

The background of the entire page is a photograph of three business professionals in an office setting. A man in a light blue shirt and dark tie is leaning over a desk, looking at a document. Two women, one with glasses and one with dark hair, are also looking at the document. The office has a modern feel with large windows in the background.

Prepping for 2021

Build a Stronger Brand in the Wake of COVID-19

Introduction.

2020 was the year we hoarded toilet paper, mastered the Zoom unmute button and reckoned with inequality and our own biases. One thing will stay with us, though: **your brand and culture matter.**

How you engage with your customers, how you support your employees and how you choose to join conversations on the world stage is increasingly more consequential. 2020 has urged us all to reconsider what's of true importance in our lives. Our values have changed, and we expect the same of the companies we join and support.

Your actions, messaging, mission and culture are expressions of your values and all contribute to your employer brand. It's this reputation that will set the tone for your upcoming year. **Employees and job seekers alike will wonder: How will you respond? How will you recover? How will you progress?**

For an answer, you must get to the heart of your brand and story. At Built In, we work with 1,800 clients across the U.S. and in different segments. Over the years, we've uncovered the elements that lead to thriving businesses. Simply put, your brand and culture will sustain you when times are tough; values guide your team when the waters are turbulent and people are dispersed; candidates and employees expect the best of you; collaboration is vital, especially for remote work; if you can't measure it, it didn't happen.

The following pages were created with this goal in mind. Use this guide to learn the importance of your employer brand and uncover the tools to build a stronger brand in the wake of COVID-19.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section I: Employer Brand: The Backbone of Your Business

- **Why It Matters**
- **How Internal Brand Affects External Brand**
- **Strength Through Story**

Section II: How to Build a Stronger Brand

- **Step 1: Update Your Core Values**
- **Step 2: Put Culture at the Forefront**
- **Step 3: Highlight Your Employee Value Proposition**
- **Step 4: Create Mission-Driven Content**
- **Step 5: Meet Candidates Where They Are**
- **Step 6: Highlight Diverse Voices**
- **Step 7: Leverage Your Leadership Team**
- **Step 8: Partner With Your Marketing Team**
- **Step 9: Prioritize Employee Retention**
- **Step 10: Track Your Performance**

SECTION I

Employer Brand: The Backbone of Your Business

Employer branding is an always-on strategy; it's working — either for or against your brand — whether you realize it or not and a start-and-stop approach will only cost you traction.

It's your company's reputation as an employer among both employees and prospective candidates, and therefore plays a significant role in your ability to attract and retain great people. In fact, a strong employer brand can reduce turnover by 28 percent and cost-per-hire by 50 percent, respectively.

Your employer brand also closely relates to your consumer brand, and therefore has a direct impact on the success of your business. In fact, companies often try to entice customers to become employees, signaling that the two brands are intrinsically linked.

In this section, we'll cover the importance of a strong employer brand and strategy when preparing for the new year.

Why It Matters.

In a year marked by the uncertainty of COVID-19, projecting a brand of stability and empathy is essential. In challenging times, the world tends to stop and rethink its values — on a personal and professional level.

As a result, 2020 has been a defining moment for employer brands, and the upcoming new year is no different. In order to demonstrate strength in the wake of COVID-19 and head into 2021 well-positioned for success, you must first look to your employer brand.

RECAP: *What Is Employer Branding?*

Employer branding is the process of managing and influencing your reputation as an employer among job seekers, employees and key stakeholders. It encompasses everything you do to position your organization as an employer of choice.

It's an essential part of your brand story — who you are, what your mission is and how you differ from other employers. As the market continues to evolve, so too must your brand. Why? Because the human brain is hardwired to seek out patterns and form narratives.

This means that even if you're not actively telling your brand story with both authenticity and intention, your customers, candidates and employees will write it for you.

No one articulates this concept better than David Brier, author of Brand Intervention: “If you don't give the market the story to talk about, they'll define your brand's story for you.”

SECTION I

This is especially true when considering the magnitude of the past year. At the start of 2020, companies prioritized growth and innovation because the public demanded it. In January 2020, the U.S. unemployment rate sat at 3.6 percent, with the jobless rate of IT professionals at just 2.4 percent in February. The market was primed for growth and the tech sector was leading the way.

Today, in the final months of 2020, the world looks very different. Not only is the unemployment rate at 7.9 percent, but what matters to people has changed significantly. Candidates and consumers alike value empathy, compassion and community action most.

A vastly different narrative requires a vastly different strategy. As such, you must dedicate the time and resources to a comprehensive employer branding strategy.

If you're not yet convinced of the importance of employer branding, consider the following statistics.

- **75 percent of candidates** evaluate an employer's brand before applying to an open role.
- Candidates are **40 percent more likely to apply for a job** if they recognize the company's brand.
- An engaging employer brand can **improve the quality of your applicant pool by 54 percent** and boost quality-of-hire by 9 percent.
- Organizations with a strong employer brand benefit from a **43 percent reduction in hiring costs**.

“

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

DAVID BRIER

How Internal Brand Affects External Brand.

It's important to remember that your employer brand is two-sided; it refers to the reputation you hold among job seekers and candidates, as well as your perception in the eyes of current employees.

Though the difference between your internal and external brand lies predominantly in the audience they appeal to, both are perceptions nonetheless and are thus a result of your deliberate actions.

The same is true for your consumer brand: how your customers experience your brand is a direct result of the experience you create. For example, a 24-hour service line will have a stronger impact on your client base than will customer service representatives who are available only during standard business hours. Similarly, a positive candidate experience will entice prospective employees far better than an ad hoc, disjointed process.

Not only must you intentionally hone the narrative behind each of these brand reputations, they must also work in tandem. Internal experiences will permeate into your external brand perceptions and relations. **Therefore, in order to create a strong, influential brand, your internal employer brand must be as carefully maintained as your external employer and consumer brands.**

Strength Through Story.

The year 2020 has posed challenges unlike anything we've seen before. Against the backdrop of the global pandemic and heartbreaking loss, the deeply rooted racial injustices and political divides that plague our country are more pronounced than ever. It's no secret: this year has shook the world to its core.

In order to rebuild — within our lives, our businesses, and on a global scale — we must band together. Physical distance cannot give reason to human separation. Connection, today, stems from words and actions. This is true for every aspect of our lives, and corporate America is no exception. Connecting with your people, your colleagues and the public starts with you — who you are, what you stand for and what you're working toward. **It's your most important story, and it must be handled with care.**

In the following pages, we'll discuss strategies to not only build a stronger brand, but to successfully put your story out into the world.

SECTION II

How to Build a Stronger Brand

In this section, we've outlined 10 steps to help you work toward building a stronger brand as you head into 2021.

A woman with voluminous, curly brown hair is shown in profile, looking intently at a computer monitor. She is wearing an orange button-down shirt. The background is a soft-focus office environment with a window and some papers on a desk. A dark blue banner with white text is overlaid at the bottom of the image.

Step 1: Update Your Core Values

SECTION II

Your core values are the essence of your brand and business. They're the guiding principles behind your company culture, mission and employer brand. Therefore, it's where you must always start when setting out to improve your strategy. This is essential at any point in time, but especially headed into 2021. Over the past year, people have refocused their priorities and adjusted their values, which means you must do the same.

Your core values resonate with both customers and candidates, which makes starting with your values all the more important. As many as 72 percent of US consumers look to buy from companies that align with their personal values. **Additionally, 14 percent of candidates say the most influential marketing material in their decision to apply to an open position is the company's core values.**

A strong corporate culture stems from a thoughtfully determined set of values, which should be both reflective of your company today, as well as aspirational.

Consider your current culture: which values does your team uphold and demonstrate daily? Add or amend those on your list of core values. Then, think about both your short- and long-term business goals; the values you set today should still be relevant five years down the line and set you on the path toward achieving your more immediate objectives.

Your values should be a guiding force behind your employer brand. For example, if your team values out-of-the-box thinking, include creativity among your core values. Remember to keep your list short — no more than 10 values — so only the truly important principles are emphasized and the list remains actionable.



Step 2: Put Culture at the Forefront

SECTION II

Today, perks and benefits are simply ancillary aspects of your business. As candidate and employee values have changed, so too have priorities. Culture programs carry far more weight than frivolous perks, as they reflect what truly matters to your company.

As such, your culture should be front and center when telling your brand story. Double down on what your company cares about. Focus on your mission, core values and company culture. The foundation of what makes your company enjoyable to employees is something that candidates will relate to.

Furthermore, highlighting your culture helps prospective team members and customers get a sense of your authentic brand and imagine themselves as part of your team. On top of that, 66 percent of job seekers want to learn about your culture and values.

Start by creating content that highlights different aspects of your business. For example, an employee spotlight is an excellent way to showcase diverse voices from across the organization and put exciting team projects front and center. You can also have employees speak to your core values and explain how the team strives to leave them out each day. Don't forget to call out your culture programs, committees and employee resource groups as these are important parts of your company culture.

66%

66 PERCENT OF JOB SEEKERS WANT TO LEARN ABOUT YOUR CULTURE AND VALUES.

“

“Your brand is what other people say about you when you’re not in the room.”

JEFF BEZOS



Step 3: Highlight Your Employee Value Proposition



SECTION II

Your employee value proposition (EVP) explains your desirability as an employer of choice. In its most basic form, an EVP answers two important questions: 1) What do you expect each employee to bring to the table? and 2) What can they expect in return?

As previously mentioned, employees and job seekers are looking for more than just a competitive salary these days. They want stability, opportunities for growth and support both in and beyond the workplace. This is often addressed in your benefits package, but your EVP is far more than that.

Your employee value proposition should clearly articulate what your organization can offer beyond the usual salary and benefits. Promoting your EVP highlights your most desirable employee offerings and positions your company as an employer of choice.

You must get at the heart of your brand. Identifying your core principles as well as your value to employees will form the strong narrative arc needed to capture elite candidates' attention and get them to join your team.

For examples of strong EVPs, look no further than this guide:

***How Your EVP Can Amplify Your Brand Story
Including 60 Examples of Successful
Employee Value Propositions.***



Step 4: Create Mission-Driven Content

SECTION II

Just as creating content about your culture can help prospective employees envision working for your company, mission-driven content helps you connect with employees on a deeper level. This benefits your recruitment strategy in two ways.

First, promoting your mission-driven values increases the likelihood of attracting job seekers with similar principles: 88 percent of millennials want to work for an employer with values that match their own.

Second, it bolsters your employer brand by establishing your reputation of having a mission beyond profit margins, which 67 percent of employees want from their employer. **Highlight your company mission by telling your story not through your services, but how you serve.**

To get started creating this type of custom content, first think about how you'll be segmenting your audience. When it comes to telling your brand's story, there's one undeniable truth: every candidate is different and they all have unique wants and needs.

Segmenting your ideal candidates into well-defined audiences allows you to strategically speak to these differences. Consider who you're communicating with, what you want to say and what action you want them to take.

88%

**OF MILLENNIALS WANT TO WORK FOR AN
EMPLOYER WITH VALUES THAT MATCH THEIR OWN.**



Then, craft the narrative, always with your mission and core values in mind. Consider the best content format for your needs. For example, a Q&A style is perfect for an employee spotlight, but a quick-hit video is a great way to incorporate multiple voices from one team.

As a final step, consider how you'll distribute and promote your new content. When possible, leverage your existing employees to help get the word out. Doing so will be to your benefit: 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.

Don't forget to track your performance. This is key for successful iterations and maintaining a long-term employer branding strategy.



Step 5: Meet Candidates Where They Are

SECTION II

Targeting your ideal candidates on their native platforms is essential to putting your brand story in front of them. User behavior online is constantly evolving as new technologies are introduced, especially in today's fully remote world.

Start by identifying the platforms worthy of your continued investment and pull back on less impactful ones immediately. This will allow you to double down on the most effective storytelling resources at your disposal.

A **candidate persona** is an incredibly powerful tool for this purpose. Not only can it help you pinpoint your target audience's preferred platforms, it can also shed light on the best subject matters and content formats to engage them.

In addition to a persona, you should also create a **candidate journey map**, which refers to the experience a candidate has when applying for a position at your company. It starts with the first interaction and includes everything in between up until they are either rejected or accept your job offer.

In short, it identifies every digital or physical location candidates inhabit throughout the hiring process — the exact information you need to effectively meet exceptional candidates where they are.

Need help creating a candidate persona and candidate journey map? [Start here.](#)

The Content Creation Playbook

How to Supercharge Your Employer Brand With Content





Step 6: Highlight Diverse Voices

SECTION II

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) has taken center stage in the workplace this year. The expectation is that every individual actively works to create meaningful change in spite of the history of injustice that has marginalized underrepresented groups within the workplace and our society at large. Corporate America is no exception.

DEI is vital to creating and maintaining a successful workplace; one founded on the principle that all people can thrive personally and professionally. In order to make DEI a pillar of your company culture today and continue to prioritize it for years to come, you must start by amplifying the diverse voices within your organization.

Listen to them internally and project their voices externally. Representation is paramount, just as equal opportunities and treatment are.

Remember, equality is not equity — there are barriers that inhibit and prohibit individuals from marginalized backgrounds and underrepresented groups from achieving the same results as their white colleagues.

In addition to making DEI a part of your core values, mission and culture, ensure that your employee spotlights and other content feature diverse voices from your organization.

For more ideas on creating a diverse, equitable and inclusive work environment, turn to the experts.

A Guide to Racial Equality in the Workplace:

DEI Experts Offer Solutions to Create a Radically Inclusive Workplace



Step 7: Leverage Your Leadership Team

SECTION II

People want to hear from leaders of the brands they trust — 79 percent say CEO visibility is very important, and they want leaders to share the company's mission and vision. Furthermore, Employees want to work for an empathetic employer so much that 77 percent are willing to work longer hours and 60 percent would take a pay cut.

Putting your leaders front and center to help tell your story is a surefire way to boost your employer brand; these individuals are top of mind when people think about employers.

Leveraging your leadership team can benefit your brand in a multitude of ways. For starters, it humanizes your company. **Putting a face to a big brand name naturally makes your company more approachable — and thus appealing — to prospective employees.**

Additionally, highlighting your C-suite and team leads is a great way to establish your brand as a thought leader. Not only does this help get your name acquainted with broader conversations about your industry, mission and products, it also adds a level of authenticity to your brand.

Finally, your leadership team is the face of your future. They're the individuals who will lead employees into the next phase of growth, through challenges and countless successes. It's essential that they're an integral part of your employer branding strategy as they'll be able to represent your brand's stability and empathy, two things employees and candidates want most this year.



77%

OF EMPLOYEES ARE WILLING TO
WORK LONGER HOURS FOR AN
EMPATHETIC EMPLOYER.



Step 8: Partner With Your Marketing Team

SECTION II


Messaging and promotional strategies are fundamental to any branding work. When seeking to refine and bolster your brand, you'll do well to loop your marketing team into the conversation. Marketers are skilled writers who create strategic messaging and promotional plans every day. Their backing gives your team the expertise needed to effectively disseminate your brand story to a wider talent base.

Additionally, combining your marketing and employer branding efforts creates a cohesive look and feel that will leave a lasting impression on your target audiences. This helps unify your employer and consumer brands, which, as previously mentioned, leads to an altogether stronger brand story.

Creating a consistent brand isn't just a smart strategy, it's a necessity: 60 percent of millennials expect a consistent brand across all channels.

Plus, joining forces with your marketing department can also cut costs — two budgets are better than one, but mitigating duplicate efforts saves time and employee resources. Not only that, but this partnership can generate revenue. Branding influences sales more than you might think: leaders report 18 percent of purchases are because of their brand while 17 percent are directly related to sales tactics.

All in all, partnering with your marketing team will streamline and strengthen your branding efforts. It's a win-win.



Step 9: Prioritize Employee Retention

SECTION II

A dedicated retention strategy will not only help you provide employees the support they need to thrive in their roles and the benefits they want, it also shows, quite simply, that you care about your people. That is the cornerstone of a great organization that employees will be clamoring to join and eager to stay with.

Though perks aren't everything, the benefits you offer employees speaks volumes about who you are as an employer and what you value. Each workforce is different and a custom benefits package is key to supporting your unique team; cookie-cutter benefits won't cut it. Survey your people to determine what it is they need to lead successful lives both in and out of the office.

Keep in mind that culture is set by leaders, maintained by employees and monitored by HR. Consciously dedicate time and resources to support the positive development and evolution of your company culture. Train new hires in your core values, implement new employee resources groups to better support your staff and create culture committees to empower employees as culture catalysts.

To stay current and competitive as hiring needs grow, leverage the insights from this report:

Candidate Insight Report

Top Perks and Benefits for Tech in 2021



Step 10: Track Your Performance

SECTION II

Almost every initiative is just about useless if you don't consistently measure and track your performance. As you work to create a stronger brand, keep a close eye on certain metrics.

For starters, ask your employees what they think. Do they notice a difference in the way you're presenting your brand? Has their own perception changed? Are the differences well received?

Consider polling your people on a regular basis to collect consistent feedback. For an additional layer of data, survey candidates who go through your hiring process — does their perception of your company align with what internal employees have to say?

For specific initiatives, such as content and campaigns, track more granular feedback. Engagement, reach, click-through-rate and clicks to apply are just a few key performance indicators (KPIs) you should consider tracking. Of course, you'll want to measure what's most important to you.

As always, don't collect data and let it fall by the wayside. Use the insights you glean to make adjustments and improvements. This is an essential step in any long-term strategy.

SECTION III

Key Takeaways

SECTION III

This past year has been tumultuous and full of challenges. Still, 2021 is ripe with opportunities. Use the remaining weeks of 2020 — and the checklist below — to start rebuilding your brand to be stronger and well-positioned for the new year.

How to Build a Stronger Brand

- ❑ **Step 1:** Update Your Core Values
- ❑ **Step 2:** Put Culture at the Forefront
- ❑ **Step 3:** Highlight Your Employee Value Proposition
- ❑ **Step 4:** Create Mission-Driven Content
- ❑ **Step 5:** Meet Candidates Where They Are
- ❑ **Step 6:** Highlight Diverse Voices
- ❑ **Step 7:** Leverage Your Leadership Team
- ❑ **Step 8:** Partner With Your Marketing Team
- ❑ **Step 9:** Prioritize Employee Retention
- ❑ **Step 10:** Track Your Performance

The logo features the text "United We Tech." in a dark blue, serif font. The text is enclosed within a square frame that has a teal-to-blue gradient. The top-left and bottom-left corners of the frame are cut off at a 45-degree angle.

United We Tech.

Built In helps tech professionals stay on top of trends and news, expand their networks and carve out futures at companies they believe in. [Learn more.](#)

A large, thick, teal-colored arrow that starts on the left side of the page and curves downwards and to the right, pointing towards the "Let's work together:" text.

Let's work together:

Select a market below.

[Austin](#) // [Boston](#) // [Chicago](#) // [Colorado](#) // [Los Angeles](#)
[New York City](#) // [San Francisco](#) // [Seattle](#)