

The candidate experience:

*Critical considerations
for creating a
memorable journey
for talent*



The candidate experience is increasingly pivotal to talent considering a role with an organization. Once an afterthought, this journey is now regarded as a holistic and crucial element of an employer brand strategy. Each step along the journey should be authentic, reinforce the employer's culture and provide transparency into how employees are valued at an organization. Employer brand touches the entire candidate lifecycle, from candidate attraction to onboarding, engagement and employee retention.

When it comes to employer brand-building, today's organizations face many challenges. A convergence of internal and external issues can bewilder even the most astute HR leaders. Information about employers, including the most intimate and sometimes embarrassing details, is now readily available online. The power of peer reviews on sites such as Glassdoor or LinkedIn, and group specific review sites such as [Fairygodboss](#) or [innersight](#) can have a disproportionate impact on reputation. And the struggle to justify investments in employer branding is eternal.

Through it all, however, employers who remain laser-focused on their employer brand will most likely succeed in providing a positive candidate experience, be viewed as an employer of choice and, ultimately, hire engaged and qualified candidates. These companies prioritize the needs of talent, knowing that every person who comes in contact with their corporate and employer brand is a potential customer, employee or partner later on. As a result, their approach creates the most positive candidate experience, which has a long-lasting impact on their attractiveness as an employer. Both successful and passed-over candidates come through their journey with a good impression that may bolster their role as a brand ambassador.

Developing a positive candidate experience requires a high level of involvement and a comprehensive view of the entire journey. There are countless touch points for every organization, but those who succeed in filling the top of the funnel and keeping the pipeline filled with talent realize the benefits outweigh the investment of time and effort. Furthermore, while corporate brand and employer brand are strands of the same DNA, the candidate experience is a journey with steps that customers and partners will never encounter. As such, companies need to consider the unique needs of the talent they seek.

Human capital leaders are aware of the challenges they have in providing a positive experience for potential employees. According to LinkedIn's Corporate Recruiting Trends 2017 report, which was compiled based on a survey of nearly 4,000 talent acquisition leaders in 35 countries, 30% say if budgets were unlimited, they would invest more in improving candidate experience. More than half say they would spend more on employer branding, recognizing the impact it has on the ability to acquire quality talent.



define the journey

To understand candidate experience best practices and how best to create a positive journey, begin by defining the journey for prospective employees. This starts at the stage before the candidate even enters the recruitment funnel and runs through to onboarding as an employee. Mapping the journey helps to identify the critical junctures that require particular attention and points that really leave a lasting impression of the organization.

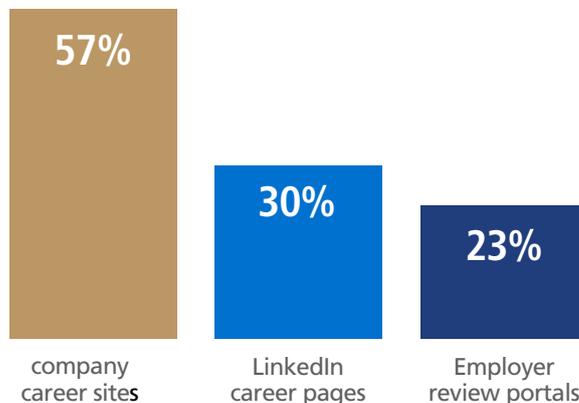
Many organizations think that the candidate experience starts when applicants enter the funnel, view postings and register with applicant tracking systems. However, starting here ignores the entire attract and source component of the recruitment process. In fact, passive and active candidates may interact with potential employers long before they even consider a career there. According to its 2016 North American Candidate Experience [Research Report](#), the Talent Board, which organizes the Candidate Experience (CandE) Awards, found that 57% of job seekers have a previous relationship with companies to which they apply, and 75% say they conduct their own research on prospective employers.

Clearly employers who seek to create maximum awareness and provide the best experience should consider investing in pre-engagement activities. For consumer and industrial product companies, this may involve leveraging its corporate brand to attract talent. A good recent example is the campaign launched by [GE](#) in mainstream media to promote itself as an employer of choice for software engineers and developers. In it, GE eschews typical corporate feel-good messaging and instead humorously acknowledges the broad misperception that its workforce is only focused on manufacturing.

Leveraging mainstream media may not be the right approach for some companies, but that doesn't mean they can't achieve similarly effective results in building a solid foundation for their candidate experience. Developing a genuine and persuasive career site remains the most effective way for engaging talent, according to the Talent Board, which found that 57% of workers visited these sites to research potential employers. This was twice the number of those who used LinkedIn career pages (30%) or employer review portals (23%) such as Glassdoor.



Where do workers research potential employers?



Source: The Talent Board

With such a broad reach, career sites are the ultimate starting point for job seekers and should provide a positive impression of the organization. Having an engaging careers site with compelling messaging and user-friendly navigation should be a priority for companies interested in converting job seekers to applicants. It's critical, then, that companies come across clearly and genuinely about their mission, values, culture and employees on the site. Considering the corporate brand is important for brand consistency, but it's important to provide authentic insight into critical content such as perks/benefits, development opportunities, corporate citizenship, employee testimonials, diversity, awards/accolades or local/location highlights.

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Another priority of career sites is facilitating fact-finding and job applications, which means they should be as user friendly as possible. This requires optimization for mobile devices — applicants increasingly turn to their devices when applying for positions — but many organizations aren't doing this. One Careerbuilder study shows that 1 in 10 millennials will drop out of the process if it doesn't allow mobile application. At the same time, the use of employee testimonial and photos/videos featuring employees are powerful resources that resonate with job seekers.

Job postings should have compelling messaging, consistent formatting and written in a manner to intrigue and sell a job seeker on the organization. Ideally, they should have a solid, well-written and interesting opening to generate interest, body copy that shows unique selling points and a call to action or more differentiators.

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It's no longer enough to just describe a company, job seekers want more information in job descriptions. Candidates want to know about salary, total benefits package, work-from-home or flexible work options, team structure and the work environment.

One gap many career portals suffer is creating a two-way dialogue. Most visitors conduct research and submit resumes, but that doesn't mean employers can't ask for their input. A candidate experience survey not only empowers HR to continuously improve and enhance the talent acquisition process, it also leaves the applicant feeling valued. Another perpetual criticism of applicants is that the application process often leaves them in the dark and voiceless, but a well-designed site can mitigate this common problem. This can be achieved by adding FAQs, establishing a candidate experience charter, outlining the hiring process and gathering feedback.

external influences

The ability to control content is critical to brand-building and therefore creating a memorable candidate experience in recruitment. But what happens when a company's reputation hinges on external influencers? Increasingly, workers turn to a wide variety of sources to learn more about a potential employer, and many of these are independent and whose opinions are crowd-sourced. According to Glassdoor, 70% of candidates use employer reviews in their decision-making, and most will refer to six different sources in their research. With so much public insight, employers can no longer hide their inner workings behind a veil.

How can companies create the best impression in the age of transparency? Getting personal is a good start. Positive or negative, reviews left by current and former employees provide an opportunity for employers to emphasize positive comments and diffuse negative ones. The challenge is dedicating resources to monitor and reply to reviews. It's difficult to cover all channels, but the major ones require attention if a company is serious about its employer brand.

Surprisingly, many organizations don't often prioritize employee review sites as an important component in their overall awareness strategy. This is a big miss. Job seekers typically start with a search engine, which often shows review site results within the first page. Therefore, it's critical for organizations to place value and resources toward monitoring review sites and keeping their profile content relevant to their audience.

Leverage the power of your employees: testimonials, photos, videos or blogs are strong options to provide authentic insight for the savvy, sophisticated job seekers of today. Using real stories from real employees helps to provide trusted and transparent viewpoints about what it is like to work at an organization. According to the Talent Board, this type of content is the second most valued by candidates, behind company values. Hearing how a fellow java developer or mechanical engineer feels about working for a prospective employer carries significantly more weight than a polished corporate video. Companies that make an effort showcasing their workforce (see [L'Oreal's YouTube channel](#)) are more relatable to candidates and therefore come across more authentic — something to consider to improve your candidate experience.

reaching multiple channels

Review sites garner much attention, but often workers begin their research elsewhere. These include professional and social networks, alumni groups, professional associations, talent and recruitment communities and social networks. For instance, developer communities such as Stack Overflow are ideal for reaching software engineers. Similarly, the Digital Marketing Association might be a venue for companies seeking marketing specialists. Companies struggling with hard-to-find skills should choose a few select portals to reach their target talent.



95% of career sites fail to provide relevant and personalized content*

Big social networks are always an option for talent leaders to attract and source candidates, but companies may expect too much of Facebook and Twitter as recruitment tools. The Talent Board reported a disparity between how much employers rely on social channels and how much candidates use them for researching and finding jobs. While 25% of companies surveyed rely on Facebook career pages, only 5% of applicants use them to find work. The gap was even greater when it comes to Twitter at 33% and 2%.

Even so, social media can be an important tool for talent attraction. The challenge is that most companies aren't leveraging channels such as Facebook or LinkedIn effectively, often failing to share content or monitor dialogue about what's being said about them. For many, even small tactical steps such as linking career sites, organizing videos on a dedicated YouTube Careers playlist or adding careers related messaging to a company overview are not part of their process.

Complementing social media are alumni groups. These groups are a low-cost channel for employers because their constituents are already familiar with and have a positive view of the company. [Boomerang workers](#) — those who return to an employer after a tenure elsewhere — are increasingly seen as highly desirable because of the knowledge gained externally and their familiarity with the company.

*Source: ere media

into the recruitment funnel

Pre-engagement is an important part of the candidate experience because it may be the first time an applicant has contact with an employer, but once she or he comes into the funnel, employers should ensure a transparent and communicative process the rest of the way. From the application on, perception becomes reality. As the candidate moves through screening, interviewing and onboarding, each step is another potential opportunity to impress or discourage talent. Organizations that set expectations about the hiring process, provide resume or interview tips, give white-glove service while scheduling interviews and communicate with candidates throughout the selection process will see positive outcomes.

Creating a positive experience for internal candidates will support retention and engagement and help HR further enhance the journey for all. Organizations often forget to solicit the feedback of existing employees seeking to move up, but they can provide unique perspectives in the context of knowing the organization. Also, providing training, resources and guidelines to your employees will help them become strong brand advocates.

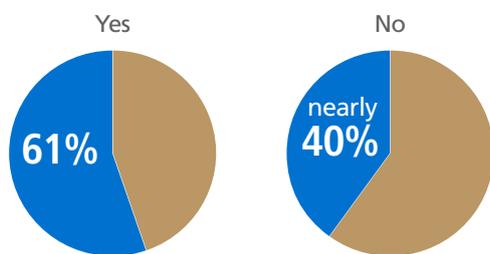
What are the priorities companies should keep in mind for the application process? It's no longer acceptable to have an application process that takes more than 25 minutes to complete. Some companies have slashed their processes to fewer than 10 minutes by using social media plug-ins or short apply forms.

Basic provisions such as providing clear instructions or FAQs, communications or acknowledgements of the next stage seem simple, yet many companies still have challenges with them. As a result, applicants may spend too much time on the application, grow frustrated, feel discouraged from submitting and may not receive any acknowledgement or communication from the organization.

Employers have been doing a better job of providing the transparency candidates expect over recent years, according to the Talent Board. In 2016, 61% of candidates surveyed were able to view the progress of their application, a rise of 18% from the year before. Still, nearly 40% are unable to track how they are faring.



Surveyed candidates able to view progress of their application



Source: The Talent Board

The application process is often the first big barrier prospective hires encounter, so companies should undertake continuous monitoring of results. Using analytics enables talent leaders to see at which point applicants most often drop off from the process. Also, HR should periodically conduct anonymous audits of the process to experience it firsthand. If surveying the actual candidates isn't possible, these steps may help identify impediments.

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turning to tech for screening

As applicants move into the funnel to be screened, companies increasingly rely on technology to pare down the field. While this has improved efficiencies and accelerated processing, it also has become less personalized. This stage can be perplexing because assessment may not test for specific skills; rather, it may be focused on aptitude and cultural fit. Helping candidates understand why some questions are asked improves the experience.

Additionally, the screening stage at many organizations offers the least amount of communication in the entire recruitment process. The Talent Board reported that only 4% provide any feedback on screening results.

For candidates who move on to the interview and select stages, many say employers don't do enough to help them get ready for phone, video or in-person interviews. Communication about what to expect and how to prepare should be a standard part of the process but is lacking at many companies. Providing an agenda, information about the interviewers, a chance to provide feedback and a timeframe for the decision-making are important details that instill confidence in a candidate and affirms their decision to pursue a career with the prospective employer. This assurance carries forward for successful hires as they onboard, resulting in greater engagement in the workplace.

Unsuccessful applicants should be treated equally well with personalized notification. Employers need not share details about the decision-making, but it's important they share the results according to the timeframe promised or implied. Even when the news is bad, how a company communicates it can make a significant difference in creating a positive journey, and what the candidate decides to share about their experience on social media. What's important is ensuring applicants are regularly contacted, made to feel respected for their submission and asked for feedback. Without input, employers don't know if they are creating an army of disgruntled individuals or sympathetic supporters.

For those who are offered a position, maintaining consistent and personal communication helps to ensure engagement and excitement before the onboarding process. Clarity is absolutely critical to ensure the

prospective employee understands what's being offered on the table, the timeframe for acceptance and whether additional discussions or negotiations may be necessary. Candidates should be excited about the new opportunity and not feel pressured or uncertain about the role or the company. Setting realistic expectations and being honest about the role, team, culture and organization will ensure a better job fit, improve quality of hire and positively impact retention rates.



96% of companies aren't getting feedback from applicants on their processes*

From candidate to employee, the onboarding step is the last, but not least, important part of the journey. This, too, will have an impact on retention and engagement. An effective onboarding process means providing all the resources they need to accelerate induction and enabling them to become productive as soon as possible. It's also an opportunity to capture the holistic view of new hires about the candidate experience. Not only will onboarding affect employee performance but also his or her enthusiasm to serve as an ambassador for the employer brand in the future.

Even as organizations face growing talent scarcity, workers are investing more time researching potential employers. For these companies, ensuring each applicant — successful or otherwise — has a positive and memorable candidate experience should be a priority because they can have a significant impact on their employer brand. As potential customers, they could also affect business in the future. So for a variety of reasons, the investment in delivering a positive and memorable journey for candidates is well worth the effort.

*Source: ere media



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