Your Internal Brand Matters

How Supporting Employees Through Turbulent Times Builds Your Brand

Introduction

During uncertain and challenging times, it can be difficult to maintain your brand positioning; messaging, strategy and promotional efforts become confusing and may even start to feel inappropriate.

It's in this moment that employers must turn to what matters most: their people. How you support your employees during turbulent times will have a lasting impact on your ability to retain team members and recruit new talent.

Today's job seekers care deeply about employer brand, so much so that 84 percent say they consider a company's reputation before choosing to applying to an open role. Company culture, core values and employee support resources are a few of the most influential factors. In short, your internal employer brand dictates your external reputation among job seekers.

Your brand is more than your image; it's how people feel about your company, and very often feelings reflect experience. How you treat your customers — AKA, the customer experience — is closely tied to their perception of your company. The same goes for employees and candidates. Ensuring how you describe your company aligns with the actual experience you provide is critical to effective branding.

In this guide, we'll break down the relationship between internal and external employer brands, as well as outline the impact of your internal efforts during turbulent times. We'll also provide ways to support your employees during this time. Remember, the ultimate goal is to show your employees you care; branding is just the outcome.

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Internal Brand vs. External Brand

Before we go any further, let's define internal and external employer branding. Understanding how the two are different and alike will set the tone for the rest of this guide.

What is Internal Employer Branding?

Your internal employer brand is the reputation your company holds as an employer with its current workforce. It's influenced by and filtered through current employees who shape your company culture and promote your organization externally.

Your internal employer brand is also dictated by your employee value proposition (EVP), which defines the mutual give and take between employee and employer. It accounts for perks and benefits, compensation, company culture and core values, to name a few.

What is External Employer Branding?

Your external employer brand is the reputation your company holds as an employer among job seekers. It is influenced by your candidate experience and what is being shared about your company on platforms job seekers frequent, such as social media and review sites.
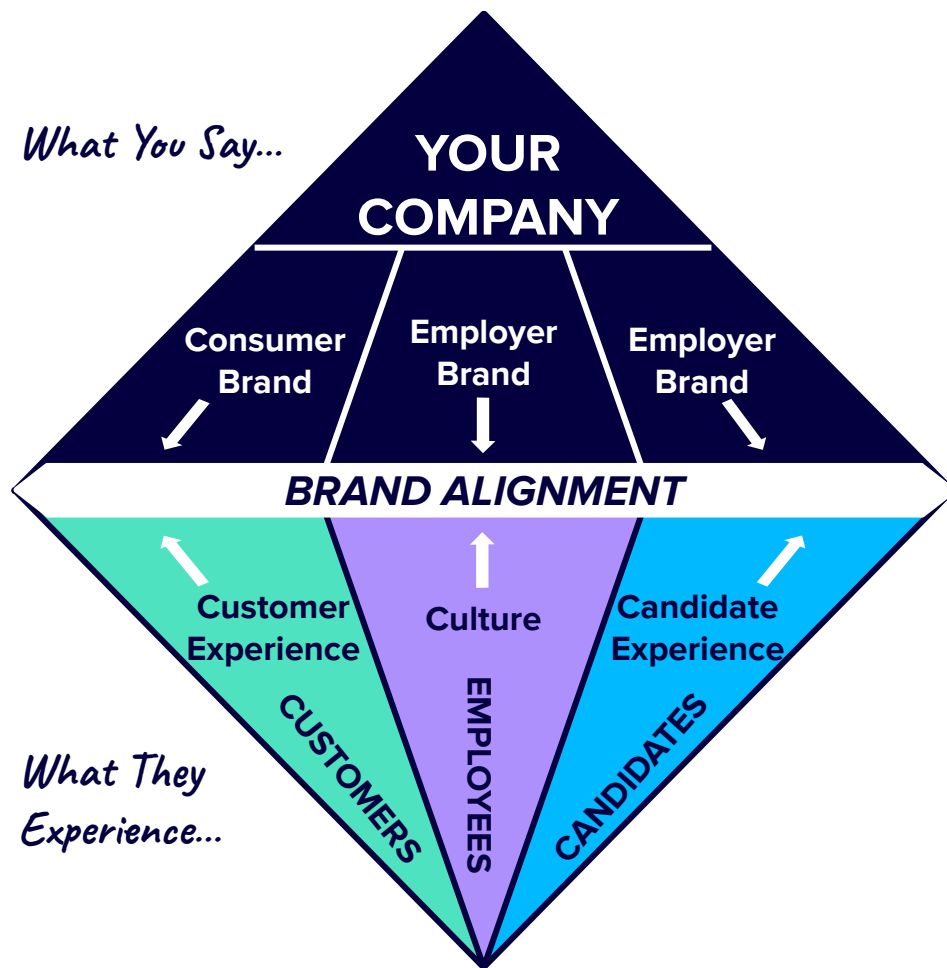
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Similarities and Differences

Internal and external branding differ because of the audiences they influence. However, they are alike because of who influences the perceptions of both; your employees. This similarity is the reason that your reputation as an employer will not vary drastically between job seekers and your current employees.

While you have some control over the external messaging about your company, there are many platforms that job seekers research that only your employees can influence. A poor internal brand will negatively impact your external brand.

Your brand is influenced by multiple factors, including customers, employees and candidates. In order to create a strong experience for each group, your internal and external brands must be aligned.

In turbulent times, you must focus on fostering your internal brand, a strong employee experience and responding to how your team members feel about your employer brand. Internal experiences will permeate into your external brand perceptions and relations.

What You Say...

YOUR COMPANY

Consumer Brand

Employer Brand

Employer Brand

BRAND ALIGNMENT

Customer Experience

Culture

Candidate Experience

CUSTOMERS

EMPLOYEES

CANDIDATES

What They Experience...

Of course, the marketing team will handle fostering a positive customer experience while talent acquisition teams will focus on employer brand and its influential factors. However, you should aim to collaborate to the point of achieving brand alignment. In the next section, we'll explain the importance of having a strong internal brand.

Why Your Internal Brand Matters

Employees are the only people who know first-hand what it's like to work for your company, and their voice and opinion can have a major impact. They have the power to share true experiences — the good and bad — with candidates and influence your external brand. It's why internal branding is seen as the most authentic viewpoint of your company, especially in turbulent times.

With <u>95 percent</u> of candidates heavily weighing a company's reputation when deciding on their next role, you must invest in branding. But in order to do that effectively, you need to focus on your internal brand. Here's why.

More than half of your employees won't recommend you as an employer.

When it comes to recommending your company to friends, only <u>49 percent</u> of employees are willing to do it. To make matters worse, employee referrals are one of the best sources for hires: the hiring process is <u>55 percent faster</u> when an employee refers a candidate. Ignoring your internal brand will cost your great candidates and rack up expensive recruitment costs due to a longer hiring process.

Candidates look to your employees for insight.

Job seekers don't just take your word for being a great company to work for, they tap into your workforce for insight. More than half <u>(66 percent)</u> of candidates identify interactions with current employees as the best way to get a sense of a potential employer. If your employees don't have great things to say, you can kiss that application goodbye.

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66%

OF CANDIDATES SAY INTERACTIONS WITH CURRENT EMPLOYEES IS THE BEST WAY TO GET A SENSE OF A POTENTIAL EMPLOYER.

Your employees' voice is more impactful than your own.

Messages shared by employees receive <u>561 percent</u> more impressions and <u>24x more</u> shares than those promoted by a company. Even more important, job posts have <u>8x more</u> engagement when shared by employees rather than the company directly.

If you really want to amplify your brand, you must make your employees want to share your message; and that starts with a great internal brand.

Culture trumps compensation.

<u>More than half of job seekers (56 percent)</u> feel culture is more important than salary when it comes to job satisfaction. And with a great culture, follows a stellar internal brand. The investment in fostering and maintaining your company as a great place to work pays off.

In order to authentically amplify your external employer brand, you need to look internally. How you choose to support your employees will leave a lasting impact on your workforce and in turn, be projected to potential employees.

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The Importance of Employee Feedback

In order to effectively enhance your internal employer brand, you need to support your employees as thoroughly as possible. Taking into account that every situation, business and individual is unique, the best place to start is by asking your employees what they need.

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It's vital that you constantly listen to your organization to determine what employees need to be successful, both in and outside of the office. Doing so demonstrates empathy and helps cultivate a positive work environment, one founded on mutual respect between leadership and employees.

Employee feedback also helps gauge the strength of your values and mission, two important criteria among candidates. In fact, the vision and mission is a job seeker's third-highest priority when evaluating a company. Listening to employees helps determine how well you align with your aspirations.

Not only is collecting feedback essential to providing employees with support and useful resources, it's also a proven retention strategy. Allowing employees to share their thoughts and voice their concerns gives them a sense of autonomy within the workplace; they're a valued contributor who has the ability to create change within the organization.

Instilling in employees a sense of ownership has a direct impact on their engagement; research shows that allowing employees to exercise their voice positively boosts their emotional engagement with the organization. Furthermore, senior manager's receptiveness to hearing feedback from team members also improves engagement.

"

No one cares how much you know, until they know how much you care."

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

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It's not enough to simply provide feedback opportunities, members of the leadership team have to be willing to listen and invest in taking action in order to make an impact on their employees' engagement level. This boils down to practicing empathy within the workplace, something 92 percent of employees believe is critical to retention.

Stay abreast of your employees' socioemotional needs through regular employee engagement pulse surveys. Allowing for open channels of communication at all times — but particularly in moments of crisis — creates a safe, healthy work environment.

That's not something employees will forget, either. "Peak" experiences — the best positive moments — influence an individual's perception of their employee experience for roughly four weeks following the event. Employees will recognize, appreciate and stick around for an empathetic employer.

In short, your genuine, deliberate efforts to support your employees during turbulent times won't go unnoticed. In fact, they'll leave a lasting impression of your company as an empathetic employer of choice.

That internal employer brand perception will permeate through your recruitment efforts as your team members organically promote your company and draw in top candidates; 83 percent of employees and job seekers are likely to research company reviews when deciding to apply to an open role.

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How to Support Your Internal Employer Brand

It's one thing to listen to employees; it's another to use their feedback to create real, positive change within your organization. In this section, we'll break down key ways to simultaneously support your employees and internal employer brand. Use this list to amplify your current offerings that relate to the turbulent times and identify the tools you may be missing.

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The following list of initiatives and ideas make up the pillars of internal employer branding that are essential to a place of work at any given time. Evaluate your current employee offerings in conjunction with the items in this section to effectively support your workforce during turbulent times.

Employee Wellness

Your employees' physical and mental health significantly impacts their performance and happiness in the office. Offer benefits and implement initiatives that support your employees mind, body and spirit. Doing so creates a positive employee experience and demonstrates your concern for your employees' wellbeing.

Fitness Stipend

It's long been known that exercise improves mental health. Encourage your employees to take care of themselves by offering a stipend for fitness classes, a gym membership or online subscription. This both promotes total wellness and provides employees with a healthy outlet to deal with life's stressors.

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Counseling

Mental health services may be available to employees through your insurance policy. However, turbulent times pose a much greater need for access to licensed professionals. Offer your employees a stipend for telehealth services or smartphone apps focused on providing mental health resources.

Mental Health Days

Good and bad days are a product of the times. Show your employees that their wellbeing is more important than their job by offering no-questions-asked mental health days. This gives employees the chance to log off for a full workday and focus on themselves. Additionally, it helps establish a relationship built on trust between individuals and the organization.

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Work-Life Balance

In addition to mental health days, offer employees flexibility to meet the demands of life outside the office. Doing so allows them to control and establish a balance between their personal and professional life that works for them.

Flexible Work Schedules

Sometimes, all it takes is a few extra hours in the day to make work-life balance a possibility. Allow your employees to define their working hours, whether that's starting and ending the day early or late. This is a simple adjustment that can have a tremendous impact.

Remote Work Opportunities

Remote work has become the new normal, but it shouldn't stop there. Work-from-home opportunities give employees the chance to accommodate their responsibilities outside of the office, focus on family and even travel. Use our guide to implement a long-term remote work policy.

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Open Vacation Policy

Encourage your employees to take breaks from work with an open or unlimited vacation policy. This is just another way to show employees that they are your priority, not their work output. Encourage employees to use the policy and ensure managers are helping to communicate this message to their reports directly.

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Company Culture

A positive work culture should reflect your employee support and internal branding initiatives. Define the culture you currently have and the culture you aspire to. Then, carefully evaluate your current culture and determine how you can better optimize it for your team's sake.

At its core, your culture is the shared set of values, beliefs and attitudes that make up an organization; it's how your team behaves when no one is watching. A winning company culture clearly defines what the organization stands for and the values you uphold.

Your Core Values

In times of uncertainty, people tend to turn toward the things that matter most — their loved ones, friends and community. Your values should reflect the things that matter most to you and the principles you strive to uphold. Turbulent times undoubtedly will cause you to reevaluate your core values, so do so with a discerning eye.

Remember, your core values send a message to your employees and the world regarding what you believe in, support and aim to achieve. Consider reworking your core values to address how you want to support employees as well as reinvigorating your internal promotional strategy of these principles.

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Townhall Meetings

In times of uncertainty, employees want to hear from leaders. Host weekly or biweekly all-hands meetings to provide important business updates, address the current situation and answer any questions your team may have. Transparency is key to reassuring and supporting employees through turbulent times.

Culture Committees

Give employees the opportunity to monitor and foster culture initiatives they're passionate about. Create employee-led committees dedicated to upholding a core value or central tenet of your culture. This can include diversity, equity and inclusion, learning and development, health and wellness or philanthropy.

Not only does this directly demonstrate your desire to make a positive impact as an organization, it shows your willingness to support employees in ways that are meaningful to them.

SECTION V

Worksheets and Resources

In order to make improvements to your internal brand, you first need to carefully evaluate your current efforts. The following resources were designed to help your team take stock of how current and prospective employees feel about your brand, as well as take action on their feedback.

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Internal Brand Audit

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Use this worksheet to evaluate your current employee offerings and internal branding efforts. Depending on your employees' feedback, add additional ideas or initiatives in the blank lines.

☐ Employee Wellness

- ❏ Fitness Stipend
- ❏ Counseling
- ❏ Mental Health Days
- ❏ _____
- ❏ _____
- ❏ _____

☐ Work-Life Balance

- ❏ Flexible Work Schedules
- ❏ Remote Work Opportunities
- ❏ Open Vacation Policy
- ❏ _____
- ❏ _____
- ❏ _____

☐ Company Culture

- ❏ Townhall Meetings
- ❏ Your Core Values
- ❏ Culture Committees
- ❏ _____
- ❏ _____
- ❏ _____

Core Values Audit

After using the previous worksheet to evaluate your internal branding efforts, use this worksheet to hone in on your values as an organization. Core values aren't something you can set and forget; if you currently have well-defined set of values, use this as worksheet as an audit: reexamine your values and modify them in response to the times, if necessary.

Value: _____

What it means to our team:
_____
_____

Does it still apply to our team?
☐ Yes   ☐ No

How can we improve and/or redefine this value?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Value: _____

What it means to our team:
_____
_____

Does it still apply to our team?
☐ Yes   ☐ No

How can we improve and/or redefine this value?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Value: _____

What it means to our team:
_____
_____

Does it still apply to our team?
☐ Yes   ☐ No

How can we improve and/or redefine this value?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Value: _____

What it means to our team:
_____
_____

Does it still apply to our team?
☐ Yes   ☐ No

How can we improve and/or redefine this value?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Candidate Experience Audit

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One of the most important things you can do as a recruiter is experience your hiring process first hand. Test-drive your recruitment process as a candidate and evaluate each step along the way. Rate each element on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the best; 1 being the worst) and take notes as you go through the process. The more critical and honest you can be, the better your candidate experience will be in the end.

Employer Brand

- Content   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Digital Presence   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Career Page   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

_____

_____

Application Process

- Ease of completion   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Length of time needed to complete application   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- User experience   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

_____

_____

Interview Process

- Frequency of communication with company   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Quality of communication with company   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Quality of interviews/interactions with company   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

_____

_____

Additional Notes

_____

_____

_____

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