

A Review of the Role of Marketing in Recruitment and Talent Acquisition

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Abstract:

In the digital age recruitment marketing emerged as a consequence of the competitive and complex nature of the labor market. This article highlights the role of marketing in modern recruitment and talent acquisition activities. It reviews as well, the literature of marketing and recruitment to track the philosophy of modern recruitment marketing. This review goes deeper into the theory and practices of employer branding as a tool to attract and engage new hires. This paper also critically discusses the relations and interactions between the components of the modern recruitment process.

Keywords: Recruitment marketing, branding, talent acquisition, talent brand, employer brand, content marketing

Introduction:

There is no doubt that in the digital age, the coexistence of human resources and marketing was found inevitable. While recruiters in the current era are in a race to gain competitive advantages in the talent acquisition arena, alignment of marketing and recruitment activities became crucial to win the talent war. Recruitment marketing as the output of this alignment introduced new approaches to attract talents. It became essential for organizations to develop a recruitment marketing strategy and establish a strong employer brand. Recruitment marketing invests in new ways to communicate and build relationships with prospective candidates. In the age of social media, content marketing plays an effective role in communicating the recruitment message and increasing the awareness of the talent brand.

Functions of modern recruitment:

It's necessary to understand the meaning of the terms; talent acquisition, recruitment marketing, employer branding, and content marketing before we correlate their functions in the hiring process.

Talent acquisition:

Talent acquisition is defined as the process of finding and acquiring skilled human labor for organizational needs and to meet any labor requirement. The narrow view of talent acquisition sees it as a role within the human resources department, responsible for searching, acquiring and hiring the best talents required to meet organization's goals, however talent acquisition as a unique function has developed to be a designated function separate from human resources and has become responsible for talent strategic forecasting, pipelining, assessment and development (Recruiter, 2019). Talent acquisition serves the procurement of the human capital as well as corporate employee development by attracting top talents to work for the organization. In other words, talent acquisition focuses on long-term human resources planning and finding the right candidates for positions that require a distinct and specific skillset (Jobvite, 2017).

Recruitment marketing:

Recruitment marketing is defined as all activities and strategies aimed at building an employer brand, increasing reach, identifying career opportunities, building candidate relationships, and managing communication with candidates (Brandon Hall Group, 2014). Another definition sees recruitment marketing as a combination of strategies and tools used by an organization to engage and nurture potential talent in the pre-applicant phase. (Rouse, 2019).

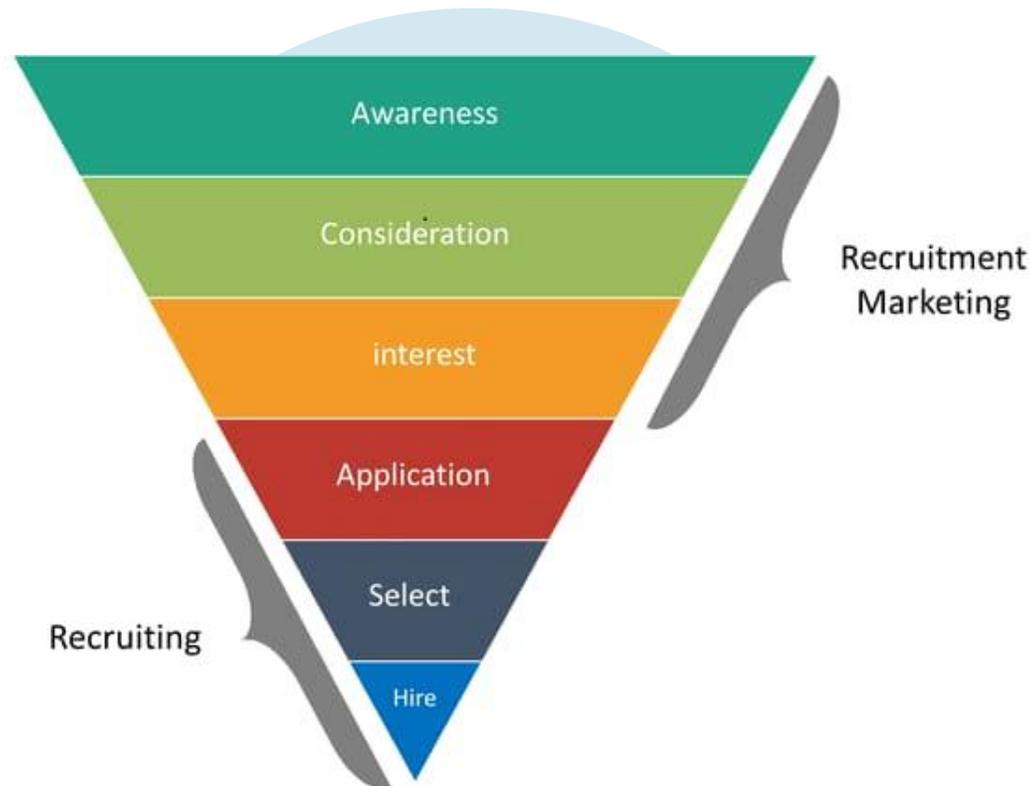


Fig. 1 The recruitment funnel (Tracy Parsons, 2016)

Fig. 1 shows the recruitment funnel and the placement of recruitment marketing in it. Numerous studies placed recruitment marketing on top of the recruitment funnel, however others see it as a pre-funnel stage, as it first creates the awareness and increases the recognition of the organization, second it helps the prospective candidate to consider what the organization offers and finally it induces the interest to apply for the job, after application candidates enter the traditional recruitment channel that processes the application, selects candidates for evaluation and finally takes the hiring decision.

Recruitment marketing as the front end of the recruiting funnel is an arena talent acquisition hasn't considered in the past, it became an effective part of the modern recruitment and talent acquisition activities that involves marketing practices (parsons, 2016).

Mike Hennessy (2017) the founder and CEO of Smash Fly Technologies, defines recruitment marketing as every recruitment tactic that includes content marketing, e-mail nurturing, social recruiting, mobile recruiting, careers sites, search engine optimization (SEO), employee referrals, talent networks, job marketing, employer branding, recruiting events, recruiting analytics and candidate relationship management (CRM) (Maurer, 2017).

The main goal of recruitment marketing is to create a talent pipeline that delivers the best candidates. It is believed that building a talent pool to fill vacant positions at any time is an urgent necessity for companies. In contrast, traditional recruiting always focuses on filling a position that needs to be filled at the moment. (Madeline, 2018).

Recruitment marketing uses the techniques of inbound marketing, develops a reliable employer brand and runs advertisement campaigns for job offers. Inbound marketing is defined as a technique for drawing customers or leads to products and services via content marketing, social media marketing, search engine optimization, and branding. (Eclipse software marketing, 2018).

Recruitment marketing integrates SEO, mobile recruiting, landing pages, content creation, career sites, social media, employee quotes, and email marketing. For qualified prospective candidates to become aware of the company and can then register in the company's talent pool and stay informed about future vacancies. In this way, a relationship with the prospective candidates is established and can be maintained by sending relevant information and job offers (Rouse, 2019).

Employer branding:

In the context of recruitment, the employer brand can be defined as the package of psychological, economic, and functional benefits provided by employment and identified with an employer (Thorne 2004). Manipulating these benefits to position the firm in the minds of potential employees as a great place to work (an employer of choice) is the role of employer branding (Branham, 2001).

Most definitions focus on the brand from the perspective of consumer marketing. A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors (Kotler, 1997). However, in the context of employer marketing, it can be defined as the set of distinctive images of a prospective employer which are manifest in the minds of the target groups- potential employees. (Meffert, Burmann & Koers, 2002). Brands are among an organization's most valuable assets as a result brand management is a key activity in many organizations. (Wilden, Gudergan & Lings, 2010).

Despite the fact that the main focus is on consumer and corporate brand, employer branding has proven itself as a targeted long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of the employees, potential employees and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm (Sullivan, 2004). Employer brand describes an employer's reputation as a place to work, and the employee value proposition, as opposed to the more general corporate brand reputation and value proposition to customers and other stakeholders (Mosley, 2014).

The employer value proposition is defined as a set of associations and offerings provided by an organization in return for the skills, capabilities, and experiences an employee brings to the organization. In the same context, EVP can be described as the set of unique employer's offerings which are considered valuable to a prospective talent (Minchington, 2010).

According to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), an employer brand is an important part of the employee value proposition and is essentially what the organization communicates as its identity to both potential and current employees (Olilla, 2018).

Heger (2007) conducted an empirical study which identified a relationship between a strong Employment Value Proposition (EVP), the core component of the employer brand, and respondents' level of engagement. The study showed that employee engagement is largely influenced by an organization's EVP, in that EVP attributes (elements appealing to employees) serve to motivate an organization's prospective candidate.

The marketing disciplines associated with branding and brand management have been increasingly applied by the human resources and talent management community to attract, engage and retain talented candidates and employees, in the same way, marketing applies such tools to attract and retain clients, customers, and consumers (Mosley, 2014).

It is relevant here to highlight the importance of Employer brand equity or EBE, it is defined as a set of employment brand assets and liabilities linked to an employment brand, its name and symbol that add to (or subtract from) the value provided by an organization to that organizations employees (Ewing, Pitt, Bussy & Berthon, 2002) in other words it is the added value of the favorable employee perceptions of the organization.

Content marketing:

Content marketing is a form of marketing focused on creating, publishing, and distributing content for a targeted audience online (Pulizzi & Barrett, 2009). According to the Content Marketing Institute (2017), content marketing is defined as a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action.

In his article “benefits of recruitment marketing” Ben Slater (2018) VP Growth at Beamery argued the essentiality of content marketing in recruitment he wrote down “Content marketing is the medium through which brands educate and build relationships with consumers. It’s central to the marketing process, and it’s a discipline that’s fast becoming essential for recruitment marketing.”

Content marketing is not new, John Deree (1895) leveraged the Farrow magazine not to directly sell John Deree’s equipment but to educate farmers on new technologies in farming business, John utilized that we know now as content to promote his brand and has become the farmers, informational expert, now the Farrow has 1.5 million circulations, in 40 countries, in 12 different languages (Pulizzi, 2012).

It’s relevant here to point out the characteristics of an effective recruitment message’s content, although research on the effects of recruitment message during the first phase of recruitment is limited (Barber, 1998), some researchers suggest that recruitment messages that provide explicit or detailed information produce more favorable reactions than non-specific or general messages. Rynes & Miller (1983) found out that an increased amount of information regarding specific job characteristics (e.g., salary, career paths, benefits, etc.) positively influenced applicants.

A comparative study for corporate and recruitment images showed that perceptions of images and intentions to apply were functions of the information available from the organization (Gatewood, Gowan & Lautenschlager, 1993). Another research argued that the ability of a firm to manage pre-interview information to increase applicant awareness and interest in learning more about organizational offerings is the key to the economic utility of recruiting efforts (Boudreau & Rynes 1985).

The perceptions of organizational attributes, such as training, compensation and advancement opportunities, have been found to have positive effects on applicant attraction to firms (Powell, 1984; Taylor & Bergmann, 1987).

With more specific information about an organization’s work environment and attributes, job seekers perceive an organization that is more likely to provide desired positive outcomes than an organization that offers more general company information. Therefore, the content message needs to show specific recruitment information, to be predictive of applicant perceptions of organizational attractive recruitment policies and to give as much useful information as it should do (Roberson, Collins & Oreg, 2005).

In the current age recruiters generate content to entertain and educate prospect candidates about the mission, vision and corporate culture of their organization, a good content that can establish a relationship with candidates, improve their perception of the talent brand and reflect the brand promise. Providing valuable and relevant information here is crucial to help prospective candidates professionally, build trust and create positive feelings towards the organization, therefore increases the organization’s talent acquisition effectiveness. Here comes the role of content as the way an organization positions its employer brand and communicates its recruitment message in a valuable and relevant way.

Employee's stories that have the most discerning and specific content enables a candidate to stand in the shoes of an actual employee and provides real knowledge of the way an organization practices EVP and this would certainly enhance the engagement process (Sundberg, 2018).

In the age of social media content marketing rely on influencers, organization's top talents are utilized as talent brand ambassadors, they use a personalized and tailored content to communicate the organization's success story (Stephenson, 2018).

The Intersections:

There no doubt that the new trends in talent acquisition widely spread and created new attitudes with new sub-categories, relevance, and practices. Studies found out that in this transformational period, a new wave of jargons and definitions came out that are quite blurry at some points when it comes to relevance and practices. This confusion is pretty obvious between the term's employer brand and talent brand, employer branding, and recruitment marketing.

This argument is not on the functions and the sub-functions; it is to point out the correlations and intersections of the various modern recruitment practices and how marketing is essential to perform these practices in the way that onboard the best talents to an organization.

If the Consumer brand is the attributes and value associated with an organization's products and service. So, the Employer brand would be the attributes and values associated with an organization as a place to work. Talent brand has been found out to be: the highly social, totally public version of your employer brand that incorporates what talent thinks, feels, and shares about an organization as a place to work (LinkedIn Talent Solutions, 2015).

Lou Adler/LinkedIn (2011) conducted a survey over 2250 corporate recruiters in the US. It stated that a strong talent brand can translate into 50% savings in cost per hires and 28 % lower turnover rate (Takeuchi, 2014). From a Glassdoor study more than two-thirds (67%) of employers believe retention rates would be higher if candidates had a clearer picture of what to expect about working for a specific organization before applying for the job (Sundberg, 2018).

Another study conducted by Kucherov & Zavyalova (2011) on 113 companies, they found out that in an organization with a developed employer brand, employees are more actively engaged in decision making and management process, in 2012 the same 113 companies were studied again and they found out that the average turnover rate with the organization with a strong employer brand is 10%, while the overall turnover average is 16%. (Joon & Zhou, 2013).

Recruitment marketing incorporates employer branding not only to acquire the best talent for an open job but also for future jobs (Mihalcea, 2017).

The marketing theory in recruitment:

It was found essential in this paper to review the theory of marketing and its implications on the recruitment process.

Branding:

Employer branding as a marketing practice has a goal which is hiring and retaining the most talented candidates and it has an audience which is the prospective candidates and the current employees, it delivers a message based on the employer value proposition to create awareness, a message that is meant to create interest and encourage talents to take an action, in other words, it helps the prospective candidates throughout their journey until they apply for the job and get hired and retain the current talents that already work for the organization (Yesbeck, 2019).

The marketing mix:

The 4 Ps of marketing or the marketing mix can be related to the talent brand as follows:

Product: which are the open jobs (responsibilities, culture, benefits, etc.) The product should address the needs of every specific job, for example, a sales job needs to differ from a technical one, in terms of the job's responsibilities and benefits.

Price: As the prestige of the job, price should point out how desirable is this job, in terms of employees' visibility to executives, autonomy to make decisions and the organization's established corporate culture.

Promotion: which are activities of advertisement, recruitment marketing, PR, etc. Promotion should target updates for every specific job on LinkedIn and blogs as well as YouTube channels of the professionals in the same fields and the job's specific recruiters.

Place: which is where jobs are offered, e.g. career website, social media, personal networks, etc. The place would be the employment fairs and events, employee referrals, LinkedIn and social media, the organization's website and job boards (Little, 2018).

SWOT analysis:

In the recruitment marketing context, developing a talent brand SWOT analysis is crucial and should be as follows:

Strengths: What characteristics does the organization have that give it an advantage? Strengths should be used as a differentiator to position the organization against the competition.

Weaknesses: What characteristics does the organization have that put it at a disadvantage? Weaknesses should be downplayed and traits that balance them are needed to be pointed out.

Opportunities: What elements of the business could be leveraged to gain an advantage? How can management take a new approach to win a talent?

Threats: What factors may cause trouble or difficulty in the process? A proactive defense should be made and preparations to make changes should start (Profitablebusin, 2013).

Positioning and segmentation:

In this context positioning of the organization's brand and differentiating it against the competition is essential, it should be performed by mapping out the organization to get a clear view of the competitive landscape, identifying the factors the organization needs to measure them against competitors.

It is important here to say that good content would deliver a positive impact on positioning efforts. Proper audience segmentation should be conducted to create a target audience and deliver the right message to the right prospective candidate.

To achieve that, marketers need to study the characteristics of the prospective talents that the organization needs, these characteristics are the same as in a consumer market and can be stated as follows:

Demographic: candidates' years of experience, seniority, skills and degree type.

Psychographic: candidates' values and attitudes, work and life balance, inspirational leaders, challenging work environment, benefits, competitive salaries, and bonuses.

Geographical: candidates' geographical locations, cultural background, undergraduate and graduate schools, are they willing to relocate? Are they currently employed?

Behavioral: how do candidates interact? On organizations' websites, LinkedIn, social media, career fairs, job search engines or employee connections (Yesbeck, 2019).

Content marketing strategy:

It has been found out that every organization should take 5 steps to develop effective content marketing strategy: Segmentation of target audience - Creation of personas for each segment - Telling stories each segment will want to hear - Sharing stories where the audience is reading them - Building relationships between prospective candidates and organizational ambassadors.

Marketers create a fictional character or a (Persona) to represent the different candidate types that might be a good fit for the job and utilize content marketing to target talents that can be identified with this persona. In this way, an organization would get to communicate a relevant, valuable, tailored, personalized, customized, clear, frank and effective content (Harvard Business School Blog, 2014).



Fig. 2 Content marketing throughout the candidate journey (Ben Slater, 2018).

Fig. 2 shows the nature of content in every stage of the candidate's journey. Effective recruitment marketing requires content that will appeal to candidates as they progress through this process. People want to know different things at each stage, and your content needs to reflect that (Slater, 2018).

Findings and suggestions:

This paper found out that talent acquisition as a unique profession is distinct from general recruitment, it requires not only skills in sourcing, tactics, candidate assessment and compliance with corporate hiring standards but also in employment branding and corporate hiring initiatives, its function is then aligned with marketing, public relations besides human resources.

This review pointed out how effective recruitment marketing can result in an increase of interest surrounding a talent brand, creation of a more qualified talent pool, a faster hiring process, and an improved candidate experience.

This article highlighted the way top talent is searching for a company the same way they would any other purchasing decision, which is why employer branding is so critical to the recruitment of the best talents. Hence it suggests organizations must shift the way they think about recruitment and invest in new ways to communicate and build relationships with prospective candidates

This paper also found out that the employer value proposition (EPV) is the essence of the employer brand and it is what makes the organization an employer of choice. This review discussed as well how businesses in the current age are in a race to involve content marketing in recruitment as a way to deliver relevant and valuable messages, hence it suggests that to utilize content as a recruitment marketing tool, content should reflect the employer brand and should communicate concepts like culture, purpose, and mission. In other words, content should be used to tell the organization's story, a story that needs to be specific and personalized to achieve the best results.

This paper also found out that marketing helps talent acquisition create a talent community, it also creates ways to promote and increase awareness of the talent brand and the employer value proposition, and consequently reduce retention, cost per hire and turnover rates.

This article found out as well that creating awareness is the core of recruitment marketing strategy and utilizing tools of the digital age is the key to increasing this awareness and engaging with prospective candidates.

To achieve the best results this paper suggests that recruiters should perform targeted advertisement on career pages, circulate a customized content on the organization's website's (About us) and (Our Careers) section, make a link on the website to a blog where prospective talents can watch current employees telling the organization's story and develop a social media presence, and this will certainly create interest, increase the organization's likelihood of a higher SEO ranking, and render a positive impact on the business in terms of increased employee retention, reduced cost per hire and lower turnover rate.

Conclusion:

Following the footsteps of the traditional consumer marketing, recruitment marketing is utilizing digital age tools, given the benefit of using pre-tested tactics, learning from consumer marketing lessons as well as employing marketing theory and strategy to ensure new hires has the capacity, quality, and efficiency an organization needs to compete in talent space. The application of digital technologies in recruitment marketing created a way of finding and engaging prospect talents by starting a relationship with them in an earlier stage before getting them to apply for the post, and this should create a foundation for a future pipeline that supplies the organization with the right talents and provides the best business impact. Inspired by the core marketing practices like branding and by nurturing content marketing, talent acquisition in the current age has a different purpose than filling a vacant post, it's not about the job anymore it's about the positioning of a strong employer brand and providing an elaborate content that triggers right talents to apply for the job.

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