

How to build a valuable employer brand from the start

By  Celeste Sirin

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It is that time of the year where we are presented with plenty of trends, insights, predictions and speculation of how this forthcoming year is going to unravel itself. As with the pandemic, no one has the answers. Our world is fluid with change and uncertainty being the only constant.

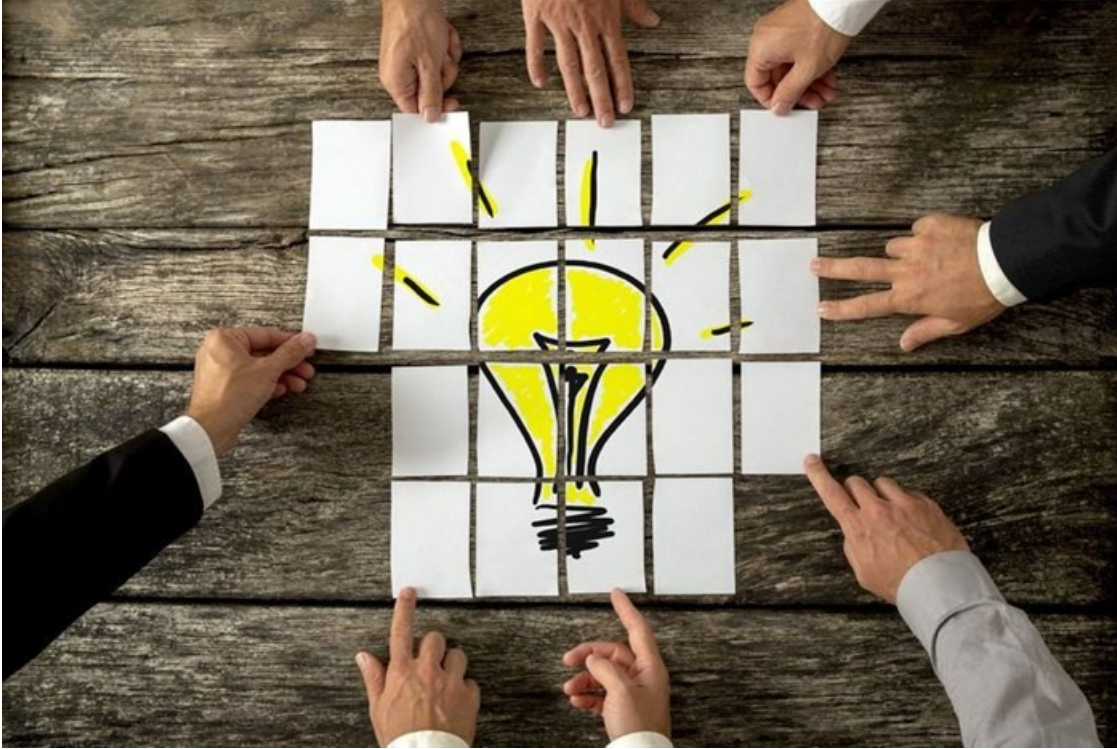


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In the last three months, we have witnessed massive tech companies laying off thousands of employees. Faced with a global recession and ongoing inflationary headwinds, investor confidence and venture funding for startups suffered a 50% year-over-year-drop in the third quarter of 2022. Whilst Africa is by no means free from the global economic slump, it remains one the fastest-growing startup ecosystems globally, with the fintech industry reported to be one of Africa's most progressive sectors. Startups play a dominant role in Africa's economic growth, led by aspiring and innovative entrepreneurs, exploiting new opportunities, promoting productivity and creating employment.

With 50% of today's workforce consisting of Gen Z and millennials, they are a good match for start-ups. However, unknown startups need to be quite clear in how they craft, inform and shape their employer brands and value propositions to engage, retain and attract this new generation as they are clear on what they want.

As the "new kid on the block", unrecognisable alongside other established employer brands and startup talent competitors, it is important that your offering is clearly defined in order to build trust from the get-go.



How startups can leverage employer branding to compete for talent

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Content: Transparency builds credibility

This is not easy, especially when you are recruiting for IT and engineering talent where the level of brand awareness is low and candidates are comparing one startup against another. As difficult as it might be, develop dependable content that leans into the brutal facts. This can be written into your culture code, values, employer value proposition (EVP), job descriptions or interwoven through your hiring process.

Comparable information and/or differentiators could be as follows:

- How does your startup level up against the industry standards?
- What's the financial health of your company and your runway?
- What's your long-term plan?
- Why is your startup less risky and more rewarding than an established brand? (pros & cons)?
- Why is your engineering lead the right person to be leading this team?
- What is your recruiting process?
- What does the first 30 days and/or onboarding process entail?
- What would cause the business to fail?
- What are your employee benefits/EVP?

Channel: Marketing and communications

There are multiple channels to communicate these frequently asked questions that often sit top-of-mind for candidates, but which are often not forthcoming.

Why wait to recruit, get your employer brand and value proposition in front of your talent market and start shaping and informing your presence through your career site, social media, outbound sourcing and/or introductory mailers, podcasts, webinars etc. The groundwork to positioning your employer brand in order to compete for the best talent is as important as is taking your product/service to market. Let's face it - without your exceptional core staff complement, you cannot confidently get your startup off the ground.



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Launch your employer brand: It won't cost you

With startups watching every penny, here are some smart tips to get you started:

Find the stories

All it takes is a short conversation with a longstanding leader/colleague/employee to find out about their toughest challenge or memorable day that underpins a unique characteristic of your employer brand. Write it down and package it in a great social media post, or audio recording and share it across channels.

Recruiter videos

Whether you are scaling up or not, instead of running a static, non-engaging recruitment banner, rather utilise your written job advert as your script to record a great recruitment video. This form of engaging content immediately humanises your employer brand and increases job application hit rates by 34% versus others.

Revamp hiring headlines

Shift away from the standard overused recruiting headlines of "Join us", "Work for us" "Hiring now" etc. and get creative

with striking headlines that align with your employer branding messaging. Share them with your talent acquisition specialists and recruiters to excite and inspire.

Build evidence of success stories

Make a start. Consistency will build momentum and soon you will become a recognisable employer brand. Develop an employer branding and recruitment marketing communications rollout plan which outlines your activity, success stories and collects data insights that will matter to secure future budget.

Metrics matter

Identify what measurables matter to your leaders, TA specialists and recruiters. Track and report on these metrics making them easily relatable for when you present your monthly progress report to earn management credibility and motivate for additional resources to help you scale.

We can acknowledge that many companies are frantically trying to close on 2022 projects. However, building an employer branding and marketing rollout plan to position your startup on the 2023 runway ahead of your talent competitors, is certainly a clever move.

ABOUT CELESTE SIRIN

Celeste Sirin is an employer branding specialist, speaker, facilitator and founder of Employer Branding Africa which aims to develop employer branding best practice in South Africa by educating South African leaders. She is a leading authority in positioning and elevating employer brands for companies, offering extensive insight into local, African and international employer branding trends.

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