

Marketing, Market Thyself

White paper

Take a moment to daydream. You've read the New Science of Marketing cover to cover. You've come up with a set of plans to take your brand over the top and crush your competition. You mobilize the troops, sell them on your plans, and turn them loose...

...and they drop the ball.

Nothing is more frustrating for a manager than lacking the personnel to implement your plans, just as nothing is more gratifying than having your employees turn in superior efforts time after time.



But here's the question—how do you get those top players? And once you've got them, how do you keep them? The answer, quite literally, is right in your hands.

You can apply the techniques of the New Science of Marketing to your own internal processes. Just as your branding efforts for your products and services will help attract and retain the most productive customers, so too can a branding effort for your company attract and retain the best employee talent.

And just as Marketing needs to take responsibility for all aspects of its brand, so too does Human Resources need to take on some of the characteristics of the Marketing Department in order to take responsibility as “marketers for talent.” Doing so initially involves a four-step reorganization of perspective:

- **Identifying the key types of employees you need**
- **Determining what makes your company a destination of choice for top talent**
- **Determining what makes your company the better choice than your competitors**
- **Discovering how to communicate the benefits of working at your company**

Granted, this is a tough task for a department that's accustomed to taking resumes as they come, working only with what rests immediately on its desk. It's an uncomfortable new role and a journey with an uncertain destination—but so too was Columbus's first trip to the Americas. So too was the decision to create your company in the first place, knowing all the potential pitfalls and chances for failure that lay ahead. In the 21st century, companies must reinvent not only their external, customer-facing processes, but their internal ones—because without the people to bring their vision to public, companies don't have a chance of making a dent.

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MARKETING TO FIND THE RIGHT PEOPLE

Even in a down economy, top talent always attracts attention. The best never want for work. So you need to figure out who these people are, determine what they want, and offer them the packages that meet their needs and desires.

And you don't have time to fool around. With the baby boomer demographic growing older, there's an increasing shortage of U.S. employees in the so-called "key contributor" demo (35- to 45-year-old), and that shortfall will only increase in the coming years.

"What we are looking for is people to give us a transfusion of their blood, rather than us giving them a transfusion, or getting a transfusion of our own blood," former Coca-Cola CEO Roberto Goizueta once said. He's got a point—the strongest companies get that way (and stay that way) by continually bringing in new ideas from outside the company. Imagine the plight of the horse-drawn carriage manufacturers early in the 20th century, when they realized they'd hired top-flight talent to help them keep doing what they were doing—but missed out on anybody who'd heard of a newfangled invention called an "automobile."



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Talent is more important than ever before. As you've seen throughout this book, the wide availability of technologies and business processes have leveled the business playing field. (Your competitor might just be reading this same sentence right now.) So what's going to separate you from the pack? Your people. The Harvard Business Review in 1995 noted that the top performers in any company have twice the productivity of average performers. How much farther could you go with players pulling twice the weight

of your existing staff? Hire the best, expect the best, and you'll be pleased with the results.

CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER, TALENT DIVISION

Hiring employees is such a critical activity that you should designate an individual as Chief Marketing Officer for Talent. As discussed elsewhere in this book, giving a single individual responsibility for important activities leads to improved performance,

greater accountability, and easily alterable metrics and operations. This Officer needs to view your entire company as a Brand, with him- or herself as Brand Manager. The company's reputation, culture, compensation packages, and activities all comprise the Brand, and the customer is the potential (and, in some cases, current) employee. Do you have what it takes to close the deal?

The key principles to building your Brand, as discussed elsewhere in the book, still apply here. The same approaches used to market any product or service can be used to market your company as a great place to work:

- Find your target market
- Identify your competitors
- Establish your key benefits
- Support those benefits with evidence
- Determine how to get your story to your target market

With a quality, Marketing-focused HR department, you can attract more qualified applicants more often and with more speed; maximize the acceptance of offers by applicants, and increase the retention of high-quality employees.



WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

Once you've determined exactly what you have to offer, you need to figure out exactly where you want to go. Do you want to hire a key executive, or do you want to increase institutional knowledge across the board in middle management? Do you want better front-line customer service help, or do you need someone to keep a handle on your growing international operations?

On a broader scale, what type of employees does your company need to attract in order to be successful in the future? How do you want these candidates—and existing key employees—to think, feel, and act about your company? Whatever your destination, you need to figure out where you're headed so that you can determine the best way to get there. You need to define what "success" looks like, where you want your department to go, as opposed to the places you can easily reach today.





A “Destination Statement,” codified in writing and understood by all key players, will help HR and Marketing determine whether they’re on track. This statement could include such elements as:

- **We will have a larger and higher-quality candidate pool for open positions than our competitors**
- **Candidates will see us as their best-choice employer**
- **Key employees will remain here because we are the best choice for achieving their professional and personal objectives**
- **Key employees will recommend us to friends they believe would be a good fit here**

Since the New Science of Marketing demands a rigorous scientific approach to Marketing analysis, you need to have some quantifiable metrics to judge your success in marketing yourself to candidates and key employees. Sample success metrics could include:

- **Percentage of candidates getting an offer**
- **Percentage of offers accepted**
- **Percentage of employee referrals generating an offer**
- **Retention rate of key employees**
- **Job satisfaction ratings**

Your Brand Positioning must be a supple document, strong enough to withstand inevitable challenges from within and flexible enough to account for unexpected forces from outside. Broadly speaking, it must take into consideration the following factors:

- **Target—Who exactly do you want to work for your company?**
For instance, “We are looking for professionals with a technology background, a graduate degree, significant work experience, and a passion for innovation...”
- **Competitive Frame—With whom do you compete for candidates?** “We compete with both the targets’ current employer and other world-class technology companies across the country.”
- **Key Benefits—What does your company offer potential employees that they can’t find elsewhere?** “We offer the opportunity to work with the finest technology minds on a wide variety of challenging software development projects.”
- **Support—Why should potential employees believe you?** “The background and accomplishments of our employees, the variety of projects in our past and in our pipeline, our customer lists, and the patents we hold.”



It's important to remember that talent isn't going to select same-ness—the best players aren't going to leave their current employers unless you can convince them that your company is different in several important areas. These might include:

- **Compensation (actual and virtual)**
- **Work/life balance**
- **Company culture**
- **Employee development and career advancement**
- **Company stability**
- **Company mission**
- **Social currency**

UNDERSTAND YOUR CANDIDATES

When you're finished shining your shoes, combing your hair, and checking your teeth, symbolically speaking, to prepare to meet your candidate, you're halfway done. You've also got to know them as well as you know your own employees. Understand them both as individuals and groups to get an idea of what's really important, both personally and professionally. Naturally, every candidate will want to impress you upon first meeting, but if they're not ready for 100

percent travel and eighty-hour workweeks, you'd better not expect it of them—or your partnership will be either a quick or fruitless one.

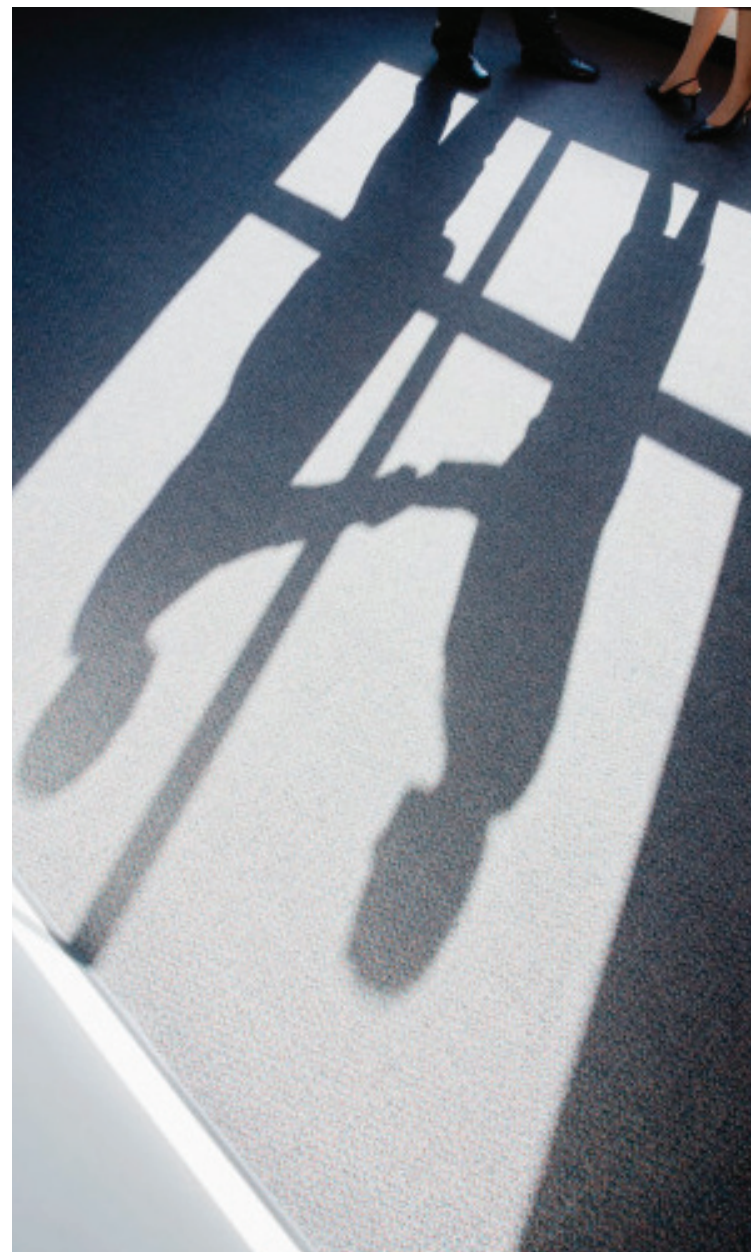
Looking at your company from a candidate's perspective can also help you understand what you're doing well, and what you might be able to do to keep yourself more attractive to candidates. It's not as if you need to install videogames and in-house Starbucks; such frivolous items are the hallmarks of shortsighted (and now bankrupt) companies. But instituting flextime, telemarketing, or in-house day-care might just be the ticket to landing that candidate looking for a more progressive work environment.


For instance, the tragic events of Sept. 11 brought a change in the perspective of many workers. Many candidates now say their faith in family and community involvement runs higher, and are seeking a balance in all parts of their life. Can you position your company to attract talent in accord with these changes?

CLOSE THE DEAL WITH THE RIGHT PEOPLE

With your HR destination plan in hand, you can go about bringing in the best people for your job. And keep in mind that you shouldn't try to build a team of all-world players; a baseball team with fifteen of the best shortstops in the universe isn't going to go very far. Your goal is to build a complete, complementary organization, with the best players at each position. Do you want well-rounded jacks (or janes) of all trades, or do you want people who bring distinctive, tightly focused skill sets? The decision depends on how you wish to set up your company—but it's a decision that needs to be made, one way or another.

Here are a couple of Marketing-based tenets to keep in mind: Hire people who know how to do what your company doesn't already know, and Find jobs for people, not people for jobs. These mantras both have the virtue of removing the straitjackets from your company, freeing you to pursue new avenues (and new hires) while not remaining bound to the traditional ways of doing business. Don't shoehorn in new hires, and they won't box you in, either.





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You’ve also got to consider the way the competition approaches the same candidates. Brand Positioning involves more than just what you say about your company—it also involves positioning the competition so that the debate is on your terms. Control the dialogue, control the message, and you control the competition—don’t let them go putting ideas into your candidates’ heads!

Finally, keep in mind that preference is perishable. Just because someone has an affinity for your company today doesn’t mean they’re going to hang around and wait for you to make an offer. If you don’t reevaluate your company’s positioning in the workforce to keep up with employee attitudes, you’re likely to find yourself without any suitors at all.