

# Human Resource Executive FORECAST 2006

## My Take

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**Q** What should HR executives' top priority be as they enter 2006?

In 2006, HR executives should invest in developing their employment brand. In today's competitive workforce market, the ability to connect with candidates will mean the difference between winning and losing candidates at a time when qualified candidate pools are shrinking. Organizations must first succeed at attracting the most-qualified candidates before any other facet of the candidate experience can be implemented.

The central component of candidate attraction is an organization's employment branding—presented in “help wanted” advertisements, job-board postings and corporate career Web sites.

The elements of employment branding are attributes candidates evaluate when considering what it's like to work at a company. It differs from a corporate or consumer brand in that it describes the company's work environment including corporate culture, employee perspectives, overall positioning within an industry and/or market, and product and service information. An employment brand must effectively communicate all these messages to candidates

considering employment at the company.

Today, the primary vehicle for communicating employment branding is the corporate career Web site.

An effective career site does more than attract large volumes of candidates, it attracts right-fit candidates. To be effective, you must acquire an understanding of job seekers' behaviors and use this information to create employment-branding messages embedded throughout all touch points of the candidate experience, positioning your company as an employer of choice and engaging only the most-qualified candidates.

Try this exercise I conducted at BrassRing. Apply for a job at your own company using your corporate career site(s) and make a candid assessment of the experience. Evaluate the messages being communicated about working at your organization. Ask yourself: Does our career site get me excited to work here? Does it help me know the company? Does it leave a lasting impression? Does it clearly illustrate the hiring process? If you answer “no” to these questions, it's time to conduct an assessment of exactly what your organization represents and how you want to portray it to potential employees. A baseline employment-brand assessment

includes a cultural audit, employee interviews and a review of competitors' employment branding.

Companies attracting the best employees put thought, energy and hard work into their messaging to candidates. Employers must think of candidates—particularly the “passive” candidate who is already employed and reasonably satisfied with his or her current job—as a busy professional willing to spend only a few moments in the initial job search at your company. Keep in mind, you are now competing for talent, and recent benchmarking studies indicate you have less than 10 seconds to attract and hold a candidate's attention.

Many companies with the best consumer brands also have strong employment brands. Many of those same companies consider the candidate experience in terms of a “customer” experience. They understand that candidate experience during the recruiting and hiring process will influence other perceptions about their company.

Making the initial investment in defining and delivering an effective employment brand will deliver significant returns by attracting best-fit talent to your company, which, in turn, results in better employee retention and thus strengthens the overall perception of your organization.