



# **Building Your Employer Brand in Turbulent Times**

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**How to Tell Your Story and  
Connect With Candidates**

# Introduction

In challenging times, the world tends to stop and rethink its values — on a personal and professional level. And rightly so; you want people to focus on health, family and staying safe.

As a result, uncertain times are defining moments for employer brands; organizations are either deemed an employer of choice or earn a poor reputation among job seekers. It all depends on your response.

So, how do you keep your employer brand top of mind while being sensitive to the challenges at hand? By thoughtfully telling your brand story.

Storytelling is in our DNA. The human brain is hardwired to find patterns — be it in faces, shapes or music — so much so that we'll actually imagine patterns when they're not there. This need to identify narratives explains the value of storytelling.

Reminding candidates of your mission, emphasizing your social impact and leveraging your people helps establish a narrative beyond profit margins. This benefits your business in a big way: 78 percent of millennials say corporate social responsibility directly influences their desire to work for an organization.

**Refocusing your messaging and how you interact with candidates will help you stay relevant among your target audience in the midst of turbulent times.**

In this guide, we'll discuss a few of the most impactful ways to highlight your employer brand during a period of uncertainty, break down examples and offer tips for success. Leverage the information here to reposition yourself among prospective employees and get back to the heart of your company.

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## SECTION I

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# Why Storytelling Matters

When things are volatile, there is typically little you can control, but one thing you can is your company's story. Investing in storytelling not only gives you a sense of normalcy but also offers your business a chance to get back on top.

With audience engagement and revenue traditionally down when times are tough, your company needs to find ways to get your brand back on track. Storytelling can help you do that.

## SECTION I

Storytelling has been around since the dawn of civilization and our brains are actually hardwired to connect with stories. It's the most natural way to build a deeper connection with candidates; something employers must fight for when tough times hit.

With every company facing this challenge, the competition to stand out as a top employer is at an all time high. By leading with storytelling you're much more likely to connect with your ideal candidates and be remembered. In fact it's been proven that stories are 22 times more memorable than facts — something to keep in mind as you pivot your employer branding strategy during times of uncertainty.

Telling a compelling employer brand story will attract great talent. Not only do 75 percent of candidates evaluate an employer's brand before applying to an open role, but an engaging employer brand can improve the quality of your applicant pool by 54 percent and boost your quality-of-hire by 9 percent.

Stories also resonate with your people internally; 67 percent of employees want to work for a company with a mission they believe in more than they want a higher paying salary.

As if that's not enough, a strong employer brand can save you money in the long run. Organizations with a strong employer brand benefit from a 43 percent reduction in hiring costs. In turbulent times when budgets are tight, every dollar counts and employer branding is a smart investment in your team's future.

The background is a solid dark blue. A large, light blue '75%' is faintly visible in the background. There are also several abstract shapes: a large light blue circle on the left, a large light blue triangle on the right, and a smaller light blue circle at the bottom right. A solid teal vertical bar is on the left side.

# 75%

OF CANDIDATES EVALUATE AN  
EMPLOYER'S BRAND BEFORE APPLYING TO  
A JOB.

## SECTION I

The important thing to remember is that storytelling happens naturally; if you're not working to intentionally manage your employer brand, job seekers will create their own narrative. As David Brier, author of *Brand Intervention*, says, "If you don't give the market the story to talk about, they'll define your brand's story for you."

Telling your brand story isn't just beneficial — it's vital. Without a concerted effort, your employer brand is entirely susceptible to the words of job seekers. And, try as you may, some might not have great things to say about your company. It's up to you as an employer branding professional to shape that narrative, especially during trying times.

***"If you don't give the market the story to talk about, they'll define your brand's story for you."***

**- David Brier**

When your company is up against challenges, storytelling is the investment you need to highlight your employer brand in the best light. Keep reading to find proven strategies for how to tell your story and tips to share it successfully. It's the ultimate storytelling guide in uncertain times.

## SECTION II

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# 4 Ways to Tell Your Employer Brand Story

When the world is on edge, priorities shift and so should your company's story. The messaging that attracted candidates prior to a critical situation won't hold up in uncertain times. You must find a new way to tell your story. To help, we've laid out four proven ways to successfully tell your employer brand story during turbulent times.

# Tell Your Story Through Your People

Who better to tell your story than the ones who live it every day, especially in times of uncertainty. Your employees are the best representation of your brand and, in the midst of turmoil, they're impacted the most. They feel the pain quickly and are the first to pivot.

Employees have first-hand knowledge of how your company responds to turbulence and the implications it has for the business. Your team members are the best indicator of what life at your company is like — AKA, exactly who prospective employees want to hear from.

Allowing your people to tell your brand story builds a more authentic connection with candidates and helps get your message in front of more people.

## Create Trust With Candidates

Having employees tell your company story gives you the chance to build trust with candidates. A majority of job seekers (66 percent) believe that interacting with current employees is the best way to get a sense of a potential employer. Your employees are an invaluable part of your story and employer brand.

The experiences your employees go through during tough times are much more relatable to customers than what your business is facing. Highlight team members to attract top talent.

# Get in Front of More Potential Applicants

Not only do job seekers relate to your employees, they also pay more attention to what they have to say. If you want to amplify your company story to the masses, empower your employees to distribute your message.

Why? Messaging that is shared by employees receives 561 percent more impressions than when a company sends it. Content also gets shared 24 times more when distributed by employees.

The result of employees telling your company story is much wider and more impactful than what your company could ever do on its own. Employees are not only your biggest asset on the front lines during turbulent times but they are also pivotal in keeping your employer brand top of mind among active job seekers and passive candidates.

# 24X

CONTENT GETS SHARED 24 TIMES MORE  
WHEN DISTRIBUTED BY EMPLOYEES.

# Employee Storytelling Examples

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Telling your brand story through your people doesn't have to be a big to-do.

Let's review how three real companies have successfully leveraged employees in their employer branding efforts.

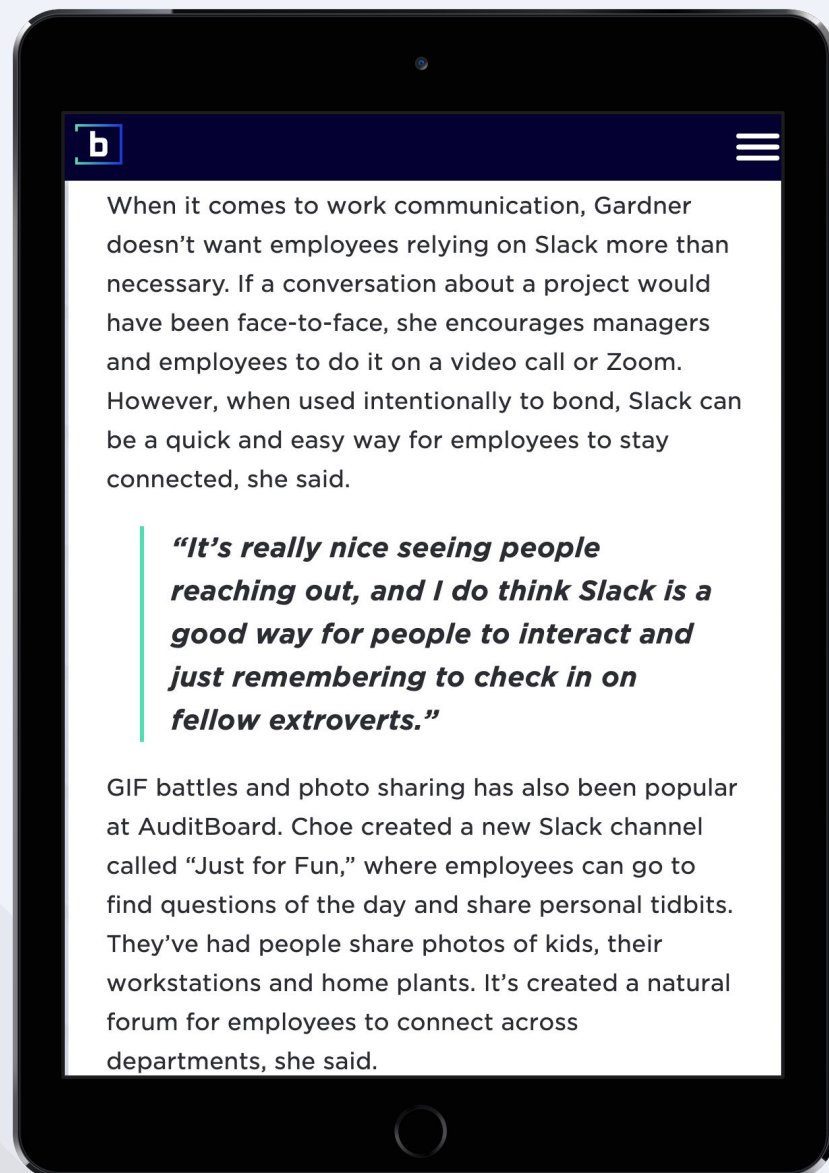
# How Tech Companies Are Staying Connected While Apart

This article details how three companies tackle the challenge of staying connected with their teams while working remote. Insights into how they've tackled this challenge during COVID-19 come directly from the employees who were impacted the most; those in charge of company culture. The interviewees discuss how at first working from home took a hit on their culture and the fun things they do around the office, but unique solutions have helped them overcome that. Instead, they've realized an even better connection is being built with one another while being remote.

[Click here to read the full article.](#)

## Why It Works

Many people face a similar feeling of isolation during COVID-19. Allowing the people in charge of your culture to share specific tactics for overcoming these obstacles will **build a connection with candidates who are looking for these same solutions.** It not only puts your employer brand in a positive light but positions you as a source of value for job seekers during their time of need.



When it comes to work communication, Gardner doesn't want employees relying on Slack more than necessary. If a conversation about a project would have been face-to-face, she encourages managers and employees to do it on a video call or Zoom. However, when used intentionally to bond, Slack can be a quick and easy way for employees to stay connected, she said.

***"It's really nice seeing people reaching out, and I do think Slack is a good way for people to interact and just remembering to check in on fellow extroverts."***

GIF battles and photo sharing has also been popular at AuditBoard. Choe created a new Slack channel called "Just for Fun," where employees can go to find questions of the day and share personal tidbits. They've had people share photos of kids, their workstations and home plants. It's created a natural forum for employees to connect across departments, she said.

## EXAMPLE 2

# How Paylocity Gives Remote Employees a Seat at the Table

With 60 percent of its workforce remote even when the world isn't facing a pandemic, Paylocity shares the perspective of four employees on how working remotely doesn't slow them down in this article. The interviewees emphasize the positive impact of investing in all employees no matter where they're located.

[Click here to read the full article.](#)

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***I tell my recruiters to find the best talent. I don't care where they're located."***

### **What opportunities are there for growth as a remote worker?**

We have an unofficial slogan called "Talent anywhere." I tell my recruiters to find the best talent. I don't care where they're located. The same thought process applies to promotions and advancement within our company. If you are passionate about your work, it does not go unnoticed.

We prefer to promote from within, and we always make those opportunities available to our employees before we look at external options. Many of our more senior product roles — such as our QA lead, dev lead, product owner and product team leader — are remote.

## Why It Works

Sharing perspectives of four employees across multiple departments shows you invest in all employees, not just a few. It provides the potential of a deeper connection to be built with readers. Candidates will appreciate hearing more than one side of the story and jump at the chance to work for an employer that makes everyone a priority.

### EXAMPLE 3

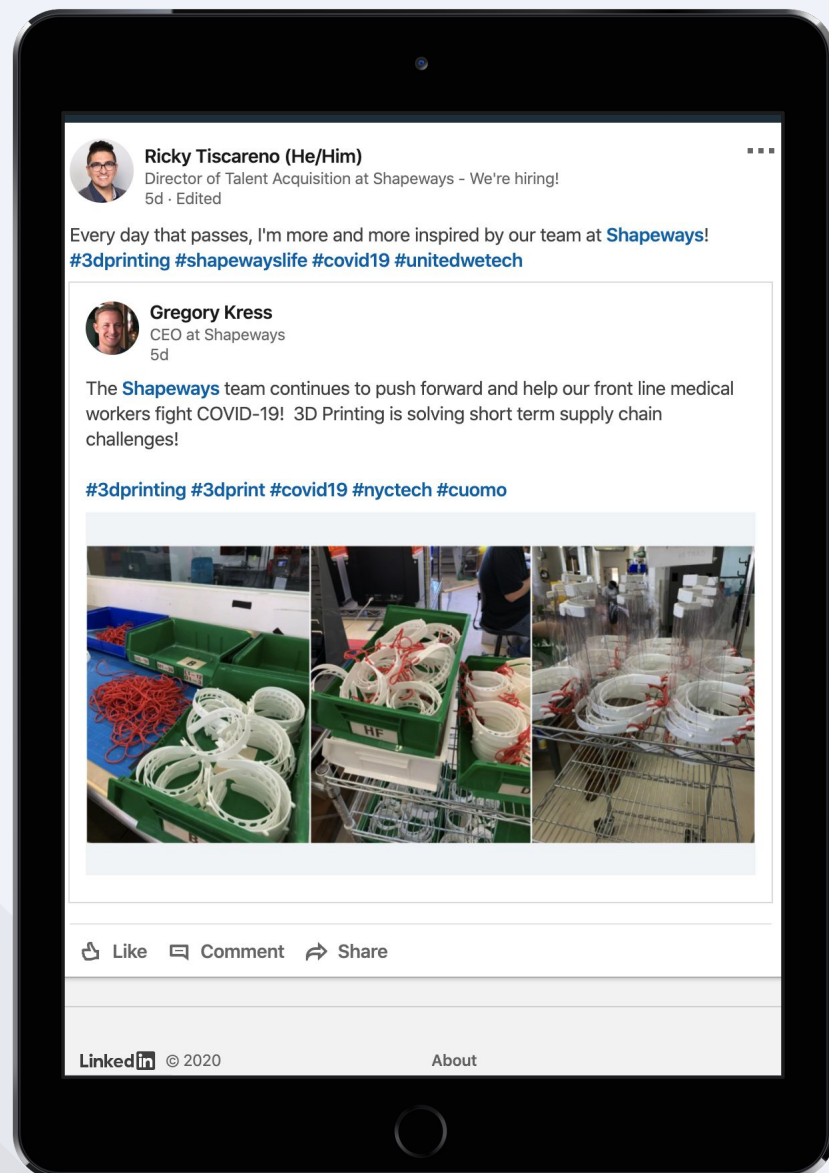
# How Shapeways is Making a Difference to Fight COVID-19

The company Shapeways is using its 3D-printing technology as a way to fill the gaps in the supply chain for medical supplies during COVID-19. Its CEO first shared the news on LinkedIn with images of the supplies they produced and was then amplified by other employees throughout the company.

[Click here to view the post.](#)

## Why It Works

Employees can add their own personality, thoughts and feelings when sharing your story. This post by Ricky Tiscareno is a great example of that. He was able to emphasize how inspired he is by the work his company is doing in the fight against COVID-19. The story is much more **compelling and authentic when heard from an individual rather than the business itself.** Job seekers will understand your company is truly trying to help, not just turn a profit.



# Tell Your Story Not Through Your Services, But How You Serve

When faced with challenges, people tend to think about what matters most. Candidates don't care as much about your innovative new strategies; what they care about is helping the community. Your company should embrace this same mindset when sharing its employer brand story.

It's time to get back to your roots. Double down on what your company cares about. Focus on your mission, core values and company culture. The foundation of what makes your company valuable to the industry and community you're in is something that candidates will relate to, especially in a time of need. Sharing this story will humanize your brand and better position you as a good corporate citizen. It's also a smart investment...

## Purpose Pays Off

Companies that stand for something benefit the most. For starters, having a mission keeps people around. In fact, employees who feel their organization has a purpose beyond profits are less likely to leave their job for a 10 percent pay raise elsewhere. Furthermore, a professional purpose can save you money: more than 90 percent of employees would sacrifice a percentage of their lifetime earnings in exchange for more meaningful work.

## Values Speak Volumes

You have a much better chance of attracting great candidates by focusing your employer brand story on the values you care about most as an organization. As many as 73 percent of adults would not apply to a job opportunity unless the company's values aligned with their own. Promoting your core values during uncertain times will foster the connection you need with candidates to reach your growth goals.

## Company Culture's Impact on Branding

When times get tough, how you treat your employees is instrumental in not only retaining your workforce but bringing in new, engaged team members. Applicants go through your hiring process trying to spot inklings of your culture and the employee experience. In fact, 68 percent believe that the candidate experience is indicative of how employees are treated at work.

Company culture is a huge component of your employer brand. So much so that it actually outranks salary during the job hunt: 56 percent of employees say a strong culture is more important than compensation.

# Examples of Mission-Driven Storytelling

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How tech companies keep their mission at the center of their employer brand stories.

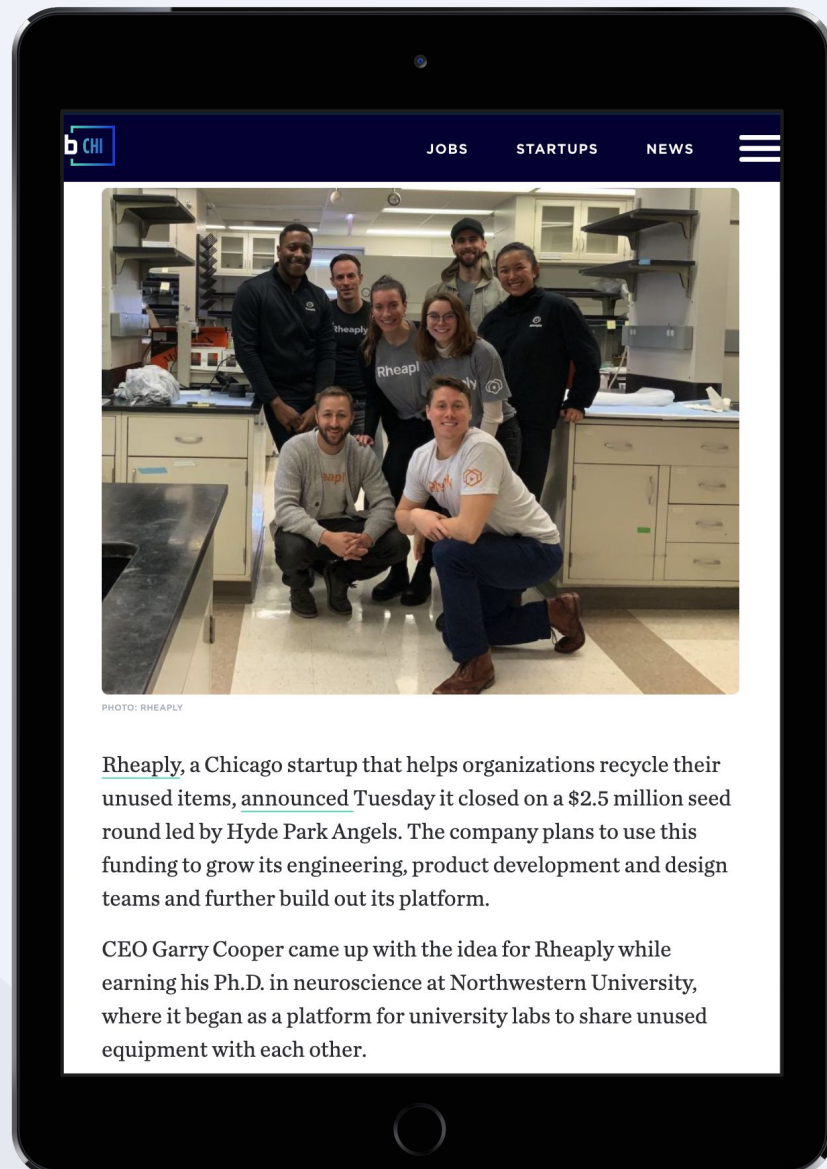
## EXAMPLE 1

# Rheaply Raises \$2.5M to Help Businesses Recycle Unused Items

While this article focuses on good news, it **shows that any story you tell can be rooted in the foundation of your company.** Rheaply first came about when its founder had the idea of sharing lab equipment with other universities.

Since then, the company has found ways to help many industries save costs and be more sustainable. When announcing its latest round of funding, Rheaply made sure its mission was front and center.

[Click here to read the full article.](#)

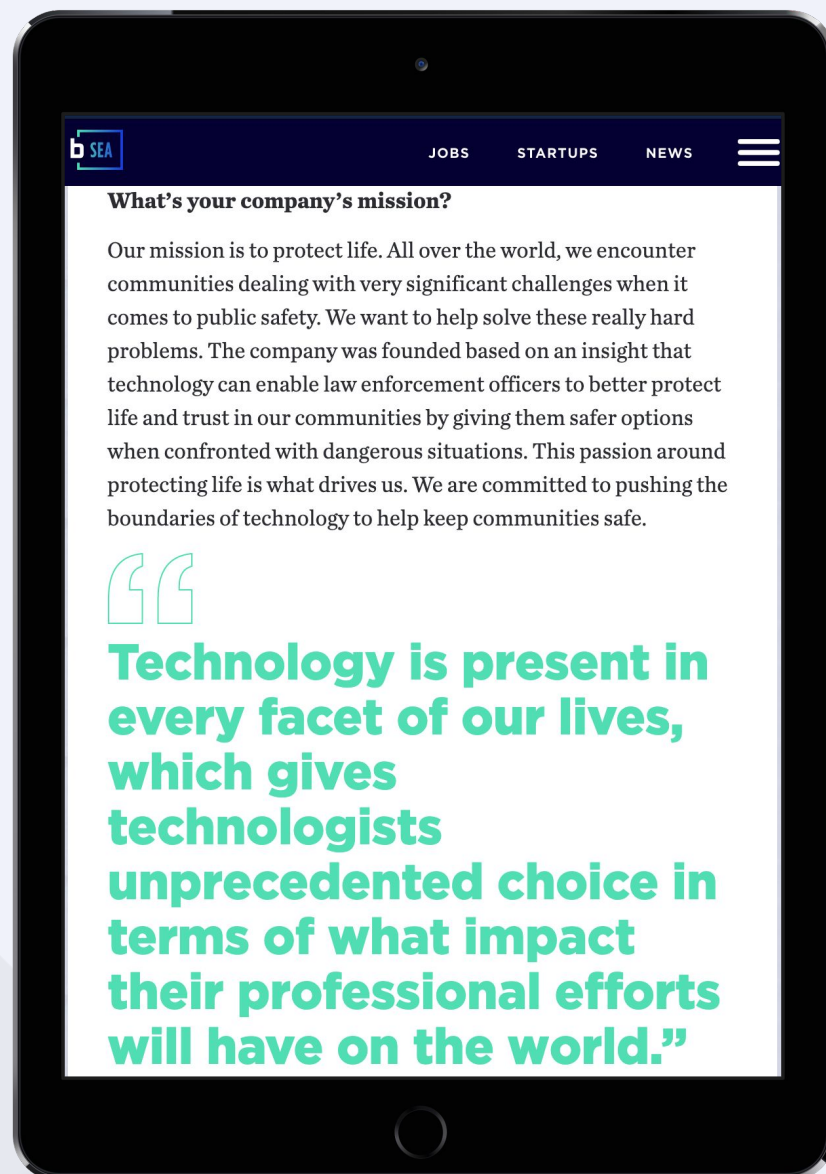


# Mission Driven: How Culture Fuels Purpose at 5 Seattle Tech Companies

Living out your mission as a company is important during good times and bad. Leaders from five Seattle-based tech companies discuss how they make sure their values are shown through everything they do.

The article represents how you can tell your company story while emphasizing the core values your organization follows and building your reputation as an employer of choice.

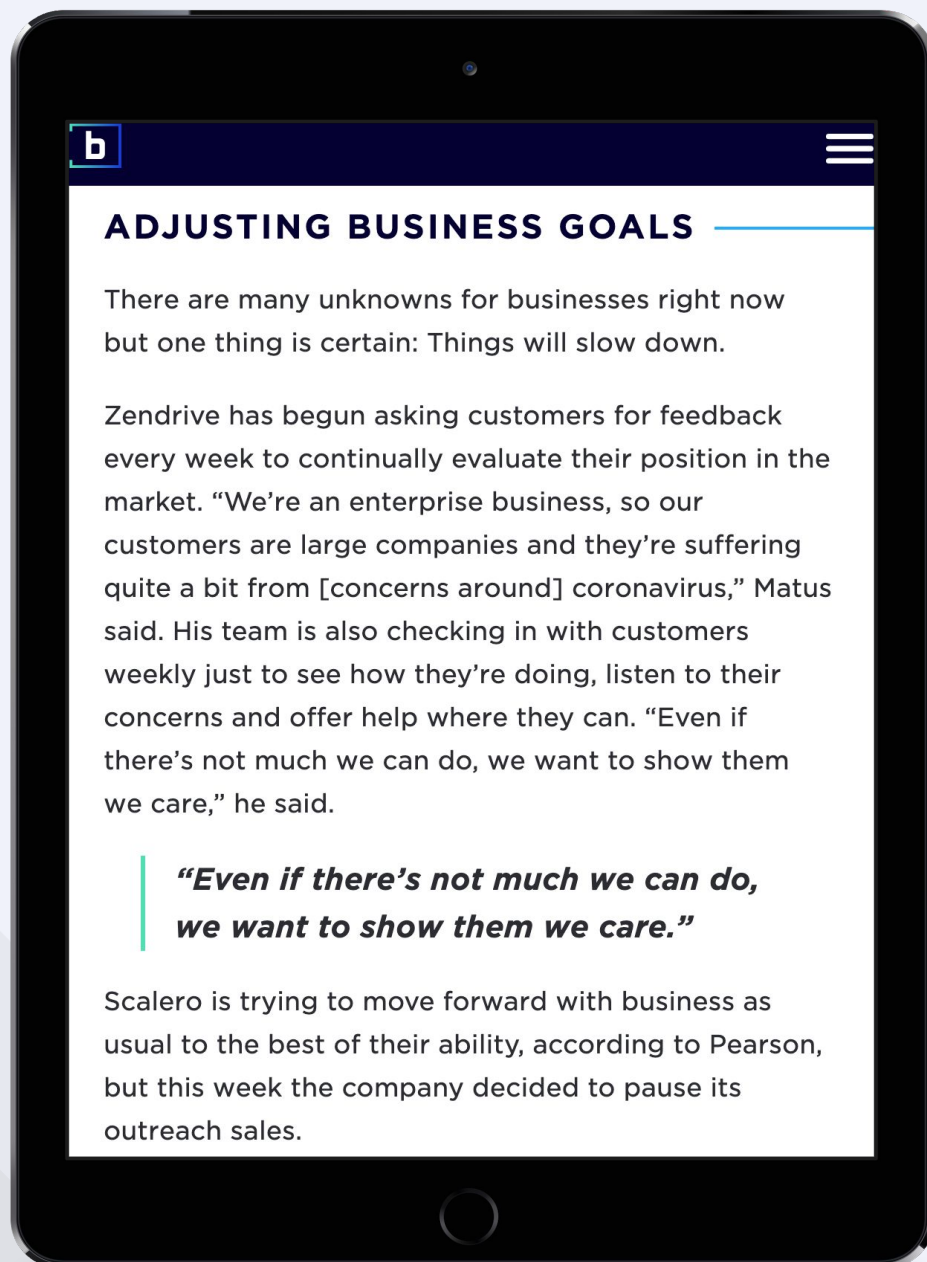
[Click here to read the full article.](#)



# Running a Tech Company in Uncertain Times

You can't live out your mission and values without a workforce. This article describes how leaders of San Francisco tech companies are working to keep their employees safe and supported during COVID-19. It's a great example of how you should be thinking about your own employer brand story in uncertain times; putting your employees first is the name of the game. Sharing how you're offering support while continuing to run your business will shine a positive light on your company.

[Click here to read the full article.](#)



## ADJUSTING BUSINESS GOALS

There are many unknowns for businesses right now but one thing is certain: Things will slow down.

Zendrive has begun asking customers for feedback every week to continually evaluate their position in the market. "We're an enterprise business, so our customers are large companies and they're suffering quite a bit from [concerns around] coronavirus," Matus said. His team is also checking in with customers weekly just to see how they're doing, listen to their concerns and offer help where they can. "Even if there's not much we can do, we want to show them we care," he said.

***"Even if there's not much we can do, we want to show them we care."***

Scalero is trying to move forward with business as usual to the best of their ability, according to Pearson, but this week the company decided to pause its outreach sales.

# Tell Your Story Through Your Actions

As the saying goes, actions speak louder than words. In times of change, every company is looking for ways to keep its brand top of mind. With this comes lots of noise from every angle. Candidates will be looking at the companies who are doing more than just talking, but taking action.

Remember, the last thing on people's minds during a disruptive period is your brand. While candidates have typically evaluated potential employers based on cutting-edge product offerings, recent funding rounds and market share — among other impressive factors — they're now looking toward an organization's community impact.

If your company takes action to alleviate the worry and concerns of its community members, your story will immediately stand out among the rest. It will positively interject your employer brand into the conversations that matter.

## You Can Have the Best of Both Worlds

The general public understands that profits will always be top of mind for businesses, but they feel companies can still make a difference. Survey results show 73 percent of people feel companies can find ways to positively impact its community while also increasing revenue. And they're right; actions are good investments. Don't believe us? Keep reading.

## Taking Action is the Right Investment

Doing good doesn't always mean more costs. In fact, companies who invest in positively impacting quality of life perform 120 percent better than the stock market. Lending a hand helps move the needle, as well as resonates with prospects: 85 percent of employees say corporate citizenship is an important employer criterion.

Telling your story through actions is well worth the effort, and finding ways to make an immediate impact on the situation at hand while strategically positioning your business is possible. It doesn't have to be a national effort either; helping the local community is just as impactful. And if you find yourself struggling to take action on your own, seek out other companies to partner with that can help you make a difference in the lives of those affected most in turbulent times.

# 85%

OF EMPLOYEES SAY CORPORATE CITIZENSHIP IS AN IMPORTANT EMPLOYER CRITERION.

# Action Storytelling Examples

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Now, let's look at a few examples of how companies have stepped up to the plate in times of trouble while keeping their employer brand in mind.

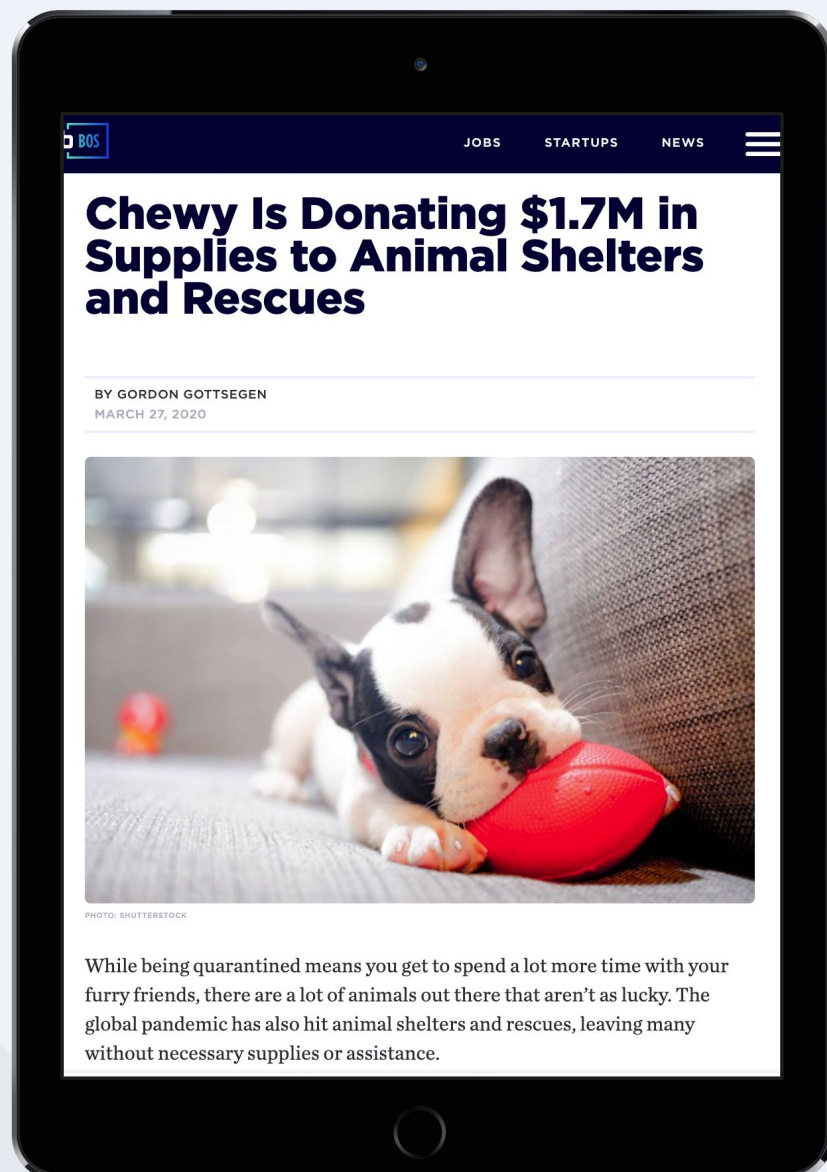
## EXAMPLE 1

# Chewy Makes a Donation to Animal Shelters

Since the start of the global COVID-19 crisis, animal shelters have been hit hard. People are forced to stay home which means less donations and adoptions, leaving shelters concerned about keeping animals safe.

Chewy, a popular e-commerce pet store, is in a much better place during the uncertain time given many people defaulted to shopping for their pets online. They've taken action by partnering with GreaterGood.org to donate more than \$1.7 million in pet products to animal shelters. They found a way to make a difference while also investing in who they care about most — pets.

[Click here to read the full article.](#)



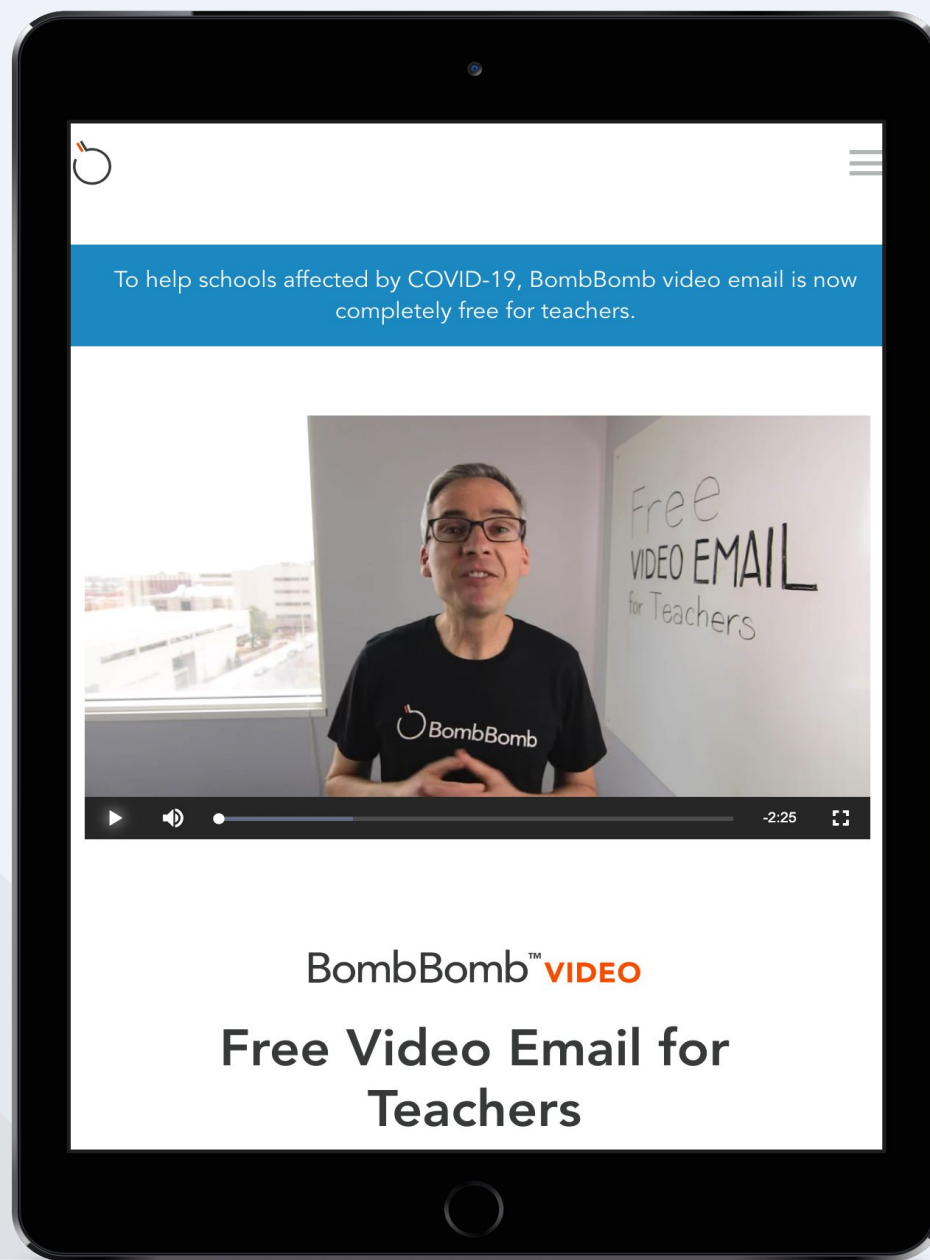
## EXAMPLE 2

# BombBomb Offers Its Software for Free

BombBomb is a great example of a company using its existing services to directly impact a community in need during COVID-19 – teachers. Schools were quickly forced to pivot to remote lessons, leaving many teachers disconnected from their students.

BombBomb immediately recognized the challenge the education world was about to face and stepped in by offering their software to teachers for free. This act of goodwill resonates with candidates; seeing an organization helping those who need it most boosts your reputation as a potential employer.

[Click here to learn more.](#)

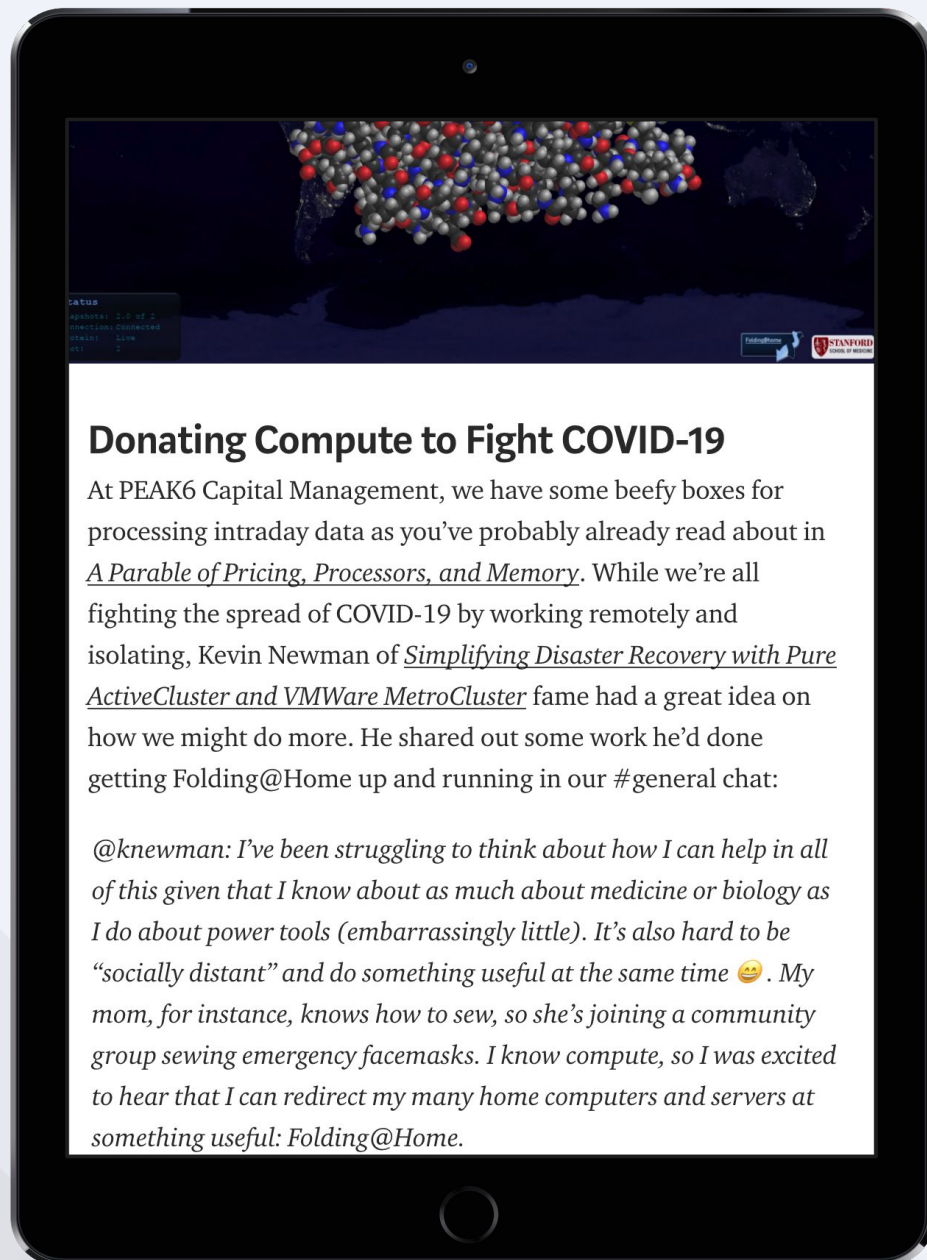


# Peak6 Investments Puts Its Skills Into Action

Knowledge is another powerful tool in times of uncertainty. Peak6 Investments' engineering team knew it had the skills to make a difference while COVID-19 continues to evolve, and they've sprung into action to help.

Using the work they've done previously to interpret data for the financial world, the team is deploying similar tactics to fight the spread of the disease. Not only does the effort boost Peak6 Investments' employer brand, but the chance to work on a project that makes a positive impact in real-time is extremely enticing to candidates.

[Click here to learn more.](#)



# Tell Your Story Through the Right Platforms

As the world shifts in times of uncertainty, so will candidate's behavior. The platforms you've been promoting your message on may no longer make an impact. You must adapt quickly to keep your employer brand in front of job seekers.

Understanding which platforms people flock to during difficult times will be influential in making sure your story is heard. **Identify which platforms are worth your continued investment and which you can pull back on.** Then, begin seeking out the platforms you've yet to tap into that will be highly trafficked during this period.

Now is not the time to lean on old habits. Rather, it's time to start interacting with candidates in new ways. Get creative. There are plenty of free platforms available to you if budgets are tight. In times of uncertainty, it's more important than ever to make sure you're promoting your employer brand on the right platforms.

# How COVID-19 Has Impacted Online Platforms

COVID-19 has forced a majority of people around the globe to stay home, which is heavily impacting how candidates are engaging with employers and conducting their job search. Here's how just a few platforms have already been affected.

## Streaming Video

The number of people accessing streaming video platforms like Netflix and Amazon grew 12 percent between March 12 and March 19, 2020, according to user network data from Verizon. This should come as no surprise given 20-plus states in the US announced shelter-in-place orders around this time. If you have room in your budget, you may want to consider allocating funds for this kind of ad spend as it has the potential to quickly share your employer brand story with candidates across a variety of geos.

## Online Gaming

Data from Verizon over this same time period showed online gaming traffic increased an outstanding 75 percent week over week. While it's likely not a traditional method for reaching your ideal candidate, it may be a promising channel to incorporate into your employer branding strategy during this period of uncertainty.

## Social Media

Interesting enough, the Verizon data also showed that social media usage remained stagnant week over week. While many would have predicted growth on social media channels, the data doesn't always fit the hypothesis. All the more reason you should stay abreast of data-driven trends during times of uncertainty and not just make assumptions about how candidates will react.



*Stay abreast of **data-driven trends** during times of uncertainty; don't make assumptions about how people will react.*

## Video Conferencing

Another unique platform to peak in the midst of COVID-19 is video conferencing platforms. With many forced to stay home, the rise of remote work has exploded and the use of video conferencing platforms is booming.

In fact, the global video conferencing market saw a significant spike during March, 2020, alone. Throughout the month, 62 million downloads of video conferencing applications — across smart devices — were recorded.

### SECTION III

# 5 Things To Remember When Promoting Your Employer Brand

By now you should be familiar with four proven ways to highlight your employer brand in turbulent times. However, the fact remains that, if you're reading this, you're up against serious obstacles. To help you take action faster and yield better outcomes, we've compiled a list of key directives to keep top of mind as you craft your story.

# 1. Be Transparent and Proactive

Transparency is of the utmost importance. With 30.3 million first-time unemployment claims recently filed in the U.S., candidates have a right to be concerned about job stability. **Be honest regarding your hiring efforts** — whether that's a delay in the process, a full-on hiring freeze or anything in between.

Additionally, let candidates know what you're doing to support employees, including those recently furloughed or laid off. People aren't going to forget COVID-19 anytime soon, nor will they disregard your response. This is an employer-brand-defining moment; take charge of it.

# 2. Be a Part of the Conversation; Don't Control it

Candidates see how you're conducting business, and aggressively plugging your products cultivates the reputation of a money-hungry employer. **Be a voice of comfort amidst the chaos.** Politely and briefly join in on the conversation to remind customers that you're there. This establishes your reputation as an empathetic employer, something 77 percent of employees are willing to work longer hours for.

# 3. Be Resourceful and Authentic

Your image, like your messaging, should be honest and authentic. Make due with the resources you have during this time and be comfortable with a less-polished final product. **Candidates will appreciate your candor.** On top of that, being authentic benefits you in the long run. Accurate, effective employer branding brings in candidates that are 50 percent more qualified — for the role and for your company — and reduces turnover by 28 percent.

Accurate, effective  
employer branding  
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## 4. Be Willing to Add Some Levity

In times ruled by fear and anxiety, a little lightheartedness goes a long way. People are looking for a bright spot and will appreciate the breath of fresh air it offers. When appropriate and applicable, don't be afraid to infuse a little humor into your employer brand story.

Doing so provides a glimpse of your company culture and offers a much-needed respite from the challenges at hand. And there's a reason behind that — laughter has been linked to tangible short- and long-term benefits including alleviating stress responses and improving immune system strength.

## 5. Be People-Focused and Leverage Your Leaders

Leverage your leaders during tough times. When the ship is headed toward uncharted waters, people want to hear from the captain. Senior members of your board and C-suite are concerned with the long-term health of your business, its relationship with the surrounding community and, most of all, your employees. A formal message from your CEO will help win over the hearts of job seekers.

# Key Takeaways

In times of trouble, your brand story should be the source of truth. Consumers care about what you stand for more than what you have to offer. To continue to thrive despite the uncertainty of what the future holds, lean into your mission statement and remember to *ACT*...

- **A**lways be authentic.
- **C**ontribute, don't control.
- **T**ap into your people.

It's important to keep in mind that the world will eventually return to normal. In the meantime, focus on being part of the solution, a force for good and an employer focused on building on goodwill.

# United We Tech.

The world needs tech. And tech has mobilized.  
Let's unite around our goal to face down COVID-19.  
Share stories of tech innovation and philanthropy  
amid the pandemic. #unitedwetech.



*Let's work together:*

Select a market to get started.

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