

Why employer branding is vital even in the midst of a stagnating economy

 By [Cindy Peters](#) 29 Jan 2019

While employer branding has made significant inroads into the South African market, with a number of companies leveraging its benefits, its relevance and how to purposefully implement it does still seem to leave many indifferent to the field. This lack of understanding, according to Celeste Sirin, managing director of Employer Branding SA, often results in companies underinvesting in what should be considered a business imperative.



Celeste Sirin, managing director, Employer Branding SA

As part of our [focus on recruitment](#), we interviewed [Celeste Sirin](#), managing director of Employer Branding SA, to find out more about investing in employer branding in SA - particularly during the current subdued economic climate, which aspects companies should prioritise while budgets are restricted, who does it best in SA, and how the fourth industrial revolution will affect employer branding into the future.

■ ***Is employer branding something all companies should invest in, regardless of size, industry and market?***

Yes most definitely! Every company has a holistic corporate brand identity, presence and reputation which has been built and evolved through its various stakeholder interactions and engagements i.e. customers, candidates, employees, suppliers etc. However, companies often don't distinguish between the product/service brand and the employer brand. The lack of understanding, importance and relevance in employer branding often results in companies underinvesting in what should be considered as a business imperative.

As companies would invest in the ongoing promotion, management, nurturing and protection of their consumer brand, so they should provide the same attention to their employer brand, irrespective of the size of the company. Companies that realise that their products/services are only as good as the people behind them are the wise ones! Your people hold the key to driving business objectives and achieving profits. Through this shift in focus, companies can enjoy the competitive advantage in attracting, engaging, managing and retaining their human capital, regardless of size, industry and/or market sector.

■ ***What's the first step for recruiters/recruitment managers in SA in transitioning from a reactive recruitment approach, to a more ongoing, strategic methodology that involves employer branding?***

Recruiters/Recruitment managers need buy-in/endorsement from their top decision-makers and/or CEO as well as the

relevant functional/operational head stakeholders i.e. IT, training and development, marketing and communications, finance etc. Recruitment/Talent acquisition managers need to adopt employer branding as a strategic intention and champion, sell and promote it to all the relevant stakeholders. Companies abroad are becoming increasingly people-centric on the understanding that their human capital is pivotal to the success of their organisations, thus the emergence of a newly designated role of [chief people officer](#). Recruitment managers need to demand a seat on their exco, change the archaic misperceptions of HR as being merely a “service centre” and start learning to speak numbers/ROI, deliverables and contribution to strategic business impact and achieving of business objectives.

Once this foundation has been laid and been translated into the business, the recruitment manager must “interrogate” their present approach to recruitment and rethink their entire [“candidate experience journey”](#) from recruitment advertising/marketing, engagement, candidate management through to on-boarding. Taking a deeper dive into the aforementioned, recruitment managers would need to look at how the recruitment team is positioning/promoting/marketing their employer brand through written job adverts, fielding/screening calls, interviewing, acceptance, regrets, on-boarding etc. With the job environment being tougher than 10 years ago, the emotional connection of recruitment leaders can make or break your employer brand.

The role of your [traditional recruiter](#) has changed to that of being far more proactive. Recruitment is now marketing, with employer branding very much interwoven through every step of the candidate journey.

Recruiters need to transition to becoming far more strategic forward thinkers and start scoping and approaching annual social media recruitment marketing and advertising campaigns versus the traditional knee-jerk reaction to recruitment. A proactive approach to educating, communicating and showcasing your company brand pre-recruitment phase is important and supports the fulfilment of talent pipelines before the need arises.



TALENT ACQUISITION

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Celeste Sirin 26 Sep 2016

■ ***The unemployment rate remains high in SA, particularly among the youth. With so many South Africans anxious for work, why should employers still invest in employer branding?***

On the one hand, the youth unemployment rate stubbornly sits at an all-time high, notwithstanding our president and government, pockets of the private sector and various business initiatives collaborating in making slow inroads to reducing this scenario.

On the other hand, companies are simultaneously gearing themselves up for pending technological changes and the fourth industrial revolution, impacting on companies that are actively addressing their [critical skills shortage](#) of software developers and similar IT skills sets. Coupled with this and due to our stifled economy, there is also a strong requirement towards recruiting sales representatives and business and middle management in order to stimulate sales/growth. For companies to compete for such skills, they very definitely need an ongoing employer brand presence, with a view to “drip-feeding” both active and passive candidate market with information/content as to why they should be considered as the employer of choice? Top of mind awareness is necessary otherwise competitors will win the talent!

Internally, companies need to work that much harder towards investing time and money in retaining and nurturing their high demand skilled employees otherwise they will lose them. Companies can ill afford having these critical roles remain vacant whilst they incur unnecessary time and money in replacing these scarce skills. To counteract staff attrition, companies are realising that it's worth investing in employer branding in order to strategise and closely manage, monitor and listen to the employees' personal needs throughout their life-cycle versus losing them to the competitor.

Insights confirm that companies need to continue revisiting each individual's situation to understand and/or address their needs, whether it's career development, providing purpose and meaningful work and/or sense of belonging. Employees have graduated to that of a consumer mindset where they are informed, knowledgeable and able to attain company reviews from the likes of Glassdoor, Indeed etc. before making any career decisions.



TALENT ACQUISITION

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Celeste Sirin 30 Aug 2016



■ ***The South African economy's taken a knock over the last few years and budgets remain tight. In terms of ongoing employer branding, what aspects should companies still prioritise?***

Companies cannot underestimate the impact that our economic downturn has had on the workforce, therefore internal employer branding initiatives need to be prioritised. Economic and emotional pressures play a big part in managing an engaged workforce and, addressing the impact it has on employees, can actively boost performance as well as social and emotional well-being. Insights confirm that organisations are beginning to expand their benefits offerings to include physical, mental, financial and spiritual health programmes, over and above remuneration. Employee assistance programmes should be revisited with a view to deploying a business model and company structure that is going to address the present SA economy e.g. financial reward versus emotional reward, flexible working hours, remote working arrangements etc.

Companies need to support lifelong learning, reskilling and upskilling with a view to growing and grooming their workforce meet their own personal career objectives alongside organisations achieving their business goals. Prioritising this factor will "future proof" employees to address any new innovations like AI/automated/digitised environment/employer branding/social media that companies are presently experiencing and needing to gear up for into the future.

Allocating time, resources and budgets towards defining one's employer brand experience and purpose – as companies would do with their customer value chain. Companies should define their employer branding strategy, review their brand promise, people practices, organisational capabilities and confirm that they can deliver on both internally and externally.

HR needs to continue leveraging off their existing brand marketing and communications team and resources in order to assist them with implementing and managing their employer branding initiatives.



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■ ***Who does it best in SA, in your opinion, and what makes their employer branding efforts stand out?***

With my external employer branding and social media recruitment marketing lens on, I have chosen companies that I believe have demonstrated how imperative it is to utilise employees to authenticate what it's like to work within their companies of choice.

[Ooba](#) - what stood out for me is how Ooba leveraged off various social media platforms as well as their career site to showcase career opportunities within their organisation. They put their [people](#) at the forefront to articulate and bring to life their various roles they have within the organisation. Their people are truly the voice of their company.

Likewise with [Jumo World](#) – when you land on Jumo World's company page, the company makes immediate reference to the fact that their people hold centre stage to their organisation - "People shape companies - Motivated by an ambitious purpose and inspired by the exceptional people that we work with." Additionally, they have created a community spirit through their people, namely "JUMOnauts" where they brought to light in an uncluttered short and sweet YouTube clip on the question – Why Jumo?

[Old Mutual's](#) dedicated and uncluttered career centre, housed within their corporate website, is well structured into different levels (young talent, career seekers and executives) and segmented into job families which allows for quick and easy access to the required info. The clear and transparent manner in which the company outlines their selection process provides candidates with the sought-after info that they require. More companies have started doing this in order to manage work-seeker enquiries.

[DigitOutsource](#) - Working in SA has identified that in order to recruit multilingual candidates, they have highlighted their approach to how the company can assist work seekers with overcoming the problem of securing work visas, together with their additional packaged benefits. It's these kinds of initiatives that provide companies with the edge to winning great talent.

Carrick Wealth utilises their social media channels effectively when it comes to their "people brand". They provide ongoing recognition to [new appointees](#) as they grow their footprint into Africa, whilst simultaneously capturing the attention of their consumer market regarding their successful expansion. They are a [humanitarian organisation](#) that executes on ongoing CSR initiatives. Social responsibility and "paying it forward" is becoming increasingly important for the new generation and this is a great advantage when Carrick Wealth recruits for wealth specialists.

■ ***How do you see advanced technologies such as AI, VR, machine learning etc. affecting employer branding into the future?***

Companies have advanced from implementing standalone recruitment marketing, talent acquisition and CRM systems to that of a full all-encompassing end-to-end digital talent acquisition, recruitment and candidate management system.

Insights confirm that automating the repetitive recruitment and selection process can promote great opportunity for talent leaders to effectively focus on employer branding in some of the following ways:

- Through supplementing the more mundane processes and procedures (such as scheduling meetings, managing calendars and automated communication) companies are freed up to better engage in more face-to-face contact with current employees.
- With HR being labelled a non-revenue generating department, they now have the advantage of building compelling data to support every employer branding expense and quantify every cost savings success story, which normally would take extensive man-hours to track and analyse.
- AI has the potential to optimise the way we promote our employer brand and attract applicants. For example, through the implementation of a chatbot, applicants that land on a company career page can interact with the chatbot to request essential information regarding the company and position. This is value-added information as today's job seekers are seeking more real-time information regarding the organisation's culture, benefits and more. Furthermore, chatbots can assist in providing candidates with guidance through their application process. Old Mutual is doing this successfully.
- Whilst the [2018 Deloitte Human Capital Trends Report](#) confirms that 74% of South African companies state that the introduction of AI, robotics and automation is important, 76% confirm that they are not ready for it. Organisations have the opportunity to reorganise their HR departments to automate dated manual processes, with a view to recruiters working alongside AI in order to focus on humanising processes and touchpoints that call for human intervention.

■ ***Employer Branding SA has done a lot to educate South African leadership on the benefits of employer branding and why it's a business imperative in attracting and retaining a professional workforce. Did you witness growing***

interest in 2018 in the field, and are more companies and recruiters embracing this marketing/HR tool in SA?

There has definitely been a slight increase in incoming enquiries from companies wishing to implement employer branding strategies focused toward them accomplishing certain objectives. These enquiries can vary from requests to facilitate and motivate strategic employer branding discussions between talent attraction champions and excos, the need to drive a regional employer brand presence (through leveraging off a global brand) in order to educate, attract talent, redefining a company's EVP (employer value proposition) with a view to elevating employer brand awareness to attracting high-demand skills.

I feel that the economic downturn has certainly resulted in companies selecting a tactical versus a long-term strategic approach towards employer branding. Additionally, and as mentioned previously, companies do not view employer branding as a critical business requirement and more of a "nice-to-have" project to implement as and when there is enough capital support such an initiative. The biggest hurdle is to gain buy-in from the top decision-makers.

■ *What are the top trends you predict in the employer branding space for 2019 in SA?*

- Until there is shift in our economic downturn with fewer companies recruiting, the focus will be very much on how best to retain, engage and nurture talent.
- Innovation towards crafting employee benefits over and above remuneration i.e. providing remote and flexible working conditions, four-day weeks, wellness initiatives etc.
- Progressive HR leaders will utilise the power behind social media to advertise and market for their scarce skills.
- Companies will utilise their existing HR infrastructures to get creative in implementing employer branding initiatives, with focus on keeping costs down.
- Companies will continue to utilise their loyal employee workforce as brand ambassadors to provide company reviews to elevate employer brand awareness and implement ERP when seeking to recruit.
- Small progressions towards trying and testing the inclusion of AI and digital technologies e.g. chatbots, online assessments etc.
- Future-proofing employees through encouraging online learning, short-term courses and workshops with a view to developing and growing existing talent and providing the necessary tools to address the changing needs of the company.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

Sindy Peters (@sindy_hullaba_lou) is a group editor at Bizcommunity.com on the Construction & Engineering, Energy & Mining, and Property portals. She can be reached at sindy@bizcommunity.com.
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