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DEFINING THE FEATURES OF THE EMPLOYER BRAND STRATEGY IN THE COVID PERIOD

Qualified and talented employees are important for the successful and efficient operation of the enterprise. In modern business, the presence of highly qualified and motivated employees at the company significantly affects its success, efficiency, competitiveness. Nowadays, new titles and positions in business are appearing in the world, such as talent development manager, talent management director and others. Therefore, attracting and retaining talented employees is a key organizational task of the company.

Since enterprises need to differentiate themselves among competitors, it is important to form the competitive advantages of the enterprise in the labor market through the development of the employer's brand and the implementation of an effective strategy.

In our opinion, the employer brand is a positive image of the company as the best place to work for staff and potential employees, which created by studying the behavior and requests of potential and current employees.

Changing the nature of business is influenced by political, economic, social, technological, epidemic and others factors, so the

role of each employee is to maintain the brand of the employer. Therefore, successful companies must create an employer branding strategy, create and maintain a team that will develop it.

A modern approach to the employer brand requires a strategic perspective on how the company attracts, engages, and retains talent. It all starts with conducting an audit of the current employer brand and / or employee experience, and the creation of the appropriate employer brand strategy. In our opinion, the employer branding strategy is a direction of the company's activity, which is aimed at forming the company's image on the labor market and in the subconscious level of potential and existing employees. A strong employer brand usually creates by the behavior of the company's leaders and is directly associates with the company's corporate brand and competitive strategy, marketing and staff development strategy, culture and ethics (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Employer brand strategy in the system of enterprise strategies

Source: developed by author based on [1]

The implementation an employer brand strategy that builds competitive advantage is complex task, involves multiple stakeholders. COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical importance of employer brand during a crisis. So, Employer Brand

strategy should be based on some principles and steps that take into account the conditions of operation during a pandemic:

1. Strategic approach to employer branding;

The employer's brand strategy must be adapted to new market conditions and aligned with the business strategy. Quarantine and the ensuing economic crisis impact on demand for goods and services. And if yesterday the business planned rapid growth and hiring, today the growth rate is much slower. Also business can find new opportunities for development: creating new products, entering new markets, developing exports, improving service and more. In this case, the employer's brand should refocus on new business goals and needs and help attract the right professionals. The company should be ready to change the portrait of the brand's target audience.

2. Attention for the integrated stakeholder experiences (human resources-freelancers, candidates, employees; customers and investors) in proces of formation the employer brand;

3. Development of a compelling employee value proposition. The Employee Value Proposition (EVP) [2] clarifies the expectations of both the candidate and the company when hiring a new employee. Creating a meaningful EVP is arguably the most important thing company can do when developing employer branding strategy. It will serve as the foundation for communication materials, influencing everything what a company promises and does when recruiting talent. In current situation it needs to be a Corona Proven EVP (value proposition of the employer, proven (verified) by the coronary crisis). This means that a company should create special conditions for job activity, special care about staff within pandemic period.

4. Employer brand should demonstrate that company is for its employees. It will be a great info drive for company's brand and will set market standards, where care for well-being, physical and mental health, technical support for remote work, work-life balance in a distance is a must have.

The main focus now shouldn't be on external brand activities, but on internal ones, and coverage and share information about company's

activity through their own low-budget communication channels as a corporate website and social networks.

5. Corporate social responsibility projects must begin with caring for their employees. Companies should take care of firstly about corporate family doctor, corporate hotline, medical insurance against COVID-19, provision of means of protection and disinfection, psychological support, online kindergarten for children of employees and so on.

6. Many companies forced to lay off and reduce their staff, because of pandemic. The company must explain why it was forced to make such a decision with the payment of compensation and provide a letter of recommendation to the next employer. Every effort must make to ensure that even those who have been released remain loyal to the company.

Such principles, ideas and actions can highlight the company's virtual culture and attract job seekers who are ideal for the culture, as well as retain talented employees in the company. If the company develops a revamped employer brand which is COVID-friendly, it should keep these tips in mind, use them (as strategy) principles, and implement them.

References:

1. Richard Mosley Employer Brand Management: Practical Lessons from the World's Leading Employers / Richard Mosley:John Wiley and Sons LTD, 2014. 320 p.
2. Bailey Reiners Creating an employer branding strategy: 17 actionable tips. URL: <https://builtin.com/employer-branding/employer-branding-strategy> (accessed 17 April 2021).