plan to excel time and again? What makes your workplace unique and attractive? What is the most valuable trait in an employee? Build a pool of these answers, and embed them into your employment brand.

- **Do frequent check-ins.** Values update with time, so keep your brand current by regularly soliciting feedback from employees and executives. Remember that you’re making a long-term investment, and regular maintenance of your employment brand will help sustain it year to year.
Mistake 6. You fail on social media.

You know it’s important for your company to have a presence on social media, but it’s time consuming—and you might not be familiar with all the options available. Unfortunately, the more you let social media slip away from you, the bigger the snowball grows. There’s a reason society uses statements like “Twitter was blowing up yesterday about…” and “It’s all over Facebook.” These are the platforms that people use today to get information and share their opinions and experiences. When you fail to be a part of the ongoing conversation, your lack of presence often speaks volumes about what kind of company you are. And it usually isn’t pretty.

- **Being involved on social media isn’t a “one and done” activity.** Be sure you post regular updates, respond to questions promptly, and communicate your brand through various formats—such as thought leadership articles, blog posts or even memes.

- **Give people a fun way to interact with your brand.** Create a unique hashtag or two that your team and other employees can use when posting about the advantages of working for your company. You’ll not only give them a mechanism for spreading your message, but you’ll have a way to track who’s talking about you.

- **Get automated.** If you’re concerned about the time commitment, take advantage of available tools that let you schedule posts in advance. You can even use these tools to post job descriptions automatically.
Mistake 7. You don’t follow through.

Of course your employment brand should tell candidates great things about what your company stands for and how it feels to be a part of the team. But when they are finally ready to put their feet in the water and apply, do you provide an experience that lives up to the expectations you’ve created? How do you think it looks if your employment brand makes you out to be a cutting-edge company with the latest technology, but you don’t have a streamlined mobile application process? Or you say you’re all about communication, but then hiring managers leave candidates hanging for a week after an interview? Bottom line: You have to put your money where your mouth is and follow through on the promise of your brand.

- **Be sure you have a killer career site.** You need a career site that’s mobile-friendly, visually appealing, and rich in the content that candidates seek. Your online application also needs to be concise and user-friendly—even from mobile devices.

- **Reinforce brand messages throughout the recruiting and hiring process.** Just because a candidate has applied doesn’t mean you stop communications. Be sure applicants know where they are in the process and have regular status updates. Show them you’re invested in living up to the brand that attracted them in the first place.

- **Don’t stop communicating your brand once employees are hired.** They are your evangelists, too. If you make the candidate experience positive and continue to support your employees with a culture they fit in and admire, they’re far more likely to go out into the world and sing your praises.
Have you seen the error of your ways?

Although creating and sustaining a long-term employment brand is certainly a complex commitment for any company, the right practices and technology solutions can simplify the endeavor dramatically. Just replace your potentially harmful behaviors with new habits that make more effective use of today’s advanced recruiting and employment branding tools.

Jobvite’s comprehensive recruiting platform makes it easy to integrate your employment brand into the process of sourcing candidates, so you can better manage and nurture relationships, create and report on communication campaigns, and ramp up employee referrals. And our user-friendly interface makes navigating the technology both intuitive and time-saving.

With the right platform in place, you can successfully craft a winning employment brand—one that makes you highly competitive in attracting skilled talent.

For more information, visit www.jobvite.com