EMPLOYER BRANDING
THE IMPACT ON RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION
Employer branding is increasingly recognised as a key component in the efforts of UK employers to engage and retain their employees, and to ensure the continuing recruitment of the best employees for their organisation. An effective employer brand can also support further the reputation of a corporate brand and improve overall productivity.

Through a tumultuous two years, the legal sector has experienced significant challenges around organisational structures and appropriate staffing. As we see momentum returning, the opportunity and challenge of building strong teams for the future is once again back on the agenda.

Although firms, corporates and other organisations still remain cautious and focused on optimising productivity across their existing staff, demand for top legal talent is creeping back.

As demand increases, many legal employers are struggling to deliver on the expectations of their employees and stake holders. There are few organisations that would not want to be known as an ‘employer of choice’, or be the proud owner of the UK’s best known legal brand. However, in the struggle to get ahead, many organisations are overlooking the real needs of their employees and are sometimes failing to understand the opportunities that can make their brand truly unique.
About this guide

For those employers who are looking to expand, ensuring they have the right person, in the right place, at the right time, is a crucial factor to future success. The strength of a brand is likely to contribute significantly to an employer’s ability to attract and retain the best legal talent in the market. This guide and supporting survey examines the role ‘employer branding’ plays in the recruitment, retention and decision making process for lawyers considering new and existing job opportunities.

What is ‘employer branding’?

A brand is made up of intangibles – perceptions, feelings and associations that exist in one’s state of mind. The ultimate goal of any branding effort is to create a loyal customer base. In the case of employer branding, that customer is the employee.

Our survey results resoundingly point to the fact that, in an increasingly competitive and busy sector, a trusted employer brand can positively impact on a number of areas relating to staff attraction and retention.

Demonstrated through our findings, this guide highlights the importance of continued review and investment of employer branding strategies and outlines key considerations for hiring employers in the legal sector.

Attitudes towards careers in the legal sector

It is important for any employer brand to contextualise its staff attraction and retention strategies in relation to employee perceptions of the industry.

The legal industry faces a time of change and operates in an increasingly complex business environment. Key issues and business drivers for change over the last two years have been the economy and global recession. The consolidation of many law firms and organisations through mergers and acquisitions has been commonplace and is set to continue. A number of organisations have managed to restructure and streamline their businesses as well as maintain their reputation as a good employer and protect staff morale. The provision of extended international legal services has resulted in some of the best career opportunities being based in overseas markets.

Whatever the current trend and business need, the importance of putting the most valued assets of an organisation - its brand, reputation and credibility - at the forefront of all business operations remains key. These factors serve to attract and retain the best legal talent, and remain crucial for both survival and expansion. Our survey asked the questions which gauge how loyal legal professionals are a) to the industry and b) to their current employer.

320 employees and 273 employers working in the legal sector completed our survey in August 2010. Respondents were a mix of legal and HR professionals across all legal functions and organisation types.

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The employer brand concept was first conceived in the early Eighties to help organisations drive greater employee commitment to ‘the brand they work for’ and compete more effectively for talent. Ultimately, strong employer branding can foster feelings of trust and loyalty among existing or future employees. The term describes how an organisation markets what it has to offer to potential and existing employees. It is not an advertisement or logo but rather the communication of an organisation’s values and culture.

### Breakdown of respondents by type of organisation:

- **An in-house legal team (Commerce)**: 21% Employers, 26% Employees
- **A Public Sector Organisation**: 18% Employers, 15% Employees
- **A 100-200 Law firm**: 12% Employers, 11% Employees
- **A Top 20 Law firm**: 12% Employers, 10% Employees
- **A 50-100 Law firm**: 7% Employers, 10% Employees
- **An In-House legal team (Banking & Finance)**: 10% Employers, 13% Employees
- **A 20-50 Law firm**: 10% Employers, 10% Employees
- **A Not For Profit Organisation**: 3% Employers, 6% Employees
- **A US Law firm**: 2% Employers, 3% Employees
1. Are you considering leaving the legal profession for a change of career?

- The majority of respondents (71%) are not considering leaving the legal profession. However, almost a third (29%) are considering a change of career with 6% of these considering a move in the near future. Comments from candidates reflected the uncertainty caused by very unstable market conditions over the last two years.

- Legal professionals who are planning a change of career are considering several different sectors, with a move into the banking, finance and insurance sectors being the most popular. Other respondents are inclined to leave the profession to set up their own business or to swap their careers for a new start in marketing, journalism or teaching.

2. Are you open to considering new opportunities within the legal profession?

- The vast majority of employees (80%) are open to considering new opportunities within the legal profession.

- We also asked what kind of role they would consider within the legal profession. Answers varied, however, as is so often the case, a desire to move from private practice to in-house was a popular choice.

3. Are you considering working abroad?

- With the majority of employees planning to leave their current employer within the next couple of years, it seems a large percentage (44%) will also be looking overseas for their next career move. It is not surprising that legal professionals are increasingly seeking global career moves with less certain career prospects available in the UK and the ongoing globalisation of client accounts.

4. How long are you happy to stay with your current employer?

- Half of the respondents (50%) want to leave their current employer within the next year and almost a further third (27%) are planning to leave during the next one to two years. This significant number can be explained in part by the recent return of increased candidate confidence in career opportunities. Over the last two years, during a time of increased redundancies, a change of employer was considered too risky and many legal professionals have been waiting for new opportunities to present themselves in order to move their career plans forward once again.

- Only one in 10 employees are planning on staying with the same employer for longer than five years. With so many wanting to leave their current employer, these results clearly demonstrate that legal employers may not be doing enough to retain their existing talent. Perhaps a valued employer brand can assist employers to attract highly skilled professionals.

Summary

The results for questions one to four clearly show a real desire for mobility from candidates in the legal sector. Although not many want to leave the sector entirely, the majority want a new job and are looking to move employers in the short term, with many looking for opportunities overseas. This desire highlights a clear need for firms and in-house employers to develop robust and effective staff attraction and retention strategies over the next year.

Key to this will be increased marketing and PR to stand out as a destination employer. Pay and overall remuneration reviews, improving career development as well as identifying and eliminating the characteristics which weaken the employment experience will also be key. More on these key considerations can be found at the end of this guide.
The importance of employer branding in the legal sector

Clearly, the value of an employer brand can attach more readily and possibly work harder for distinct practices, be they niche specialists or household name organisations. Our survey asked the question how central brand was to an employee’s decision making when considering a new role and also, how brand was likely to impact on their job satisfaction, commitment and productivity.

5. A trusted employer brand is central to my decision making when considering a new role

- A trusted employer brand is very important to the vast majority of respondents when considering a new job. These figures, 83% for employers and 79% for employees, show just how central a trusted brand is to the decision making process.

6. A trusted employer brand is more important to me than pay and bonus when considering a new role

- Pay is often quoted as the overriding factor when considering a new role; however, four in 10 employers (40%) and over a third of employees (35%) consider a trusted employer brand as more important to them than pay and bonus when considering a new role. This is a significant figure and emphasises again the key role employer branding has on employee attraction.

7. A trusted employer brand is likely to positively impact on the enjoyment of my job

- The vast majority of both employers (80%) and employees (74%) believe that a trusted employer brand is likely to positively impact on their job satisfaction.
8. A trusted employer brand is likely to positively impact on my commitment and productivity

- A significant number of employers (73%) and employees (65%) feel that a trusted employer brand is likely to positively impact on their commitment and productivity.

- Only 1% of employers and 5% of employees strongly disagree. This might be because the commitment and productivity of these individuals remains high, irrespective of their employer’s brand.

**Summary**

The results to questions five and six clearly show the importance and central role employer brand plays for staff attraction in the legal sector, whereas the results to questions seven and eight demonstrate the same for employee retention. The reputation, brand and emotional capital of organisations is becoming increasingly important as employees begin to demand a similar level of service as they would expect as consumers. When choosing a new company to work for, candidates carefully consider pay and benefits, work-life balance, working culture, career progression and training. More often than not, jobseekers associate these attributes (when they are positive) with a strong, clearly defined employer brand. Therefore developing your employer brand, embedding it within your organisation and effectively communicating it to your target audience is of paramount importance for any legal employer right now.

**Employer branding considerations for the legal sector**

When it comes to staying ahead in the staffing stakes and becoming that crucial ‘employer of choice’, having a strong employer brand is essential. It not only encompasses the perceptions, feelings and associations in the minds of employees about the employment experience but covers the whole employee life cycle: from first contact to departure.

Britain’s Top Employer Awards run by the Telegraph judge organisations on pay and benefits, training and development, career progression, working conditions and company culture. Each of these aspects make up the employer brand and the perceptions of existing and prospective employees needs to be positive in each area to attract and retain the best legal talent. In 2010, Berwin Leighton Paisner LLP, Denton Wilde Sapte LLP and Weightmans LLP were judged to be the best legal employers based on these criteria.

Below we have outlined some key considerations for developing your employer brand, which is crucial especially in times of heightened employee mobility, as currently observed in the legal profession.

1. **Influence positive behaviours by clever reward and benefits strategy**

   Employers with a good reputation and a strong distinctive brand rely on it heavily to attract the right staff. Candidates often tell us that they want to work for a strong and trusted brand which looks after its people. Up there with the brand is of course salary and clear career progression.

   It is well documented that pay alone cannot create and sustain competitive advantage when it comes to candidate attraction and our survey results go some way in supporting this. While financial rewards are important, non-financial rewards can also be key in reinforcing the brand. Some leading legal employers are now taking action and are using a distinctive array of ‘total reward programmes’ to build a powerful and attractive employer brand. As reward can influence employee behaviours, it should be linked to behaviours that ultimately support organisation strategy.

However, you must also check regularly whether the reward approach is adding value to the employer brand - using HR metrics such as employee surveys or performance management data, as well as business metrics including customer service or budget reductions.

2. **Offer a clear career path**

   Employers who can offer a clearly defined career path and dynamic working culture, are well placed to secure the best talent available. For example, a well considered staffing plan, linking promotion and reward via regular appraisals and consistent competency based assessment will significantly assist in the development and retention of an engaged and motivated workforce.

3. **Engage your employees**

   While a jobseeker’s first impression of your organisation will determine their immediate interest in you, this perspective will keep changing. Making sure that your staff support and understand your brand is therefore vital. They are your strongest brand supporters and must live and breathe the brand, understanding what it stands for and where you intend to take it. Before taking your brand to market, ensure it is properly understood and fully communicated internally. Remember that internal buy in is just as important as your external marketing. What is the point in spending millions on marketing campaigns if your existing employees contradict, both visually and verbally, what you are trying to communicate to potential customers or employees.
4. Tailor your Employee Value Proposition (EVP)

Employee Value Proposition (EVP) describes the characteristics and appeal of working for an organisation: it includes the associations/offerings provided by an employer in return for the skills, capabilities and experiences an employee brings.

Successful organisations show that it is important to target various audiences when developing their employee brand; taking into account differing values, ambitions and needs in addition to geographic and cultural backgrounds. This enables an effective, tailored EVP to stand out as different but also have the gravitas to be a magnet for talent as well as retain engaged and motivated employees.

5. Use the emotional connection

Emotion is at the core of brand’s power, connecting via the products, services and the experience the brand represents and what a customer aspires to be. In the case of an employee, the emotional connection with the brand is the foundation for a relationship and can make employees loyal, devoted and committed to the business, which will positively impact on the quality of work and productivity.

6. Be consistent in what you say and do

Employer brand and external brand strategies must be aligned, ensuring both are giving the same consistent message when a prospective employee approaches your firm.

Any customer, supplier or potential employee who interacts with your practice expects to see consistency of your brand. From an attraction and recruitment perspective, that means the visual identity, the tone of voice and the face to face experience that is used throughout your campaigns – all need to be ‘on brand’. This can only be achieved by your employees understanding why these things are important and what they mean to the firm and the potential employee.

Furthermore, effective employer branding shouldn’t change with the tide. A well thought-out brand strategy looks to the long-term objectives. In tough times, a strong brand with consistent messaging is even more essential, helping to make current employees feel more secure and confident – and will play a factor in your practice’s future.

7. Communicate and shape perceptions

Communication is a crucial way of reinforcing the employer brand, raising awareness of what your organisation can offer. More importantly, actions speak louder than words – so experience of your organisation’s actions influences people much more than communication, but communication creates the linkages in those experiences.

Scrub out every encounter an individual might have with your brand – from seeing your advert as a consumer, calling your helpline as a customer, to receiving interview feedback as a jobseeker. Work with your recruitment partner, HR and marketing functions to help create the right experience at every encounter.

Employer rankings such as The Guardian’s ‘Ideal Employer List’, FORTUNE’s ‘100 Best Companies to Work For’ or even Working Mother Magazine’s ‘100 Best Companies for Working Mothers’ help to shape perceptions in a more definitive way. Organisations which land on ‘top employer’ lists often offer challenging assignments, exciting training and development prospects, and therefore recruit bright people selectively. Or they may offer market-leading products and services and people are attracted by the external perception.

Quite simply, they have developed clear messages about who they are and what they stand for and communicated them consistently.

8. Execute management buy-in

When it comes to driving the concept of employer branding into something that is achievable within the business strategy, the role of senior leadership is essential. Often successful brand strategies are those where the CEO is visible and active in the process. Yet building a great brand takes more than one corporate function. It is important to harness the strengths across different teams within the organisation. It can’t be done by marketing or corporate communications alone. Only when people work together, seamlessly, can authenticity in the employer brand be possible.

9. Implement effective recruitment and on-boarding processes

Every step of the recruitment process shapes what a potential employee thinks of your firm and in turn, influences whether they accept or reject a job offer (or even apply). So it’s important that the recruitment experience correctly reflects your brand and attracts and engages the right people.

Some of the things to consider are: where and how you advertise a role; how easy is it to apply; how you respond to applications; how your interviews are conducted; your rejection and offer process and finally how you stay in contact (and maintain interest) with the new recruit until the day they start.

Firms with poor recruitment practices are likely to damage their employer brand and undermine their bottom line. Many organisations are fatally undermining their recruitment and retention efforts because inept or downright rude interviewers are making a negative first impression with job seekers. Many are simply not equipped to deal with a surge in applications and unfortunately this means processes that may once have been standard are now being neglected. This will have a direct impact on employer brand and it’s sure to mean prospective candidates are put off. A bad recruitment experience is at least as damaging as a bad consumer experience in-store, so it’s important to ensure that even rejected applicants still have a positive experience.

Once a person is on board, the knowledge and goodwill promised at induction should live up to expectations and reality. Employment experience should be reviewed in detail from this point. It can be hard for new employees to reconcile a miserable workplace, lack of training and poor management interaction against the organisation’s slick external branding, for example. External and employer brands must align closely – otherwise, disappointment and cynicism sets in.

A comprehensive and integrated approach to every aspect of the employee’s working experience is required to ensure employees remain engaged and motivated by the organisation’s mission. Do employees know what the current business priorities are and how their role supports these? Does the workforce feel that it has a voice and can offer feedback on issues that affect them and their work? A culture of open and honest communication takes time and planning, and should not be considered a ‘given’ within any organisation.

10. Evaluate achievements and monitor progress

Finally, but most importantly, carefully supervise your progress. Find out what your employees and ex-employees think. Their feedback is crucial and will keep you right track on track, or at least, help you to make informed decisions about what to change or adapt.

Contact Us

In our experience, all of the points detailed above have a part to play when it comes to reviewing employer brand attraction and retention strategies for the legal profession. Our findings conclude that a strong employer brand not only influences staff retention and talent attraction but also directly correlates to job satisfaction, commitment and productivity levels.

To find out more about how we can help you with building your employer brand or employee value proposition, or to discuss a specific recruitment or retention need, please contact:

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Hays provides an integrated recruitment solution to the UK’s Legal and Company Secretariat sectors. Our proven track record spans almost 20 years in all areas of Legal and Company Secretarial recruitment, from contingency-based sourcing to retained campaigns and strategic recruitment management solutions.

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We offer confidential, expert advice on opportunities, compensation, business plans and exit strategies pertinent to professionals considering a move. We have the ear of key decision makers across all our clients and we have been instrumental in introducing and placing hundreds of fee earners and company secretaries into a vast array of organisations.

If an organisation has strategic growth plans or needs incisive market analysis, we are often consulted as a first point of contact. From blue chip corporates, national and international firms through to niche practices, we cover the vast majority of the legal and company secretariat market, including:

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