How to Craft a Strong Remote Employer Brand When You Recruit and Hire Online

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When the COVID-19 pandemic forced millions of people into remote-work arrangements, it also forced thousands of employers to rethink their recruiting and hiring strategies.

Companies that have embraced remote work as a viable option in the post-pandemic economy now find themselves with exponentially larger talent pools because, for them, talent is now unbounded by geography.

Further, having a remote (or partially remote) workforce can drive up retention rates and employee engagement, John Hazan, Dan Schwartz, Nate Anderson, and Andriana Diez at Bain & Company write.

Fluency in remote work is now a competitive advantage for companies. "In a world shaped by global competition, emerging skill shortages, and changing demographics, remote working could be a key enabler for companies to more effectively deploy their workforce," writes Raphael Bick and his collegues at McKinsey.

"Virtual approaches to work can also be a competitive advantage to attract a wide array of employees, including working mothers, professionals who want more flexible lifestyles, as well as broader international talent."

While day-to-day workflows are finding ways to thrive in a virtual environment, however, remote recruiters and employer brand-builders working from home are having to make a harder pivot.

Employer branding has long been a digital discipline, sure, but it's worked from an assumption that, eventually, a candidate's digital touchpoints would become in-person interactions. How, then, can employers craft a strong brand when their recruiting and hiring have moved online?

Here are five tips for building a compelling remote employer brand when those later touchpoints remain in the digital realm.

Place Your Company's Values Front and Center

This is employer branding 101, and it holds true whether you interact with candidates in person or online only.

As Kate Heinz at Built In puts it, companies must be explicit about their core values, and they must demonstrate how their teams live those values.

"As candidates progress through the interview process, make up for the lack of in-person interaction by creating virtual opportunities for them to engage with your people and get to know your type of organizational culture," Heinz writes.

"Schedule video conferences with various members of the team and discuss some of the innovative remote team building activities you've implemented. Anything you can do to mimic the impact of an in-office interview is fair game, so get creative."

Make Company Leadership Accessible

This is a corollary to Heinz's point. For an employer brand to thrive in a totally digital space, the company's leadership needs to get active and involved.

This is simple to achieve. You can start by having company leaders record introductory videos, as Daniel Teo at HRM Asia explains. Send those to candidates before the first interview round. You can also send articles written by company leaders or talks they've given. Even better: Make leadership accessible for direct Q&A.

Note, too, that leadership takes on a different dimension in remote working environments. Leaders must be less tactical and more inspirational in the way they guide their teams, Andrea Alexander, Aaron De Smet, and Mihir Mysore at McKinsey write.

"When the workforce is hybrid virtual, leaders need to rely less on hierarchical and more on inspirational forms of leadership," they argue. "The dispersed employees working remotely require new leadership behaviors to compensate for the reduced socioemotional cues characteristic of digital channels."

Be sure this spirit of inspirational leadership shines through in the content and communications between senior leaders and candidates.

Demonstrate a Culture of Connectivity

Social connectivity is the bond that holds any workforce together. When people share a sense of purpose and a feeling that they're working alongside their colleagues toward a goal, it's a deeply satisfying feeling.

When teams switch to working remotely, research has shown that some people miss the connectivity that previously thrived in the office, Adriana Dahik et al. at BCG report. This is based on the consultancy's survey of more than 12,000 employees across the U.S., Germany, and India.

For recruiters, a crucial aspect of remote employer branding is to reassure candidates that they will be joining an actual team, not an atomized workforce full of people they never get the chance to know.

So, tell stories about how your workforce has adapted to remote or hybrid-remote ways of doing work. If there is a blog or a Slack channel where people share personal stories, for example, let candidates have a peek into that world.

Invest in the Right Tech to Recruit and Hire

Remote employer brand-building starts with having the right technology for every part of the candidate journey.

At the very beginning of that journey, the right tools can reinforce a strong employer brand by making sure the right candidates see the right vacancies. AI is helpful in personalizing that phase of the journey, then plotting out subsequent touch points to ensure qualified candidates see themselves reflected in the right roles.

Along that journey, too, tools that facilitate thoughtful interviews will be helpful. "From a candidate perspective, I believe that companies should emphasize a thoughtful interview process — one that allows hiring managers and coworkers to genuinely get to know the candidate," says Ken Schnee, a general manager at candidate screening company Sterling. "These interviews can be designed to demonstrate company culture as well as engage with teammates."

Those touchpoints can also reinforce previous interactions, as described above: Chats with company leadership, demonstrations of a connected culture, explication of the company's values.

Follow Through on an Employer Brand Promise With Thoughtful Onboarding

"Tomorrow's workforce is just as important as today's," Elizabeth Kaufman et al. at BCG write. "While it is natural for leaders to spend a large majority of their time thinking about how best to position their existing employees for success in remote settings, they must not lose track of how to adjust the recruitment and onboarding of new employees in a remote setting."

The BCG team notes how important it is for new hires to have content and processes from Day 1 to get them up to speed. This includes everything from training modules to simply having a virtual channel for new hires to meet their colleagues for a friendly chat.

Mac's List founder Mac Prichard recommends creating a welcome package — with warm greetings and an overview of company rules and culture — for remote hires.

"Send this welcome package to your new hire with plenty of lead time before their start date and schedule first-day meetings for onboarding and training," Prichard writes. "This will enable the new employee to familiarize themself with the materials, ask questions, and know what to anticipate on their first day."

By visualizing the entire candidate journey and looking for places where digital interactions can replace or even improve upon in-person interactions, employers set themselves up for long-term success.

Even when recruiters and HR teams are working remotely alongside the rest of the team, this attention to detail will help build a remote employer brand that attracts top talent, wherever they themselves might be.

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