

# The truth about branding

By Gaynor Lowndes, Managing Director of The Recruitment Training Company

Recruiters often make the mistake of assuming that branding is just about a pretty logo, a snappy catchphrase, and a clichéd body of text about “quality recruitment solutions tailored to your needs”. On the contrary, I believe that the word “branding” can be defined by another single word: “reputation”. This means that every activity you undertake as a recruiter is “branding” because it impacts your reputation individually, and that of your company. These actions speak far louder than the text of your mini-bio or the stylish layout of your company’s website. In my training, I refer to this as “action branding”.

So, as a consultant or manager, ask yourself this question right now: “What do I/we provide that other recruiters or agencies do not?” – an important question in an industry that is quite literally saturated with agencies and employees. The number of agencies registered in Australia cracked the 4,000 mark back in 2006, with over 60,000 consultants, and growth has continued to be phenomenal. With this in mind, what you do (action), not what you advertise, is what will make all the difference. This applies on both an individual and company level.

In my time as a trainer, I have worked with a number of clients throughout Australia, and several stand out as individuals and companies who understand the true meaning of “branding”. Their “action branding” methods exhibit key differentiators that set them apart, and the end result is an excellent and continually growing individual and corporate reputation within their respective markets.

I have a client in the Melbourne area, specialising in the pharmaceutical sector. This particular market is relatively small yet highly specialised and, therefore, fiercely competitive. This particular team have set themselves apart from the competition by “integrating” themselves into the industry they are recruiting for. Important lessons can be learned from this. I have heard it said that recruitment is a “fringe profession”, due to the fact that we are too often seen as the irritating, money-grabbing desperados of the business world rather than value-adding service providers.

My client team in Melbourne understood that if they were to win the trust of their prospective clients, they had to become their indus-

try colleagues rather than simply “recruitment providers”. How did they go about this? They attended pharmaceutical conferences and networking functions, they immersed themselves in the news and current affairs specific to the pharmaceutical industry, including maintaining an industry news section on their website. In short, their branding (through their actions) identified them as integrated “members” of the pharmaceutical industry and profession, not as separate, outside entities trying to throw candidates at potential clients. The trust, respect, and the industry affiliation were all there, thanks to their integrative “action branding”.

One of my major clients in the Sydney area is an agency specialising in real estate and property. They have the unparalleled trust of their clients, who possess an almost unusual confidence that this agency will provide them with quality and loyal candidates, on-demand in a short timeframe. My client is renowned in the real estate market throughout Sydney (and beyond), with 80% of its candidates coming from referrals and repeat registration. When I spoke to the directors of this company, they told me that for years they had relied on advertising for their resourcing, basically ignoring client concerns about the effectiveness of advertising only in the candidate-short market. The Managing Director, whom I will call Jason, received a wake-up call one day when a client said to him: “If candidate advertising actually worked, I’d do it myself, and wouldn’t bother with you guys. Show me what you can do that I can’t do myself?”

Jason and his colleagues realised then that their services were only sustainable if they could milk multiple opportunities from just one candidate, ie referrals and repeat registrations. They took action based on this, offering rewards and incentives for referrals, and revamped their rather tired candidate care procedures to increase (and practically guarantee) loyalty and retention. Clients throughout the industry were impressed and pleasantly surprised by the renewed efficiency and sustainability of their candidate pool, made up of loyal, exceptional quality candidates, many of whom testified that they wouldn’t even consider using another agency. Thus, the actions of Jason and his team resulted in some of the most positive branding success

stories I have seen in 20 years of recruitment experience.

On an individual level, one of the greatest “action branding” success stories I have ever seen involved a young consultant named Rob, who was barely 25 when I first trained him at one of my Sydney public workshops. A generalist consultant, I would describe Rob’s proactive reverse marketing strategy as something akin to “recruitment genius”. Exaggeration or not, it has established for him a highly successful personal brand throughout the industries he recruits for, and throughout the recruitment industry itself (he is a constant headhunting target of the rec-to-recs). Rob only does a small number of interviews in a day, so that he can leave enough time in between each, to sit down and reverse market the candidate while they wait in the office. Candidate retention and loyalty is near-perfect, as they can physically see his proactive approach to finding them a role, and clients are impressed with his selective sense of quality (because he only does a limited number of interviews, he can’t waste his time with questionable candidates). Rob’s personal brand is inevitably “quality and proactivity”, a true asset to his individual reputation, his agency, and the industry as a whole.

Such secrets to a great recruitment reputation or “brand” cannot be found through empty advertising and marketing promises. I encourage all recruiters to be walking advertisements for themselves, their agencies and the industry through their actions and methods. Consider what you can change about your approach, or the approach of your company, that will develop and enhance a truly profitable “action brand”. ■



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