

The 3 principles of
Employer Branding

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The 3 Principles of Employer Branding

About This Book

This book is based on a presentation I gave at the University of Rhode Island in October of 2010 on employer branding and social media.

To learn more about employer branding and social media, including step-by-step instructions on getting started, check out my book *Culture Convo* at <http://renegadehr.net/culture-convo>.

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Introduction

If you could work at any company in the world, where would you want to work?

Why? What about that organization do you find attractive? And how do you know what you know about that organization – what it's like to work there?

That's employer branding.

Companies with a strong, well-known employer brand get more applicants. They get better-qualified applicants. They spend less money per-hire on recruiting.

This book is about the three principles of employer branding in the digital world.

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I. You don't need money (*just time*)

Employer branding used to take lots of money (and not a lot of time).

You took out ads in the local paper. You had big booths at job fairs. You gave tons of useless but colorful crap to college kids and job seekers – pens, stress balls, paperweights.

It didn't take a lot of commitment. Just money.

Now, the opposite is true.

Social media makes the cost of communicating zero. Sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr let you connect with potential candidates and let them know how awesome you are for free.

Instead of money, the new currency is time.

Time spent connecting, sharing and building relationships. Time spent helping others. Time spent producing tools and information that are useful, entertaining or both.

Zappos.com is an online retailer. Tony Hsieh, the CEO of Zappos, uses social media to give people an inside glimpse into his organization.

Their [Facebook page](#) features photo albums with titles like *Caption of the Day*, *A Typical Day at Zappos* and *Bunk Desks*. They're fun and a little weird (*which is how Zappos' describes its culture*), and wildly entertaining.

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On Twitter, Tony Hsieh posts things like this (*also fun, a little weird, and wildly entertaining*):



Zappos has zero marketing budget. They spend nothing on their employer branding efforts. But they put in a lot of time to produce stuff that people actually want to pay attention to.

You don't need money. Just time.

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2. It's not just for “cool” cultures

Zappos gets used as an example of great branding with social media quite a bit.

This makes most HR pros roll their eyes. “My culture isn't like Zappos. We're not fun and edgy. We sell widgets.”

You don't need to have a “cool” culture to have a great employer brand.

[Choate, Hall & Stewart](#) is a mid-sized law firm in Boston, MA. Raise your hand if you think law firms are “cool.” Anyone?

Choate isn't hip and edgy like Zappos, but they are a great place to work. They've even got an award from the Boston Business Journal to prove it!

On [their careers page](#), they use videos to show people just what it's like to work there in ways that an expensive ad campaign never could. My favorite ones are the “Buy a Mac” spoofs – Choate vs. Megafirm.

Sharply contrasting themselves with larger law firms, they let people know that at Choate, you participate in meaningful work and have more work-life balance.

They don't sugar coat it. As they note in one of the videos, “I have to do document review, too. But that's not the only thing I do!”

The videos are short and entertaining, and quickly show why Choate is a great place to work (even if it's not a “cool” one).

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3. You don't control your brand (your employees do)

Every time an employee posts something on Facebook or Twitter about what it's like to work at your organization, they build your employer brand.

This scares the hell out of most organizations.

So what do they do? They block social media sites. They implement broad social media policies. They in no way solve the problem.

Because employees are still talking about it what it's like to work there.

They're posting to social networks on their smart phone. They're having conversations about it over dinner or at the bar with their friends (*which isn't really any different than posting it on Facebook, is it?*)

Want to control your employer brand? Here's the magic formula...

Build a great culture and empower employees to talk about it.

Zappos is so passionate about their culture that they do a "culture audit" every year. Tony Hsieh emails all of his employees directly and asks them to share their thoughts about what it's like to work there.

He compiles their responses – good and bad – into a 500-plus page book that he gives to all of his employees. You can actually buy a copy of *The Culture Book* on Zappos.com.

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They don't stop there. *(Remember, it's not just about building a great culture. It's about empowering employees to talk about it.)*

All employees get trained on what Twitter is and how to get the most value out of it. Zappos has [a public list of employees who tweet](#) (use Twitter). You can find their *Beginner's Guide* there, too.

In the summer of 2010, [Cisco](#) intern Greg Justice produced a rap video titled, "[I Am the World's Most Interesting Intern](#)" and posted it to YouTube. In it, he talked about his computer, his ergonomic desk chair, the great projects he was involved in only eight days into the job.

It became a viral hit. Rather than try to control the brand, Cisco gave Greg [his own playlist on their official PR YouTube Channel](#). He produced nine more popular videos.

You don't control your brand. Your employees do. Build a great culture, and empower them to talk about it.

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