

2017



**North American Employer
Brand Trends Report**



INTRODUCTION

Employer Branding Is Your Culture Strategy

Over the last five years Employer Branding has become a staple in HR and people strategy. The rapid adoption of Employer Branding is an exciting indication that HR is evolving into much more of a culture and brand leadership position within the business. What has become evident though, is how challenged organizations are at the moment, when it comes to elevating their Employer Branding strategy to drive the right business results as opposed to just launching new creative branding such as a refreshed careers page and a 3-minute video that lives on the site. Culture is impacted by the people, experiences and communications within an organization. Employer brand strategy effectively aligns all of these efforts under one common banner.

As this investment continues its rapid growth, Blu Ivy Group decided to further explore where exactly North American leaders have focused their investment, understand how they are tracking its impact on their business, and uncover where the biggest gaps and opportunities are so that

the industry can realize much more success in 2018.

Blu Ivy Group conducted one of the largest studies amongst North American CHROs in the summer 2017, focused exclusively on the status of employer brand strategy. We did this because we know from our years of consulting experience in this field, that this is a strategy that must be lead by the executive team, if it is to have the business results that organizations are seeking. We talked to more than 200 CHROs and asked them to share their thoughts on Employer Branding, their views on culture, and how they are utilizing employer brand strategy to impact business priorities. We explored how organizations measure success, and how employer branding will integrate into their overall business objectives in the years ahead.

The Blu Ivy Group Canadian Employer Brand Trends Report reveals emerging employer brand practices and a shifting tide in terms of what executives across North America are identifying as their priorities.

TREND 1

Employer Branding Is Now An Essential Component of HR Strategy



87% of Employers across North America have initiated an Employer Brand strategy.

87% of North American employers now see the value and understand the importance of an employer brand strategy. Even those few organizations that do not have a strategy in place, have budgeted to begin the work in fiscal 2018. This is a significant change to our 2015 study that reported just 65% of organizations had begun this work.

The level of sophistication and approach to employer brand strategy has also been elevated as leaders recognize its impact on the brand, work culture, engagement and talent acquisition. As a result, the average budgets for Employer Branding have risen to an annual spend of between \$100,000 to \$250,000. Not surprisingly, with the increased level of investment, the level

of leadership of the individual overseeing the work within organizations has also risen.

No longer the darling of HR or talent acquisition team alone, we are thrilled to learn that the bulk of executive leadership now understand employer brand and see the value and impact it can have on the business as a whole, and how it can influence stronger cultures and financial results for organizations.

Why is Employer Branding in the spotlight? To start, employee engagement is abysmal – according to Gallup’s World Poll in June of 2017, a meager 15% of the world’s working population is actually engaged. In North America, the number is slightly better, but still, roughly 70% of all workers are not engaged today. According to this study, most employees don’t just dislike their job, but also their leaders.

Blu Ivy Group job seeker studies have also revealed



that over the last five years there has been an ongoing decline in employee pride and alignment to their employer’s leadership team.

CEOs are feeling the pressure to address declining productivity (likely a result of low engagement), and increasing turnover of top talent. Marry that, with the recent data from PWCs CEO survey, that 52% of CEOs globally are planning to increase headcount over the next 12 months, and 77% are very concerned that the shortage in key skills they need could impair their company’s growth.

Old management, leadership, HR and recruitment practices, are failing to deliver on a great work experience. Inconsistency in leadership skills and behaviours across organizations means that despite best efforts, great recruitment marketing and engagement surveys alone are just not fixing the root of the talent challenge.

Employer brand strategy enables an organization to understand what top talent values most and uncover what the single biggest threats are to the employee experience and engagement. With these insights, companies are getting a much clearer picture on how to elevate engagement more consistently, develop more branded experiences, provide more meaningful management and leadership training, improve communications

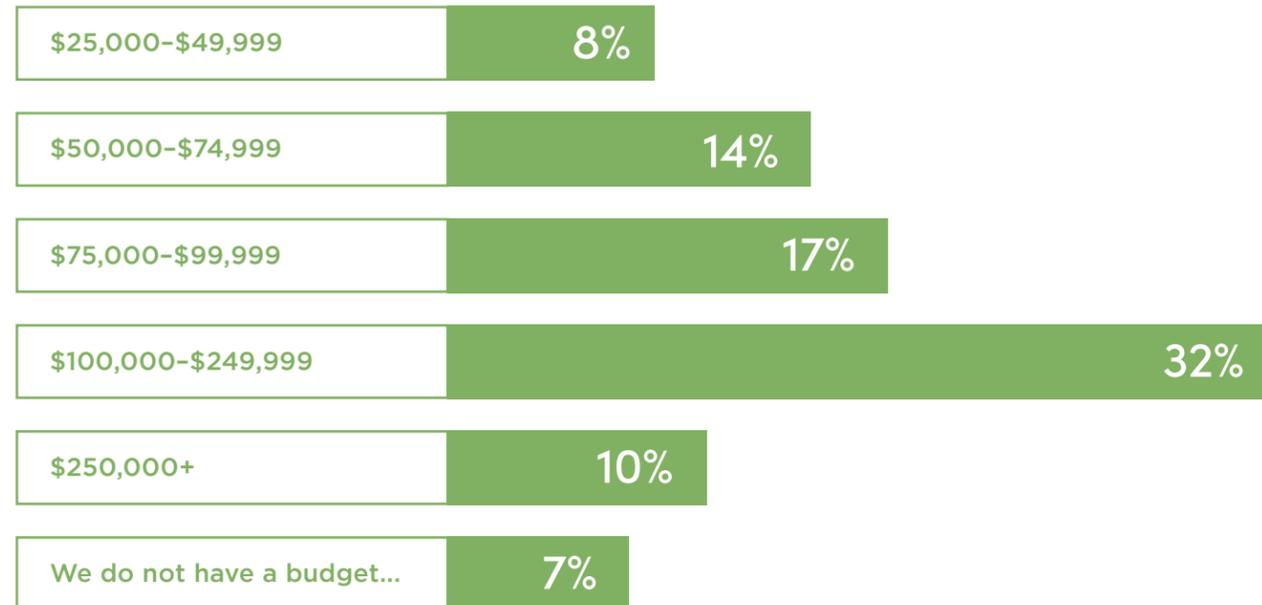
and dramatically improve the recruitment and careers story. Ultimately, this is the strategy that many believe is allowing their organizations to make massive culture shifts and best in class recruitment practices.

As the executive teams continue to gain deeper insights on the cost of hiring and retaining talent, we anticipate that employer branding will continue its adoption as a primary culture and business strategy.

Developing a long term Employer Branding strategy will define what your employees value most. Why does that matter? Because in a time when trust and transparency is needed more than ever, it’s the employees’ voice that needs to be heard and shared to attract and retain the best talent.

Leandra Harris,
Managing Director, Blu Ivy Group

Budget for Employer Branding



What steps can you take to ensure you are developing an employer brand strategy that will drive measurable business results by the end of 2018?

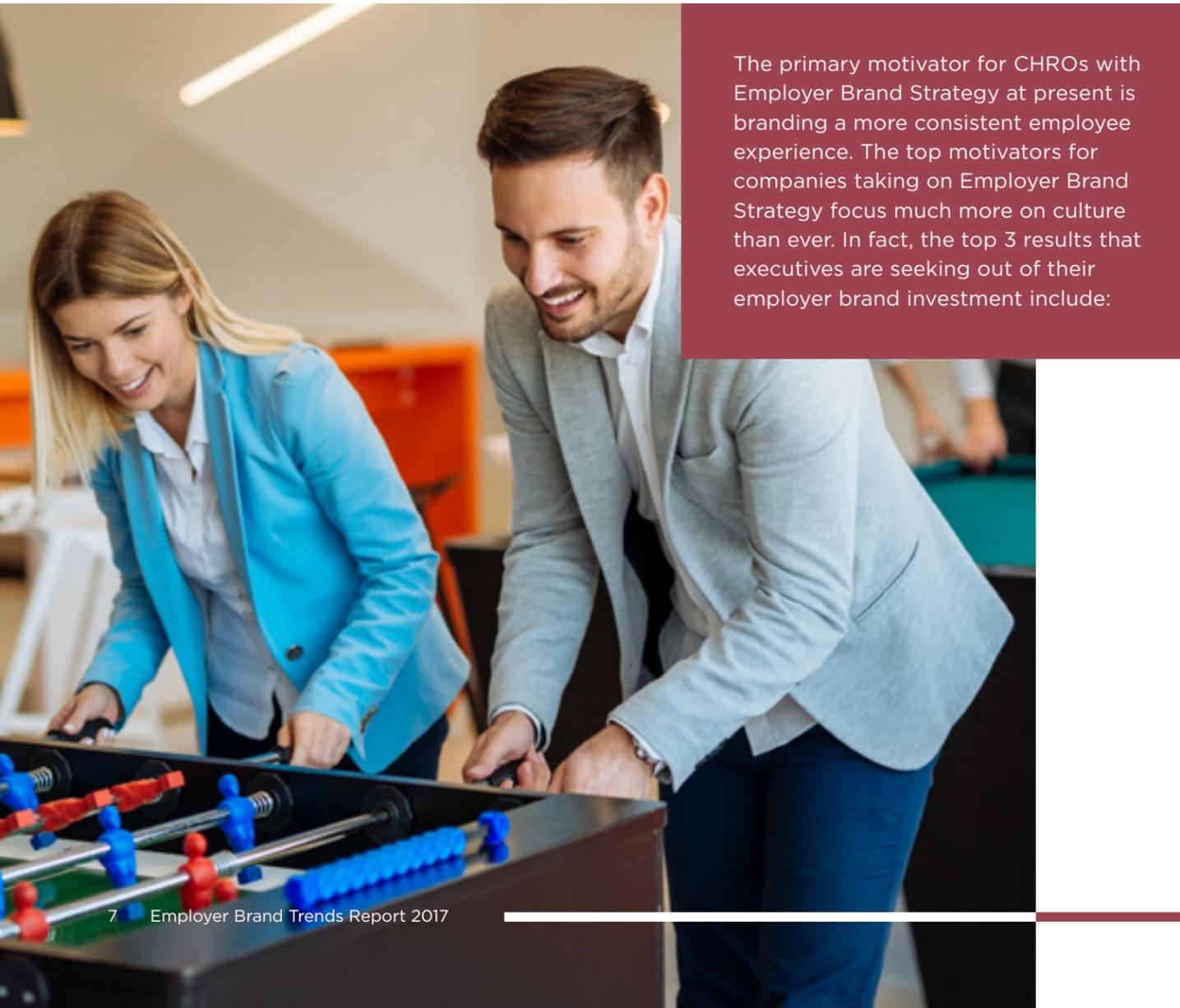
1. Appoint an Internal Employer Brand Leader that is respected and heard at the leadership table. Ideally, they should have a background in Strategy, HR and Communications.
2. Establish a steering committee for the project comprised of Talent Acquisition leadership, Training and Development, Communications, Social & Digital, and Brand Management.
3. If you are looking to build an EVP, launch and get measurable business results in 12 months, hire an employer brand consulting firm. It is a lot of heavy lifting, stakeholdering and project management to get it completed, and activated. Use a trusted external advocate to support building the foundation, and to learn from through the process. This will enable you to build in house expertise along the journey.
4. Establish a maximum of 3-4 Business Objectives - ensure that they are not focused exclusively on recruitment results in the next 12 months. Think longer term and bigger picture. Remember a strong employer brand strategy will positively impact how you are perceived and experienced by internal and external talent.

5. Ensure that the budget secured for this work is aligned to the impact you are looking to make for the business in 2018. Consider the impact you are seeking from this strategy. Compare to other people and talent program investments. Understand that this strategy is designed to align talent to executives and corporate vision, reduce turnover, elevate talent acquisition results, improve internal and external communications and brand preference. If your budget is spread too thin, you are likely to have limited impact. Consult an employer brand advisor when building your plan and budget. Learn the pros and cons and how best to spend year one, depending on the business impact you are seeking.
6. Your strategy must include the research and build phase, stakeholdering, and validation phase, the internal and external activation phase and consistent scorecard analytics to measure and improve results.



TREND 2

Branding The Employee Experience Is Now A Top Priority Amongst Executives



The primary motivator for CHROs with Employer Brand Strategy at present is branding a more consistent employee experience. The top motivators for companies taking on Employer Brand Strategy focus much more on culture than ever. In fact, the top 3 results that executives are seeking out of their employer brand investment include:



Delivering Consistent Employee Experiences



Improving Engagement



Improving Communications

This is an interesting and exciting shift occurring across North America. Historically Employer Branding was utilized primarily as a recruitment marketing solution alone. The old mindset and common misconception, was that a company simply had to build a great tagline, launch a new careers site, and put out some social content with pictures of your employees and one would be done with their employer brand work. This mindset of course made it exceedingly difficult to measure true ROI and long term business results.

With the advent of social media and employer ranking sites, organizations and their cultures are under far more scrutiny and demand for cultural transparency in the public eye. Employer Brand can no longer

be controlled by great taglines and careers pages.

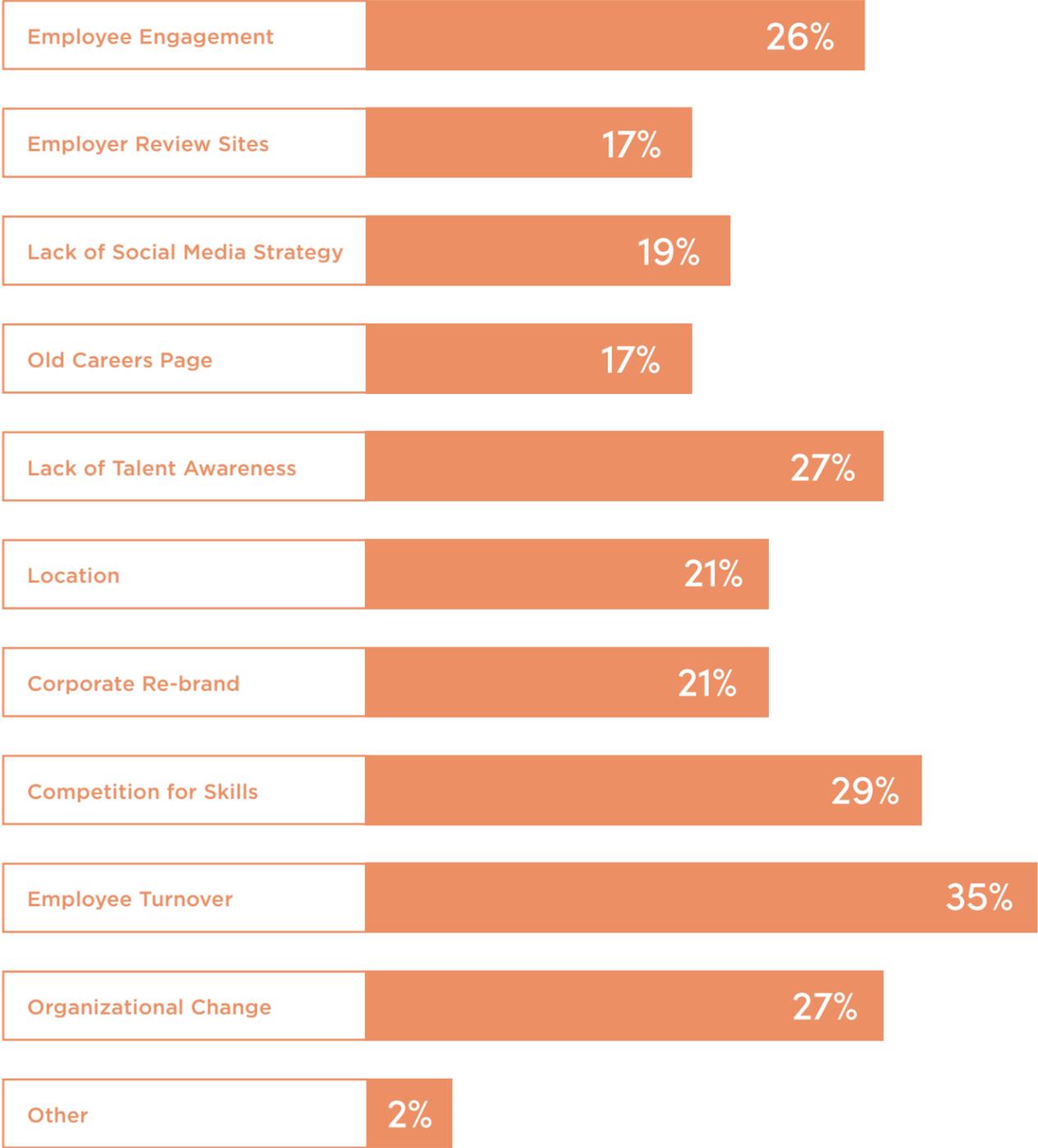
Hence, Employer Brand 2.0's far more strategic focus. Now, leaders are looking to operationalize the Employer Brand and create an Employee Experience function, and in some cases, department within HR. This requires that organizations focus on ensuring that the experience throughout the employee lifecycle, regardless of role, division or manager, is consistent and aligned to the Value Proposition and Employer Promise. Today the objective is for companies to deliver on their Employer Brand promise to employees better than their competitors, and deliver with far greater consistency. Today's talent, much like today's consumer, are advocates of experiences, not advertisements.

This shift requires that when uncovering your EVP an organization clearly understands the current state. Where are the biggest threats to the employee experience today? How aligned are leaders at all levels to delivering and communicating a consistent experience? What programs need to be rebranded first?

This shift also impacts how budgets and activation dollars are allocated, as well as the internal expertise required to make monumental impact on engagement and culture. With 1/3 of organizations indicating that employee turnover was the biggest threat to their employer brand, it is critical that leaders make wise decisions on how this strategy will be rolled out internally.



Biggest Threats to Employer Brand



One of the common reasons organizations do not realize the success they should with Employer Branding is that executive leaders have not been whole-heartedly committed, or accountable to the organization’s employee value proposition (EVP). Leaders may not be fully aware of the EVP or the direction of the employer brand strategy, or they may not know how to effectively deliver consistent employee experiences that align with the EVP. It’s not enough for an organization and HR to articulate its EVP – if leaders are not fully aware, accountable, and supportive of the EVP, or how to deliver upon it, an organization will not be successful in delivering consistent employee experiences, and ultimately, will fail to truly differentiate itself from competitors.

Caryn Sabine,
Employer Brand Strategist, Blu Ivy Group

What should employers do to ensure that their employer brand strategy delivers a more branded employee experience?

1. Ensure EVP research is not just focused on the positive aspects of why talent join and stay with an organization, but authentically looks at the biggest threats and inconsistencies in the employee experience.
2. Launch and stakeholder the EVP and Employer Brand with all HR and Leadership first. Ensure that they support and understand the direction.
3. Deliver Living the Employer Brand training to leadership and management. Oftentimes we hear that the biggest gap in experiences is delivered by management. This group have the largest influence and impact on your culture, and employee communications. Ensure that they know the EVP, and how they can and should deliver more effectively on the employee experience.
4. Build an internal activation strategy that not only looks at communications and creative, but also addresses the threats and inconsistencies. Assigning someone from a training and design background to oversee Employee Experience is ideal to ensure focus and accountability.
5. Establish a Brand Ambassador Program and Team with a focus on both internal engagement and social media messaging.
6. Measure the success of the employer brand internally through regular pulse surveys.

TREND 3

Social Media Content Marketing Is Currently the Primary Investment Area for Promoting Employer Brand Externally

Employer brand communications has assuredly made a big leap in the last 12 months and for the first time, we see that



Facebook



LinkedIn



Twitter



YouTube



Careers Website



Instagram

organizations are investing their communications efforts more on social content than on their careers landing page. Today there is a clear indication that storytelling, content marketing and social recruitment are the primary communications platforms. What is also interesting to see is that YouTube has risen to one of the primary social platforms. More and more employers are elevating their content marketing strategy to include quality video campaigns.

In a sea of increasing content, 2018 will challenge employers to utilize streamlined campaigns, and employer brand content calendars that effectively cover their EVP storyline and strategic objectives.

Blu Ivy Group conducts research with external talent and jobseekers on an ongoing basis and we have learned through that research, that Facebook, Instagram and

Youtube continue to garner the most exposure to talent based on their frequency of usage. We also know that this will allow employers to build the most effective awareness campaigns from a budget perspective. LinkedIn remains one of the primary platforms for job seekers who are actively looking for work, and who are business networking so it is imperative that a multiplatform, mixed media content strategy is an ongoing part of the external communications efforts.

Social media is no longer a platform that should be owned and content controlled by corporate brand alone. If so, an organization is missing out on more than 50% of its effectiveness. If your executive leadership team agree that the employer brand is critical to organizational success, then they must agree and support a social content communications strategy that supports this mission on an ongoing basis.

In this social media driven society, it is imperative that organizations are active on social channels and have implemented a social strategy that fosters and promotes their employer brand. With potential candidates and current employees having access to information at the tip of their fingers online, organizations need to be effectively developing and managing their social presence and employer brand. Focusing on having two-way dialogue on your channels will help promote engagement from your audience. With a variety of popular social platforms and new ones constantly emerging, it is important to focus your social strategy on select platforms that are relevant to your target audience. Ensure that content is authentic, accurately represents your EVP, and paints the story of what it is like to work at your organization. The more genuine the content the better.

Emily Harrington,
Employer Brand & Communications Strategist, Blu Ivy Group



TIPS:

1. Conduct a thorough social, digital and SEO analysis to understand how you are positioned with your target talent pools, and benchmark against your competitors' strengths.
2. Build a digital and social strategy that looks at building awareness, helps to recruit and convert talent to applicant.
3. Build a content strategy that is compelling to both passive and active job seekers. Ensure that it is a mix of branded and in-the-moment content that employees would be eager and proud to share within their networks.
4. Before you venture into video content, work with your agency to ensure you have the right budget, and campaign vision in place so that you can drive the appropriate volume of engagement and impact.
5. Remember that social marketing is not just what you put out as an employer, but the conversation that is happening in those networks. Engage in two-way conversation. Engage your employees in sharing this content in their personal platforms to truly amplify your results.
6. If you do not have the talent in house to manage this work, don't ignore it! Employer Brand agencies like ours will happily provide outsourced solutions over the short or long term as you need

TREND 4

Employer Brand Crisis Management Is On A Steep Incline

In business, brand reputation is everything. A corporate reputation is fragile, and it can take just one crisis to cause long term and occasionally irreparable damage to the company's image. Social and digital media has created a world today of radical transparency. The high expectations of talent, both as employees and job seekers reign supreme.

Ignoring negative employer rankings and candidate experiences on Glassdoor, Indeed or corporate social platforms is no longer an option.

The fact is, talent does not care what the internal reasons or justifications for the negative reviews are. They care about the culture that they are reviewing or experiencing with their own eyes.

Today, companies are required not only to communicate effectively, but to truly listen to employee and social conversations and, respond in a way that aligns with the employer brand and promise. Annual or semi-annual engagement surveys are simply no longer effective tools for listening and gathering input on the employee experience.

To avoid a surprise crisis, garner more timely information and react more efficiently, organizations are moving towards regular pulse surveys with employees and candidates to understand how effectively they are delivering the employer brand and learn where the focus needs to be directed.

When we asked executives to share what they currently see as the biggest challenge to their employer brand today, they stated:

37%

Employee Satisfaction
(Current employees)

34%

Employee
Engagement

31%

Employee
Turnover

31%

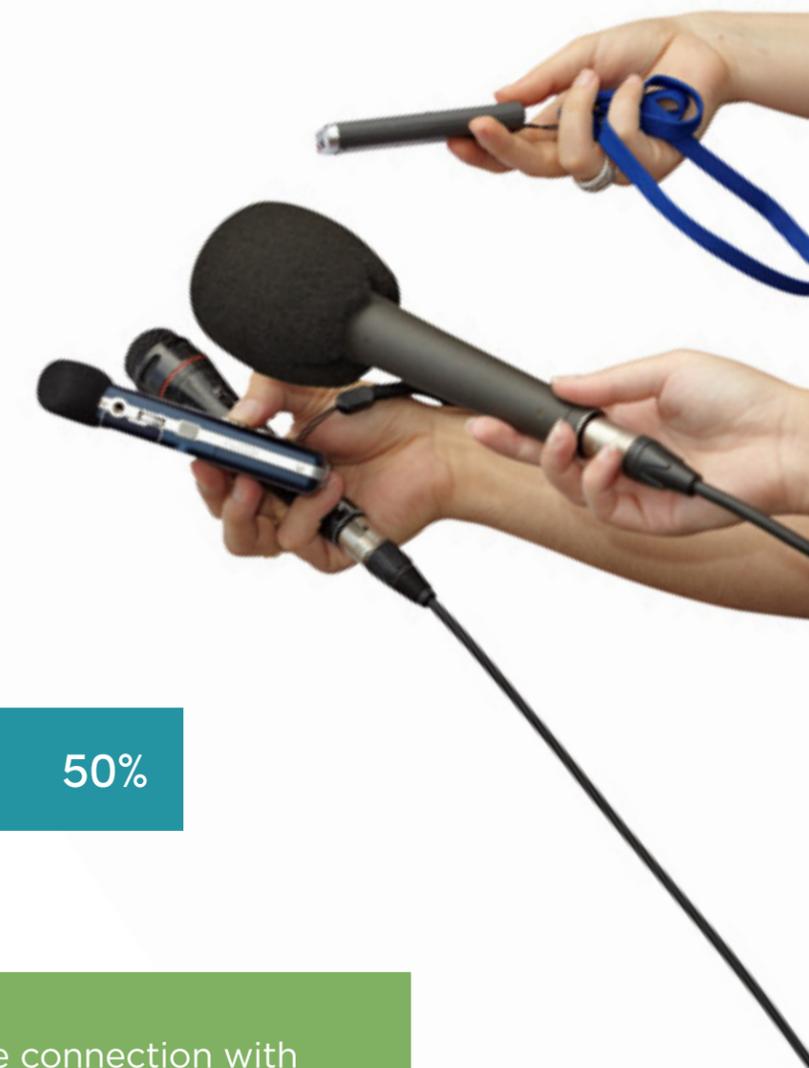
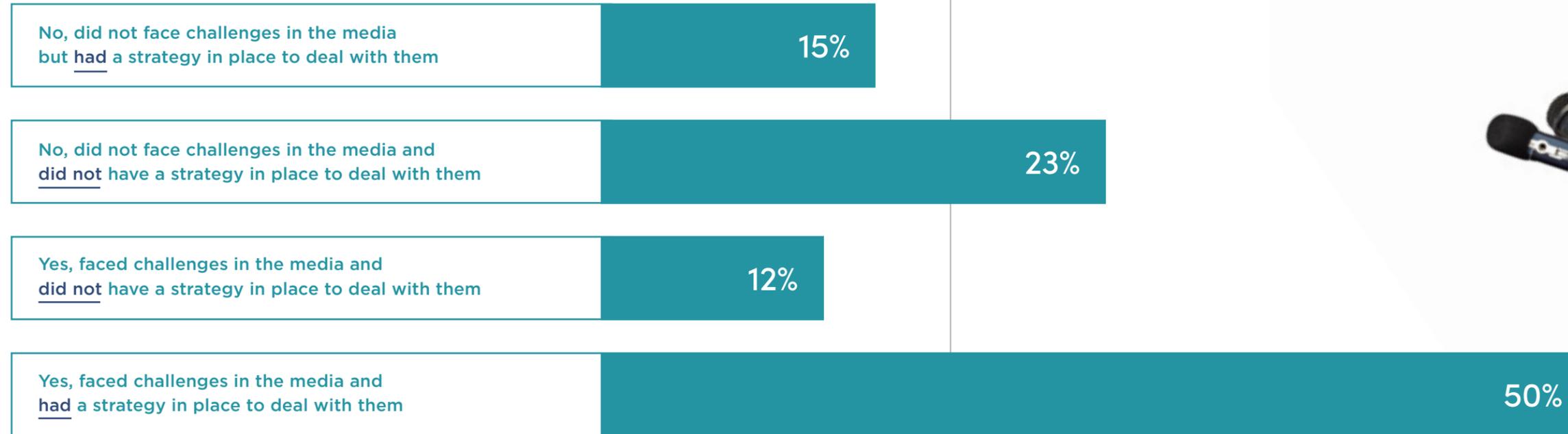
Rapid Growth

This finding reiterates the importance of focusing on internal brand activation, as well as branding the employee experience when rolling out an Employer Brand Strategy. Employer Branding provides a roadmap to driving engagement and employee pride in the core areas that threaten your reputation. This in turn, reduces turnover (typically by as much as 10% in 12 months) and provides the necessary foundation to handle rapid growth.

It also provides a deeper insight into the sharp

incline organizations have experienced in terms of crisis management in the media over the last three years. The employee who is dismissed, or the employer brand threat that is disregarded, is likely your next crisis. Given that the average PR crisis in North America costs an average \$500,000, there is little doubt that 2018 will see more organizations developing plans to understand and address these threats, as well as build thoughtful crisis management and communications plans, specific to the employer brand and EVP.

Experienced Challenges in the Media - Past 3 Years



What should employers do to prevent an employer brand crisis?

1. Understand not only your EVP, but also your top employer brand threats.
2. Develop a clear action plan to address your top three threats.
3. Work with your PR and Corporate Affairs team to share the employer brand and EVP communications. Build an Employer Brand Crisis Action Plan.

4. Assign and train appropriate listening and responding skills for your social media team to further enhance the employer brand communications and experience.

5. Conduct quarterly pulse checks on the employer brand experience internally and garner employee insights on the biggest threats. Ensure action on most critical items.

6. Develop a storytelling culture that encourages employees to share their own authentic and personal stories aligned to your employer brand.

In a world filled with so much noise, where talent are working with high demand deadlines, rapid and ongoing change, and expectations of delivering outstanding products or services, it is incumbent upon leaders to look at the experience they offer their employees.

Branded experiences, a consistent vernacular about what employees value, and management accountability to the employer brand are critical for elevating engagement, reducing turnover, and becoming a preferred employer.

Most leaders have really made the connection with having a strong employer brand and how this effects their current team and quality of new hires. They recognize that building a strong employer brand that is at the heart of their company, increases engagement, attracts the best talent and in the end, has a positive impact on the bottom line. They see that the right Employer Branding strategy is a living entity that makes their employees proud to work there, and acts as a magnet to top talent in the marketplace.

Madeleine Waterfield,
Employer Brand Consultant, Blu Ivy Group

We see so many organizations beginning to utilize our BIG Employer Brand Scorecard pulse surveys to measure the adoption of the EVP into the culture, track its success, and understand where they need to adjust. This is exciting for the industry and our clients because it is truly indicative of the shift from strictly talent attraction communications, to a culture and engagement strategy. Taking this holistic approach to employer brand leadership is truly the most financially rewarding and sustainable win for our clients. There is nothing more rewarding than helping our clients realize the full potential of their employer brand.

Stacy Parker,
Managing Director, Blu Ivy Group

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There is little doubt that HR and business culture is undergoing massive transformation within leading organizations. The demands to engage employees, attract and retain top talent, develop strong C-Suite successors and to differentiate services in a way that is meaningful to customers is at a critical point. Employer Brand strategy is now being embraced as the ideal platform for HR leadership to align all of their talent programs, brand the employee and job seeker experience, elevate the corporate culture, and drive performance. In order for HR executives to operate as true C-Suite consultants, Employer Branding

ownership will require executive level ownership, with budgets and scope that cover both internal and external engagement, communications and alignment. This is not a one-time project, but rather a required change in HR how approaches its role within the business. As is evidenced in this research, employer brand crisis management is on the rise. Having a strong platform from which to communicate and lead during growth and crisis is critical to achieving the corporate vision. Branding the talent experience, and communications is no longer a nice to have, but a critical shift in building highly attractive workplaces and brands.

For more information about this report, employer brand best practices, or general inquiries on getting the most from your employer brand work, talk to one of our Managing Directors today by reaching us at info@bluivygroup.com or calling us at **647-308-2352**