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How do Global Organizations Build Employee Advocates Who Champion Their Brand

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Abstract

[Excerpt] Increasingly job applicants are focusing more on the image of the companies that they are applying to. 54% of online job seekers read company reviews before deciding to join and 75% of job seekers consider the employer brand before deciding to apply to a job. A staggering 69% of would-be employees would not accept a job from a company with a bad employer brand even if the alternative was no job at all. Additionally, positive employer brands can have positive effects on a company's bottom line. A study found that positive employer brands can lead to reductions in turnover and cost-per-hire, as well as an increase in qualified applicants and time to hire. These statistics show the strategic importance of focusing on an employer brand that delivers for potential applicants. In the following research we will determine the best strategy for building an employer brand through a company's own employees.

Keywords

Human Resources, branding, employee advocates, brand ambassador, brand management, HR, brand citizenship

Comments

Suggested Citation

Required Publisher Statement

Executive Summary

Research Question

How do global organizations build employee advocates who champion their brand?

Introduction

Increasingly job applicants are focusing more on the image of the companies that they are applying to. 54% of online job seekers read company reviews before deciding to join[1] and 75% of job seekers consider the employer brand before deciding to apply to a job[1]. A staggering 69% of would-be employees would not accept a job from a company with a bad employer brand even if the alternative was no job at all[2]. Additionally, positive employer brands can have positive effects on a company's bottom line. A study found that positive employer brands can lead to reductions in turnover and cost-per-hire, as well as an increase in qualified applicants and time to hire[3]. These statistics show the strategic importance of focusing on an employer brand that delivers for potential applicants. In the following research we will determine the best strategy for building an employer brand through a company's own employees.

Factors Influencing Brand Citizenship Behavior

An organization's leadership style plays a vital role in brand transformation and brand esteem. A value-based regime and a transformational administration affect workers positively and irrevocably[4]. Although polar opposites of each other, both *Transactional leadership style* (focus on organization, supervision and group performance, maintaining normal flow of operations and exchanging rewards for performance) and *Transformational leadership style* (focus on team-building, coaching, collaboration & inspiring change within the organization) are the more dominant styles in explaining brand citizenship behavior. It is important to note that employee behavior is framed by internal brand perception[5]. This means that the corporate image of a company should mirror the organization's reality. For new employees in the organization, brand training has a positive impact on communication, satisfaction, and employee commitment. Evidence shows that employers who delay brand training fail to produce positive outcomes in communication, satisfaction, and commitment[6]. Marketing and incorporating brand messages into work activities help a company to prosper by advertising its brand. Simultaneously, involving HR in internal branding projects through an understanding of the company's values and work culture can help in the creation of a common goal for both HR and marketing departments[7]. For successful implementation of brand values and leadership, the HR department should be brand-centered; applicants with high personal identity-brand identity fit should be recruited and promoted[8].

Designing a Brand Ambassador Program

Get Executives on Board: Start with communications from your executive team that encourage engagement. Let employees know that it's ok to talk about the company on different platforms, this can be a big change from previous communications[9].
Educate your employees: Keep your employees up to date with what's going on at the company[10]. Use social media and the company intranet to post product updates or new releases, event details, and communications from the leadership team[11]. It is vital to partner with marketing to educate your employees on what rules you have for social media and brand management[12].

Encourage Share and Tell:
Create content and hashtags for your employees to share. Organize employee events to allow employees to engage with each other and the brand[13]. Allow employees to write on your company pages such as LinkedIn or company blogs[14]. Make sure employees know that engaging with your brand on social media can enhance their image as well. As shown in Figures 1 and 2, a large majority of respondents claimed that their professional engagement on social media helped to further their careers[15].

Measure Success:
The goal of employee advocate programs is to give applicants a realistic preview of working at the company. This will encourage self-selection and improve desired recruiting metrics. Using retention rates, the cost and quality of hires, and the number of applicants you can track the success of your employee advocate program[16].

Practitioner Examples

GE
In 2017, GE began to roll out an employee brand ambassador program with a $0 budget[17]. They grew their brand ambassador army to 13,000 ambassadors with few resources and achieved strong results. The premise of the program was a foundational course in how to use personal social media to promote the GE employer brand. This course allowed passionate employees to connect with the brand and provided a streamlined approach to messaging. The course has since been incorporated into new employee orientation and other areas of the employee life cycle. GE also focused on the longevity of their brand ambassadors by making the process easy for employees. They have multiple ways of delivering content that employees can "amplify" and allow participants to be as involved as they want. The program partners with marketing to continue engaging ambassadors in the company messaging. Making sure employees knew they had permission to post about GE was key. This culture shift was achieved by involving key leaders as role models. Some quick engagement best practices are having an ambassador's resource web page on your company intranet, holding monthly tips and tricks workshops, and continuously creating engaging content with your communications or marketing team[18]. This initiative resulted in 800% increase in applicants following the first brand ambassador campaign. There was an increased talent pool through use of ambassador connections and organic engagement took the place of paid campaigns (equivalent to $3M in Q1 2017).

Patagonia
Patagonia is widely known for engaging its employees in its brand offerings. Specifically, Patagonia hires product enthusiasts who participate in the sports and activities that the company produces for. This employee alignment with the output and values of the organization has allowed for a unique employee ambassador system to be set up. Patagonia employees are frequently quoted in company blogs and used as advocates of the company[2]. Patagonia's use of employees makes them an attractive place to work for millennials seeking value driven work and outdoor enthusiasts who can picture themselves alongside the adventurous employees at the company.

Conclusion

Internal brand management has a significant impact on brand commitment which leads to brand citizenship behavior and brand citizenship behavior has a significant and positive impact on overall customer satisfaction. It is clear that HR's vital role in promoting and sustaining this environment can reap benefits that ripple not just within the organization but also impact bottom-line results.

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Appendix

Benefits Advocates Receive from Employee Advocacy

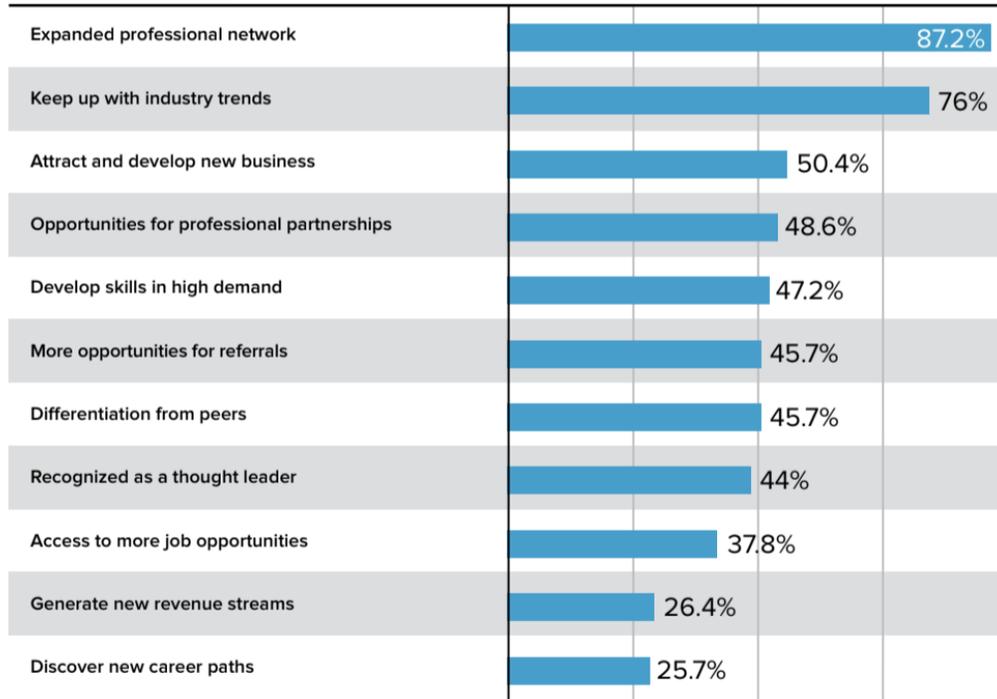| Benefit	Percentage
Expanded professional network	87.2%
Keep up with industry trends	76%
Attract and develop new business	50.4%
Opportunities for professional partnerships	48.6%
Develop skills in high demand	47.2%
More opportunities for referrals	45.7%
Differentiation from peers	45.7%
Recognized as a thought leader	44%
Access to more job opportunities	37.8%
Generate new revenue streams	26.4%
Discover new career paths	25.7%

Figure 1: Bloom, K. (2016). *Understanding Employee Advocacy on Social Media*. Hinge Research Institute in association with SocialMedia Today.
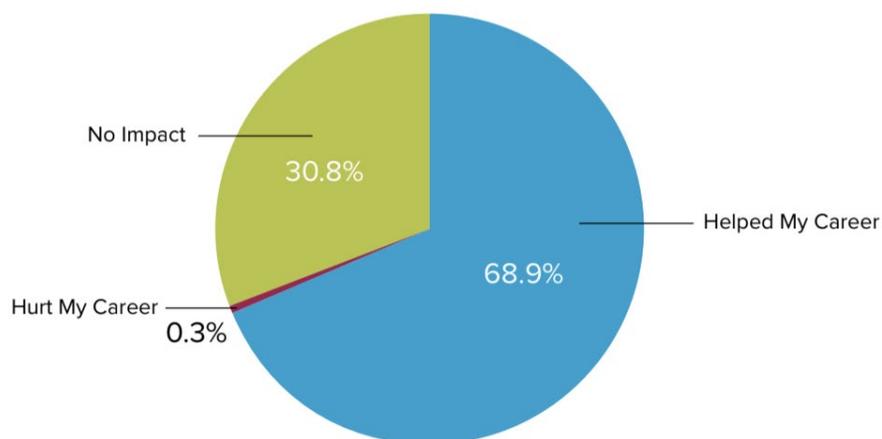
Impact of Social Media on Your Career

No Impact — 30.8%
Helped My Career — 68.9%
Hurt My Career — 0.3%

Figure 2: Bloom, K. (2016). *Understanding Employee Advocacy on Social Media*. Hinge Research Institute in association with SocialMedia Today.

Further Reading

Understanding Employee Advocacy on Social Media

Posted November 16, 2015 by Hinge Marketing
Conducted by Hinge and Social Media Today Every year, social media plays a greater role in shaping the way firms are perceived. And increasingly, the lines between personal and business social networks are blurring. In this new study from Hinge and Social Media Today, we describe how the most successful firms are encouraging their employees…

https://hingemarketing.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Research-EmployerBrandStudy-1.pdf

Research Shows Firms with Employee Advocacy Programs Grow Faster

Posted November 16, 2015 by Lee Frederiksen
Are your employees advocates for your firm? In our new research report, we uncover how firms are using employee advocacy on social media to build their brand.

https://hingemarketing.com/blog/story/research-shows-firms-with-employee-advocacy-programs-grow-faster