THE IMPACT OF EMPLOYER BRANDING ON THE IT RECRUITMENT PROCESS

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Abstract:

In the fast-paced world of IT recruitment, the significance of employer branding has grown immensely. This research explores the substantial impact of employer branding on the hiring of IT professionals. Faced with a competitive market and a continuous demand for skilled IT talent, organisations must distinguish themselves to attract top candidates. This research investigates how a well-defined employer brand can significantly impact the recruitment process in the IT sector. It explores the critical elements of an effective employer brand, such as the company's mission, values, work culture, and employee value proposition (EVP). Furthermore, it delves into the strategies and communication channels that resonate with IT professionals, emphasising the importance of online platforms and IT-specialised recruitment methods. The findings highlight the strong link between a robust employer brand and successful IT recruitment, revealing effective strategies for securing top talent in a competitive landscape.

Keywords:

employer branding, recruitment, IT.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's dynamic business environment, attracting and retaining qualified talent is a key challenge for organisations. The concept of employer branding is gaining increasing importance. Employer branding refers to the strategy by which organisations build their identity as an employer, and communicate their values, culture, and employee benefits, to attract the most qualified candidates. This process is increasingly recognised as a key factor in successful recruitment and building a formidable team. Through this paper, we will explore various aspects of employer branding and its role in recruitment, providing insight into the significant link between effective employer branding and the successful attraction of qualified candidates. Through the analysis of relevant theoretical concepts and a case study, we will consider the recruitment process and the application of employer branding in practice, to provide a deeper understanding of this topic and its impact on modern organisations.

2. EMPLOYER BRANDING

The term employer branding refers to the creation and maintenance of an ideal image, as well as the corporate identity of the company. The term itself was mentioned for the first time in 1990 by Simon Barrow, and then, together with Simon, Tim Ambler defined the term employer branding in 1996 (Barrow & Ambler, 1996). Employer branding includes the opinions of employees, impressions that candidates have obtained through job advertisements, social networks, job interviews, as

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well as information provided by acquaintances who work at that company. All these components together shape the company's reputation and image as an employer both in the public and among potential candidates. Every employer has its own brand, which can be positive or negative. That is why it is important to actively work on building and improving the brand. The importance of employer branding is becoming more important day by day, and internal and external branding are equally important. Employer branding is key to building a reputation, attracting candidates and talents, employee retention, preventing dissatisfaction in the workplace (The Value Of Employer Branding, 2023).

2.1. How to successfully define the company brand?

Defining the brand involves shaping the identity and positioning of both the organisation and the employer within the market. It aims to build a brand that attracts and retains the target group, builds trust, and creates long-term brand value. For the brand to be successfully defined, the employer goes through the necessary steps. It is necessary that the employer understands the target group and researches their needs and values to be able to shape a brand that will fit well with them, clearly establish the company's mission and vision, and identify the core values to be communicated through the brand, identifies brand values that will differentiate it from competitors, develops a visual identity that reflects the brand's personality and values. Maintains its brand, every contact with employees (as internal branding) and every touch with the public (as external branding) must maintain a positive impression of the brand, and it is necessary that the employer monitors and adjusts the performance of the built brand, analyses the results and measures success, because defining the brand is a process that is constantly being developed.

Defining an employer's identity involves crafting a mission, vision, and brand values. The mission clarifies the organisation's actions and goals, while the vision outlines an inspiring future. These elements should complement each other. Brand values define the organisation's beliefs, forming its foundation (Brand Identity, 2023). Brand communication encompasses all elements forming a brand's identity. It should be authentic, appealing, and relevant to establish an emotional connection with the target audience (Brand communication, 2023). Creating a visual identity involves corporate design, which includes elements like logos, typography, colours, and layout. Consistent use of this design across communication channels enhances brand recognition and awareness, setting it apart in the market and forging emotional bonds with the audience (den Held, 2023).

Internal branding involves establishing a brand identity within a company and ensuring it is embraced by employees. The primary aim is to empower, motivate, and align employees with the organisation's goals and values. This is achieved by communicating the brand's vision, mission, and values, offering training and support, fostering teamwork, and recognising achievements. Strong internal branding leads to higher employee engagement, loyalty, and productivity, which, in turn, enhances external branding and the company's market reputation (Mitchell, 2002). The Employee Value Proposition (EVP) is a unique set of offerings that a company provides to employees as part of its business strategy. It includes benefits, values, work culture, and growth opportunities in exchange for their commitment. The EVP is crucial for employer branding, aiming to establish the company as an attractive employer. Its key goals are attracting, retaining, and motivating talent while nurturing long-term relationships. An effective EVP sets the company apart in the job market, attracting candidates who align with its culture and values. Key components of EVP include benefits, career development, work culture, business mission, and work experience (Šta je EVP?, 2023).

External employer branding encompasses the strategies and practices a company employs to cultivate and uphold its brand image in the external sphere, focusing on how it projects itself as an appealing employer to the broader community. Establishing a positive reputation is crucial for drawing in high-calibre talent. This entails activities such as managing online reputation, delivering favourable candidate experiences during the recruitment journey, and maintaining transparent and authentic communication with potential employees and the public. Moreover, employee engagement is a significant factor in external employer branding. Content and engaged employees can serve as brand advocates, exerting a positive influence on the organisation's image among potential candidates. Monitoring in employer branding involves collecting, analysing, and tracking data to assess brand perception and strategy effectiveness. Methods like surveys, social media tracking, feedback analysis, and retention rate monitoring are employed. Insights from this monitoring help organizations refine their branding strategies to better attract talent in the labour market. Creating a brand strategy is essential for its successful marketing. Each successfully defined brand has a different branding strategy, but they all have a focus on creating an emotionally engaging and authentic experience for their audience (Brand strategy examples, 2023).

Corporate responsibility is a crucial aspect of employer branding, as it signifies an organisation's commitment to societal and environmental responsibility. Firms practicing corporate responsibility enhance their reputation, gain a competitive edge, and achieve long-term success.

They actively engage in addressing social issues, environmental protection, human rights promotion, and community improvement. In today's business landscape, corporate responsibility is vital as consumers, investors, and employees expect companies to take ethical actions and contribute positively to society (Fernando, 2023).

3. RECRUITMENT

Recruiting is the second of the six processes in human resource management, following planning and succeeded by selection, employee training and development, career development, and finally, employee performance evaluation and compensation determination. The recruiting process entails identifying qualified candidates to fill open positions (Jackson & Schuler, 2009). How the recruitment process will take place depends on the economy where it occurs. Recruiting in the IT industry is quite a demanding process due to the nature of the job. Successful recruitment brings highly qualified experts crucial for the company's technological development. Organisations must be flexible and innovative to attract and retain top IT talent.

The characteristics that distinguish recruitment in the IT sector from recruitment in other sectors are Dynamism – The IT industry is changing day by day. Technologies advance rapidly, and not following trends makes evaluating and finding ideal specialists increasingly challenging. Shortage of talent – The extensive demand for senior candidates results in a talent shortage in our labour market. Technical skills - Candidates must have specific technical skills, as they significantly influence their recruitment. Technical interviews - For recruiters to know that someone is an ideal candidate, they should conduct a technical interview. Primarily, it involves a technical task, questioning, or code examination. The interview's complexity varies based on the candidate's targeted position level. Continuous learning and development - The rapid advancement of IT technologies means that professionals must continuously improve their skills and follow trends to be more attractive to recruiters. Teamwork and agility – Teamwork is just one of the characteristics of an IT company workplace and it is vital to an optimal work experience. To swiftly adjust to market changes and promptly meet market demands, candidates should possess the crucial trait of agility (Tegze, 2020). IT recruiter is a demanding position which requires professional knowledge and understanding of the specifics of the IT industry, technology, and trends.

Recruitment planning involves identifying the need for fresh staff by systematically analysing the organisation's current human resources and future requirements. This process includes job analysis to create comprehensive job descriptions, and facilitating recruitment, selection,

and performance evaluation. In the dynamic IT industry, monitoring technology trends and workforce capacity is crucial for ensuring a high-quality professional team and efficient recruitment planning (Đorđević Boljanović, 2022). Internal recruitment involves moving existing employees within the organisation, either through transfers or promotions based on qualifications and past performance. It helps retain talent, boost motivation, and reduce recruitment costs. However, it may lead to a lack of fresh perspectives and competition, potentially causing stagnation and reduced employee motivation (Đorđević Boljanović, 2022). External recruitment involves the use of various methods to bring in external experts for new positions. While it can be costly, it brings fresh perspectives and ideas to the organisation. The choice between internal and external recruitment depends on factors like the position, industry, urgency, and budget (Đorđević Boljanović, 2022). Advertising in recruitment involves creating a job description and specific job advertisements. These ads are tailored to the job description and are promoted through various communication channels to attract a broad audience of potential candidates, filling the open position (Đorđević Boljanović, 2022). Employment agencies serve as intermediaries between employers and candidates, aiding in the recruitment and selection process. They come in several types, including general agencies for all industries, specialised agencies for specific industries, executive agencies for managerial roles, temporary agencies for seasonal and substitute positions, and headhunting agencies for key expert positions within organisations. Online recruiting, which involves attracting and finding candidates through digital platforms, is increasingly popular among employers due to its wider reach and efficient candidate filtering. Various online platforms and professional networks, such as LinkedIn and specialised job websites, offer quick and cost-effective ways to connect with potential candidates. This approach also taps into a global talent pool, supplying access to a diverse range of skilled individuals (Đorđević Boljanović, Dražeta, Babić, & Dobrijević, 2020). Referral recruiting, which involves sourcing candidates through employee referrals or personal contacts, is gaining popularity due to the assumption that successful employees will recommend suitable candidates. Some organisations even offer incentives to employees whose referrals are hired. However, it can lead to issues like team homogeneity, nepotism, internal conflicts, and biased recommendations, potentially affecting the objectivity of the hiring process (Đorđević Boljanović, 2022). Recruiting through universities aims to attract and hire young talent but can be costly if scholarships are involved. On the other hand, job fairs offer a more cost-effective strategy for direct interaction with candidates, allowing employers to assess skills and present their brand effectively, while candidates gain insights into the employer and open positions.

Active talent search, particularly in IT, involves identifying and engaging highly skilled candidates, often for senior positions. This approach is commonly associated with headhunting, where recruiters actively seek out potential candidates who may not be actively job hunting. In IT, platforms like LinkedIn and Github are vital for such searches. LinkedIn offers a vast network for recruiters but requires effective search strategies, including Boolean search. Github, primarily for developers, supplies technical insights and can be filtered by location, programming language, and more. Once a candidate is found, recruiters can initiate direct contact and explore further collaboration (What is a headhunter, 2023).

Job advertisements play a crucial role in attracting candidates. They should be concise, clear, and include essential details like job title, work mode, company description, job responsibilities, qualifications, benefits, application instructions, and a transparent selection process. Common mistakes to avoid are lengthy, generic ads with irrelevant information and unclear communication (Job Advertisement, 2023). Creating visuals for social media to accompany job advertisements is essential for grabbing the audience's attention. These visuals should align with the brand identity, be informative, and tailored to the specific social media platform's image format. Engaging and creative visuals can enhance user interaction and reach a broader audience (How do you create engaging visual content, 2023).

4. CASE STUDY

This case study focuses on the recruitment and initial interview phases conducted by "Friendly HR" for a client company seeking a candidate for a job vacancy. The process began on April 12 and concluded on June 28, 2023. The process began by creating a well-optimised job advertisement based on client-provided information. This job advertisement was published on poslovi.infostud.com to reach a broader audience. Additionally, an attention-grabbing visual for social media, specifically LinkedIn, was crafted to engage potential candidates. Active talent search techniques, such as Boolean search on LinkedIn and Recruitin.net, were employed to find suitable candidates for the role. Once potential candidates were found, personalised communication was initiated. A candidate's profile was analysed using the Crystal plugin, supplying insights into their communication style and personality. This analysis guided the creation of tailored messages for candidates. Following candidate responses, the process moved to interview scheduling. Well-prepared interview questions, employing various interviewing methods, were used to gain a deeper understanding of candidates' skills, experiences, and motivations.

Figure 1. Job advertisement.

Java Developer

<u>Belgrade, on-site</u>

About the comany

Our client has been a leading Serbian software company for 30+ years, specializing in the development and implementation of its own high-quality software products and solutions. The company's systems support energy production and supply, telecommunications, trade, manutacturing, public administration, pharmaceutical companies, property management, and hotels.

We are currently looking for a Java Developer (Medior/Senior) to join our client's team of more than 60 IT engineers.

Qualifications:

- 3+ years of experience
- Java
- Databases (Oracle, SQL)
- Spring Core
- REST web services
- A degree ina a tehnical field or equivalent work experience
- Solid command of the English language
- Bonus: Experience with ERP systems

We'd love for you to apply, even if you feel you don't meet every requirement in this post. We are looking for great people, not just those who check every box.

What's in it for you:

- Opportunity for growth and development with quarterly performance reviews and promotions
- Flexible hours
- Salary range MEDIOR EUR 1300-1700 net, SENIOR EUR 1700-2100 net
- Budget for your professional development
- Private health insurance
- Annual bonuses and 13th month salary
- Sports activities
- Team building activities twice a year
- Rooftop DJ parties at the end of each mounth

If this sounds like you cup of Java, APPLY NOW by sending us your CV!

The selection process is straightforward and take only 2 weeks.

Source: (Jobs, 2023).

4.1. Visual for social media

The visual that will be posted on social networks, primarily on the LinkedIn platform, shows an illustration of a desktop computer on the monitor of which code in the Java programming language is written (Figure 2). The code itself prints the most essential information from the job ad, namely the position to be filled, the required experience, and the salary range. The code has a syntax error, and thus, as said in the post description, the idea is for a potential candidate to recognise it. The more users of the platform interact with the post, "like" or comment, the more "walls" the post will appear on and the greater the chance of finding a potential candidate. The post description is as follows: "If you understand what's wrong here, read the entire ad at the link in the comment!"

4.2. Headhunting and candidate contacting

The Boolean search on LinkedIn and the Recruitin.net website was used for the method of active talent search for this paper. Once potential candidates were found, Github was used to determine their qualifications and required skills for the given position. Analysing the LinkedIn profile of one of the candidates that was found, using the Crystal extension on Google Chrome (Figure 3), we arrived at a way to approach him (Figure 4).

4.3. Interview

The interview is a panel by way of organisation, structured type with behavioural and situational questions. The interview was formed exclusively for the needs of hiring a candidate for whom the client has a vacant position - Java Developer. Some of the questions for the interview are: What kind of work fulfils you the most? What motivates you to work hard at work? What got you interested in programming? Why did you decide to study Java? how would you behave in a situation where you have a deadline, and you cannot finish the work because someone else who has not completed their part of the work is slowing you down? Can you describe to me a situation if you would have to adapt to changes in the work environment or project? How would you adapt and how would it affect you and your work? How would you react if you had to use a programming language at work that is not characteristic of your job description? How would you overcome it? Do you have any questions?

At the end of the interview itself, it is important to mention the next steps in the selection process and to leave enough time between the candidates for questions and concerns of the candidate. In this step, it was not possible to offer a preliminary job offer as the first round of interviews was conducted by the employment agency. If the candidate successfully passes to the next round, the company does it itself, and then the salary and other benefits are negotiated, up to the signing of the contract.

Figure 2. Social media visual.
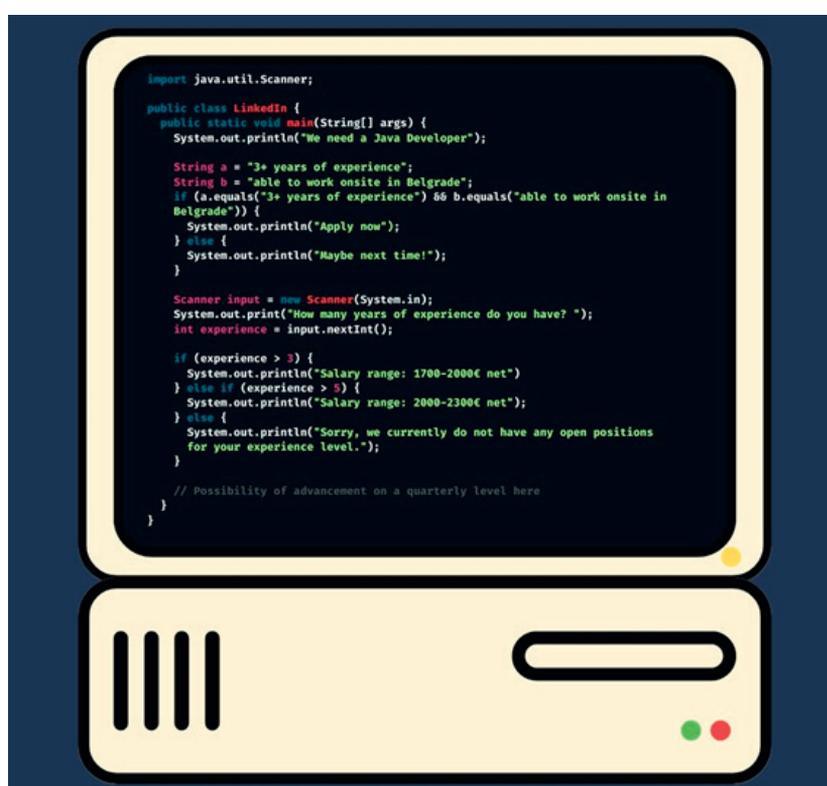
Source: (Friendly HR Job Java Developer, 2023).

Figure 3. The result of the "Crystal" analysis of the candidate's LinkedIn profile.
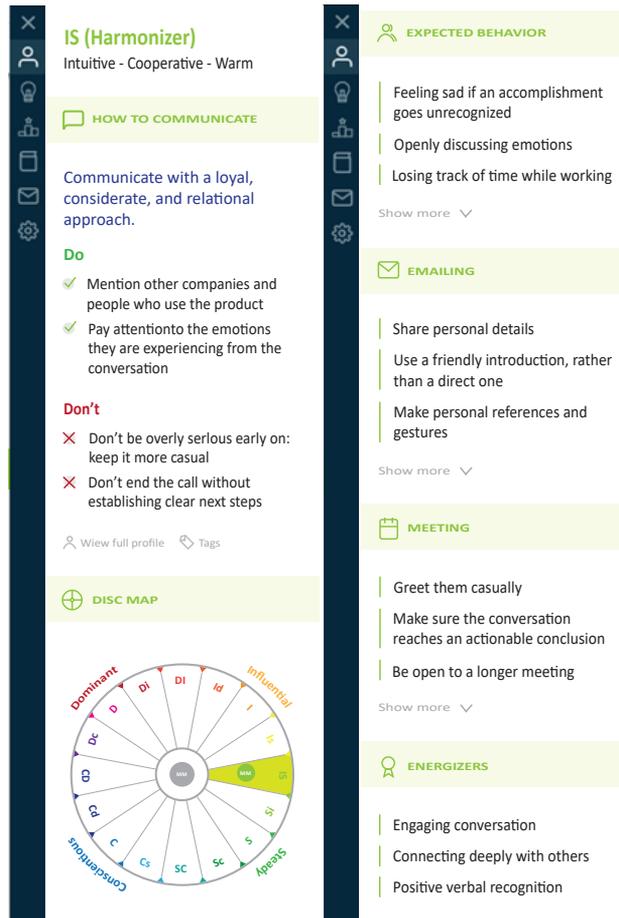

Figure 4. Example of a message sent to the candidate on LinkedIn.

Hey ***,

I hope you are well (and other formal phases). I am contacting you on behalf of the "Friendly HR" agency whose client is curently looking for a Senior Java Developer for the design development and maintenance of an ERP system. I am looking for a person who is good with Java, Oracle and SQL databases, and from looking al your profile I cincluded that you have all these skills, The location is Belgrade, we work in an agile team, from the office, and the company has been working for 30 years and has about sixty employees.

The starting net salary is between 1700 and 2000 EUR with the possibility of quarterly advancement. Working hours are flexi, and a 13th salary, vudgets for education, private health, and sport activities are included.

The selection process is no longer than two weeks, and I am open to all information. What to you think of this offer, do you have any questions?

4.4. Case study conclusion

In this case study, we analysed the recruitment and selection process for an open position, focusing on four key activities: creating a compelling job ad, designing engaging social media visuals, actively searching for top talent, and crafting effective interview questions. The job ad was thoughtfully crafted to attract a broad and relevant audience with clear language detailing qualifications, responsibilities, and the company's culture and brand values. Creative social media visuals effectively boosted the job opening's visibility, engaging potential candidates active on social platforms. Active candidate sourcing allowed us to discover highly qualified talent through research and

networking, with a focus on one candidate. Our interview questions, particularly situational ones, helped assess adaptability, problem-solving, and other abilities. These efforts culminated in a successful recruitment process, resulting in the ideal candidate moving to the next interview stage with the recruitment agency's client. The candidate was successfully hired on June 28, 2023.

Employer branding had a significant impact on the effectiveness of filling a position in this case study. Through the implementation of the employer branding strategy, the employment agency managed to attract a greater number of qualified candidates for the open position. This was achieved by creating a positive reputation for the employment agency as an organisation that cooperates with desirable employers that offer attractive working conditions, career development opportunities and employee support. Through this case study, it was seen that the quality of the employer's brand had a significant impact on the candidate's interest in the position. The agency actively promotes the culture, values, and benefits that the client offers to employees on social networks and other platforms. Through a visually appealing post, it created a strong impression among the target group of candidates. Also, through an active search for candidates, the company attracted potential talent who were already familiar with the brand and motivated to apply for the position. This approach to recruitment enabled a more efficient selection process. Employer branding contributed to increasing the visibility of the employment agency on the labour market, attracted qualified candidates and desirable employers, and shortened the time needed to fill a position.

5. CONCLUSION

Recruiting top talent is crucial for building a formidable team, and employer branding is a key part of achieving this goal. This paper supplies valuable insights into the significance of employer branding as a recruitment strategy. By effectively communicating an organisation's values, culture, and employee benefits, a compelling employer brand can be created that resonates with the target audience. This approach enables attracting the right candidates who align with the organisation's vision and values. In the digital age, potential candidates have access to a wealth of information about companies through online platforms. Therefore, a strong employer brand can create a positive perception and attract candidates, making the organisation an employer of choice. The presented case study confirms the importance of employer branding throughout the recruitment and selection process. High-quality employer branding can help organisations stand out in the labour market, attract talented individuals, and

create a positive employer reputation. This paper can serve as a foundation for further research into employer branding strategies, a crucial factor for organisations' success in attracting talent. On the other hand, a weak or negative employer brand can discourage talented individuals from considering employment opportunities with the organisation. Conducting further research into the long-term effects of employer branding on organisational development and competitiveness in the labour market is also recommended. Exploring modern technologies and trends that can influence employer branding strategies is vital to remain relevant and attract the most talented candidates in modern recruiting practices.

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