

CONNECTIONS

An Edelman perspective on making meaningful employee connections that deepen engagement, build trust and accelerate business performance.



MAY 2012

CONNECTING WITH TODAY'S (AND TOMORROW'S) WORKFORCE: SIX WAYS TO BUILD A REPUTATION AS A BEST PLACE TO WORK

How does your company treat its employees? The answer matters. According to the 2012 Edelman Trust Barometer, an organization's reputation as an employer is critical to its overall trustworthiness: "Treating employees well" is the third-most important action a company can take to build public trust, behind only listening to customers and offering quality products. Indeed, a track record as a trustworthy employer bolsters a company's broader corporate reputation with audiences beyond current and prospective employees.

To that end, companies often ask us what they should do to make any number of "best places to work" listings. The reality is that there's no quick ticket to the top: A company's employer brand develops over time and reflects the overall relationship employees have with your organization. If your company is serious about building its reputation as an employer, first take an honest look at your organization's employee experience:

- Are there specific things that need to be addressed before your company deserves a spot on an employer of choice list?
- How strong are the connections you're forging – between leaders and employees, between employees and their peers and between employees and customers?
- What data do you have, such as engagement surveys or exit interviews, that indicate areas to improve or amplify?

FROM THE 2012 EDELMAN TRUST BAROMETER
How important is each of the following in building your trust in a company?



Once your company is confident its reputation as an employer is solid, seek out external recognition frequently and proactively. Here are six actions you can take, starting with your own employees:

1. INITIATE A CONVERSATION ABOUT WHAT MAKES YOUR WORKPLACE UNIQUE

Ask your own employees what brought them to your company – and what has kept them there. Ask managers to nominate employees who aren't afraid to speak up – they'll know who they are – and tap participants in leadership development programs or solicit input openly on your intranet or an internal social media platform such as Yammer. Such stories make powerful proof points when seeking external visibility. Conversely, should your company experience challenges in the future, these stories can serve as "reasons to believe," small nuggets of evidence that the organization can stick it out and succeed. Think about interesting ways to communicate these anecdotes – what about asking employees to submit videos of their kids explaining what Mom or Dad does at work, or having employees post "why I work here" to the company's Twitter feed in under 150 characters?

On a related note, know what people are saying about your company's employee experience online via job-rating sites (Glassdoor, Hallway, Jobitorial, Vault, CareerBless, Indeed) and social sites, including industry-specific forums



such as CafePharma, FinBox or Abovethelaw. You may uncover misperceptions that will shape the story you tell about your company's work environment. And be sure to align your employer brand story with overall corporate positioning so that the face you present externally is consistent.

2. TAP EMPLOYEES AS AMBASSADORS

The Trust Barometer clearly indicates regular employees (especially those with technical expertise) are among a company's most trusted spokespeople. Seek out volunteers to serve as company advocates: Certify them to advocate appropriately via social media, offer them shareable, compelling content to post and feature them in your recruiting materials. Many companies make ambassadors available to chat with job candidates via the company's recruiting Twitter feed or LinkedIn group. Others encourage employees to provide a "day in the life of" view into the company by posting photos, status updates and videos that illustrate their experience. Furthermore, from a reactive standpoint, ambassadors can step up and help defend the company from detractors.



Companies typically embark on such programs by first understanding the risks of encouraging employees to talk about the company online, then mitigating those concerns by introducing online behavior policies that ambassadors can easily comprehend and apply. Sometimes training (on company positioning, communication skills or online engagement) is helpful. From there, it's a matter of equipping ambassadors with authentic, relatable content that they feel comfortable sharing with friends, be it on Facebook or at the store.

3. ESTABLISH YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE IN THE PLACES JOB-SEEKERS GO

Yes, it's important for a company to tell a compelling story on its own websites and channels. But increasingly, candidates are seeking information from a wider array of venues, including social networks, employer rating sites and the forums mentioned above. Make sure your employer brand shows up in all these places through a combination of paid advertising, employee ambassador outreach and multimedia storytelling that illustrates what working at your organization is all about. And don't forget to reflect your brand in job descriptions, which often end up forwarded or posted on sites other than your own. Reading a position description may be the first experience a candidate has with your company, so seize the opportunity to convey your company's employee experience, not just to list job requirements.

4. DON'T FORGET ABOUT MEDIA

New communication channels seem to emerge almost daily, yet traditional media is still highly influential. In our experience, employee of choice recognition alone is not enough to make a story outside of trade announcements. But such recognition can serve as a timely news hook to bolster an overall strategic media plan with key business media, HR trades and relevant local media.

Moreover, the employee stories you collect in pursuit of employer of choice awards or for your overall brand story can make for great local media coverage, particularly when it comes to job creation stories. What about the manager of your company's local plant who started as a line operator and worked her way up? Or a group of young employees hired via a diversity recruiting partnership with an area university?

Similarly, if you're prepping your CEO for a media interview, make sure he or she is equipped to at least make mention of the company's employee experience – after all, your employer brand is inextricably linked to your organization's overall reputation. Employer of choice positioning is also valuable when developing third-party advocates, particularly community leaders who want to know how your company is creating local jobs.

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From Edelman's Employee Engagement Practice | April 2012



5. MEET PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYEES WHERE THEY CONGREGATE

Just as you should connect with employees via online destinations they're already visiting, seek to attend the events your prospects do, irrespective of industry. For example, in an age where many employers are looking to hire talent with strong digital chops, participating in premier digital events like SXSW Interactive can be incredibly valuable. To maximize your presence at such venues, incorporate your employee experience into speaking engagements, influencer meetings and conversations with other attendees. This effort should complement your company's executive visibility and corporate reputation strategy.

6. SELECTIVELY SEEK OUT EMPLOYER OF CHOICE RECOGNITION

Naturally, many companies covet a spot on Fortune's annual Best Places to Work For list, the U.S.'s most prominent such honor. Yet many other recognition programs may prove more achievable and effective in connecting your organization with the kinds of employees you need most.

Go after the awards that support your company's recruiting and retention goals: Expanding your presence in a particular market? Apply for location-based awards (such as Chicago Tribune's Best Places to Work in Chicago.) If you're in an industry where the war for talent is especially fierce or need to recruit employees with specific skills, seek out sector-specific programs (such as ComputerWorld's Best Places to Work in IT.) If you're looking to diversify your workforce, aim for awards that appeal to the type of employee you need to recruit, such as Working Mother's Best Companies for Multicultural Women or BusinessWeek's Best Places to Launch a Career.

ABOUT US

Edelman's Employee Engagement Practice helps organizations **accelerate business performance**, delivered by highly engaged and trusted employees. We do this by making meaningful, trust-building **connections** — connecting employees **with the company**, connecting employees **with each other**, and connecting employees **with the outside world**. We have a global network of employee engagement specialists who can develop engagement strategy; deploy the tools and processes to deliver it; create the multimedia channels and content that support it; and design the insight mechanisms to measure it.

