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Employee Value Propositions: A Key Marketing Tool for Talent Management



The focus on talent has gained much momentum in the past decade, reflecting the critical role that attracting, developing and retaining talented people has on business success. In this article, **Susan Sochart**, Group Account Director at BRAND LEARNING, reviews the importance of Employer Branding and the development of compelling Employee Value Propositions (EVPs) in attracting and retaining talent, and offers some practical ideas for handling these critical company initiatives.

Talent Management: A powerful strategy for business growth

Not that long ago, the ‘war for talent’ dominated the headlines, with corporations desperate to compete for the right resource. Today, despite the impact of recession on headcounts, it remains critical to attract and retain the right talent, and CEOs and HR Directors need to ask themselves some tough questions:

- *Are we offering a differentiated promise which will attract target candidates and motivate current employees, and which is closely aligned to our corporate brand?*
- *Are we over-reliant on salaries and missing other more compelling attraction and retention benefits?*
- *Are we investing efficiently using an integrated media approach which targets the right candidates at the right time with the right message?*
- *Are our employees experiencing the promises they were given when they joined?*

As these questions illustrate, rather than being a glorified ‘tug of war’ between companies over a decreasing pool of eligible candidates, Talent Management now holds a more strategic role.

So, in the same way as the move in the late 1990s from “Market Research” to “Customer Insight” departments signalled a more strategic and business-critical role for that team, the shift of focus to “Talent Management” in the Human Resources function signals its fundamental role in delivering a company’s growth objectives, by ensuring the right resources are on board. Building ‘employer reputation,’ just like building brands, requires a more strategic approach and the appropriate use of proven marketing tools.

Corporate brands, Employer brands and Employee Value Propositions (EVPs): What’s the link?

A relevant and differentiated ‘employer brand’ is key to attracting the right people to an organisation, and a powerful tool in its development is an Employee Value Proposition (EVP).

Just as a brand’s positioning provides the guiding light for its evolution and supporting activities, an EVP captures the essence of what a company wants to stand for in candidates’ and employees’ minds relative to competing employers. As such, an EVP is a vital first step in the development of a compelling employer brand.



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It is critical to understand how an EVP works in the context of the overall 'corporate brand' and how it is brought to life throughout the organisation's activities. The diagram below illustrates the inter-relationship between the corporate brand positioning and the range of promises it spawns e.g.

Customer Value Propositions (CVPs). A corporate brand positioning sets the agenda for the promises to specific target audiences – customers, employees, shareholders and the wider CSR community – but to deliver against those promises, employees need to be actively engaged to deliver a coherent brand experience at all 'touch points'.

The EVP, which defines the employee experience of the corporate brand, must therefore link to and build off key corporate brand elements, such as the corporate brand idea and values or beliefs, and engage all employees in its delivery.



EVP: The sum of the parts

At Brand Learning, we define an EVP as: "The unique set of attributes and benefits that will motivate target candidates to join a company and current employees to stay".

So what should an EVP contain? Not surprisingly, it should comprise similar elements to a brand positioning – namely, a clear strategic **positioning** (how we define our market, who's our target candidate/s, who's our competitive set); an underpinning **insight**, based on a deep understanding of target candidate and employee needs and motivations; a compelling and differentiating **promise**, supported by key, tangible facts; and an integrated **expression** of the EVP across all external and internal 'touchpoints'.

In short, an EVP should provide a succinct and clear distillation of what sets you apart as an employer, brought to life in a way which your target candidates or employees will find irresistible. Think Virgin, Google, Procter & Gamble, Accenture...



Key challenges and Practical responses:

At face value, the process of developing a compelling EVP sounds straightforward. But, based on our practical experience with our multinational clients, we've identified a number of challenges detailed below, as well as some practical responses:

Challenges

1. Effective EVP development demands Marketing excellence: Expertise is required in segmentation, insight, brand positioning and brand activation – yet EVPs are often driven and owned by the HR team who may not have all the above capabilities needed

2. Stakeholder engagement is critical: Lack of stakeholder engagement will seriously undermine the ability of the EVP to gain commitment and traction within the business and hence its ultimate effectiveness

3. Bespoke research is needed: Companies tend to fall back on existing research, but rarely has it been designed to uncover springboards for genuine EVP insights and propositions

4. Avoid internal focus: EVPs can be overly introspective and tactical, undermining their differentiation and ultimate impact

5. Employees are a discerning audience: EVPs offer a promise that needs to be delivered: employees are no less discerning than customers of a company's brands

6. There is a key difference between the EVP and the communication itself: An EVP is not an end in itself, it needs to be brought to life internally and externally through many touchpoints

Practical Responses

1. Combine a team of HR and Marketing: Both sets of functional skills should be brought to bear – HR teams can align and engage internal teams and stakeholders, Marketers bring skills in insight generation and proposition development. For both teams this is an excellent opportunity to build new skills

2. Define programme of stakeholder engagement upfront: Our work with our clients always involves engaging key stakeholders in scoping, EVP development and implementation. The approach can include depth interviews, facilitated workshops and diverse engagement materials

3. Generate rich, focused insight and involve wider team: We have seen how it has opened eyes amongst the team, highlighting new ideas and dispelling corporate myths. Innovative research approaches can add real value e.g. discussion boards, which engage the wider team in the process

4. Combine analytical and creative thinking in an iterative process of generation: Just as a brand needs an objective view and a future perspective, so too do EVPs. Generative sessions should be creative, challenging and stimulating – brains should hurt and, at the end, eyes should shine

5. Identify the shifts and action plans required: The gap between current reality and aspiration must be closed. Defining the perception shifts required and the action plans to close the gap is a key step prior to any communication

6. Bring the EVP to life through internal engagement and external implementation: All employees have a role in communicating the EVP, so engaging and enabling them to be employer 'ambassadors' is time well spent. Externally, the approach requires the defining of objectives, targets and channels and the creation of an implementation plan which brings cut-through in a saturated market



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The challenges are real but the benefits immense. Employee Value Propositions offer a key marketing tool to enable employers to attract and retain the right talent and to build the competitive edge needed to drive growth.

BRAND LEARNING is partnering major global companies in developing compelling Employee Value Propositions, leveraging our deep expertise in building capabilities in strategic marketing and brand-building and in employee engagement to create programmes that drive tangible changes in employee's attitudes, behaviours and skills.

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