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Employer Branding - A Communication Imperative for Nonprofit Organizations

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As the [Nonprofit Workforce Shortage](#) crisis continues and hiring has become more competitive, many nonprofits are searching for innovative ways to recruit, develop, and retain talent.



More than likely, you are noticing that employers are sharing creative and compelling advertising campaigns to attract new employees, and you may be wondering how you can do the same for your nonprofit. After all, your organization has a great mission and culture that many professionals would enjoy being a part of.

These savvy employers do not depend on job postings alone, but utilize social media, online advertising, and even strategic partnerships to reach a greater

audience.

The types of campaigns I am referring to are among several ways employers attract job seekers, and your organization could be one step away from creating compelling advertising campaigns as well. That process begins by understanding employer branding.

Jobseekers can fall into two categories – active and passive. Active jobseekers are proactively looking for their next employment opportunity. Passive jobseekers are not actively looking but may entertain a conversation. In both instances, your career campaigns need to capture and maintain jobseekers’ attention long enough for them to click and apply. This is especially true if your organization’s strategic plan depends on increasing your workforce.

Enter employer branding, which is a [set of human resources and marketing activities](#) that raise awareness about pertinent aspects of positive employee experiences – from application, throughout their tenure, and ultimately, their departure from the organization. The entire journey experienced by an employee is “brandable.” In this article, I further explain what employer branding is and share tips on how nonprofits can jumpstart or further amplify this mission-critical function through strategic communication.

The Talent Management Lifecycle (TML)

In a nutshell, every aspect of the Talent Management Lifecycle (TML) can be strategically communicated about via an employer brand. At the core of the TML are culture; engagement; values; and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). All these elements are essential to prioritizing, building, realizing, and sustaining an effective people management strategy. The elements are at the core because they are foundational priorities and commitments for the organization.

Employers of all sizes and missions have an employer brand – intentional or not – that is grown either organically or strategically. Simply put, a well-crafted employer brand paints a vivid and realistic picture of what it’s like to work for your organization. The employer then must work to ensure that the employee experience matches the expectation.

Research shows employer branding results in a [28% reduction in employee turnover](#), as well as a reduced cost-per-hire and increase in qualified applicants. This might explain why 46% of nonprofits surveyed about their talent acquisition priorities for 2022 said that [strengthening their employer brand to attract better talent](#) is among their top three areas of focus. Without this employer branding effort, it is harder for nonprofits to make an impact and attract desired talent. Their brand story must be succinct, clear, and executed well.



Some employer branding strategies focus on spotlighting an [organization's commitment to inclusion, equity and justice, and therefore center that attracting, engaging and retaining diverse talent is an essential aspect of their people management philosophy, decision making and career campaigns.](#)

Traditional employer branding incorporates three main segments of the employee experience: Attract, Grow, and Value. A key mistake that organizations make is focusing solely on Attract, which is a great place to start, but certainly not to end. Infusing details about the employee experience from the other two stages, Grow and Value, is just as important. These two stages offer opportunities to engage existing and even former employees who may be willing to help increase awareness for an organization.

Employer Branding Tactics

For example, sharing uplifting staff stories is an underutilized tactic. A story about an employee who is highly engaged, energized about culture, and able to thrive at work plus maintain a great sense of work/life integration would be attractive to future talent and might inspire other positive experiences internally as well. A story of an employee who has grown and can share highlights of their career journey and the rewarding positions they have held is a strong communication asset and would work well for an employer branding campaign. Likewise, an employee being recognized for a professional or personal accomplishment, going the extra mile on their work, or living out organizational values is a powerful component to an employer brand. I can't say it any better than the late, great Maya Angelou said: *"People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but **people will never forget how you made them feel.**"*

And that's part of what employer branding means – doing, saying and being what is described in your campaign messaging, measuring perception, and adjusting in real time.

Have a hybrid or fully virtual workforce? Your career candidates may not be able to tour your organization's workspace, but they can still meet a cross section of your people, and not just the ones with whom they are interviewing. One method to strengthen how candidates engage with current employees is to use video strategically. Beyond video interviews, consider pre-recording videos about the employee journey. This type of campaign allows the candidate to clearly see team members they could be joining.

You can also include videos about the organization, or clips from past public events or staff celebration events, giving candidates a deeper appreciation of how your community looks in real life while cutting down on their reading materials. You may already have these assets. It is all about communication, transparency and seeking to increase the candidate's understanding of your workforce, culture and business priorities and where the role they are applying for fits in. This closes the gap between perception and experience, painting a clearer picture of reality and reducing their need to guess, speculate or assume.

Does your organization have a dynamic leader who intentionally sets and champions culture? Incorporate them in your employer branding campaigns. Don't just describe the culture, offer a video of your CEO sharing why the culture is important to the mission. Making the organizational culture apparent even before a candidate

decides to apply for an opportunity can increase applications.

Here are some immediate other areas to strengthen communication for your employer brand:

Employee Value Proposition (EVP). An EVP is an exchange statement for time, talent, and service that extends beyond total compensation. This proposition is not static. Rather, consider it a living organism that needs to be massaged over time to accurately reflect the employee experience. An EVP may be communicated most during the Attract stage; however, it is best understood and shaped based on the post-hire experience. An EVP from a nonprofit which I believe is well-stated, interesting and easy to understand is this one from Texas Health Resources, a nonprofit health system that operates a network of hospitals and related health facilities in North Texas:

Together We're Making a Difference. As one of the largest faith-based, nonprofit health systems in the U.S. we play a huge role in the communities we serve in the greater Dallas-Fort Worth area. Our mission is "to improve the health of the people in the communities we serve" and we get it done every day. Imagine the power of 23,000+ team members with a singular focus and determination. We're doing the stuff and staying on task in the rapidly-changing healthcare industry. Agreed, it's no small task, but it's definitely one we're up for.

Our career growth and professional development opportunities are top-notch and our benefits are equally outstanding. We have so many other things to share with you. Apply today and join our award-winning Texas Health family and become a part of a team that is improving the health of our communities daily. You really do belong here.

Careers webpages, social media messaging and ads used for job openings:

Take a look at your careers page. Would you apply for a job at your organization if you were not already on staff? Consider the following questions: Does the messaging and imagery tell a story of what it is really like to work here? Does our EVP shine through in the messaging we are using on our site, social media channels and other job posting sites such as LinkedIn and Indeed? Do the images used, if any, relate to how our workforce looks? How easy is it for prospective talent to understand the people doing the work?

Think through where job openings are on your website. Perhaps you can add a link to your careers page from high-traffic pages to capitalize on visitor traffic. It also matters how the positions are described and other key details about the role, including salary ranges, essential duties and details, and your organization's commitment to DEI. Sharing your organization's values on your careers page could also be part of this process. Most importantly, how easy is it to apply?

Thinking through the answers to these questions can help your team tweak your careers pages and other communication assets over time. The goal is not to fix everything at once, but to continuously improve the user experience on those pages.

External brand audit. Expand your brand audit to what's on other websites as well. Be aware of anything online that could be detrimental to your employer and organizational brand. Look at what's being said on feedback channels, including all forms of social media and employer ranking sites such as Glassdoor.

In examining what is said about working for your nonprofit, also consider what is *not* being said. It's not just about keeping negativity at bay, but also actively promoting positive discourse around your organization.

If bandwidth permits, a good next step is to assess your organization's employer brand internally. Internal feedback can be gathered from employee pulse surveys, focus groups, town halls, and [employee experience](#) and [stay interviews](#). These sources will help you determine what to include in your communications and what to begin addressing to strengthen the employee experience or [probe deeper for greater understanding](#).

Note that to get the most authentic responses in anonymous employee feedback, there needs to be a balance of different feedback channels and perceived trust that leadership is actively listening and vested in creating stellar employee experiences.

What are for-profit companies doing with their employer brands? The number one thing mission-driven organizations can learn from for-profit companies about employer branding is to just do it. Corporations may have more money, but nonprofits have compelling missions, rich histories, and committed staff, and those are invaluable selling points. Employer branding is particularly important in today's job market because career candidates are seeking meaningful work experiences and to contribute to the greater good. They are also seeking to work for employers who

are making socially conscious decisions even beyond their mission.

Your organization's mission is important and deserves to thrive, and the people you attract, develop, value and retain will help you achieve impact that much faster.

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Our Series on Creative Approaches to the Nonprofit Workforce Shortage Crisis

This article is part of [a series describing creative, practical approaches to the workforce shortage crisis](#) that can elevate equity, address burnout and stress, and discover, nurture, and develop talent in nontraditional ways.

One of our five [core values](#) at the National Council of Nonprofits is “Honoring the Nonprofit Workforce,” which reflects our deeply held belief that “Nonprofits and their employees should have the respect and the resources needed to get their work done.”

That core value shapes our work creating and curating information to assist frontline nonprofits with their operations and capacity-building. It also drives much of [our advocacy work](#) promoting public policy solutions at the federal, state, and local levels to get more funds to nonprofits stretched by the combination of growing needs, decreasing revenue, increasing costs, and rising salaries.