

Make Recruiting a Marketing Event

By Joan Stewart, Media Relations Consultant

The next time you find yourself grouching about not being able to find and keep enough qualified employees, start compiling a list of your company's "good stuff"—reasons why people would want to work for you, or why your employees stay.

Then use that list as the springboard for a publicity campaign that will bring job-hunters to your door and help keep the employees you have worked so hard to recruit and train. The current labor market has convinced many media-savvy companies that publicizing their present work environments and other benefits can be just as important as marketing their products and services. Smart companies are relentless about turning recruitment and retention into marketing events.

In other words: You must market internally as well as externally.

Thinking Outside of the Box

Companies everywhere are coming around to this marketing ideal. At United Parcel Service, for example, telephone inquiries about jobs paying from \$8.50 to \$9.50-an-hour—some of the most difficult positions to fill—were up 11 percent over one year in the Chicago region. Why were there so many calls for this kind of job?

The jump was due largely to a proactive media campaign touting everything from the benefits of being a UPS worker (from package handler on up to the top) to the company's generous tuition reimbursement. A Chicago PR and marketing firm worked on a publicity campaign for UPS, focusing on local media. It helped the company snag 40 media hits, many of which painted a picture of UPS as a great place to work and a good corporate citizen. A few of those stories were picked up by national publications such as USA Today. Imagine your company making those kinds of headlines!

Dave Chisholm, staffing and development manager for UPS' North Central Region, says the company doesn't know exactly how many people apply for jobs because of media publicity, but said, "we suspect strongly that combining this recruitment PR with recruitment advertising is a very potent strategy."

The real benefits to UPS don't stop at a pile of news clippings. "It's what those articles actually stimulate," Chisholm said. "They've given us a lot of credibility with people who have job training programs, with city leaders, with people who can fund programs to get more trainees into UPS."

Once employees are hired, the strategic marketing continues. UPS is doing everything possible to keep its new people, including promoting from within. Chisholm and UPS chairman Jim Kelly, like many other senior executives at the company, started as package handlers or sorters, received extensive training, and were promoted through the ranks. These stories inspire and motivate front-line workers.

Make Marketing Work for You

UPS is just one of hundreds of success stories out there. How can you make the same sorts of changes in your organization? Well, while it might help, you don't necessarily need to hire outside PR assistance. There are several things you can do to make your own marketing push:

- Write articles for trade journals and industry publications, positioning the authors as experts, and explaining what makes your company different from the competition. Frame the articles when they're published, and hang them in your lobby for everyone to see.

- Write letters to the editors of newspapers, magazines, and trade publications. Carefully weave into the letters reasons why your company is a great place to work and the type of people you hire. Include contact information, such as an e-mail address, at the end of your signature.
- Don't forget community shoppers, alternative weeklies, and African-American and Hispanic newspapers. Keep an ear out for what people are reading.
- Pitch story ideas about the labor shortage to reporters, and tell them what you are doing to recruit and retain employees. It will give you a chance to explain all the reasons why people should work for you.
- Appear as a radio or TV talk show guest who can offer expert advice on a particular topic. During the interview, mention that your company is recruiting.
- Let local newspapers and TV stations know about fun things you are doing at your company, such as chili cook-off contests or costume parties. If the event isn't worth an entire story, it might be worth a stand-alone photo.
- Publicize your unusual training programs. Job-hunters know they are in such demand that they can pick and choose between companies that offer the best training.
- If your company is an Employer of ChoiceSM, get your CEO onto the public speaking circuit to talk about it. You might even attract the attention of people who aren't necessarily job-hunting. If the CEO isn't a great speaker, a speech coach can help.
- Publicize your company's pro bono projects, charity fund-raisers, volunteer programs or anything else that positions you as a good corporate citizen.
- Be sure the home page at your web site lets job-hunters know that your company is a great place to work. Include employee testimonials.

Media Works—Believe It

Media publicity not only spreads the word about your company to the world at large, but serves as validation to your current employees that your company is a special place. It's one thing just to tell your employees that you've got a good place to work, but having them read about it from an independent source is something else entirely. Just as PR efforts help you immeasurably in your external marketing, when transferred to the internal side of things they can make a world of difference.

Start small. Try just one of the above suggestions. Then try another. Then watch your recruiting and retention efforts become more effective than you'd ever dreamed.

Joan Stewart, a media relations consultant and trainer, works with organizations that want to use the media to establish their credibility, enhance their reputation and position themselves in the employment marketplace. She is the publisher of the booklets "113 Tips for Recruiting Valuable Employees" and "107 Tips for Keeping Valuable Employees." Sample tips and ordering information are at www.publicityhound.com.

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