

# Talent attention and persuasion 01

## A noisy world

Human attention spans have been shortening for a number of years now and recent research from The National Center for Biotechnology Information has shown our average attention spans can now be as low as 8.25 seconds. This is down from 12 seconds in 2000 and is less than the 9-second attention span of a goldfish!<sup>1</sup> The study indicates that this has been caused by an increase in external stimuli in the last decade. With this in mind it is clear that the incredible rise of mobile devices and the proliferation of social media as our go-to channel for all information and communication are likely to be the key drivers of our reduced attention span.

If you want exceptional talent working in your organization you have to recruit the right people and to do so you have to get their attention; see Figure 1.1. Recruitment has always relied on advertising and marketing methods to attract the right people but recent shifts in technology and communication mean that getting ‘talent attention’ is more of an issue than it has ever been. In the coming chapters we will look in detail at the tools and techniques being used successfully to recruit exceptional talent but it is important first to consider the vital concepts of attention and persuasion on which the best strategies are based.

Getting the attention of the right people to join your organization has always been an issue but it has never been so acute as it is now for companies attempting to recruit exceptional talent in our exceptionally distracted world. Humans are exposed to a huge amount of information on a daily basis and the statistics show that contribution to this noise from social media is extraordinary. Twitter generates 500 million tweets per day; in the same time frame Facebook will

have 300 million photos uploaded, and its users will ‘like’ content in their feed a total of 4.5 billion times. Over the course of a week, 130,000 long-form posts are written in LinkedIn. Recruitment channels are significant contributors to this information overload, with a million job postings a week currently being added to job aggregator Indeed in the United States and United Kingdom alone.

Connecting the right audience to your recruitment message against this background noise of digital distraction is obviously very challenging. There is some good news, though. The same research that reported on the destruction of our attention spans also revealed that once someone gives something their full attention in the digital world they will focus fully. The study showed that the average time spent watching an online video once play has started is as long as 2.7 minutes. Bearing in mind that most online video consumption is done on the small screen of a mobile, with the likelihood of any number of real-world distractions going on at the same time, this is actually quite remarkable.

The key driver of getting attention is trust. Audiences are more likely to engage with content from trusted sources and, as the Edelman Trust Barometer<sup>2</sup> indicates, they are also very likely to trust content from people they view as being just like them. Employers can tap into this in a number of ways to get the attention and build the trust of the exceptional talent they need. Before we look at these techniques in detail it is worth taking a moment to get some background and look at how talent attraction has evolved over the last 20 or so years.

## **From advertising to attraction to attention**

Talent attraction has changed a lot in the last 20 years; it has even changed its name. Formerly known simply as ‘recruitment advertising’, ‘talent attraction’ has become widely adopted in response to its rapid evolution and growing complexity.

In the pre-internet era, advertising was pretty much the only technique available to market employment opportunities to talent. National and local newspapers and the trade press all carried page upon page of recruitment advertising; a massive cash cow for the publishers involved. Impact was limited by the distribution and

frequency of the publications and there was never any guarantee that the adverts were even being read.

The rise of the internet turned everything on its head and in the early 2000s significant change came to the recruitment industry. As the audience moved online so did jobs advertising, and traditional publishers found themselves facing a new breed of competitor, the job board. Employers also began to build their own careers websites and implement a new type of software called applicant tracking systems (ATS) to manage the new online recruitment process. These systems allowed for greater efficiency in the recruitment process by keeping job applications in a database and making it much easier for recruiters to schedule interviews and collate feedback from hiring managers. While it may have seemed like a revolution at the time, in retrospect the core model of recruitment marketing didn't actually change: it was still classified advertising, it had just moved online. However, while this wasn't the revolution it seemed, there were still considerable benefits in the change for both employers and job seekers. Information on available jobs all over the world was now available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, companies could use their careers sites to sell themselves as employers on their own terms, and the rise of the ATS reduced the administrative burden of the recruitment process for both recruiters and applicants.

Over the next 10 years we saw a gradual evolution in line with the development of the sophistication of the digital landscape as a whole. Employers have always been particularly slow to adopt emerging techniques, but gradually search engine marketing and other digital marketing tactics crept into recruiting as a way of getting competitive advantage in the war for talent. Recruitment advertising didn't fully capture the scope of this emerging complexity and 'talent attraction' replaced it as the phrase of choice around this time. It is now used as an umbrella term to encompass all the activities companies do to market themselves to potential employees.

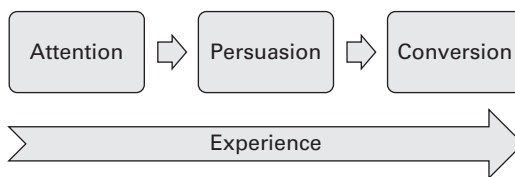
From 2010 onwards the parallel rise of social media and mobile internet is changing everything. If the change of the first 10 years of the 2000s was a gradual evolution, what is happening now is an increasing pace of revolution driven by social media, mobile internet and an explosion of innovation in an increasingly well-funded

HR technology sector. The last five years have also seen LinkedIn go from a site with a restricted audience of tech professionals to a global powerhouse and mass-market recruitment platform. Employers are now able to be much more proactive and target the talent they want directly even if those people are not currently actively job seeking. It is a world away from putting an advert in a newspaper hoping the right people will read it at the right time and waiting for them to come to you.

This growth of direct connectivity between recruiters and candidates, facilitated by social media and LinkedIn in particular, has driven significant structural changes in recruitment. While recruitment agencies are still important intermediaries in certain markets and circumstances, in the last 10 years we have seen a dramatic rise in the number of companies that are bringing recruitment in house. Multinational corporations, SMEs and start-ups have all seen massive benefits from taking more control over their recruitment by building up their own in-house teams or by using companies specializing in recruitment process outsourcing (RPO) to build on-site capability for them.

It is becoming very clear from this revolution in technologies, platforms and the underlying structure of the industry itself that a new era of strategic marketing is upon us: an era that will see the old rules rewritten as employers embrace a host of new techniques to find, engage and recruit. It's a world where talent acquisition will need a new model to work to, a model that prioritizes attention, persuasion and the importance of a quality candidate experience as the power firmly shifts away from the recruiters towards an ever more global pool of exceptional talent.

**Figure 1.1** Talent attraction model



Unfortunately, the move to strategic marketing is not a straightforward one. The pace of change has left many employers wrong-footed and unable to adapt their approaches quickly enough to keep pace with the media choices and communication preferences of the talent they want to connect to. In-house recruitment is growing but not many companies are developing the in-house skills for strategic recruitment marketing. Very often there isn't the expertise or resources to properly update and evolve 'tried and trusted' methods of talent acquisition that are becoming increasingly ineffective. As a result, employers find themselves muddling through, trying to get talent attention in a cacophony of noise using outdated techniques. There is also a temptation to use new products and technology as a silver bullet to solve all talent attraction problems, but ultimately these products are just tools not solutions and without the right strategy and resources in place to execute them properly they can actually do more harm than good.

It is becoming very clear that the traditional reliance on CVs is incompatible with a mobile world and while many recruiters still argue that old ways are the best, the old ways are creating an overwhelmingly negative perception of employers for job seekers who are used to being able to do everything they want from their smartphones. Mobile requires an entirely different design mindset and as yet only a small minority of employers have made their careers websites and applications processes compatible with the needs of mobile users. The fact that the majority of job seekers are now attempting to search and apply for jobs from their phone underlines just how behind the curve the thinking is here.

It is not all bad news, though. A number of progressive employers have been able to make sense of this chaos and there are some fantastic case studies emerging that are helping to illustrate what can be achieved and to model the way forward for the sector as a whole. We'll look at these case studies and the techniques and tactics they use in more detail over the next two chapters. Before we can do that, though, we need to address the biggest strategic challenge employers need to overcome before they can properly embrace these new ways of working, get the right talent attention and build vital trust with exceptional talent. We need to talk about recruitment's persuasion problem.

## The persuasion problem

Recruiters are professional persuaders. They spend their careers persuading people with the right skills and talents to become candidates, persuading the right candidates that the opportunity and the organization the recruiter represents are a great move for them and then persuading at offer stage to nullify counter offers and to finally turn a candidate into an actual hire. They also have a level of access to talent via social media and a set of tools that are cleverer and more sophisticated than a recruiter working 20 years ago could have ever imagined in his or her wildest dreams. Social media marketing, search engine marketing, e-mail marketing, content marketing, inbound marketing: the tools and techniques available to persuade talent at scale are seemingly endless and working well in other business sectors outside recruiting.

While recruiters are brilliant at persuading on a one-to-one basis it is becoming clear that adapting these skills to persuade on a one-to-many basis is not something they are finding particularly easy. Having access to the tools is one thing but having the time and expertise to understand them and use them well is something entirely different. Many companies have made an investment in in-house recruitment but relatively few have made an investment in specialist marketing resources for recruitment or training to upskill their existing recruiters with the appropriate marketing skills.

As we've seen, the world has moved on and the techniques that worked a few years ago are often no longer an effective way of recruiting exceptional talent in our new noisy mobile world. The problem though is not just about being ineffective. In many cases poorly thought-out talent marketing campaigns and activity are causing genuine reputation damage, not just for the employers themselves but for recruiting as a profession.

The problem manifests itself in three areas: quality of content, the quality of distribution of that content and the conversion of any interest the content generates. As we'll see later on, marketing using quality content that gives an authentic view of the employer is a key strategy and when employers get this right it works brilliantly. However, despite the growth in the use of quality content for

recruitment the job posting is still the main unit of content currency and they are almost always universally terrible.

The rise of the job board in the early 2000s made it easy for employers and recruitment agencies to advertise jobs cheaply, quickly and easily, and the volume of advertised roles increased dramatically. However, as volumes and speed of posting increased, the quality of the copywriting in these adverts decreased dramatically. It soon became the norm for job descriptions, which had previously just been used internally to document the role for HR purposes, to be posted out as external adverts in their unedited form.

Internal job descriptions are not normally written for the purpose of persuading someone to take the job; instead they focus on the roles, responsibilities, skills and experience required. While this is crucial information it doesn't sell the job as the next career move for a talented individual or promote the company as an employer of choice. Recruitment adverts have always been text-heavy, particularly as they were traditionally placed in the classified advertising sections of the newspapers and trade press. However, it was fairly standard practice to include at least a few lines to sell the job and the employer to the target audience. Once posting internal job descriptions as adverts became the norm, this kind of promotional content within the copy became the exception rather than the norm. It has also become the norm to use internal job descriptions as job postings on corporate careers. The quality of marketing can be even worse here as many employers use ATS systems to post the same copy used in internal job requisition approval processes directly to the external corporate careers site.

Initially the proliferation of internal job descriptions as external advertising didn't have much of a detrimental impact. In the days before mobile internet, social media and LinkedIn, job hunting was mainly a proactive activity in which people would sit down at a desktop or laptop to give their fully focused attention. Job boards, corporate careers sites and recruitment agency sites were really the only places they could go. However, in a world that has shifted from desktop to mobile, where skill shortages have led to a dramatic increase in candidate-driven markets and where the best talent is exposed to a cacophony of noise from ever-increasing numbers of

channels, the poor quality of job posting copy is a massive contributing factor to recruiting's persuasion problem.

Job postings are still the major currency of recruitment marketing and as the number of channels to reach potential talent has grown so has the potential to distribute them to a larger audience. Unfortunately, job postings distributed via social media can be ineffective as they are often delivered without context and aren't necessarily appropriate in terms of format or in keeping with audience expectations of the purpose of social media. Recruitment technology providers are exacerbating this problem by offering social media integrations in their software to allow users to bulk-post jobs to Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. These postings are not optimized for the nuances of the individual platforms in any way and because of this can have very limited visibility.

At the most extreme end of the scale certain companies and individual recruiters have been known to adopt a 'pray and spray' strategy, spamming job postings into every available channel at every available opportunity in the hope of some kind of response. While this does sometimes provide positive results, the ever-diminishing returns of response quality create a vicious circle where an increasing amount of job posting spam has to be posted for it to work. This does nothing to enhance the reputation of recruiting as a profession and can do serious reputational damage to the employers concerned.

Spam is also a problem for the industry when recruiters contact potential talent directly. The rise of LinkedIn and other proactive sourcing techniques makes it possible for recruiters to reach out directly to potential hires either via e-mail or LinkedIn's internal messaging system, InMail. Unfortunately, poorly targeted bulk spam messaging is often favoured over tailored one-to-one communication and some recipients end up receiving multiple messages on a daily basis notifying them about opportunities that are not relevant to them. The situation has got so bad, particularly in the tech sector, that some professionals with sought-after skills are hiding their contact details and taking their LinkedIn profiles offline to avoid these generic approaches.

The final manifestation of the persuasion problem is a lack of sophistication in converting interest into applications. Nearly



all large employers and a significant number of smaller ones use Applicant Tracking Systems to manage their recruitment process. ATS came into being in parallel with the e-commerce systems used to manage online sales from the late 1990s onwards. Unfortunately the evolution of ATS has not kept pace with the ever-growing sophistication of e-commerce and many ATS are outdated and no longer fit for purpose. We'll look at ATS in more detail in Chapter 3, but for now it is worth noting the poor candidate experience they can give applicants and their general lack of mobile compatibility. This means that very often hard-won click-throughs from job postings are lost when a terrible user experience meets a digital savvy and mobile audience.

Corporate careers sites also have a conversion issue. Recent research from Phenom People<sup>3</sup> showed that only 4 per cent of the visitors to a corporate careers site actually go on to apply for a role. A poor ATS experience will contribute to this, but in a lot of cases many career site visitors are at other stages of the decision funnel and just aren't ready to apply at that precise point. Just because they aren't ready to apply it doesn't mean they don't want to start a dialogue with the employer or its recruiters. Despite this, relatively few companies have some kind of e-mail capture or talent community feature on their careers website. Unfortunately, much of this traffic goes unconverted and many promising potential candidates are lost, never to return.

The consequences of the recruiting persuasion problem are severe. The interest of exceptional talent is lost, advertising spend and recruiter resource are wasted and there is potential reputational damage to employers, individual recruiters and indeed the profession of recruiting as a whole. So why does it happen and how can it be fixed?

A key point to make here is that the techniques highlighted when we're talking about poor practice are not actually bad techniques. Distributing job postings widely can be a very successful tactic if they are well written and arrive in the right place, at the right time with the right message to influence the right audience. Likewise, appropriately personalized and highly targeted LinkedIn InMails are critical to a successful recruiting strategy. Stack Overflow's 2015 Developer Hiring Landscape survey<sup>4</sup> illustrated that tech professionals still rate

e-mails and InMails as the most effective way for recruiters to get in touch with them despite being one of the most spammed market segments because of skill shortages in their industry. Experienced tech recruiters also report that job boards remain a key source of hires if the job postings are well written and persuasive.

The problem comes when lack of resource and experience and poor technology force recruiters to get into the spiral of diminishing returns that causes the proliferation of recruitment spam. This in turn helps to exacerbate the lack of trust that makes attention and persuasion so challenging for so many employers when they are recruiting. The underlying cause tends to be underinvestment from employers, meaning they are not keeping up with the pace of change and expectations of the talent they are looking for. There are lots of ways to fix the problem and there are a growing number of employers who are embracing the strategic marketing age and getting fantastic results.

In Chapter 2 we consider the specific ways employers can improve their recruiting strategies but before we get there it is important to look at how employers can build the trust they need to get the right talent attention and persuade exceptional talent to join their organizations. The critical factor is employer brand, and to understand employer branding we first need to understand the structure of the social web and its role in creating the reputation currency that sits at the heart of any employer's brand.

## **Social building blocks**

Social media can be a confusing place. It has become ubiquitous incredibly quickly and continues to change on an almost daily basis. It's not surprising that many employers struggle to keep up with the latest techniques for recruiting using Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram and the many other emerging social platforms. When you strip away the hype, though, there are always three main building blocks to any successful use of social media for recruiting and employer branding. These building blocks are social graphs, sharing and social proof.

## Social graphs

Everyone has a social graph. It is a visual way of mapping the direct and indirect relationships between people and mapping out shared connections in overlapping networks.

The concept behind social graphs has been used by sociologists since the 1950s but their role in describing the structure and growth of social media has solidified the phrase in the marketing lexicon. Social graphs are the foundations of social media, enabling sites like Facebook and LinkedIn help people to map their connections and keep in touch with far larger networks of people than has been possible before. The way LinkedIn describes its network in terms of first, second and third degree connections is a social graph in action. As more and more people join social platforms and connect their networks the potential reach is becoming extraordinary. At the time of writing, Facebook has 1.7 billion active monthly users and it estimates that on average there are 3.57 degrees of separation between them. It is easy to see why ideas, news, photos, memes, recommendations and other content can spread so quickly.

As well as being the key factor for the rapid spread of information through social networks, social graphs have had a proven role in recruitment long before the internet was created. In 1973 the US sociologist Mark Granovetter published his now famous work *The Strength of Weak Ties*.<sup>5</sup> As part of his research Granovetter looked at how people in a Boston suburb who had recently changed job found their new opportunity. His work demonstrated that people who found jobs through referrals from people in their network were likely to have found them through weak ties, ie the more indirect relationships on their social graphs.

It's important to understand that social networks are not like the websites that came before them and actually represent the aggregated social graphs of their users. These social platforms help people manage a larger number of weak ties than ever before and mean that we all have much bigger networks for reach and influence. This is an important development for recruiting and, as we will see later in the chapter, social media networks are an effective way of distributing stories and building trust. Therefore, they should form a critical part of any strategy to recruit exceptional talent.

## **Sharing**

If social graphs represent the foundations of social media then sharing is the fuel that drives it. Mark Zuckerberg first presented his law of sharing at the F8 Facebook developers' conference back in 2011.

As he was talking to a room full of developers Zuckerberg chose to express his law of sharing in algebraic terms but also provided this useful translation: 'The amount of stuff we will share today is twice as much as on this day a year ago; sharing is growing exponentially'.<sup>6</sup> His law is somewhat self-serving but illustrates just how important sharing is to the health of social platforms. Facebook itself has 300 million photos uploaded and shared every day and in the same time period its users' content generates 24 billion likes. Sharing is equally important for Twitter and LinkedIn.

The key for employers that want to tap into social graphs to reach target audiences is creating and curating content that users will want to share and engage with. A unit of social media content that users can engage with is known as a 'social object' and this can be anything from a status update to a photo, video or even a job posting.

## **Social proof and reputation**

As far as employer branding is concerned, social proof is the most important concept of all and it is built on the back of social graphs and sharing. Social proof is everywhere and reputation is now earned, not owned. We live in a feedback society where the wisdom and experience of our networks are trusted to help us make key decisions about what we buy, what we read, where we go on holiday, what we watch and, critically, where we work. Indeed it is not just our close networks that we trust; we are also more likely to believe the word of a stranger than be 100 per cent trusting of companies who are trying to sell us products, services or employment opportunities.

Review sections are found on pretty much every site that is selling products to consumers, providing prospective buyers the 'social proof' they need to make their purchasing decision. TripAdvisor is one of the best known examples of this phenomenon, delivering social proof in the travel industry by enabling users to read and write

reviews of hotels globally. It is familiar to everyone who travels and has changed the industry for ever.

Unsurprisingly then, social proof is becoming absolutely critical for building trust for recruitment purposes. Exceptional talented people will never take the company's recruitment marketing messages at face value and will always look for third-party evidence as part of their decision-making process.

The most obvious place to find social proof in recruiting is via global employer review site Glassdoor. Glassdoor works in a similar way to TripAdvisor but rather than rating hotels users are rating their employers, both past and present, for everything from salary to working culture and their approval level of the CEO. Glassdoor holds a database of over 12 million reviews and is actively operating in a growing number of countries. Users are not just looking to Glassdoor as a source of information of where they might want to work; it has also become an important tool for the due diligence candidates now undertake on employers while going through the interview process and certainly before accepting a job offer. Originally viewed with suspicion by employers (and still criticized as being over-negative by some) it is interesting to see a lot of companies, including high-profile employers such as Unilever and Rackspace, now embracing it as a vehicle for social proof and actively promoting their profiles to potential hires.

Social proof in recruiting is not limited to Glassdoor but is something employers can use in a number of ways to help illustrate their culture and build their reputation as an employer of choice. Whether it is as simple as profiles of employees on the corporate careers site or as complex as a structured employee advocacy programme, it is vital anything an employer puts forward as social proof is authentic and transparent. These are two key factors in building trust and are now critical to building an effective employer brand.

## Employer brand

The concept of an employer brand has been around since the 1990s and was described by employer branding expert Brett Minchington in 2010 as being 'the image of your organization as a great place

to work in the mind of current employees and key stakeholders in the external market (active and passive candidates, clients, customers and other key stakeholders)'.<sup>7</sup> While the concept has changed little, the influencing factors and channels of communication have shifted radically in the last five years, so much so that employer brand is seen by many as being slightly outdated and the phrase 'talent branding' is coming to represent a more modern approach to employer brand communications.

Fundamentally this reinvention as talent branding is driven by the quest for exceptional talent and the recruiting persuasion problem. At the simplest level it is about building trust in order to gain attention and persuade by presenting a view of the organization, its culture, values and employment experience. Employer brand insights specialist Universum defines an employee value proposition (EVP) as being 'a unique set of offerings, associations and values to positively influence target candidates and employees'.<sup>8</sup> This EVP needs to be transparent and authentic rather than just a strapline created via a marketing focus group. As we will see, the companies that do this best are the ones that are open and honest and let their employees speak as advocates for them.

In a competitive marketplace it's crucial for every organization that the impact and reach of its employer brand, and EVP, are leveraged to help showcase differentiation. We have seen that digital communication channels are becoming noisier and this means each business needs to be creative in identifying all opportunities to maximize their brand.

Potential employees' perception of a business, particularly of its values, purpose and what it would be like to work for, is often shaped by a complex mix of customer and user experience. Whether we admire a quality product range, commitment to service or the way it markets itself externally, impressions of what it would be like to work in a business are shaped by external brand perceptions. These are important for job seekers as they will often frame their understanding of the EVP.

Brand perception is a key factor influencing a job seeker's impressions of what a company would be like to work for. That perception, while based on a mix of experiences, can also be affected by many outside influences and unfortunately these may not always be

positive. Sentiment can be affected by things such as negative feelings towards the business sector, trading circumstances, a corporate scandal or financial problems.

The transparency that digital and social channels enable can also create short-term problems, such as a social media storm over a poorly worded update or negative employee reviews on a site like Glassdoor. Many of these situations contribute towards a company getting a bad reputation and in a competitive talent market, reputations matter. To overcome this, employers need to own their messaging, or else outsiders will be setting the conversation and they risk being on the defensive. Research from the United States has shown that 69 per cent of job seekers would not consider an offer from a business with a bad reputation – even if they were unemployed.<sup>9</sup>

It is not only market conditions that can cause this. Low brand awareness and poor brand image are often also found within industries that are seen as unglamorous or old-fashioned, or those in which there is a high proportion of lower-status work. For a skilled candidate considering his or her options, these types of companies can seem high risk and less attractive; the various sector or performance issues adversely impact attempts to differentiate themselves as an employer of choice. It is in helping to overcome challenges like these that a properly coordinated and constructed talent branding strategy can be most powerful.

Interestingly, research on what candidates look for in their career moves indicates that specific industries and sectors are not always the main focus. There are a number of things that they actually value including: remuneration, opportunities for development and skill enhancement, flexible rewards, leadership, a great place to work where they feel valued, culture, a strong network of internal relationships and corporate citizenship.

It is key that employers differentiate themselves by proving they are able to meet a new employee's expectations by demonstrating that all of these elements of value are part of their EVP. This requires all stakeholders to work together. Those from talent acquisition, HR and learning and development (L&D) need to identify the opportunities for skill and career enhancement, experiential learning and for project work, and look for ways to help bring this to life.

As HR practices evolve so talent will want to know how the business approaches areas such as performance management, whether it is purely used to measure and assess or to constructively help employees grow. They will be interested in the range of rewards and opportunities for flexibility, and the physical workspace.

For a younger, more aspirational workforce, companies may need to show that they provide opportunities based on achievement and merit, diverse roles and working patterns that suit preferences and skills. Flexible working, lateral career moves and strong social networks will also prove attractive. Creating a working environment and culture in which people can perform, grow and thrive can outweigh concerns over sector, function or reputation.

It is very clear from companies that are doing this successfully that the most compelling way to show that the business delivers on its EVP is by communicating these elements through the sharing of positive, authentic employee stories, that underline culture, showcase the employment experience, and that will also resonate with a talent population looking for new challenges. Therefore, the opinions of a company's employees on their experience at work are a crucial part of employee branding. As we have seen there is growing distrust of corporate marketing messages and a desire for the social proof of the insider's point of view. At the same time large businesses with a variety of recruitment needs will be communicating simultaneously with a number of different audiences. One of the most effective ways of getting an authentic and tailored message across is via employer-generated content.

The content of employee reviews on sites like Glassdoor is out of the immediate control of employer branding professionals so taking an active role in promoting authentic employee stories in channels where the organization has more control is now a vital part of talent brand strategy. The corporate careers site is an obvious starting point here, and social media provides a massive platform for brand communication via the social networks of a company's employees.

Recent research has shown that there are a number of challenges that organizations need to overcome to effectively harness the power of employee-generated and shared content.<sup>10</sup> These include: identifying effective employee brand advocates who will be sources of



content, making sure that content is produced regularly on an ongoing basis, ensuring the content messaging is aligned with the EVP while remaining 100 per cent authentic, and ensuring consistency of content format (especially within large organizations).

Many companies have overcome the challenges and are using employee-generated content to resonate with their target audiences and massively extend the reach of their brand. Here are three examples of what they are doing to make this happen.

## **1 Finding and encouraging employee brand advocates**

The important thing here is to understand and harness the different motivations employees may have for creating and sharing content. Motivations will vary but they could include recognition among their peers, the opportunity to enhance their own professional brand, the kudos of winning a competition or financial reward.

## **2 Using technology**

There are a number of emerging technology providers that are helping companies automate the sourcing and sharing of employer stories. Adoption isn't yet widespread but companies such as Workometry and Life Guides are helping organizations market themselves effectively using employee-generated content and insight. Meanwhile Papirfly is working with a growing number of clients to help them guarantee brand consistency in the publication of employee-generated content.

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### **CASE STUDY** Internal brand advocates at CA Technologies

One company using technology brilliantly to activate its internal brand advocates is CA Technologies. Craig Fisher, who is Director of Employer Brand and Talent Acquisition Marketing for CA Technologies, is a strong believer in employer advocates. In his own words:

The EVP, in my opinion, has to come from the inside out. So you have to really talk to your employees about what's good about your company, be transparent about that, agree to work on the things that you need to work on, but highlight the best parts. Get your employees to talk better about those things online.<sup>11</sup>

CA Technologies has been using a platform called QUEsocial to make it easier to help its employees share content with their networks and could instantly see the benefit of connecting with the social graphs of its employers. As Craig says:

We started with 80 champions on the QUEsocial platform and we discovered that their networks don't completely overlap. In fact, they only overlap by about 20 per cent. So, when we're sharing content, we're reaching a whole lot of people that we would never have reached otherwise; it's not just the same people getting all the same message.

Rather than just using these employee champions to share job openings Craig works with them to provide valuable content for the target audience:

We use a 5:1 give-to-ask ratio whereby you post more helpful things that aren't necessarily written by or about you or your company to your audience. You grow your own thought leadership this way, and your network becomes more involved with what you're doing because you're a helpful resource. So, your network grows and the trust in your network grows. Then every once in a while, 'Oh, by the way, we're hiring,' or, 'Oh, by the way, check out our white paper,' or, 'Our CEO on the cover of Forbes,' and so on.

This helpful third-party content could include news about the industry or more specific job seeker advice on topics like improving LinkedIn profiles or tips to ace interviews. Craig also stresses the importance of providing value for the employees themselves in this process:

The human element is important. You can't just wind it up and push all your jobs and company news out to a bunch of your employees and expect them to share it without giving them a 'What's in it for me?' Give them some content that will help them build thought leadership in their own networks and grow their networks and help them be a better member of their online communities. When you can do that then you can really sell it to the employees and give them a reason to want to do it. We get amazing feedback from our entire organization about how well it's working.

CA Technologies is seeing some impressive results from this form of employer advocacy. In five months, the audience for its careers site and social media

profiles has increased by 1019 per cent. It has had a 33 per cent increase in social media post reach, a 68 per cent boost in clicks per article and a 70 per cent boost in total engagement. Craig estimates that if it had had to pay for the same amount of coverage, over a year it would have cost \$720,000. Using an employee network approach has been incredibly valuable.

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### **3 Radical transparency**

Perhaps the boldest move in employee-generated content is to adopt a strategy of radical transparency and make employee communications and conversations that would have traditionally happened behind the company firewall, public and accessible via social media. This isn't a strategy that will work for everyone but those companies that have been willing and able to work in this way are reaping considerable benefits. Two examples of companies using this approach are dating technology business Match.com and the US restaurant chain Chili's. Match.com uses its Facebook page for employees to communicate with each other and share stories in a very public way. Potential employees are also invited to join in and engage with the content, an approach that allows them to feel they are getting a more authentic view of life at those organizations. Chili's is doing some brilliant work in the same way on Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram and it is useful to look at this in more detail.

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#### **CASE STUDY** Chili's

Originally opening in Dallas in 1975, Chili's was a pioneer of casual dining and now has restaurants in 31 countries. A few years ago, it did a blind study of people it considered to be exceptional managers at other brands and found that it had an image problem as an employer. Chili's was felt to be an old brand that wasn't growing, wasn't innovative and was somewhere that wouldn't offer the growth and development these people were looking for.

Chili's realized that the best way to correct these perceptions was to give people an authentic view of what the employer experience was really like and how the company was innovating in its industry. Social media was an obvious

channel to do this as so many of its team members were actively sharing their love for the brand on social channels with many posting pictures and talking about what it was like to work at Chili's.

The Director of Workforce Community and Communication, Chris Ebbeler, describes how it got started:<sup>12</sup>

We started very quietly on Twitter, and what we found pretty quickly was that we started to get recognized by our own team members. We started to engage, we started to build out a story that there is something going on at today's Chili's. The Chili's that you might remember from being a kid and coming into the restaurant with your mum and dad is a different Chili's today than it was maybe 15 or 20 years ago. We've grown into also telling that story on LinkedIn and on Instagram. We have found them to be great places for us, it's been fun to see people identify and understand the story that we are telling.

From there Chili's has continued to find innovative ways to tell its story and that of its employees on social media. It uses social media hashtags as a way of pulling the content together and has run contests to further engage its team and showcase itself to external talent. As Chris says:

I think if anything, if there is a secret, it's that we've been able to reach those people that are touching our guests every day and they love that we see the hard work they are doing. In a sea of people that might work here one day, and 80,000 people that work nationally and around the world, that we're able to look into and get a glimpse of what's going on in their life at more of a local level, and really engage with that, has led to results. It's been really, really rewarding because people have a great sense of pride in the company. When they show that on Instagram, we are able to repurpose it. We use it a tonne in our advertising, our talent marketing. As anybody would say, user-generated content has such a level of authenticity that's hard to find anywhere else.

Chris also believes that success is not just about improved employer brand perceptions but also better employee engagement:

One of the things we look at is belief in brand direction. So if we are telling the right stories and if we're connecting and engaging with our team members in the field, then a by-product of that should be that they really believe that what we are doing is the right thing, and that they're a part of it. You know, that they are engaged in the fact that they believe in this company, that they want to stick around.

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## How to get talent attention

We can see that talent attention is the critical first stage to hire exceptional talent but it is increasingly difficult in a noisy world. Many companies don't know how to evolve their legacy talent attraction strategies to this new reality and are unwittingly contributing to the recruiting persuasion problem via poorly marketed job postings and recruiter spam. Trust is the underlying factor here and can be built through an effective talent brand that communicates a compelling EVP using authentic employee-generated content communicated by employee advocates tapping into the relevant part of their social graphs.

Now we understand the importance of trust we can look at the specific tools and techniques progressive companies are using to attract exceptional talent.

### Notes

- 1 <http://www.statisticbrain.com/attention-span-statistics/> (quoted in Microsoft research in folder) National Center for Biotechnology Information, US National Library of Medicine, The Associated Press, 2 April 2015
- 2 [http://www.edelman.com/assets/uploads/2016/01/2016-Edelman-Trust-Barometer-Global\\_Leadership-in-a-Divided-World.pdf](http://www.edelman.com/assets/uploads/2016/01/2016-Edelman-Trust-Barometer-Global_Leadership-in-a-Divided-World.pdf)
- 3 <http://www.phenompeople.com/blog/cast-a-wide-talent-net-and-picking-the-cream-of-the-crop-with-machine-learning/>
- 4 <https://www.stackoverflowbusiness.com/talent/resources/developer-hiring-landscape-2015>
- 5 [https://sociology.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/the\\_strength\\_of\\_weak\\_ties\\_and\\_exch\\_w-gans.pdf](https://sociology.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/the_strength_of_weak_ties_and_exch_w-gans.pdf)
- 6 <https://techcrunch.com/2011/07/06/mark-zuckerberg-explains-his-law-of-social-sharing-video/>
- 7 [https://issuu.com/brettminchington/docs/employer\\_brand\\_leadership\\_a\\_global\\_perspective](https://issuu.com/brettminchington/docs/employer_brand_leadership_a_global_perspective)
- 8 <http://universumglobal.com/business-solutions/employer-value-proposition-development/>

- 9 <https://www.glassdoor.co.uk/employers/popular-topics/hr-stats.htm>
- 10 Papirfly Employer Brand Insight Report 2016
- 11 <http://rfpodcast.com/2016/06/ep-56-how-to-use-employees-as-brand-advocates/>
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