

# Lēad<sup>TM</sup>

Issue 15



Engaging the Changing World of Work ■ Wearing Corporate Culture on Their Sleeves ■ Disruptive Technologies and Future Staffing Needs ■ Selling a Bill of Goods: How Brand Misrepresentation Can Lead to Legal Liability for Employers ■ Creating the Vibe to Thrive

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## THE VALUE OF BRAND ATTRACTION

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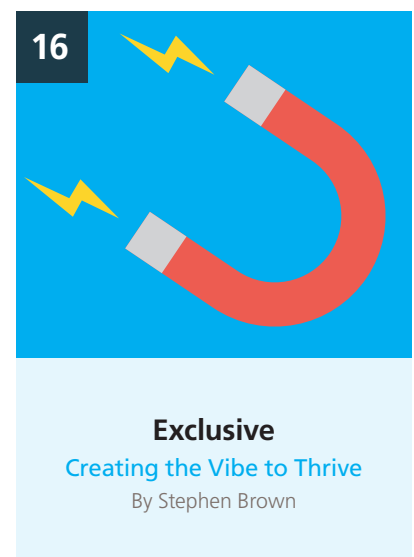
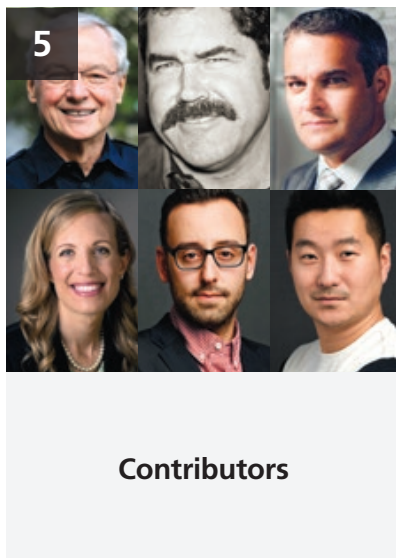
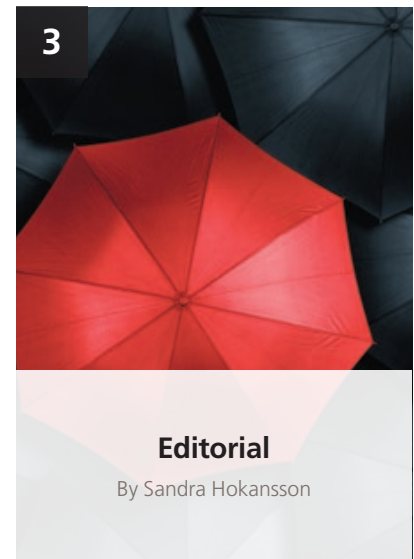


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# Lēad

## Issue 15



Lead™

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Lead™

As the barriers between the public and the inner workings of organizations come down, propositions associated with branding must be backed up by reality...”



**Sandra Hokansson**  
President and Country Manager  
Adecco Employment Services Limited

**E**FFECTIVE RECRUITMENT BRANDING has always been a necessary component of the recruitment process because it helps organizations ensure that they can attract the quality talent they need to compete in today’s marketplace. However, recruitment branding is now more strategic than ever with many campaigns targeting specific demographics and incorporating the cultural sensitivities necessary for success on a global scale. Furthermore, social media’s impact on recruitment branding should not be underestimated; the speed at which positive and negative feedback is generated can be disorienting, underscoring the need for thoughtful applicant, candidate, and employee engagement.

As the barriers between the public and the inner workings of organizations come down, propositions associated with branding must be backed up by reality – by far the more significant side of the recruitment branding equation. What employees experience once onboarded is unquestionably more important than what they are *told* they will experience. If an organization is successful at attracting quality talent but then does not actually foster an employee value proposition that matches the recruitment brand it

projects, the brand, not to mention the organization itself, will be negatively impacted. An organization is most successful at creating sustainable brand value when their value proposition, which is quantifiable, is showcased by their brand.

At Adecco our culture is based on our values and we strive to keep this top of mind in all that we do. We participate in the Great Place to Work® survey each year to quantify our journey and drive us to improve the everyday experiences of our employees. Validating our brand is an ongoing journey and one that our employees engage in collectively.

In this edition of *Lēad*, you will find several great examples of successful branding and employee value propositions from FUSE Marketing Group, Frank & Oak, and Movember Canada. Furthermore, Rubin Thomlinson LLP highlights the legal implications that can arise when a brand proposition and reality are out of sync, while Dr. Peter Andersen opens our eyes to how disruptive technology can alter an organization’s brand proposition forever.

We hope you enjoy this edition of *Lēad*. ■



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## Contributors

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**PETER ANDERSEN, PhD** Economic Forecaster  
Andersen Economic Research Inc.

Peter Andersen is an independent consulting economist specializing in applied economic forecasting. He obtained his doctorate in economics from Harvard University. Peter provides strategic economic advice to management through boardroom meetings, video conferencing, economic reports, email commentary, and telephone calls. He is a regular keynote speaker at industry conferences in Canada and the United States. In addition, Peter taught financial economics as well as money and banking at the University of Texas at Austin from 2001 to 2010.



**PETE BOMBACI**, Country Director  
Movember Canada

Pete Bombaci is a veteran of the hospitality and alcohol industry having worked for over 20 years in sales, trade marketing, and brand development. Prior to joining Movember, Pete led his own consulting firm where he helped clients understand that delivering remarkable experiences every day is key to building a strong brand. As Canadian Country Director of Movember, a global charity supporting men's health, Pete focuses on growing, grooming, and thanking the Movember community across the country throughout the year by working with community groups, businesses, men's health partners, and many others to help create their Movember journey. Pete has a passion for making a difference in the world and takes pride in helping Canadian Mo Bros and Mo Sistas who share this conviction.



**STEPHEN BROWN**, President, Partner  
FUSE Marketing Group

A former account director and vice-president of client services, Stephen Brown co-founded in 2003 FUSE Marketing Group, which leverages data-driven research and insights to craft innovative and effective marketing campaigns for some of Canada's best-known brands, bringing their businesses to new heights. Since forming FUSE, Stephen has launched four more marketing companies. Additionally, Stephen is a member of the Young Presidents Organization, he sits on the board of directors for the Canadian Marketing Association (CMA), he is the master of ceremonies for the CMA Awards, and was the chairperson for both the CMA's National Convention and Fashion Cares, Canada's largest HIV/AIDS fundraiser.



**PATRIZIA PICCOLO, BA, LLB** Partner  
Rubin Thomlinson LLP

Patrizia Piccolo is a partner with Rubin Thomlinson LLP, a boutique law firm specializing in employment law and human rights issues. Patrizia is a trusted advisor to senior executives in transition, and provides strategic advice to both large and small employers and their human resources and management teams. Whether advising an employee or an employer, Patrizia's practice covers all aspects of the employment relationship from hiring, performance management and workplace restructuring, to termination advice. Patrizia also advises employers on employment-related regulatory issues, including *Employment Standards Act*, *Human Rights Act*, *Labour Relations Act*, and *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act* compliance.



**HICHAM RATNANI**, Co-founder, COO  
Frank & Oak

As the co-founder and COO of menswear e-tailer, Frank & Oak, Hicham leads the brand's operations, logistics, technology, and member services teams. He prides himself on being a "numbers guy" who uses data intelligence to improve the customer experience, but is also a team leader and motivator, creating company culture behind the scenes. After graduating from McGill with a bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering, Hicham became a technology strategist at Deloitte. He later left his corporate life to co-found Frank & Oak. In just two short years, he's successfully transformed the online brand and retailer into a menswear destination for the digital generation.

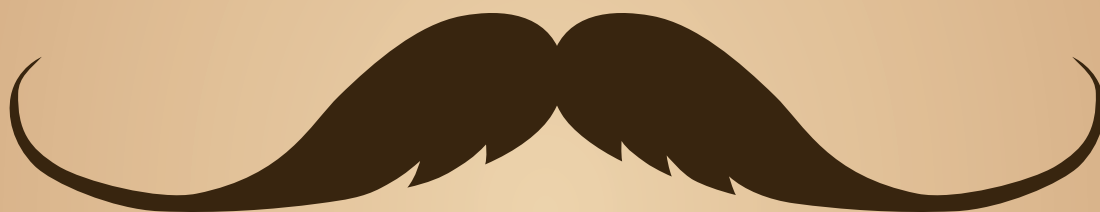


**ETHAN SONG**, Co-founder, CEO, Creative Director  
Frank & Oak

As co-founder, CEO, and creative director of menswear e-tailer, Frank & Oak, Ethan enhances everything customer-facing, including the product, marketing campaigns, and online shopping experience. Originally from China, Ethan has worked in locations all over the world, including Shanghai, Paris, and Vancouver. He holds a bachelor's degree in Computer and Electrical Engineering from the University of British Columbia and professionally performed and studied drama and dance for several years. In 2012, he co-founded Frank & Oak to revolutionize the traditional retail model and offer men the simplest way to shop online. Ethan's entrepreneurial spirit and passion for both the arts and sciences make him a successful driving force behind the innovative brand.



# *Engaging the Changing World of Work*



**With Pete Bombaci**

**A**CCORDING TO A 2012 STUDY conducted at the University of Calgary\*, the amount of charities in Canada increased by about 21% between 1992 and 2008, while the amount of foundations almost doubled. The same study also reports that, of those many organizations, health-related charities made up only 6% of the charities in Canada in 2008, while health-related foundations made up only 14% of all Canadian foundations. What these statistics show us is an increasingly competitive Canadian non-profit market; a market that Movember – the 2004 brainchild of a few Australians that has prompted men around the world to grow moustaches every November to raise money for prostate cancer, testicular cancer, and men’s mental health – boldly entered in 2007.

Back then, with just 2,400 Canadian participants (called “Mo Bros” and “Mo Sistas”), Movember raised just over half a million dollars. A mere eight years later, the country boasts 173,000 Mo Bros and Mo Sistas who last year alone raised

\$32 million CAD, further solidifying Canada’s place as one of the top fundraising Movember countries in the world. “To date, Movember Canada has raised over \$149 million CAD, and that’s an outstanding amount that we are very proud of and all made possible by our passionate Mo Bros and Mo Sistas across the country,” says Pete Bombaci, Canadian Country Director of Movember and (so far) six-time Mo Bro.

When asked about why he thinks the movement has become so successful in Canada, Bombaci says it’s got a lot to do with the fun of it. “I think it’s the humour in it; the irreverence. Canadians enjoy poking fun at one another, and when you match that with such incredible causes, it’s hard to not get involved. The simple act of growing a moustache has created a community that is truly making an impact on men’s health.”

The movement’s distinct branding reinforces that same humour and irreverence. The Movember website ([www.movember.com](http://www.movember.com)),

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\* Payne, Abigail. Changing Landscapes for Charities in Canada: Where Should We Go? Calgary: The School of Public Policy, University of Calgary, 2012.



“...Movember’s marketing in Canada and around the world has transcended the traditional strategies used by many other fundraising organizations...”

featuring a simple yet striking black-and-white motif unabashedly plastered with assertive typefaces and feral iconography, simultaneously parodies and pays homage to old-fashioned machismo, not unlike one who sports an early twentieth-century handlebar or twirly moustache in the early twenty-first century. “Movember’s a global brand, so our campaign theme is identical in all 21 countries we operate, but each year we strive to change, so any moustache style stands a chance at the spotlight.”

Of course, it’s all in good fun, and that’s exactly why Movember’s marketing in Canada and around the world has transcended the traditional strategies used by many other fundraising organizations: it turns men into walking, talking billboards for men’s health, and they are literally able to start conversations that get men to open up about their health. As Bombaci says, “With all the funds that we raise, if we can’t get a man to go to the doctor when he’s in need or when he’s feeling under the weather, then all the programs and all the research are for naught.”

But it’s more than just the fun that attracts people to Movember. According to Bombaci, Movember’s success is not only reflective of Canadian society, but of evolving societal values everywhere Movember has taken root (pun intended) – and those changes, along with a unique and relevant branding strategy, are crucial to attracting more Mo Bros and Mo Sistas as well as the right talent to lead the campaign year after year. “I think the world is changing,” says Bombaci, “and I think more people than ever before are looking for jobs that have a purpose. They want to feel that they’re making a difference and contributing to something that’s having an impact. When it comes to hiring, we look for passionate people who truly want to stand up and make a difference in the world.”

Finding the right people, especially to be employees, is particularly important. When asked about the demographics Movember tends to attract, one might expect Bombaci to answer that it’s primarily Generation Y, who are by many accounts considered the most socially conscious generation to date. However, according to Bombaci, Movember transcends age groups as much as it transcends borders. “It’s more about psychographics than demo-

graphics,” he says. “We’re not only looking for people with the skills to own the challenging roles we have, but also the right personality, drive, and commitment to get the job done – and more importantly, a desire to make a difference.”

When it comes to brainstorming those local strategies that continually push Movember to engage with other organizations, Bombaci says, “In Canada, it’s about identifying various communities that are important. The oil and gas industry, for example, loves to have a little camaraderie, so we’ve run online Movember Network Challenges, like the Oil Rig Rumble. From campuses to the insurance industry to hockey, we’ve created fun and engaging Network Challenges for all the communities we are highly engaged with.”

Regarding the team’s engagement in planning, Bombaci comments that ideas from everyone, regardless of their departmental function, are most welcome. “We’re a small, tight-knit organization, so everybody has an opportunity for input. Our open forum team meetings allow everyone to contribute. The minute a campaign ends, we go straight into planning for next year, which is a collaborative process that reflects on the last campaign and informs how we can do better.”

Such inclusiveness is not only a staple of Bombaci’s leadership style, but also of Movember Canada’s employee value proposition/ employer branding proposition – and it, along with an ingenious branding strategy and customized Canadian outreach efforts, is a cornerstone of the team’s success. “I will say that my philosophy in business is about treating your staff with respect and empowering them to come to work motivated every day so that they give you their best,” says Bombaci. “The learning I’ve had as a leader working in organizations and speaking with HR people over the last 20 years of my career has provided me with great guidance on how to build an organization and how to lead a team. As a result, there’s always a little bit of HR in everything that I do.” ■









# WEARING CORPORATE CULTURE ON THEIR SLEEVES

An Interview with Hicham Ratnani and Ethan Song



Boasting more than 100 employees – and growing – after just two years in business, Montreal-based menswear company, Frank & Oak, has made amazing headway in changing how men shop for their clothes. Every month, the company website features new, on-trend clothing and accessories, which Frank & Oak itself designs and manufactures. This stunning startup success all began with co-founders Hicham Ratnani and Ethan Song, who sat down with Adecco to discuss how they first acquired the employees they needed to flourish, how their workforce needs continue to evolve, and what they do to adapt to those changes.

*When you first started the company, did you have a clear idea of the type of people you wanted on your team? If so, how did you go about finding them?*

**E.S.:** For us, the company is about creativity and technology, and we wanted people who had an interest in both. So, that was a clear guideline for us. We started with zero employees, and then grew to two, then to 10. Most of the time that growth occurred because of community connections, whether through Montreal's creative agency community or the startup community.

*Was it initially difficult attracting or finding the type of people you needed?*

**H.R.:** Finding the right mix is tough, which is why you have to hire slow and really look at referrals. It's great when people in the company bring in their friends because there's a very high likelihood that they will be a good fit and we can grow from there. I would say that our first 10 to 20 employees were all friends of friends, and we had tremendous chemistry because of that. At the beginning, there would be days where you're coding all day and tagging boxes all night, so it's important to have a cohesive team.

*What were some of your most intense growing pains?*

**E.S.:** Early on, our main challenge was attracting people. As a startup, you have to sell people on the dream and the vision. But as you grow, your challenges change. As we grew, we realized that it's easier to maintain a company culture on a smaller scale. The bigger you get, the more you have to decide between hiring for culture or strictly for skill. Ideally, you want to find both.

*Do you feel that you've been able to maintain that sort of culture since the beginning or has it shifted over time?*

**H.R.:** Our culture is certainly different now because we have over 100 people, but we still have most of the people that have

been here from the early days. We also have a very specific onboarding process, which is a three- to four-month journey during which the new hires meet with our HR person every week. The technical onboarding side is there, obviously, but we mostly concentrate on the cultural side. I personally run a two-hour cultural onboarding session where we go through the history of the company and talk about some of the highs and lows, as well as what makes us a special and fun place to work. And then I'll bring in our first five or six employees to share their favourite stories about Frank & Oak. This is very powerful because you have somebody else there to demonstrate the reality: a voice for what it was like in the trenches of the early days. I believe those stories speak to where we come from and, ultimately, it empowers the current employees and new hires because it makes them say, "Yeah, I can do this. I can contribute and maybe even create 100 more jobs here because I know I have the power to do so at Frank & Oak." We also make sure that we are always empowering our team. We have a really open and transparent dialogue with each of them, and we let them know that they can make a difference.

*Do you follow the same hiring process for all hires?*

**E.S.:** We have definitely added more steps to our hiring process recently because our team has grown, and we are now hiring for more senior roles. Even during the hiring process, we spend a lot of time on the Frank & Oak culture, which I believe is one of our main differentiators. We break down the process into three parts: the first part is an interview to assess the right experience and the right alignment of skills; the second part deals mostly with culture – we bring in other members of the team to bounce around ideas with the person to see how they integrate and whether they're the right fit; and the final stage is a test of sorts – a technical test for programmers or a design test for graphic designers, etcetera. We believe it's important to challenge candidates on their hard skills too.



“COMMUNICATING OUR CULTURE IS DEFINITELY SOMETHING WE CONSISTENTLY BUILD UPON, WHICH IS WHY WE EMPHASIZE IT SO MUCH DURING OUR ONBOARDING PROCESS.”

*How do prospective employees learn about Frank & Oak as an employer?*

**H.R.:** Prospective employees learn about us through a variety of methods. Often they're clients. Actually, most of the people who started working with us in the beginning were clients, which is humbling because it means that they wanted to be a part of the company beyond being clients, and we love that. The people who apply to us are people who think we have the right branding, the right approach, and who think we do things that are aligned with their values.

*You speak a lot about developing your culture. Did you have a clear idea about the type of culture you hoped to develop?*

**E.S.:** Absolutely. That's extremely important to us. We're definitely looking for people who want to be great – not just good. But beyond that, what I believe is the most important aspect of our culture is multi-disciplinary collaboration. It is essential that our technology team is interested in sitting down with our design team, and that our business team has discussions with our technology team so that nobody is working in a “silo”. Having everyone work on the same floor ensures no one is separated. We hire people who also have this vision of inclusiveness.

*Do you feel that you base some of your strategies on the type of employees you have?*

**H.R.:** The right strategy isn't necessarily A or B, but usually something in the middle. We think we have great people and try our best to foster their talents. If there's someone with a particular interest, we'll try to foster it. At the same time, our vision is shared, and everyone contributes to our strategies. For example, when we

created our technological roadmap for the next three quarters, we involved everyone – every person had a say. We then presented the final plan and everybody signed off on it.

*Do you feel your culture communicates itself, or do you have to reiterate your culture to employees?*

**E.S.:** Communicating our culture is definitely something we consistently build upon, which is why we emphasize it so much during our onboarding process. The way we create social moments is definitely something that needs to be maintained because in a typical work environment, people naturally stick to where they're most comfortable. You need to be able to facilitate the kind of dialogue and openness we aspire to.

*Looking back, is your current direction still aligned with your initial mission?*

**H.R.:** Absolutely. It's fun to step back and look at our beginnings and our initial challenges. But our goal remains the same: to help a generation of men dress and live well, and to make a lasting impact on society.

*Now that you're two years in, do you feel you have a clear vision of where you're heading?*

**E.S.:** We're always evolving, and our goal is to build a global business that's anchored here in Montreal. And to do that, we need the best people who want to help us achieve that goal. We develop the vision and hire according to that vision. ■

The background image is a photograph of industrial machinery, likely a manufacturing or assembly line, with a strong orange color overlay. The machinery features various components such as rollers, guides, and structural frames, arranged in a perspective that leads the eye from the foreground into the background.

# Disruptive Technologies and Future Staffing Needs

By Peter Andersen, PhD



*“Job applicants have a responsibility to research and understand the ways that companies operate before deciding whether they have the personality make-up that would be a good fit.”*

**N**EW EMPLOYEES BRING SKILLS, aptitude and experience to companies, and in exchange, they are offered incentives to come on board. A company's culture is likely to be a key attraction for new hires. If applicants find that the company's approach to doing business suits their personal profile, a strong attraction can be created at the outset. This can be reinforced by an outline of potential career growth within the organization. Such incentives are more effective than entry-level salary and benefits.

However, there needs to be a close alignment of expectations and reality for job applicants and employers. For example, not all new employees with high-level technical skills will be a perfect fit for all technology companies. Corporate cultures can be vastly different with different histories, core values, and management styles. The same applies for companies in any industry.

Job applicants have a responsibility to research and understand the ways that companies operate before deciding whether they have the personality make-up that would be a good fit. Otherwise, they could find themselves wasting a year or two of their time, as well as the employer's, before they move on.

In addition, the hiring company needs to be acutely selective in identifying exactly the kinds of people that they are looking for. Doing so will help bridge the gap between expectations and performance. Such practices appear to be more common today. Job market data shows a growing discrepancy between job vacancies and actual hiring. The implication is that companies are being much more careful in their selection procedures.

However, for many companies, events are moving so quickly today that it is difficult to determine where things are headed and how they'll look five to 10 years from now. It is therefore not easy for companies to identify what their staffing needs will be in the not-too-distant future. The end result is that it may be difficult for many companies to live up to the employer reputation that they would like to present.

This difficulty has arisen because innovation has taken on such importance in a world of intensified competition. Clayton Christensen's concept of the innovator's dilemma is a powerful warning of the disruption and opportunity presented by innovation. Companies that decide to resist disruptive technology – innovations that disrupt existing markets, even creating new ones, by displacing older technologies – because they want to avoid undermining their core business are at risk of falling behind the needs of tomorrow's customers.\*

The process of such technological change can be either discontinuous or continuing. The organizational changes that are produced are more than just the result of technology itself. The fundamental driver is always found in its application – the manner in which technology is applied, which is highly unpredictable. It can take decades before a new technology can be effectively put into application. However, in some instances, advances elsewhere will have an overnight effect on what is possible. The advent of cloud computing is an example of such an accelerator. In the end, technology has to be profitable in order to be disruptive. Once profitable, technological innovation will then change companies, industries, markets, and the economy itself in fundamental ways.

The job market therefore faces fundamental adjustments. Disruptive innovation will play an economic role sooner than you expect. It will be a powerful force this decade in North America. An evolution in assembly line production is already underway as a result of 3D printing. The next phase will be industrial-grade systems to produce metal parts. In addition, advanced robotics will provide the dexterity and intelligence to substitute “low wage” equipment for people. The capital costs of robots have declined to the point where their equivalent wage per hour is becoming competitive with low wage developing countries. North American manufacturing will become more competitive as distance and time become more important issues for design, engineering, production, and marketing. ■

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\* The Innovator's Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail, Clayton M. Christensen, Harvard Business Review Press, 1997.



# Selling a Bill of Goods

HOW BRAND MISREPRESENTATION CAN LEAD TO LEGAL LIABILITY FOR EMPLOYERS

By Patrizia Piccolo, BA, LLB

“EMPLOYER BRANDING IS THE PERCEPTION of qualities that make a company a desirable place to work. Understanding the importance of internal and external employer branding is pivotal in recruiting and retaining top talent”.<sup>1</sup>

## When Misrepresentations about Employer Brand Occur

Recently, I had the pleasure of meeting some individuals who were once very energetic, enthusiastic, creative, driven, and successful. They were pleased with the positions they were in and on an upward trajectory in their careers. As part of that upward trajectory, they had been identified as excellent candidates for “better”, “more financially rewarding,” and “more fulfilling” positions. In fact, they had accepted positions with what they *thought* were the crème de la crème of organizations.

Unfortunately, the purpose of my meetings with these individuals was to discuss why they have lost their energy, enthusiasm, creativity, and drive, and to discuss the legal issues and remedies that may arise from their situations. They brought to my attention the discussions they engaged in when conducting their due diligence research into the companies that were wooing them. Those discussions typically included promises of greater pay. However, due to the modern practice of impressing upon potential employees the wonderful experience associated with an employer’s brand, the

discussions often also revolved around: what makes the company different from others; what a candidate can expect to learn there; the work-life support the company offers; how a candidate will be treated by their manager, their co-workers, the owners, and others in the work environment; the kinds of projects they would be working on; and the likelihood of long-term employment with the organization.

When individuals are identified as desirable candidates, sometimes employers tailor their brand to entice those individuals into an employment relationship. And sometimes, when such enticement is successful, the individual discovers that the representations made were false. In severe cases, the employee discovers that when the representations were made, the employer knew that what they were saying was false. From a human resources perspective, such misrepresentations can produce disgruntled employees who underperform. The individual may even immediately start searching for a different position (perhaps even on company time), and they will also likely seek legal counsel and recourse.

## Legal Recourse for Misrepresentations about Employer Brand

Legal recourse against employers can include claims of constructive dismissal and negligent misrepresentation. The law, with respect to the tort of negligent misrepresentation, is described



“...employer brand is synonymous with employer reputation.”

in a 1993 Supreme Court decision<sup>2</sup> where the judge established a five-part test as follows:

1. There must be a duty of care based on a “special relationship” between the representor and the representee;
2. The representation in question must be untrue, inaccurate or misleading;
3. The representor must have acted negligently in making the misrepresentation;
4. The representee must have relied in a reasonable manner, on the negligent misrepresentation;
5. The reliance must have been detrimental to the representee in the sense that damages resulted.

The case involved negligent misrepresentations made by an employer (an entity who was in a “special relationship” with the potential employee) to induce a person to leave secure employment and join their employ. The plaintiff, a chartered accountant, applied for a position with the defendant to develop a particular line of software and was told that the project was a major one for which the staff would double. However, the plaintiff was not told that there was no guaranteed funding or that the position was subject to budgetary approval. Two weeks after the plaintiff started, the defendant’s management team considered and rejected the funding proposal. The plaintiff received notice of termination in due course. They were later awarded damages for negligent misrepresentation.

Other notable instances of negligent misrepresentation include a case in which a company president gave inaccurate and misleading projections that the plaintiff relied upon in deciding to join the company<sup>3</sup>, and a case in which an employer’s failure to disclose highly relevant information about the prospects of a thoracic surgery practice cast doubt on representations made to the plaintiff.<sup>4</sup>

## Liability Arising From Negligent Misrepresentation

In yet another notable case regarding negligent misrepresentation<sup>5</sup>, the Supreme Court of Canada discussed the measure of damages in negligent misrepresentation:

“The plaintiff seeking damages in an action for negligent misrepresentation is entitled to be put in the position he or she would have been in if the misrepresentation had not been made”.

In other words, when a negligent misrepresentation induces a candidate into employment, their position is usually that, had it not been for the negligent misrepresentation, they would not have entered into the employment relationship. For example, an employee could argue that they would have remained with their previous employer and earned a bonus or other incentive. Such rewards are compensation that they forewent because of their current employer’s misrepresentation, thereby entitling them to damages. Also, if a candidate moved to accept employment by an employer who misrepresented themselves, the employer would be responsible for the costs incurred by the employee. Damages awarded against employers in these situations can be significant.

## The Takeaway

As noted above, “Employer branding is the perception of qualities that make a company a desirable place to work.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, employer brand is synonymous with employer reputation. If the result of employee deception (the deception being the falsities about the workplace or the work) is a very costly, very public lawsuit alleging negligent misrepresentation by an employer, the employer’s entire branding strategy is, in my opinion, all for naught.

Therefore, the key for employers to avoid the negative impact of negligent brand misrepresentation is to present themselves in the most *accurate* light possible; not to sell a bill of goods. ■

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<sup>1</sup> Haldemann, Alexander PhD and Eiselin, Lucas – cited in: Employer Branding: Winning the Race for the Right People by Molly Davis – June 25, 2013 – published on the Meta Thinking website [www.metadesign.com](http://www.metadesign.com)  
<sup>2</sup> Queen v. Cognos Inc., [1993] 1 SCR 87  
<sup>3</sup> Steer v. Aerovox, 1984 49 (NS SC) (Can LII)  
<sup>4</sup> Khan v. Vernon Jubilee Hospital, 2008 BCSC 1637 (Can LII)  
<sup>5</sup> Rainbow Industrial Caterers v. Canadian National Railway Co., [1991] 3 S.C.R.3 – paragraph 20  
<sup>6</sup> Haldemann, Alexander PhD and Eiselin, Lucas – cited in: Employer Branding: Winning the Race for the Right People by Molly Davis – June 25, 2013 - published on the Meta Thinking website [www.metadesign.com](http://www.metadesign.com)

# CREATING THE VIBE TO THRIVE

By Stephen Brown

As the president of the Toronto-based brand activation agency, FUSE Marketing Group, Stephen Brown has a unique perspective on employee value proposition and employer brand proposition. After all, how many organizations out there hold axe-throwing contests to boost employee morale? Drawing from his experiences, Stephen explains how attracting creative thinkers is about more than having an exciting brand – although, that is definitely important. Rather, it's about building a creative-friendly culture on a foundation of hard-nosed facts and realistic goals.

**W**HEN I FIRST STARTED OUT IN MARKETING, I was pretty green. Fresh out of university, interviewing at agencies, I didn't have the "top factors" for employee satisfaction in mind, such as job security, opportunity for advancement, and proper wages to name a few. I just wanted a job. But there was one thing I was keenly aware of; something that can be sensed from the reception desk all the way up to the president's office: vibe.

I didn't know it at the time, but what I was feeling was essentially an agency's culture. It, above everything else, can be the deciding factor in an organization's ability to attract great talent and produce great work.

At 11 years old, my agency, FUSE Marketing Group, is still a young, vibrant, and passionate place to be. That kind of atmosphere is something our management team has nurtured from the first day we opened our doors. It's something we actively pursue to this day, and it can be read in the core values we developed collectively: passion, achievement, integrity, collaboration, and courage, or "PAICC" (pronounced "pace") for short.

PAICC is about people. After all, in the marketing industry every success is 100% about people. That's why you want the best, most talented, and most passionate people you can find – or why you want them to find you. Ultimately, if we can't attract the very best, we can't be the very best.



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With that said, championing culture can seem a little counterintuitive to our clients. While we want prospective employees to know about our internal culture, our outward-facing proposition to clients can appear to be something else altogether. We’re in a unique space. We provide 360 degrees of thinking, which means we compete against ad agencies, digital agencies, customer relationship management shops, and more. Additionally, our focus is on data, insights, and results. So the question we always ask is, *How do you attract creative thinkers – be they a digital strategist, account director, or junior writer – when your business is based on pragmatics, such as analysis and measurement?*

The truth is that, to keep your people and your clients happy, you have to be both creative and pragmatic. In fact, the pragmatic supports the creative. This kind of thinking ensures that you’re delivering big ideas *and* results. We sum this approach up in our mantra, *Fearless thinking*. We find that before you can even get to the big idea, you have to see the big picture. With data-driven research and insights, you’re freed from the unknown and empowered with unwavering clarity. What it comes down to is this: when you see everything, you fear nothing. Attracting, supporting, and nurturing the individuals who help us achieve fearlessness brings us back to our culture – our vibe. That’s why we provide a work environment that breeds curiosity and creativity as well as a willingness to root everything in data. How do we do that?

It begins with our space. We’re fortunate to work in a brick-and-mortar location in the Fashion District of Toronto. If you want a workspace with character, the Fashion District is the place to be. The open concept layouts found within its former clothing factories encourage collaboration, which is why we invest heavily in our surroundings. We’ve even gone so far as to shut down the agency for half a day to ensure every member of FUSE can attend offsite training sessions in brainstorming and ideation techniques. These sessions have resulted in tangible and actionable solutions for both clients and potential clients.

We also maintain a “work hard, play hard” mentality. We regularly schedule onsite and offsite events that encourage participation and interaction. Sometimes they involve our work and the marketing industry; sometimes they’re simply fun ways to strengthen our team. Here are a few examples from the past year:

- Tailgate Party – The best way to get psyched about a Blue Jays game.
- Axe Throwing – Just what it sounds like. A friendly competition of throwing axes at wooden targets – not each other, of course.
- Mechanical Bull Riding – Actually, our Christmas party. Nothing celebrates the season like beer and bruises.
- Show and Tell – A chance to share the best and brightest discovery you’ve made in our industry.
- Monday AM Status – A first-hand account of what’s happening at the agency each week.
- President’s House BBQs – What better way to celebrate our successes over four months?
- Tuesday Games Night – Old-school board games to stretch our minds and skills in new ways.

Thanks to our approach, we have a remarkably low turnover rate and news of how we treat our employees has spread by word-of-mouth, attracting some of our best talent. In fact, 90% of all of our hires come from referrals. When you love the place you work, you want friends and colleagues to know about it, and better yet, you want them to experience it for themselves. (The \$1,500 finder’s fee we offer doesn’t hurt, either.)

We also attract talent through social media. Every event is photographed and posted to our Facebook and Twitter accounts as well as to our website, allowing us to show the marketing community what it’s like to work at FUSE.

Culture – healthy, collaborative, and engaging – is crucial to attracting talent, both raw and refined. It allows our people to pull evermore original ideas from the ether while keeping their proverbial feet planted firmly on the ground, rooted in what’s real about the market, about our clients, and about our industry. And this culture gives off a vibe – one you can feel from the reception desk up to the president’s office. ■



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