

## Branding and hiring in a 'social' world

*Social networks change how people spread the word about potential employers*

BY DAVID LITHERLAND

Although human resources, sales and marketing departments may occupy different corners in an office, it's widely accepted they share a common and critical role as brand ambassadors. What is not often considered, however, is the impact the hiring and interview process can have on corporate reputation and perception.

Job postings and interviews are often the first opportunities for potential employees to get a sense of a company's overall culture, brand identity and messaging. As such, the hiring and interviewing process should be regarded as an extension of marketing and time should be dedicated to ensure it is being managed and executed with corporate goals and brand standards in mind.

In an age of social media, brand identity is more vulnerable than ever. Candidates leaving an interview with a sour taste can and will log onto to their Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter accounts or personal blogs to vent negative experiences. Taking into account the tech-savvy population today, damage to a company's brand is merely a 140-character Tweet, status update or blog post away.

Three-quarters of people worldwide who go online visit social network and blog sites, a jump of 24 per cent from 2009, according to the Nielsen Company. And they spend 22 per cent of their time online at these sites. The average visitor spends 66 per cent more time on these sites than one year ago — almost six hours in April 2010 versus three-and-a-half hours last year.

The proliferation of social media allows people to highlight a positive interaction with an organization and make it an attractive option for others to consider when looking for a new job.

Even if a job is not offered, as long as the interviewer and other

representatives of the organization treat the candidate with respect, she will likely share her positive experience with her social and professional networks.

But the proliferation of social media can also turn hundreds of potential candidates against an organization. The ramifications of negative comments made over social media networks are far-reaching. They could impact a firm's level of attractiveness to high-calibre prospects in general, ultimately creating future struggles for employers in finding and hiring quality employees.

The attitude of an interviewer not only influences whether or not a candidate will accept a job offer but greatly affects her perception of an organization in general.

### Where companies go wrong

Failure to recognize the link between branding and hiring puts a company at risk of significantly damaging its reputation and undermining traditional marketing efforts.

More often than not, companies go wrong in how they respond to job candidates after the interview process. The urgency of filling a position, the flurry of resumé collection and the intensity of the interview process are all communicated to potential candidates. Candidates feel this urgency, meet it and expect a swift decision and response.

However, if a company's timelines change for various reasons (another project comes up, the job description changes or someone goes on vacation), it might fail to communicate that change to candidates.

When faced with this silence or lack of communication, candidates inevitably lose excitement and momentum in their interaction with the company and may ask themselves, "Is that the way they make decisions?" or "Is this management's communication style?"

Often interest in the position

### TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS

## How to use social media to find candidates

Increasingly, social media is on the radar of employers, recruiters and HR professionals as a tool for tapping into large pools of potential employees.

"As a creative digital agency, it only makes sense that our potential employees would be active online," said Stephen Beck, a creator and partner at Vancouver-based Engine Digital. "Networks like LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook are essentially online extensions of resumé, allowing us to make connections with suitable candidates and promote job postings."

How are networks like LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook being used to help find candidates?

- Staying in touch with colleagues and contacts within particular industries as a future source of potential employment and referrals.
- Using the network's search capabilities to find potential employees through keyword searches, past or current employers, interests and hobbies. This enables contact with candidates who may not be actively searching for a job.
- Conversely, candidates will actively seek out employment opportunities and make contact through these networks.

Out of the various networks, LinkedIn's focus on connecting professionals rather than distant acquaintances has made it one of the most popular tools for recruiters. While Facebook and Twitter are still effective, LinkedIn profiles resemble a resumé — making the network highly "job-friendly."

While social media can be an effective tool, it should be seen as a supporting piece of the recruitment picture. Professional recruiters, ads, online job boards and conducting regular face-to-face hiring and interview processes continue to be key parts of an overall recruiting strategy.

disappears altogether. Not only has the company made a horrible impression and lost a potentially good employee, but it has also indirectly influenced the opinions of the people in their social and professional networks.

Additional areas where hiring etiquette can have a negative impact include situations where an interviewer criticizes a resumé, lacks enthusiasm or meets with a candidate only to gain insider information about a competitor.

### Common professional etiquette

In the end, winning over job candidates and, by extension, their networks, comes down to common professional etiquette, respect, common sense and awareness. Those involved in the hiring process should also be in close contact with marketing and communications departments to ensure the brand messaging is upheld.

Here are other simple tips:

- Remember any contact with candidates — phone interviews, in-person meetings, emails — counts as a marketing opportunity.
- Treat everyone you interview as a potential customer.
- Allow enough time for each interview.
- Prepare standard questions for all candidates.
- Even if an interview is going poorly, continue in a positive manner.
- Use an interview to give a candidate a positive perception of the organization as an employer and as a business.

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