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IBM Talent Acquisition Optimization
In most conversations about employment branding, discussion revolves solely around candidate attraction and filling the pipeline at the front end. But the truth is...

To be effective, your employer brand has to be at play in every stage of the candidate experience.

When your employer brand is firing on all cylinders and fully integrated across every touchpoint of the candidate experience, there are countless talent acquisition problems it can solve for you. This eBook will talk about five of them.
Problem # 1:
Not attracting enough passive candidates

LinkedIn estimates that two-thirds of the workforce is not actively looking for a new job opportunity. But at the same time, 90% of global professionals admit they are interested in hearing about these job opportunities.

So why the contradiction? It’s simply a matter of motivation. These passive candidates are interested in something new, but not motivated enough to put in any real effort into learning about your organization. Their current career and compensation is good enough to suppress their drive to find something better. So how do you connect with this interested, but passive candidate audience? If they’re not actively seeking opportunities, they won’t be on job boards or members of your talent community.
Solution:
Meet them where they are – their social feeds

With online users spending nearly 30% of their time on social media, you have a powerful vehicle to drive the casual browser to deep, interactive content about your organization – giving them the opportunity to discover on their own if they are a fit.

Share employee perspectives
Leveraging employee stories can help bring your employer brand to life. By identifying individuals who reflect what it’s like to work at your organization, you can develop greater employer brand transparency, create advocates for your company and attract candidates who will be a good fit for your culture. We will discuss the power of a strong employee ambassador program more in Problem #5.

Encourage employee participation
An organization’s social recruiting efforts are most successful when amplified by your existing employee audience. It’s beneficial to ensure your employees are comfortable speaking about your organization publicly in a positive manner. Social media policies and guidelines often include only a list of dos and don’ts, which can deter employees from posting about their employer altogether. In addition to the list of what isn’t acceptable, consider including preferred real-life examples of employees sharing about your company on social media. Providing employees with culture-specific hashtags is another way to encourage them to actively promote your organization. Take for example #LifeatKohls, #HootsuiteLife or #InsideZappos. Individuals who are active socially and are excited about your company will naturally surface as potential candidates for becoming an impactful social influencer.

Last, be sure you provide positive reinforcement for those employees who are sharing your ideal content by liking and retweeting their posts. And, of course, continue to build deeper relationships with them.

Include calls to action
Social media’s role doesn’t end with piquing interest. When you capture the interest of candidates who feel as though your organization might be a great fit, make sure they can easily continue their journey with you. Be sure to include a clear call to action in your content, directing them to your informative and intuitively designed career site, which we talk about in Problem #2.

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How do you know when it’s working?

The number of hires is usually the first (and often only) metric inquired about when looking into the value of social recruiting. Although immediate hires are the ultimate goal for recruiting on social media, it is not the only relevant factor. Here are a few other metrics to consider:

- **Follower growth rate**: Track the growth rate of your channels over time. In addition, compare the growth rate before and after you start your employer brand efforts or after specific campaigns are released.

- **Engagement with your candidate-centric social content**: Keep track of how many interactions your content has received to understand how well your message is resonating.

- **Link clicks from social to your career site**: Include URL shorteners in your call to action statements to track the number of clicks.

- **Incoming traffic from social**: Track the volume or percentage of career site traffic that is sourced from social media using Google Analytics.

- **Goal conversions**: In Google Analytics, you can set up goals to measure specific actions your incoming users are taking, like how many are joining your talent community or applying for a specific position.

Learn more about tactics for converting passive candidates

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Problem # 2:  
Career sites that don’t convert

A great online candidate experience starts with a great career site. Job seekers are two times more likely to go to a career site than LinkedIn or review sites like Glassdoor, and 76% prefer to apply through a career site.

Are you providing a great candidate experience on your career site?  
The first step in determining if you are providing a great candidate experience is to review your website analytics. A high bounce rate means a candidate visited only one page during their visit, a key indicator that your site is not doing the job.

High bounce rates signify that candidates are not finding what they’re looking for—either because the content isn’t there or the user experience is unintuitive. Most users make this determination in less than 10 seconds. This also means that users aren’t spending enough time on your site to make any emotional investment in your organization as a place to work.

What’s a good bounce rate?  
At IBM Employment Branding, we’ve collected bounce-rate data specific to company career sites to help provide some guidance on how well your site is performing compared with others.

We’ve found that the best career sites have bounce rates in the 27%–40% range. We consider 41–55% to be average, and 56%–70% to be high. Although there is always room for improvement, anything in the average or high range should be a more immediate cause for concern.

Figure 1: Career site bounce rate benchmarks
Solution:
Put critical information front and center on your career site

Whether or not you have a dedicated career site, you can provide a great candidate experience online by giving candidates the information they are looking for (content) in the location they would expect to find it (usability) using these tips:

Content:
• Review analytics to determine what content isn’t working and, more importantly, what is
• Visit competitor career sites for ideas specific to your industry
• Ask applicants or new hires for feedback
• Watch what users are looking at (either with Google Analytics or a tool like Hotjar) to determine which aspects of your culture to feature
• Weave messaging from your employee value proposition (EVP) throughout the site
• Be transparent about the status of their application

Usability
• Guide candidates to the logical next step (such as application or more information) by strategically placing calls to action throughout your site
• Include the job search feature in a consistent and prominent location on all pages
• Provide a smooth integration with your applicant tracking system (ATS)
• Use consistent, simple navigation and include no more than 5–7 categories that are applicable to the majority of your target audience
• Conduct user testing to see which content grabs attention and which calls to action get the most clicks

The ROI of an effective career site
An outstanding career site is no longer a nice-to-have part of the candidate experience. Candidates expect consumer-level treatments and a well-designed, informative career site will positively impact your ability to recruit. When you improve bounce rates, you also can increase the number of applicants per job and ultimately reduce cost per hire.

Learn more about expressing your employer brand through your career site

IBM Talent Acquisition Optimization
Problem # 3: Losing quality applicants because they don’t match current openings

Talent communities are a powerful tool for retaining candidates who have expressed an interest in your company and engaging with them over time. Hiring from this pool decreases the time to fill because these candidates are further along in the selection process.

So why don’t more companies use talent communities? Many companies think of creating talent communities as a supplemental task, secondary to the immediate need of filling open requisitions. They consider talent communities a luxury, not a necessity.

Another hindrance is that the corporate approval process for building a talent community can be slow, so employers sometimes avoid it altogether. In addition, companies are reluctant to dedicate personnel to complete these tasks.

The fact is talent communities are necessary to your overall recruiting strategy. Consider this: 94% of recruiters expect hiring to become more competitive in 2017. It’s a buyer’s market for job seekers. Given this, 82% of recruiters see “proactive recruiting and talent pooling as a major priority” this year. An active talent community is a must-have for building relationships with great candidates even when you don’t have the right position available for them. And what motivates a candidate to join your talent community? A strong employer brand.
**Solution:**

Build your talent communities through employment branding

If you have a strong employer brand, high-quality candidates are more likely to sign up through your talent community even when you don’t have job openings. They are more willing to wait for an opening with a company for whom they feel an affinity.

With your employer brand established, your talent communities will serve as a valuable extension of the brand so candidates can feel that they’re already part of it even before they’ve spoken with a recruiter. Talent communities sell your company culture and identity, giving candidates a sense of who you are and keeping them engaged with you.

For recruiters, talent communities are a means of nurturing and building relationships through regular communication. Over time, recruiters get to know targeted groups of similar recruits, as opposed to a few candidates interested in a single opening.

Here are some tips for leveraging your employer brand to build a more effective talent community.

**Message consistency**
No matter where a candidate interacts with your brand, the message they receive should be the same. This way, there will be no question about what you stand for, what you offer employees and the type of experience they can expect as a candidate.

**Don’t let talent communities become stagnant**
Content must be dynamic or candidates will lose interest. For example, if the first three emails from your company are attention grabbing and distinct from one another, candidates will look forward to the fourth. When messaging is creative, informative and aligned with your brand, members of your talent communities will say, “I can see myself working here.”

**Optimize talent communities for mobile devices**
For mobile users, keep forms short and simple and keep your messages short but personable. Use video and avoid long paragraphs.

**Be proactive, not reactive**
Talent communities are the best means of keeping quality talent interested in your company, even years before you may need them.

A global research firm, for example, hires candidates with at least two or three years of experience. It compiled a list of recent college grads but didn’t know what to do with those inexperienced candidates.

The firm invited the grads to join a talent community designed for them and to sign up to receive regular communications. About every three months, candidates receive a new message, such as a link to an employee video testimonial or a newsletter with company updates.

This company has solved the problem of losing quality candidates by using a talent community based on their brand. Once candidates have gained the requisite experience, their recruiters are ready to talk to engaged, informed and familiar talent.
Problem # 4: 
Hiring quality candidates who don’t fit company culture

One of the biggest expenses associated with talent acquisition is turnover. Every time someone quits, replacing that employee can cost as much or more than a year’s salary. And one of the main reasons employees defect (or fail) in less than a year is that they’re not a culture fit. Add to that the current buyer’s market for candidates, and getting it right the first time by hiring employees who are good culture fits becomes more important than ever.

Hiring the wrong culture fit is expensive beyond just increased turnover. When a company hires candidates who conflict with the company culture, productivity, innovation and overall satisfaction go down. A successful company culture can significantly reduce turnover rates, lower average compensation rates and result in a higher level of commitment from new hires (Corporate Leadership Council, 2006; Kucherov & Zavyalova, 2012).

The question that active and passive candidates are asking themselves about any given position is whether your culture is one they can thrive in. And if you’re not expressing your authentic culture to candidates throughout the recruitment process, how will they know?
A commitment to culture research goes deeper than gathering senior leadership at an offsite retreat to discuss what they think the culture should be. While there’s nothing wrong with cultural aspirations for your company, you cannot begin to initiate those changes until you know the current state of your culture. That means setting aside time and resources to conduct culture research the right way.

Get outside help
Engaging an outside culture research consultant is critical. A company is rarely able to objectively and critically examine its own culture. And when leadership is performing the investigative interviews and focus groups, employees won’t be very candid with their answers.

Assess culture using multiple tools
Culture researchers use a variety of assessment tools to map out your unique culture. This should include quantitative methodologies, like surveys, and qualitative approaches such as interviews, focus groups or observation. Surveys are beneficial because they give all employees an opportunity to provide feedback and provide metrics and comparisons to see if aspects of your culture are companywide or department specific. But they’re not enough. Real conversations with employees allow researchers to collect stories and other unstructured, off-the-cuff expressions of culture.

Most importantly: Act!
Once you and your culture consultant have gathered and digested all the information, it’s time to take action. The worst course of action you can take is to ask for employee input and then do nothing with it. Even though you may have started on your EVP journey for the benefit of future candidates, your present employees who have contributed to the effort want to see what you’ll do with their input. Put it to good use, share the results and thank your research participants.

Building the EVP
Your consultant will help you distill the research findings into a concise and inspiring portrait that authentically describes what your culture is like and what kind of employee thrives here. This is your EVP, and it should act as the foundation of your recruitment messaging and employee engagement strategies.

With a strong, authentic and resonant EVP underpinning your entire candidate experience, you’ll attract the right culture fits to your company while subtly letting misfits know that this isn’t the place for them. The result is a pipeline of higher-quality candidates.

Solution:
Gain a deep understanding of your corporate culture and share it liberally throughout the recruitment process

Find out more about how a strong EVP and understanding of culture can help you recruit better candidates
Problem #5:
Low employee referral rate

Companies often miss one of the most influential resources for finding quality candidates: current employees. Not only are employee referrals a quick and cost-effective recruitment approach, research shows that referred employees have a longer tenure and higher job performance (LinkedIn, 2016).

The employee voice can have a significant impact on an organization’s referral program. According to MSL Group, social media posts shared by employees reach 561% further than the same posts shared by company pages. Plus, 75% of people admit they overcome concerns and make a decision about a brand with the help of their peers.

Every company already has potential brand ambassadors in current employees who believe in the company and the brand. The challenge is activating them and directing their advocacy in the right direction.
If you want a great employer brand that resonates with the public and potential recruits, you must first invest in cultivating that culture within current employees. The best company cultures were not artificially created in a boardroom and then shared with the world. They were grown organically and spread by employees voluntarily becoming brand ambassadors. Yes, marketing and social media efforts play a crucial role, but only when employees are in the driver’s seat because they genuinely believe in the employer brand. Creating and marketing an inauthentic employer brand will be detrimental to your employee engagement, employee retention and overall revenue.

Make sure your employee brand ambassadors believe in the company as much as you do
You might be asking yourself, “Who would post the information that exposes the dissonance between your true employer brand and the one you promote?” The answer is your employee brand ambassadors. Often, companies think they’ve identified and “created” brand ambassadors to promote their employer brand with a large marketing push. The truth is every employee is a potential brand ambassador. With or without a marketing initiative, employees speak to others about their experiences at work. This fact can either bolster your hiring efforts or torpedo them. And that’s because 75% of American workers would refuse a job with a company that has a bad reputation (Staffing Industry Analysts, 2012).

Get on the same page
If you want passionate brand ambassadors to authentically represent the company, you should ensure they have a firm understanding of your employer brand and the qualities that make successful employees. A successful employer brand can significantly reduce turnover rates, lower average compensation rates and result in a higher level of commitment from new hires. At the center of every employer brand is an EVP. It serves as the foundation of a company culture and a company’s promise to the employee experience. The right EVP can ignite a passion within your organization. An authentic EVP is the first step toward having brand ambassadors represent your organization.

Remember, every employee is a potential brand ambassador. Employees will represent the authentic employer brand to candidates, whether you’re managing that brand or not. If you really want to move the needle on employee referrals and are confident employees understand and support the employer brand, then identify those who are most passionate and outspoken. Give them a platform and multiple channels to share the employer brand. Employee referrals are a top resource for quality recruits that companies often overlook. Ask yourself, is your current employer brand having a positive or negative impact on those referrals?
So what’s next?

In order for employment branding to solve all of these problems, it has to be:

- Based on in-depth, high-quality culture research
- Creatively and inspiringy expressed through a resonant EVP
- Applied to every touch point across the candidate experience

This is a tall order for most talent acquisition departments. Your first step is to talk to one of the culture research experts at IBM Employment Branding.
About IBM Employment Branding

As an offering of IBM Talent Acquisition Optimization, IBM Employment Branding began nearly a decade ago with the idea that employment branding is not HR or marketing – it is, in fact, HR and marketing. It’s the point where they intersect, then interact.

So, what makes us special? We are a team of marketers who have spent years branding solutions to HR and now building solutions for HR. Our talented team of marketing professionals is dedicated to a single industry – HR. We built our proprietary approach on the best behavioral science tools and practices in the industry.

And we integrated it all with world-class IBM infrastructure. It’s a different idea. A different structure. And it’s all designed to give you dramatically different outcomes.

Learn More
Contact Aaron Hofeling to learn more about how we can help you optimize your employer brand through:

• Culture research
• Creative EVPs
• Career sites
• Recruitment marketing
• Social recruitment
• Culture and job videos
• Talent community management