

White paper.

Employer Brand and Location

Don't like the conversation? Change it.

strengthen employer brand • engage people • cut the cost of talent



THE DAVID GROUP

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Would you move to Cary, North Carolina to join a company? How about Coppell in Texas? Or moving to the city of Kent in the state of Washington to advance your career? You might when you hear that each of these cities is the home of a company listed in the top-20 of *Fortune Magazine's* Best 100 Companies to Work For. Each of these companies – SAS, The Container Store and Recreational Equipment (REI) – is able to draw talent to their organization based on their sense of purpose, relevancy and a rich work experience all of which is shared through their respective employer brands.

We frequently hear from senior HR leaders that location is an impediment to their ability to attract, hire and keep talent. Well, location is just one conversation in your employer brand dialog so unless you can easily move your company, we suggest moving on to another area of conversation. As the charismatic character Don Draper points out in the popular show *Mad Men*, "If you don't like the conversation, change it."

A strong employer brand – one that is communicated well – will go a long way to compensate for a company's location. That's because a strong employer brand embodies a work experience that is rich, rewarding, authentic and full of opportunity. People will go out of their way to find this type of employment experience. Yes, we still have to work to overcome location in key moments of the candidate-potential employer courtship but a strong employer brand will put everything into proper perspective.



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Emotional Connections

There will always be an emotional reaction to a company's location. In fact, it may be one of the first emotional reactions that candidates feel when they first become aware of a company as a potential employer. "I'm kind of interested in this company but they are located in Anytown, USA. I don't know if I can live there." That's a valid human reaction based mostly on emotion. And, the truth is that some candidates will never get beyond this point.

It is possible, however, to draw candidates to other emotional connections that will counter-balance your organization's location. If your location is an initial detractor then compensate by clearly articulating stronger elements of your employer brand's employment promise. Innovative work, personal career growth, leadership role, rewarding team dynamics; these are illustrations of emotional connections that help a candidate begin to visualize working for you. If she can see herself becoming a part of a great team and leading it to new heights in the industry, then location

becomes a less critical factor in her considerations.

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Choosing which employer brand attributes to use as emotional connectors is an important part of this process. Let's be clear: every organization that employs people has an employer brand. If there is a work experience then there's an employer brand. Your task as a leader – and ours as HR communicators – is to focus on those elements of your employer brand that are most relevant, truly authentic and that resonate strongly with the people you need to hire, engage and keep.

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Every organization is different. The elements of what makes up your work experience are distinct to you. But they are real. Entwined in the work experience you and your employees share is the employer brand story that will not only connect with candidates, it will help to make your location an item that is lower on a candidate's list of considerations. Understanding, packaging and promoting your employer brand in a way that connects and engages is the challenge.

Continuous Employer Brand Communication

We're fans of continuous employer brand communication. Because people now get information, form opinions and make decisions based on 24/7, socially-wired, all access communication platforms, it takes a continuous effort to communicate and reinforce your employer brand promise to drive candidate engagement. Once you understand that a continuous flow of employer brand communication is needed, it's easier to see that there may be moments when it becomes important to accelerate this type of communication.

So, just putting out counter-balance employer brand messages alone is not enough. To overcome location, employers should focus on critical moments to accelerate a candidate's engagement. Videos highlighting personal stories, interactive gaming, talent networks and easy resume submission are just a few of the ways to accelerate employer brand engagement. For this issue, that moment would start from first awareness of you as a company through on-boarding, ensuring that you minimize last minute "recanters". (See graphic 1)



Graphic 1: Steps in the Candidate – Employer Relationship

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But, accelerating communication necessitates a need to be ready at every touch point. It doesn't help if you've achieved strong interest by a candidate but then subject her to an online application process that is too hard to complete; or the "black-hole" effect of not providing status updates; or by sending your candidate to a hiring manager who tries to, on his own, "sell the city" while not reinforcing the important employer brand attributes needed to keep the candidate's interest. You've worked hard to get your candidate to this point. Each touch point is precious. Don't lose them now.

Summary

It's easy to lose sight of how powerful an employer brand is. We know that stronger employer brands reduce turnover, increase employee engagement, cut cost-per-hire and shorten time-to-hire. What we sometimes forget is that a strong employer brand also connects people through purpose, mission and shared values all of which work to overcome an issue like your location. In employer brand communication, sometimes the *why* is more important than the *where*.

Key Takeaways

- Be sure that your employer brand communication is well defined and authentic. You won't make the case in overcoming location if the more compelling aspects of your employer brand aren't true.
- Use your people to help tell your employer brand story. People connect with people, not brochures or web pages. Also, consider building home-grown talent over the long term by investing in your local community talent resources.
- Use a wide variety of communication tools and applications including mobile, landing pages, videos, interactive games; anything to keep and accelerate candidate engagement.

Workforce Communications Practice

The David Group's Workforce Communications Practice is an emerging force in employee and employer brand communications. Our mission is to work with North American organizations to strengthen their employer brand, engage their employees and cut their cost of talent.

The David Group

The David Group is a national recruitment and retention advertising and communications agency. With offices in Cleveland, Austin and Chicago, we help employers find, attract, engage and keep talent.

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