

Who must **LEAD** employer branding?

A look into the future of employer brand leadership.

By Brett Minchington MBA

Over the past seven years, I have been fortunate to travel to more than fifty cities in thirty countries to share my employer branding knowledge and experience with thousands of leaders.

The number one issue that continues to draw discussion and debate is whether employer branding should be a human resources or marketing function, or both! There are also a number of leaders who support the view that it requires a combination of expertise from multiple functions to effectively deliver an employer brand strategy that builds value.

Declining role of HR

Our global research at Employer Brand International (EBI) over the past five years shows a declining role of HR in employer branding, with 46% of HR departments responsible for the strategy in 2009 compared to 36% in 2014 (see Figure 1). The study also found the traditional custodians of the corporate and consumer brands, the marketing department, is responsible for managing the employer brand in only 15% of companies.

Too many companies view employer branding as a 'project based' or 'add on' function to **an already overstretched human resource function**, and then complain about the lack of return on investment.

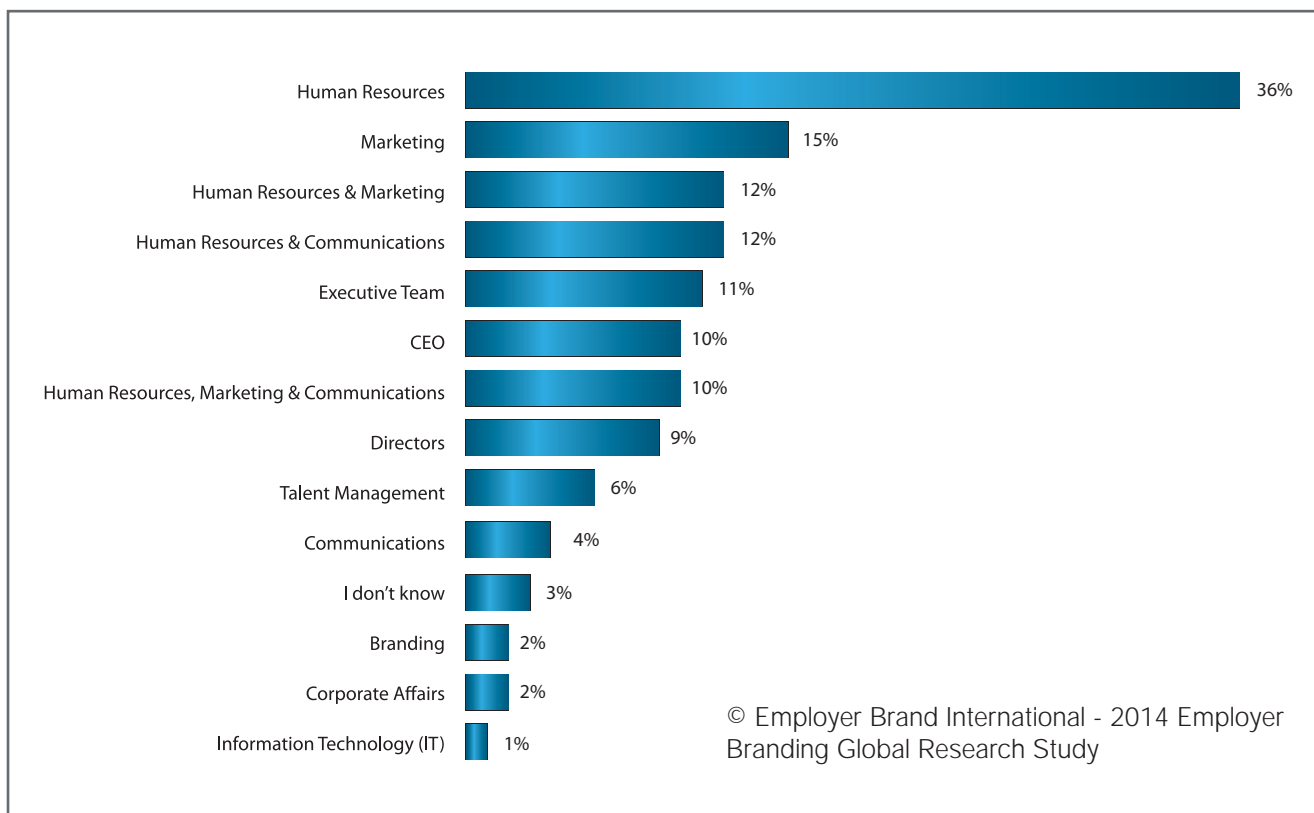


Figure 1: Department(s) responsible for managing their employer brand (>100% as more than one answer is possible)

The survey findings also show clear evidence that the leadership of employer brands is evolving into other functions. Interestingly, the Executive Team (11%) up from 2% in 2009 and CEOs (10%) up from 1% in 2009, are now responsible for the employer brand strategy. This suggests more companies now deploy a strategic approach to employer branding. In 34% of companies, teams of two or more departments from Human Resources, Marketing and Communications are responsible for managing the employer brand, compared to 31% in 2011.

The rise of employer brand leadership

Nike and Facebook recently placed ads to recruit employer brand leaders. However this trend is not limited to Fortune 500 companies. According to indeed.com, during the period 2009 – 2013, there was more than a 300% increase in the number of employer brand manager positions advertised in the USA.

Over the past five years, I have been tracking, collating and analysing job descriptions for employer brand leader positions as vacancies have been

advertised around the world. The review found a diversity of approaches being taken by companies in recruiting employer brand leadership talent (see Table 1). What is consistent is the increasingly strategic nature of the role requiring professionals with experience in functions such as branding, consulting, social media and events.

Strategic leadership function

The focus for the employer brand leader is on recruitment at companies such as Facebook, Amazon and KPMG. However, companies such as LinkedIn, IKEA and Amtrak have adopted a holistic approach to employer branding across the total employment lifecycle.

History shows that companies transition towards a strategic approach to employer brand management after two to three years of adopting the concept. This is consistent with how employer branding evolves inside a company as expertise and experience builds across the leadership teams.

It is clear that, with the increasing talent shortages around the world, we will begin to see many more follow the lead of companies such as Google, IBM, Marriott, 3M and EY in recruiting leaders to leverage the value an employer brand strategy has on profitability and sustainability.

Whilst there are company culture and structural issues in reorganising and implementing a holistic employer branding function if the trend of appointing employer brand managers continues as it has in the USA, Europe and the UK, there is no doubt the role of the employer brand leader will become more commonplace in places such as Russia, Brazil, UAE, Poland and Asia as companies in these regions seek the benefits gained by those who are already three to five years into their journey.

Too many companies view employer branding as a ‘project based’ or ‘add on’ function to an already overstretched human resource function, and then complain about the lack of return on investment.

We are still at a phase of first mover advantage, with EBI’s research finding only 17% of companies having a clearly defined strategy (up from 14% in 2011). Those acting now still have time to ensure

they will become top of mind in the employment choice for talent they seek to drive growth and profitability in possibility the most challenging economic times in history!

Future focus of employer brand leadership

When considering the evolving nature of business impacted by political, economic, social and technological changes (and increasingly environmental – think BPI) and the role of the employee in contributing to brand equity, the focus of future discussions should be on the skills, experiences and capabilities required to successfully execute the employer brand strategy and the structure of the team that supports it!

Whether the personnel come from human resources, marketing, communications or other

Table 1: The employer brand leadership function (five year tracking study)

Company	Responsibilities/Experience											Focus					
	HR	Recruitment	recruitment marketing	Communications	Public relations	Marketing	Media	Brand	Consulting	Social media	Events	Candidate experience	recruitment	Engagement	Retention	Requires Qualification	Years/ experience
3M	✓		✓			✓				✓	✓		✓			✓	3-5
Akamai Technologies	✓	✓											✓			✓	10
Amazon	✓	✓						✓					✓			✓	n/s
Amtrak	✓				✓			✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	n/s
Bristol-Myers Squibb						✓			✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	8
Cargill	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	8
CEB		✓		✓		✓				✓			✓			✓	7
Coca-Cola Hellenic				✓		✓				✓			✓			✓	n/s
EY		✓				✓				✓			✓				6
Facebook		✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓				10
Ferrero	✓			✓		✓		✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	3-5
Google	✓								✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	n/s
IHG	✓							✓					✓	✓	✓		n/s
IKEA	✓	✓	✓				✓						✓	✓	✓		n/s

n/s - non-specified

Table 2: The employer brand leadership function (5 year tracking study)

Company	Responsibilities/Experience												Focus			
	HR	Recruitment	recruitment marketing	Communications	Public relations	Marketing	Media	Brand	Consulting	Social media	Events	Candidate experience	recruitment	Engagement	Retention	Requires Qualification
JP Morgan Chase	✓		✓	✓		✓				✓		✓			✓	5
Kinross	✓			✓		✓						✓				8-10
KPMG		✓	✓	✓					✓			✓				5-6
Liberty Mutual				✓		✓			✓			✓			✓	7-10
LinkedIn				✓								✓	✓	✓		8-10
Marriott	✓			✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	2-4
Mars	✓					✓						✓	✓	✓	✓	n/s
Nike				✓	✓		✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	5-7
RBS		✓	✓			✓				✓		✓				n/s
Standard Chartered Bank			✓	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓				n/s
Verizon	✓	✓		✓		✓						✓	✓	✓	✓	10
Wendy's	✓								✓	✓		✓			✓	10

n/s - non-specified

function is not the debate we should be having. The focus should be on how your company develops a competent team of professionals sourced from inside and outside the firm who can develop and execute an employer brand strategy that builds value. I support the view that people are a company's main source of competitive advantage and this is where the employer brand strategy has most impact!

The traditional siloed approach to managing the attraction, engagement and retention of talent is out of date and out of step with today's candidate and employee needs. More needs to be done by organisations to facilitate cross functional leadership of the employer branding function to ensure a more cohesive approach. In more than one hundred events at which I have presented, I can only recall one finance director in the audience (from Nike).

There is little wonder why one of the biggest challenges for employer branding leaders is to gain

budget approval for their employer brand strategy.

Managing the employee experience across the employment lifecycle should be a shared responsibility. Employer brand leaders need to build awareness and capability in employer branding across the organisation rather than relying on only one or two leaders to manage the function as has been traditional practice. ■

Brett Minchington, MBA, is Chairman/CEO of Employer Brand International, an international strategist, corporate advisor and educator (www.brettminchington.com) who has trained leaders in more than 50 cities in 30 countries. His latest book *Employer Branding & the new world@work* and other titles are available at www.collectivelearningaustralia.com.