

Employer Branding and Multiple Identities in the Hotel Industry

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Service employees have long been seen as the interface between an organisation and its customers. This is particularly the case in the hospitality industry where the actions of the employees are often seen as the manifestation of the brand and the major contributor to the reputation of a hotel. Employees have become the most valuable asset of hotel companies, a company's success will depend greatly on building a work environment that attracts, meets and exceeds employees' expectations. (Franek and Vecera, 2008).

Corporate brand management requires the total commitment of all staff within an organisation (Balmer, 2001) to deliver the brand promise to the stakeholders and create a strong corporate reputation. Employer branding is key to this commitment and is an increasingly important topic for research and practice in multinational enterprises because it plays directly into the corporate reputation, talent management and employee engagement agendas (Martin et al. 2011). In particular employer branding can play a strategic role in 'future-proofing' corporate reputations (Martin 2009; Burke et al. 2011).

In the hotel industry, employer branding is more complex than in most other types of organisation as employees are often performing their work tasks under the direction of three different stakeholder groups. There is the hotel brand such as Hilton or Holiday Inn involved in setting the brand standards and marketing the hotels; the management company retained by the property owners to run the hotel and employ the staff; and finally there are the property owners. Corporate reputation is important to all three but particularly to the hotel brands and the bigger management companies that manage many hotels.

This raises questions as to who do the hotel employees identify with and which corporate identity is important for recruitment and does this alter once they are employed. A programme of qualitative research was undertaken with hotel brand managers, management company executives, hotel general managers and hotel employees to explore this further.

The research found that the corporate reputation of the management company and to a lesser extent, the property owner was critical to the management team when considering job opportunities. Whereas, lower level employees were more concerned about the corporate

reputation of the hotel brand when joining the organisation with retention being influenced more by the reputation of the management company.

The hotel brands build their “employer reputation” around tangible cues such as: the employee travel programme; a distinctive logo; training programmes; reward programmes; career development portals. Whereas the “employer reputation” of the management company are built around a more “local” personal culture revolving around the general manager and his support team. Overall success is dependent on the alignment of the vision and values of brand, management company and property owner.

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