

# KEEPING THE CORNERSTONE OF YOUR ORGANIZATION

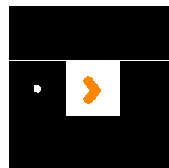
*Employer Branding is a Necessity  
in an Economic Slowdown*



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The present realization of an economic slowdown possibly leading to a recession has sent many organizations scrambling to tighten spending, an action that most people would have been hard-pressed to foresee just twelve months ago. The outlook of potential hiring freezes and massive layoffs has caused some organizations and their respective human resources gatekeepers to retrench and even eliminate recruitment and retention initiatives. Is this a smart decision?

This course of action may achieve minimal short-term gains, but also carries the risk of ending all-important dialogue with existing and potential employees. If an organization is to survive the onslaught of an economic downturn and negative press that so often predicates a business slowdown, it must hire and retain the best employees in the marketplace.

### ***Don't be afraid to act in these times***

Your organization must be prepared to wait out the gloom prognosticators, and move forward despite the urge to do otherwise.

In the past, most recessions of negative growth in the United States have lasted upwards of four consecutive quarters. Moreover, in some industries, the purchasing cycles may take an additional year or two to recover to pre-recession levels. Panic can set in.

Many organizations simply examine the sales forecasts and cut spending across the board, which is likely to include a reduction or even elimination of communication expenditures to customer *and* employee constituencies. In essence, companies will no longer *talk* to their key audiences during a recession. This may spell disaster.

Recent studies have shown that this reactive course of action may leave organizations vulnerable once the economy has regained momentum. Firms that drastically disengage in dialog with its core constituencies, be they customers or employees, often find their share of mind and market share reduced once recovery has begun.

From a staffing viewpoint, companies that retrench are likely to find themselves in a catch up mode, chasing those organizations that wisely tried to reach and embrace employee constituencies during the recession.

A senior HR professional must resist the temptations of departmental cutbacks and drastically reduced communications to employee audiences.

## ***Develop your Employer Brand***

The astute human resources executive should consider a proactive route, namely to engage in a corporate *employer branding* exercise to reach a broad array of audiences including current employees, potential hires, investors, influencers, and even the general public.

To the uninformed, employer branding may seem like marketing lingo. And indeed, it is. Marketing acumen is now firmly embedded in the mindset of effective human resources communications. Indeed, the best of today's HR professionals must recognize that they are corporate marketing communications strategists as well as human resources specialists.

Let's examine in detail what employer branding can achieve for an organization, and how it can be implemented.

### ***What is employer branding?***

*Employer branding* is the development and communication of an organization's culture as an employer in the marketplace.



Employer branding effects the experience of being employed by a particular firm. During divergent periods of economic growth or recession, employer branding assumes that *all* employees are discriminating consumers, to be engaged, won over and retained by employers.

Employer branding is the essence of the employment experience, providing touch points that commence with initial employer brand awareness, and continuing throughout the tenure of employment, even extending into retirement.

Employer branding is a distinguishing and relevant opportunity for a company to differentiate itself from the competition.

### ***What can employer branding do for an organization?***

When properly planned and executed, an employer branding initiative can generate lively dialog between an employer and its employees, build a rationale for a 'mutual working arrangement', and establish compelling reasons to commit to the arrangement.

A successful employer branding initiative articulates a reason why a potential employee should consider a particular employer.

Employer branding isolates the competitive advantages that one employer has over others in its marketplace in times of employment consideration.

Employer branding also creates meaningful and lasting reasons for employees to remain loyal to their employer.



### ***How to implement an employer branding strategy***

Here are six steps that will assist HR decision-makers in the implementation of a sound and effective employer branding strategy.

1. Develop a series of measurable and attainable business objectives for your employer branding campaign. Be certain to consider existing and potential employee groups, as well as key influencers and thought-leaders. Remember that in uncertain times like today, recruiting and retention objectives fluctuate, with potential hires sometimes rethinking pay and perk demands, and showing more loyalty.
2. Enlist the services of a recruitment advertising agency to focus on employer branding strategies and execution. There are many such firms that have a wealth of industry expertise, and will bring the employer brand to life in traditional and non-traditional media including Internet-based initiatives.
3. Launch an information gathering process that will identify and prioritize the needs and expectations of the target groups you wish to reach. Uncover the employees' perceptions of the existing employer brand through primary marketing research. Use a firm that has experience in HR communications strategy. This discipline will help determine how the employer brand has evolved in the mindset of the target audience.
4. Have the agency create an employer brand strategy built on a foundation of vital information and data that will resonate with the target audiences. Validate this strategy with key constituencies.

5. Execute the employer branding strategy, following the creative and media guidelines established by your agency.
6. Monitor the progress of your employer branding strategy through a well-defined response management program. Be certain to track employees referrals, processed resumes, tendered and accepted offers, retention rates, and job posting hits. Remember to review action timelines for each of the aforementioned activities.

By adhering to these six steps, a company can feel confident that it will be a leader rather than a follower during economic downturns that appear periodically.

Careful planning and development of an employer brand will help draw positive attention to your company, bring life to recruiting efforts, and solidify retention rates.



*Steve Mamarchev is a recognized leader in the areas of marketing research, human resources, communications and strategic planning. Steve, who heads up best practice research and communications at Inward Strategic Consulting, brings expertise and drive to the firm. His academic background spans the country with a BA from Harvard and an MBA from Stanford. Prior to joining Inward, Steve served as senior vice president and managing director of Research Dimensions International, working globally with clients in high-tech, health care, hospitality, financial services, food, automotive and human resource sectors. Also, he has conducted numerous management seminars and has been guest speaker at many national business conferences.*