

# Why you shouldn't retrench employer branding during downsizing

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Notwithstanding the economic downturn and inflationary climate, it is a given that companies continue to positively market, advertise and sell their products and services. They acknowledge that this is necessary to maintain their brand awareness, attract customers and stand apart from their competition. Investing in recruitment marketing and employer branding should be considered as no different, yet it is.



Image source: Mbhd Khairil – [123RF.com](https://123RF.com)

HR departments are often the first to experience budget cuts, with leaders finding it difficult to justify investing in their employer brands and recruitment marketing at a time when they are experiencing layoffs and job freezes.

Why should one's employer brand marketing be any different to consumer brand marketing? Surely your people are the trusted force behind driving your business objectives, sales, profits and existence?

Think again before you consider pulling the plug on your employer branding and marketing budget, as I highlight the following:

## 1. Remaining employees are not unaffected

Upon companies laying off employees, the people who are left behind do not come off lightly. In fact, they bear the repercussions of having possibly lost long-standing team members and/or leaders with whom they might've built solid working and personal relations.

This can obviously have an enormous impact on the moral, motivation, engagement and working relations between your workforce and the business. At the same time, restructures might lead to remaining employees bearing the brunt of increased workloads, additional imposed expectations, extra hours, and even the deviation and/or retraction of remote, hybrid and flexible arrangements.

A presenter at a recent networking function that I attended used a very fitting analogy. She relayed her story of having to lay off employees and managing the aftershock, which she confirmed felt like someone having come out of ICU and needing to get healthy again.

The chances of your outgoing and remaining employees questioning the levels of trust and your promises of not living up to your values, is also a reality. Without having control over your external communication channels, talent is free to post whatever they perceive, believe and experience. This can span across multiple channels from review sites eg. Glassdoor, Google, Indeed etc. or social media platforms ie. LinkedIn, Facebook, Tiktok, Instagram etc.



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## 2. Some considerations to how leaders can positively dial up on internalising their employer brand marketing

- **Appoint an impartial party to conduct an employee climate survey** to gauge and recommend on how best to rebuild, engage, communicate and nurture a damaged value system and exchange.
- **Internal communication strategy:** Leaders will build trust and strengthen the company's internal credibility through dialling up on transparent communications. Whilst sometimes vulnerable, bold and authentic articulation of what steps are being taken to rebuild organisational culture, and values (both confirmed and aspirational) will go a long way. Don't allow employees to rely on their own perceptions and hearsay when you can positively shape your communications.
- **Refuel and internalise the company's value proposition:** Check in that employees remain aligned to the company's purpose, culture and value exchange in order to galvanise (retain) your highly skilled talent that might still feel vulnerable and tempted to move if approached with a great offer.
- **Employee generated content:** The power rests with the collective, human voice of employees. Dial up on employee communications and engagement through encouraging the sharing of employee generated activity, authentic content and honest stories to revitalise and build credibility. This will positively inform and shape a fragmented talent brand.
- **Activate an external employer brand and marketing communications plan** to instil credibility and inform and outline the renewed employer brand message to counteract possible negative external talent marketplace perceptions. This will keep your passive audience well-informed, and ready to apply when things do pick up and you are ready to recruit again. Talent leaders can be on the front foot through building a committed talent pipeline for the future ahead of your talent competitors.

“ *"Your employer brand is not what you say it is, it's what your employees say it is - and they're more likely to speak up in tough times. Invest in them, and they'll invest in you, no matter the economic climate."* - Kirsten Davidson, chief communications officer at Glassdoor. ”

## 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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