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Behind the Glassdoor: Managing Your Employer Brand

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Summary: If you're not managing your association's reputation as a place to work, a handful of former employees will do it for you, which could mean trouble in both the short and long term. Learn how to develop a strategy around your employer brand.

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"I hear it's a great place to work."

How many times throughout the course of your career have you heard a similar statement, or its opposite? Ten? Twenty? One hundred times? The difference with such statements today is that they are playing an increasingly pivotal role in attracting and retaining top executive and managerial talent.

As the job market has shifted from employer-driven to candidate-driven, an association's "employer brand" —its reputation as a place to work—has become a key driver for successful recruitment.

The [2014 MRI Network Recruiter Sentiment Study](#) [PDF] illustrates that, in the first half of 2014, 42 percent of job candidates rejected job offers as a result of accepting an offer with another company, up from 33 percent in the first half of 2013.

While some of this behavior is attributable to compensation, much of it is due to the multiple resources currently available to candidates to perform their own research.

Yes, employers are still Googling job candidates, but the most recent [CareerBuilder Candidate Behavior Study](#) demonstrates that 62 percent of candidates investigate a potential employer on social media to make sure what they're "being sold during the interview process" is accurate, and 58 percent

responded that the top component of an employer brand that makes a company attractive is its reputation for treating employees well.

Resources such as [Glassdoor](#), [CareerBliss](#), and [Indeed](#) leave indelible marks on the perception of your association to potential talent before they even engage with you at a first interview. Once considered little more than a rant site, Glassdoor now promotes itself as the "world's most transparent career community." With more than 6 million employer reviews, it has evolved into the top site for job seekers to vet potential employers.

Although the average employer rating on Glassdoor is currently 3.2 (out of 5) stars, the truly damning reviews tend to be the stickiest. There is now a veritable cottage industry of blogs that track the worst companies to work for, many based on Glassdoor and other resources. Optimal Solutions Group, a consulting firm based in College Park, Maryland, often hits the top of such lists, with comments such as "The turnover is phenomenal. Beyond a core set of a few employees, a large proportion stays for less than 18 months. The Optimal model is to hire new graduates at low salaries, work them to death (some actually sleep overnight in the office sometimes), and then they either move on after a year or go back to school."

Ultimately, if you're not managing the perception of your employer brand, a handful of former employees will do it for you.

What can you do? First, recognize that, while an employer-branding strategy requires the resources of marketing and communications staff, it's not up to them: Urgency for employer branding must be driven by the highest level of staff leadership.

After you have buy-in from leadership, you should craft a strategic employer-branding plan that includes an assessment of your association's anticipated talent assets and deficits over the next several years. A clear picture of your association's human capital strengths and weaknesses will help inform your employer brand messaging.

Then, take a deep breath and dive into your employer brand audit. Regardless of whether you partner with a third party or do it yourself, the objective is to produce a sober and unbiased snapshot of your association and to determine a baseline by which to measure the impact of employer branding efforts. The elements assessed may include employer review sites, social media conversations, employee surveys, exit-interview documentation, and focus groups. Tempting as it may be, don't fall into the trap of trying to guess which former—or current—staffer said what about the association. What's done is done and you want to focus on identifying recurring patterns and themes uncovered by the audit.

Once you have a solid understanding of the market's perception of your employer brand, you can begin to craft and implement an appropriate tactical plan. Your employer branding plan may include addressing negative reviews, publishing positive staff stories on your association's website, and publicizing unique benefits to influencers. Or, you may discover that you need to take a step back and focus on internal issues that require longer-term solutions.

Regardless, all employer branding plans must include identifying and enlisting your association's best ambassadors—your staff—to help promote and endorse the employer brand through social media and other channels.

While social media is a key element to managing your employer brand, the payoff to exemplary employer branding is often commendation by traditional media as a "Best Place to Work." When asked about achieving frequent recognition as a "Best Place to Work," American Speech-Language-Hearing Association CEO Arlene Pietranton, Ph.D., FASAE, CAE, said, "ASHA's commitment to employee work/life balance, wellness, our workplace culture and social responsibility have helped us grow and maintain a first-class team, and we are very proud that our employer brand receives widespread accolades."

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