

Winning the 'war for talent' with strategic PR – the power of a strong employer brand

Despite a forecasted recession, it's clear that last year's drought of talent will continue to frustrate UK employers' attempts to expand or fill critical skills gaps in their workforce over the course of 2023. With unemployment rates at historic lows of 3.7% and job vacancies still at historic highs, the UK's problematic labour market is here to stay.

For those looking to turn the tide in the 'war for talent', it must be recognised that the war has been decisively won by the talent – as Tim Ryan, US Chairman of PwC, *quipped last year* – and as such, businesses will need to invest greater time and effort into proactive outreach to potential new hires.

To secure talent, a firm can no longer sit back with a laissez-faire attitude towards talent acquisition – no matter their market position in their respective industry. While many firms opted last year for simply offering higher salaries than competitors to attract talent, an uncertain economic outlook will make this a riskier strategy.

Many UK businesses this year may not have the war chest to offer further

unsustainable pay bumps. We are already seeing reports of how the UK's £32 billion legal sector has struggled to match the salary offers of US firms, supported by the comparative higher strength of the dollar.

If beating competitors on price isn't on the cards, there are alternative methods of attracting talent that can be equally effective. Since the pandemic, a growing issue amongst many people is the desire to secure a role with a company whose culture and values align their own aspirations and goals. It is worth remembering that the so-called 'Great Resignation' was not driven by salary consideration, but an overwhelming desire amongst workers to find a workplace that better suited their own needs and comforts.

This growing attitude amongst employees presents a fantastic opportunity for businesses struggling to attract talent with their salary offerings. There is now a strong business case for investing more wisely in proactive methods of 'employer brand' building to showcase your credentials as a purpose-led and supportive employers.

In the professional services space, for example, the power of employer reputation in attracting talent is clear, as the so-called 'Magic Circle', 'Big Four', and 'Bulge Bracket' firms can expect a steady stream of applications from young graduates and experienced talent alike.

However, for small and mid-sized firms, it can be a struggle to stand out from the crowd. In this highly competitive labour market, it is important for these businesses to be bold and creative in their external communications and go beyond simply advertising details about their company culture on websites and job specs.

It is here where the value of public relations becomes clear. With experience in helping organisations to maintain and build a positive public image, the PR industry has the expertise to help ensure a story is told both effectively and to a wider audience of potential talent.

Whether it's sharing details of your ESG commitments, unique workplace initiatives or the core beliefs of the founders, proactively engaging in PR can be an effective recruitment tool. By helping organisations to secure coverage in key trade titles or building the online reputation/reach of a company via LinkedIn, effective PR can provide prospective new hires with a glimpse into the heart of a company – allowing them to better understand how engaged and committed an employer is in their career and wellbeing.

The 'war for talent' is fast becoming a war for positive PR, in which employers need to utilise new tools for reaching out to fresh talent pools and tell their unique business story in a bid to stand out from all the rest.

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