



HUMAN RESOURCE (HR) BRANDING – AN ECONOMICAL WAYS TO MAKE A COMPANY FAMOUS

Mandha Shyam

Department of MHRM, Kakatiya University, Warangal, Telangana, India

Corresponding Authors' Email: shyammanda520@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

A brand is a product, service or concept that is publicly distinguished from other products, services or concepts, so that it can be easily communicated and helps in establishing a unique identity. The most important point to be noted here is that building a brand is a corporate strategic issue and not a short term tactical activity. HR today is viewed a big role in driving corporate success and for customer satisfaction. HR branding has been an established phenomenon in the western countries; it is still to catch Indian organizations. Already there are a few Indian companies' like Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Wipro, Infosys, Satyam, Tata Telecom Polaris etc., which are successfully ruing with established HR brands both in India and abroad. This article emphases the need of HR branding and achieving brand success in employees. Particularly, this paper proposes some guide lines and ways for economical steps for promoting Company by all means with HR Branding.

KEYWORDS: Human Resource, HR Branding and Economical

INTRODUCTION

Organizations, in the past, looked up to functions like sales, marketing, Research and Development, etc, to foster the growth of the company, but today, they are also looking at Human Resource (HR) for the same. Most professionals now admit that one of the few channels left to communicate the corporate brand to its customers is the employee. Various researches have revealed that strong brands contribute to strong competitive presence in the market. Therefore, the importance of branding HR follows quite as a consequence. A brand is a product, service or concept that is publicly distinguished from other products, services or concepts so that it can be easily communicated and helps in establishing a unique identity. The most important point to be noted here is that building a brand is a corporate strategic issue and not a short term tactical activity. In case of HR, the past few years have seen dramatic changes in its perception or outlook by corporate leaders. From just being looked as a support function, HR today is viewed as a key player in driving corporate success and customer satisfaction. While HR branding has been an established phenomenon in the western countries it is still to catch on in Indian organizations.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are

1. To present the need for HR branding and achieving brand success through employees and to analyse the various steps involved in HR Branding and
2. To highlight some guide lines and economical ways to make a Company famous by all means with HR Branding.

THE NEED FOR HR BRANDING

The past few years have seen dramatic changes in its perception or outlook by corporate leaders. From just being looked as a support function, HR today is viewed as a key player in driving corporate success and customer satisfaction. In today's knowledge driven economy, HR plays a strategic role in bringing in the right kind of people into the organisation. In a sense, HR is the first face of an organisation that a new prospective employee sees. HR is of paramount importance for an organisation. Market research has shown us many times over that strong brands do contribute to strong competitive presence. In that sense, in HR's new avatar, the importance of branding HR follows quite as a corollary. In the present times, the role of the HR manager is more of public relations skills combined with strong problem-solving skills. The top management is able to recognise the HR team's contribution to the business objectives of the company, by and large; other employees tend to overlook its role in the success of the organisation. The biggest hurdle is the fact that HR departments derive their importance by becoming 'power centers' and that have to change. It has to be become a partner as the other functions are, than just remaining a support arm

To make the right impact on the target audience, the HR head needs to have a good understanding of the business and its future course. This can help him/her increase the value and stature of the HR function within and outside the organisation. A good balance between task and people-orientation, responsiveness to employee issues and concerns, coaching and training people managers to take responsibility of people-related issues can help in establishing a good brand.

ACHIEVING BRAND SUCCESS THROUGH EMPLOYEES

A brand is an external manifestation of several internal processes of a company. The stronger the internal processes the better the chance of the brand getting stronger. Time and lack of a continuous brand perspective can create problems in its success. Potential employees in the market place would like to associate themselves with companies that have a brand of success, leadership, people-development, and which instill a deep sense of pride and commitment. Not many HR departments market themselves correctly, internally as well externally. However, there are few companies like Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Infosys, IBM, Cadence, HP, Sun Microsystems, Wipro, Daksh, Satyam, Tata telecom, I-Flex solutions, Texas Instruments, Polaris Software and Birlasoft, who have successfully established their HR brands both in India and abroad. The Indian companies Wipro and Infosys would be the leaders in branding. In case of MNCs, it is Microsoft, IBM, Intel, Oracle, HP and Accenture, which are the leaders. Experts state that to reach out to all levels of employees, the HR team has to perform the role of a facilitator instead of enforcer. Effective communication (listening and promoting) and educating the employees about their capabilities and potential contributions can help strengthen the HR brand. There are three steps to embed the HR brand. First is the strong internal anchoring of HR. HR members must have a pride in their profession and must not be limited to activities like staffing, training, and compensation. HR members must see themselves as architects, not as functionaries alone. Secondly, HR has to function as the CEO's closest ally and must extend this to each of the business leaders within the organisation. Lastly, the HR must take the lead in investing in 'reflecting' and 'visioning' processes in the organisation.

Take the case of TCS, which started its HR branding initiative two years ago. While the company had successfully implemented the HR policies, TCS was lacking in effective communication with its employees across the globe. TCS decided to bring about a significant change in the company communication processes, the way things were communicated. In addition, the company also decided to align the HR and corporate communication relation to make an impact on its internal customers. Understanding the importance of communication, the HR adopted different PR related activities to reach out to its employees. Things like changing the tone of communication, encouraging Friday dressing, evolving a separate HR logo or sending them calendars (listing monthly HR activities) has helped TCS score high on the employee satisfaction surveys.

After getting a feel of things, the HR team can decide which brand identity works best for their work culture and create it. These can be taken from the basic values, which the company stands for. For example, if the HR has identified 'trust' and 'timely delivery' as their key brand, they have to make sure that their workforce delivers accordingly. For this, they have to identify the typical best practices and train the workforce. The HR policies and programmes have to be framed in such a manner that they reinforce and promote the 'brand behavior' and people

think themselves as a 'brand'. This need is to be followed by each employee of the organisation. However, the most important promotional piece is the HR department itself, where they can achieve success through their own example. In addition, the HR also has to use PR as a major skill to make its brand visibility. Besides, communicating it in board meetings, organisation's newsletter and intranets, the HR team also has to devise different employee-friendly schemes. To gauge the real experience of the employees and make an impact of being there, the intranet acts as a great tool. In HP, individuals can log in their complaint or request on the intranet, which is solved in a short span of time.

STEPS INVOLVED IN BRANDING

The following are the various steps involved in HR Branding.

Know Thy Customers

The first step in creating a brand identity is to determine who your customers are, what they need, and how they currently perceive you. Are your primary customer's upper managers, line managers or the entire workforce, what products and services do they use from HR, What would they like from HR? Do they use any HR services from outside vendors, and if so, why how do they perceive the internal HR department, to get truthful and useful information, it may be worthwhile to hire an outside specialist to conduct these interviews in private. Employees are more likely to state their true feelings about HR if they are guaranteed anonymity, and don't have to share their opinions in front of peers and co-workers.

It is important to start with gap analysis. Now-a-days in companies, there are many ideas about what HR is. When one thinks of human resources, they think of training, recruitment, personal welfare, salary and bonus, the corporate environment, and a whole range of concerns which can make brand development trickier. Companies often start with structuring various activities of HR to build a prototype which acquires all the qualities of a brand. Then they acquire and divest other company's ideas, to groom themselves with new technology, converge into new brand areas and pretty soon they outgrow.

Stemming a Strategy towards Development of Mission Statement

Once the needs and current perceptions of a company's existing customers are determined, then the way the HR department is perceived can be changed. All HR departments wish they could be strategic. But this may not be the most appropriate goal for every HR department in every company. In some companies, internal customers may want the HR department to provide great service in all the traditional HR areas. In many companies, customers may expect HR to take responsibility for productivity growth. HR managers have to decide what brand identity works best for organisations particular culture and then work to create a mission statement and an organization that supports that identity. Once you determine what your brand identity will be, take some time to craft a mission statement that will guide you through all the improvements that need to be made.

Monitor the Change Performing Gap Analysis

Based on customer input, HR department needs to do a better job by providing good services. Whether it's hiring employees or conducting team-building sessions, customers want you to be more responsive and pleasant to deal with. Because branding is about delivering a promise, we must ensure that people, practices and systems in the HR department all work to support the goal of customer service. There has to be an alignment between the brand promise and what you actually deliver. Just as the company does not hire retired men in leisure suits to sell its hip, young clothing, we should not staff people who are unwilling to go the extra mile for line managers. For a brand identity to work, the systems must provide itself with back-ups.

Act the Talk

In the world of consumer goods, a product without a distinctive logo, slogan and type of packaging would become standstill. For example, a can of Coors beer looks very different from a can of Coca-Cola. These companies understand that the look and feel of their products communicate strong, albeit subtle messages to consumers. Does it make sense for the HR department to create its own logo and slogan? Is the look of the HR department itself important in communicating brand identity? Packaging is an extremely valuable way to communicate and reinforce what a brand is about, but it would not work unless there is substance behind it.

HR department

Has made substantial improvements, then the new look can be a way of communicating those improvements to others. For example, as told by Shiv Balan, Head of HR at GMR Group, more than 80 percent of stored memory comes from the visual sense. "What you see, you remember, more so than any of the other senses." Consumer companies understand this, and that's why they spend enormous sums developing logos with memorable type, images and color. If you think developing a separate logo for your HR department, it will make stand out and get noticed, there's no harm in it. A verbal tag-line can also be an effective tool in getting your message across. But probably the most important packaging item is the HR department itself. Branding is not just about a label, logo, name, environment or color. More to the point a service brand HR is about people. It is all about how those people act, talk and treat others. Company's could spend millions of dollars redesigning HR department, developing a logo and tag-line, and communicating the new brand identity, but if the people in HR are impossible to deal with, forget it. Your accomplishment is nothing.

Flatter a Lot

The most important step that needs to be followed is to create a system in which you can consistently deliver the brand's promise, and you have packaged the department in such a way as to subtly communicate the improvements that have been made. Now is the time to begin tooting your horn. Be sure to use language that employees will understand. Don't get so caught up in HR jargon or terminology that you end up losing the audience.

Enhance Visibility

Another PR technique that will help you to spread the good word about HR is to be as visible as you can - not

only within your own company, but also in the larger world of human resources. Reach out to magazines and speak at HR conferences. This gives external validation for the brand changes you have made internally - and sometimes that's what it takes to get managers to pay attention.

No Looking Back

As HR struggles to gain a foothold in the rapidly changing world of business, the profession must regularly subject itself to self-scrutiny and be willing to make tough choices about what it will and will not stand for. The HR brand is in transition, but with careful attention the brand can harness an identity, learn to compete with external vendors and provide what customers expect. The trick is to remember that branding is not a paint job. You can't dress up the HR department in new colors and expect people to believe everything has changed. Branding is only convincing, credible and effective, if it reflects changes in substance.

ECONOMICAL WAYS TO MAKE A COMPANY FAMOUS

Companies on a shoestring budget can build brand identification using a variety of no-cost and low-cost measures. Before doing so, firms should be wary of things that can go wrong should they emerge as an employer of choice. A company's human resources brand is the image it has among employees and job candidates. It's a long-term strategy--the sum total of all of the experiences employees and candidates have when they come in contact with the company.

Low-Cost Branding Tools

The companies have a little money to spend on human resources branding. Here are some low-cost things to do.

- Re-energize your existing employee referral program and set "targets" for referrals from each department. Include participation as part of the normal performance appraisal process. Provide employees with cards listing the top ten reasons why it's great to work for your company.
- Encourage employees to put decals, license plate holders, etc., on their vehicles to broadcast their loyalty. Sell or distribute employment-branded items (hats, T-shirts, pens, etc.) that depict work at your organization.
- Participate in community clean-up programs; get your organization named on "clean-up" highway signs.
- Develop an alumni club for ex-employees and retirees. Involve these former employees in the process of spreading the word.
- Distribute logo book bags, T-shirts, and other similar items to children; sponsor school events.
- Work with the advertising department to place ads that occasion-ally highlights your great people and management practices as well as your products.
- Train and reward managers for excellent people-management performance.
- Conduct surveys of college students, business writers, academics, executive recruiters, and influential business leaders as well as your employees to assess your perceived strengths, weaknesses, corporate culture and image.

- Revise recruiting practices to include "wow" elements to make a lasting impression. Continually review your recruitment strategy and team capabilities.
- Have the CEO or human resource vice president write a book about the organization's people-management practices.
- Participate in industry-wide benchmarking studies to help build your visibility.
- Include marketing and branding experience in the criteria you use to hire additional recruiters.
- Create a process to measure and evaluate the program's effective-ness, monitor its progress, and improve it.

Low Cost Things to Build Human Resources Brand

Here are a variety of no-cost things organisations can do to begin building your employment brand.

- Assess your organization's current management practices, benefits, culture, etc., to identify what you "have to sell" and what you need to improve.
- Do a quick survey or assessment of your current employment "image" among employees, applicants and general public using surveys and focus groups.
- Develop a catchy slogan that highlights your very best "great place to work" feature(s).
- Rename some of your successful people programs with "catchy" names that grab people's attention.
- Do a side-by-side comparison of your benefits and people pro-grams against those of your talent competitors. Identify areas where you are clearly superior.
- Identify and assess your competitors' employment "brand" against which you'll be competing. Develop a branding strategy that high-lights the differences between you and your competitor.
- Compose one or two-paragraph profiles of individual employee "success stories" for use in articles and on the Web site.
- Work with the sales department to identify public sales events and trade shows where materials highlighting your great people practices can be displayed.
- Quantify the participation and usage of your work-life balance and other similar high-profile people programs. Quantifying the usage sends a more powerful message than merely saying "we have a program."
- Get key managers to write articles and give talks at industry association meetings. Be sure they include great people practices in their materials.
- Get managers to give talks at community meetings and at the local Chamber of Commerce that highlight your people practices.
- Invite family and friends of employees on site to see "what it is like to work here" and the importance of employees' work so that they will help spread the word on what a great place your organization is to work.
- Offer benchmarking sessions on your great "people practices" to teach your customers and suppliers how you do great people management in an attempt to get the attendees to spread the word.
- Ask the union, if you have one, to help spread the word about what a great place to work you are.
- Encourage local college professors to visit and write "case studies" and articles about the company's people practices.

CONCLUSION

Branding is not just about a label, logo, name, environment or color. More to the point a service brand HR is about people. It is all about how those people act, talk and treat others. The most important point to be noted here is that building a brand is a corporate strategic issue and not a short term tactical activity. HR today is viewed a big role in driving corporate success and for customer satisfaction. There are a few Indian companies' like Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Wipro, Infosys, Satyam, Tata Telecom Polaris etc., which are successfully ruing with established HR brands both in India and abroad. Companies on a shoestring budget can build brand identification using a variety of no-cost and low-cost measures. Before doing so, firms should be wary of things that can go wrong should they emerge as an employer of choice.

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