

Candidates, Consumers And Your Global Brand

A worldwide survey into the impact of the
candidate experience on consumer preferences



Contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Moments of truth in the employment lifecycle
- 4 Background and methodology
- 5 Candidates as consumers: considering the full employment lifecycle
- 8 The need to ensure a positive brand experience
- 9 The industry expert's viewpoint
- 10 Social media multiplies brand impact
- 12 What the experts say
- 13 Candidate acceptance of social media in recruitment
- 15 Conclusion and recommendations
- 17 Socialize, appropriately.

Introduction

Despite the global downturn of recent years, leading organizations are still competing for the best talent around the world. Indeed, it is widely recognized that the need to attract the best skills is as urgent as ever, as blue-chip firms reposition themselves in their emergence from the recession.

Employers that are succeeding in this 'war for talent' recognize the importance of proactively maintaining a well-managed and consistently positive employer brand, as the most talented individuals cherry pick the companies they would like to work for. And the war for talent has not ceased. Deloitte's recent Talent Edge 2020 study - a survey of more than 350 employees at large companies - found that nearly two in three were 'actively testing' the job market.

But as we understand more about how an organization's brand develops, it has become clear that corporate reputations are formed over a multitude of touch points with consumers, current employees and jobseekers alike.

For multinational organizations working across multiple regions there is the added complication that while some rules of best practice may apply throughout the world, there are also cultural differences to consider. Understanding these differences and reacting accordingly can help organizations to not only appeal to the best and brightest talent across the globe, but also to ensure that whenever these individuals come into contact with an organization its corporate brand as well as its employer value proposition are reinforced. Our research shows how this can maximize bottom-line profitability for corporations across all industries - but **only when done effectively**. Get it wrong, or be ineffective, and corporations incur real risks.

Moments of truth in the employment lifecycle

One of the most direct and meaningful contact points between any individual and a brand (beyond employment itself) is, of course, the recruitment and selection process. It represents an interesting 'sliding door', a moment of transition in which an existing or potential customer is in the early stages of becoming part of the brand itself. It is often an emotive experience for candidates and an opportunity for employers to demonstrate the brand values they espouse.

Unfortunately, this essential part of the employee experience is all-too-often overlooked, or poorly ranked as a component of the wider business strategy. Yet the manner in which candidates are treated throughout the course of their application, and the level of attention given to important cultural conventions – especially at a local level - can significantly influence whether they choose to take up employment with an organization.

However, there is a further unseen factor. Our research reveals this brief initial experience greatly influences the candidate's on-going attitude in context of their relationship with the company as a consumer or as a business buyer.



If a candidate's experience is negative, regardless of whether the candidate's application is successful or unsuccessful, organizations do not just risk alienating one customer – they also risk losing a potential 'evangelist' of the company's products or services. Our research shows a readiness on the part of candidates from all regions to tell their story to contacts in their personal and professional networks – and this has been exacerbated by the ubiquitous nature of social media, which gives users the ability to communicate bad news quickly, and to a high number of people with ease.

In this way, one of the most vital skills for the expert sourcer, recruiter, hiring manager or HR professional is understanding the crucial role social media now plays in recruitment and corporate reputation across different local markets.

It is important to consider all touch points within the employee lifecycle when thinking about brand impact on candidates.

Background and methodology

The statistics referenced in this paper form the results of research conducted by Alexander Mann Solutions in late 2010.

The research, conducted as a survey, aimed to establish global views on candidate and employee experiences and the correlation of subsequent impact on brand and consumer activity

Sample Size

Findings are based on answers from **540 respondents**

Location

Respondents were located in the **United Kingdom** (36 per cent), the **United States** (29 per cent) and **China** (35 per cent).

Gender

Gender responses were split evenly at 49 per cent for women and 51 per cent for men.

Employment

88 per cent of the sample were confirmed to be **employed** at the time of response.

Channels

Respondents were sourced from a combination of **passive professional networks** and **active career channels** such as Monster.com, Monster.co.uk and ChinaHR.com

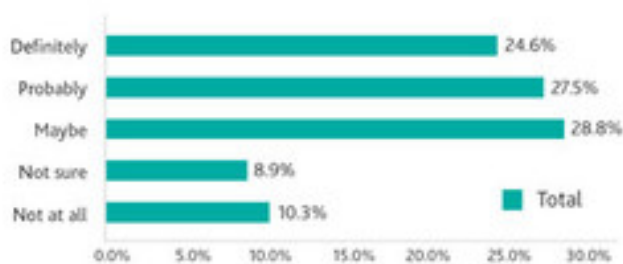
Candidates as consumers: considering the full employment lifecycle

“As an employer you have to get that whole journey right, because it doesn’t stop with the unsuccessful candidate or the departing employee any more.

“That person will continue to exist as a potential customer, product advocate and as a possible future hire or rehire. Maximizing their experience, wherever they sit on those first two wheels, is vital to ensuring that they will continue to view your brand favourably.”

Simon Thomas, Head of Global Brand & Insight,
Alexander Mann Solutions.

There's particularly alarming news for any business wishing to retain control of its reputation and brand. More than half (52 per cent) of respondents across the world said a negative interview experience would likely impact on their buying products or services from that organization in the future. Only 10 per cent said it would not, with the remainder undecided.

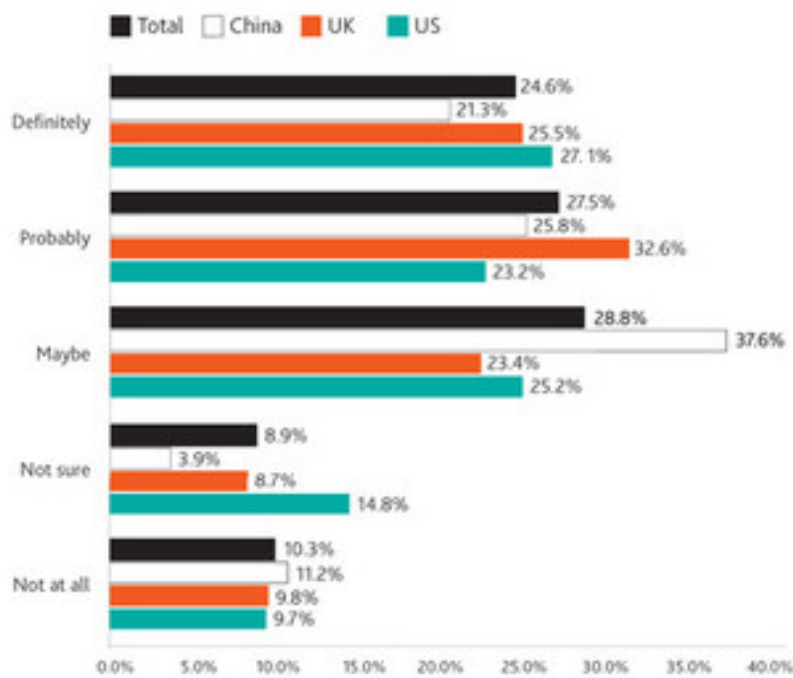


All: Extent to which a negative interview experience with an organization affect your likelihood to buy a product or service from that organization as a consumer.

This presents a threat to all organizations, and where it hurts: the bottom line. In an economic environment where recruitment and HR resources are already stretched, the added possibility that a bad interview or job seeking experience for a candidate may negatively influence their buying decision for that brand is alarming.

With a firm correlation between the quality of a business’s recruitment cycle, and its on-going attractiveness to any candidate engaged in that cycle, organisations must look to what the potential financial implications of a poor recruitment experience could be.

Interestingly, what’s important in a candidate experience varies by region, and in fact organisational awareness and knowledge of differing regional tastes is essential, as is understanding how cultural variances factor in the recruitment process. UK respondents, for instance, seem particularly sensitive to the quality of their interview experience. 58 per cent of those surveyed in the UK were likely to be put off by a poor or negative experience, admitting that it would “definitely” or “probably” have a damaging effect on future buying decisions.



By Country: Extent to which a negative interview experience with an organization affect your likelihood to buy a product or service from that organization as a consumer.

While the situation in the US and China may be slightly less acute (50 per cent of and 47 per cent of respondents respectively said that a negative interview had the potential to change their purchasing decisions), overall the figures remain significant.

Respondents in China indicated a sensitivity to initial messaging prior to first interview, while the U.S. audience reinforced that the period between interview and acceptance is a critical highlighted the period between interview and acceptance as a critical, as it is at this point that disengagement is most likely to occur.

“There’s a single global principle that holds true to all markets: employers need to dispose of the mentality that it’s a one-way, single pronged journey of engagement with their company.

“There has been a noticeable shift of power. Individuals can now choose whether to connect with an organization or not, and they have a clear option to do so both as a candidate and as a consumer. Organizations need to be humble enough to accept this, to fully understand their audiences, and to cater to their candidate’s needs and wants.”

Lisa Chartier, Head of Resourcing Communications US for AMS.

Simply put, organisations need to ensure they manage consistency and quality of experience throughout every stage of the candidate journey, or they risk losing both a candidate and a customer. And the benefits of such an approach are obvious. Ensure that each applicant - regardless of calibre or level - enjoys the candidate experience, and the company is assured continued patronage, purchase of products and services. More importantly, they secure a long-lasting advocate for their consumer and corporate brands.

The need to ensure a positive brand experience

One of the clearest messages from this research is the need for organizations to ensure a positive experience at every touch point with potential customers and employees.

Our research clearly indicates that regardless of region, every organisation's reputation is at risk during each interaction with a candidate - including the interview and post-hire process - all regions showed a strong correlation between the candidate experience and the subsequent impact on consumer buying intentions.

The industry expert's viewpoint

"I think that consistency is one of the biggest challenges facing the recruitment industry right now. "

That's the opinion of says Todd Raphael, Editor in Chief of recruiting community, ERE.net. "There are so many different channels and touch points for candidates that maintaining the same standard of brand experience across them all is incredibly difficult."

"Even the biggest brands struggle sometimes," he explains. "One of the world's largest fast food chains held a recruitment day recently, where they planned on recruiting 50,000 people in one day. It was well publicized and I thought it was an interesting initiative. So I dropped into a few different branches across town to see how well it was translating to the physical sites."

"Even between branches, let alone across states, there were considerable differences. One location I visited had balloons, displays, and the manager was handing out discount coupons to everyone waiting in line to apply for a job. They'd made a real day of it, and clearly knew that these people were more than just job seekers – they were potential customers too."

"At another branch though, the manager just didn't appear to be bothered and was borderline rude to some of the candidates I saw," continues Todd. "That's inconsistency at its worst. Not only did the brand experience not match up between branches, but it was also inconsistent from the overall experience that the recruitment exercise promised overall."

Todd has a key piece of advice for anyone trying to steer clear of that kind of scenario.

"It's an old piece of advice, but so many brands still don't follow it – treat your candidate like a customer. Even if you turned them down for a job for a good reason, that doesn't make them any less valuable to you as a potential customer. So you've got to get that experience right."

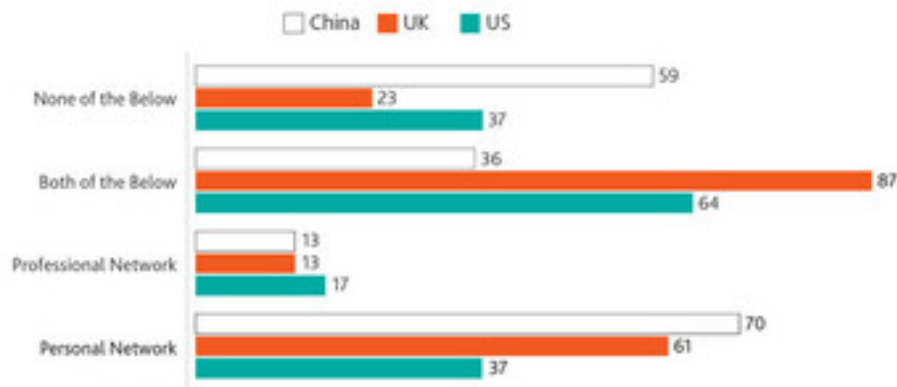
Todd Raphael, Editor in Chief of recruiting community, ERE.net.

Social media multiplies brand impact

The internet has created limitless opportunities for businesses. It has also given their customers a voice, and that voice is not always a happy one.

Social media – in particular, branded feeds and fan pages – has given angry or frustrated customers the perfect arena in which to vent their displeasure. A survey conducted by Lightspeed Research in January 2011 found that 15% of 18-34 year-olds have used an official Facebook page to complain about a brand.

Naturally, this attitude extends into the recruitment world. In the social media age, the relating of negative interview experience is unlikely to stop with immediate family and friends – it's likely to be shared, widely, and happily. The old English adage 'Bad news travels fast' is particularly apt in an environment where opinions are openly shared, where communication channels serve thousands of people, and when the sharing of information occurs with a click of a button.



If you had a negative candidate experience with an employer, which are you most likely to tell about it?

Across all regions, 77 per cent of respondents said they are likely to tell people within either their professional or personal networks (or indeed both) if they have had a negative interview experience. However, candidates who said they would share the bad news amongst only one network of acquaintances preferred their personal circle (33%) to their professional connections (8 per cent).

Naturally, this is an area where location dictates common practices. Candidates from the UK are more likely to tell both personal and professional networks, whilst those from China either tell people in their personal network - or no one at all. Candidates from the US are most likely to spread news of a negative interview experience among their professional connections.

As with so many elements of the recruiting process though, from adversity comes opportunity.

"At Alexander Mann Solutions, we're beginning to identify opportunities that can extend an Employee Referral Program into the candidate population, rather than the current audience of existing employees," says Lisa Chartier, US Head of Resourcing Communications at AMS.

"Candidates often have strong professional networks, and if a certain individual isn't a right fit for the position they just may know someone who is. And if they're approached in the right manner during the interview process, they just might be willing to share that information."

It's clear that organizations risk compromising long-term sustainability by ignoring the impact of the candidate experience. And there are compelling reasons for organizations to align the activities of HR departments with existing Marketing teams and brand custodians, and to ensure an organization's aims and values are aligned to the complete hiring process— be it selection, assessment, interviewing or on-boarding of candidates.

At the same time, this alignment must be driven by an understanding of the expectations and cultural preferences of candidates in local markets. In many instances, a close working partnership between HR, Marketing and the recruitment functions can provide valuable insight into the audiences and communities accessed by all three. A deeper relationship between these business functions can lessen the risk of alienating candidates, enable the identification of potential candidate pools or target markets, and ultimately enhance profitability.

What the experts say

"Having recognized that such a strong correlation existed between candidate experience and consumer preference, we deliberately created our global employer branding agency to apply consumer marketing principles to clients' HR challenges," says Martin Cerullo, Founder and Global Director of Resourcing Communications at Alexander Mann Solutions.

"The results of this survey serve as confirmation that this approach was the right one, and will help our clients achieve the best overall results on behalf of their respective organizations."

"We track and monitor online mentions for some of the world's biggest brands across 200 million different sites", adds Dan Purvis, Director of Public Relations at The Meltwater Group. "So we have great insight into just how fast news spreads online. That's something that big companies are particularly interested in, and it's particularly relevant to brand perception and recruitment too."

Meltwater Buzz, a tool that specializes in providing sentiment analysis from social media and online comments, is finding favour with some of the world's biggest firms.

"It's a natural extension of press monitoring in many ways. Companies want to know what's being said about them, where, and how that impacts on their reputation. "

"There's a big HR element to that; candidate attraction relies on having a credible, attractive brand, and you don't want anything getting in the way of that."

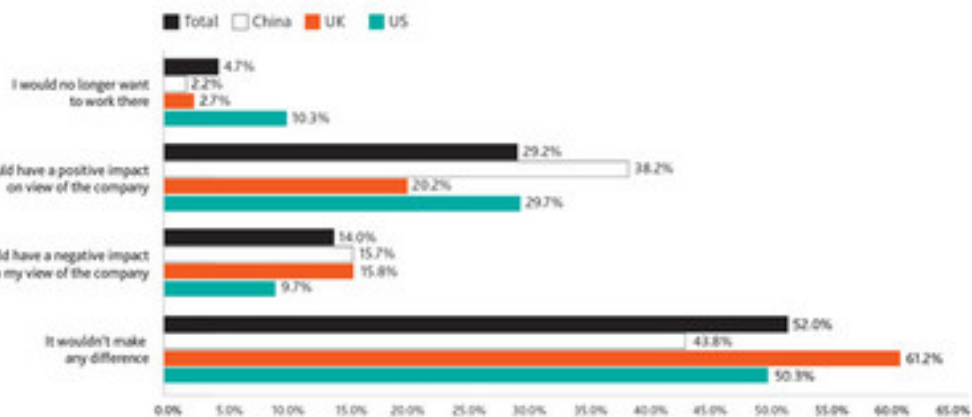
Dan Purvis, Director of Public Relations at The Meltwater Group

Candidate acceptance of social media in recruitment

Social media is often considered to be a way of 'taking' from candidates, but the game is changing.

That's the opinion of Lisa Chartier. "Social media can also be a great way to give something back. It's a chance for brands and companies to evolve how they present themselves and their value proposition to talent on an on-going basis, rather than relying on the one-off interaction that a candidate might get from an interview or a glance at your website. And candidates are starting to appreciate that."

The survey findings hint that companies that use social media as a reference point in the Assessment and Selection process are not necessarily viewed in a negative light. Whilst employers have historically been hesitant to openly use social media to validate a candidate's behaviours or experience - either due to perceived privacy concerns, through internal policies, or due to technical limitations - the findings indicates that, on the whole, candidates are open to the practice.



How would a potential employer checking your social networking profiles (e.g. Facebook or Twitter) during the application process affect your view of the company?

"This should open many doors for recruiters of today and the future to be confident in their outreach and web 2.0 sourcing approaches," adds Chartier.

Yet again, though, regional variations are very evident.

While savvy organizations have for a long time focused their marketing on delivering a compelling and controlled corporate message across a variety of media, these regional differentiations demonstrate the importance of understanding cultural preferences.

Candidates in China, for instance, are nearly twice as likely (38%) to have a positive view of companies that use social media as their counterparts in the United Kingdom (20%), yet similar numbers in both countries would view this form of screening in a negative light (around 15%)

Organisations that are aware of local variations in attitude will be better placed to target and attract talented individuals. "Markets across the globe are now highly networked and interactive across regional and continental borders," says Cerullo.

"Whilst other markets around the world are using tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and Foursquare to share opinions and affiliate with brands, China as a market is seeing social media outlets such as Weibo, Kaixin and RenRen emerge. To their detriment, most HR functions have been slow to adopt these channels to support their employer brand and talent engagement strategies.

"Put simply, now is the time for action."

Martin Cerullo, Global Head of Resourcing Communications,
Alexander Mann Solutions.

Conclusion and recommendations

This global research presents employers, recruiters and HR professionals with a range of information for consideration when tackling the increasingly complex challenge of delivering a positive brand impression throughout the entire recruitment lifecycle.

It all begins with defining what that employer brand platform is, and effectively adapting and embedding it into respective locations, channels and stages of the recruitment process.

Of particular importance for all is the lasting impact that a negative experience as a candidate can have on their loyalty, attitudes and feelings towards a brand, not just as a candidate, but as a consumer.

With so much at stake (around half of global respondents stating that they would potentially stop purchasing from a brand with which they had a bad experience), managing and mitigating that risk is an essential element of recruitment.

Any organization seeking to deliver a best practice approach, especially in global markets, should take the following recommendations into account.

Integrate recruitment as a part of business strategy, not as a 'cost'

While it has not been uncommon for HR and recruitment functions of large organizations to find themselves in isolation from the wider business strategy, the vital importance of the candidate experience as part of that overall performance cannot be underestimated. Recruitment teams must speak the language of organisational decision-makers, and present negative candidate experiences for what they are: **a potential loss of revenue.**

As our research demonstrates, failure to handle the employee journey – no matter how long or short that journey may be – will do more than just deter candidates or drive employees out. It is likely to leave a lasting impact on their decisions as a consumer too, which will greatly affect your business.

Strive for consistency during recruitment, and be realistic about your offering

If you **deliver on the promises** you make during the hiring process, you are much more likely to **retain talent** within your organisation and customers. Given the cost of hiring and training replacement staff, there are significant cost benefits to retaining the ones you already have – and retention starts at recruitment.

It's vital to ensure that all employer touch points accurately reflect the brand, its true values, and the qualities of the roles on offer. As the results of this study demonstrate, the risks of not doing so are significant.

See the journey through

Taking account of the end-to-end nature of today's employee experience, brands and companies must strive to ensure that they provide 'alumni' with the most positive experience at all stages, **whether they are potential future rehires or not.**

Interactions between the employer and employee **no longer begin and end within one specific role.** Employees who leave an organization in negative circumstances are likely to share this attitude with both their personal and professional networks, in both private and public forums, and mitigation is key. Manage your message well and these same outlets can play to your advantage. For free.

Socialize, appropriately.

Social media is here to stay, and it has revolutionized the recruiting landscape.

Knowing how and when to utilize it to best effect remains key to using it successfully however, and key to this is understanding the audience that you are reaching or targeting.

As our research shows, candidate attitudes to social media and its role in the recruitment lifecycle have changed. Organizations seeking best practice here should consider its specific relevance to their local market as both an information gathering and distribution tool, as well as its role in long-term candidate/employee engagement.

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About Alexander Mann Solutions

Alexander Mann Solutions (AMS) builds world-class talent and resourcing capability for leading organisations across the globe, based on the shared belief that people are the foundation for success. As a trusted advisor, we deliver a range of measurable solutions through integrated outsourcing and consultancy services.

Listening to our clients, these services have been blended over the years to deliver significant financial, performance and competitive benefits for many of the world's leading brands, such as Microsoft, Barclays, Deloitte, Credit Suisse, Novartis, GE Capital, Rolls-Royce, Vodafone and Cisco.

AMS pioneered Recruitment Process Outsourcing (RPO) in the European market in 1996, and what followed was a step change in the professionalism of the recruitment industry. We listened to the market and have never stopped delivering innovative solutions. By early last decade we had rapidly grown and were deploying solutions for a wide range of organisations across Europe, Asia Pacific and the Americas.

While RPO and Contingent Workforce Solutions remain a core component of what we do for our clients, we now have a range of consulting teams who work across all stages of the talent and resourcing lifecycle. These teams are fully integrated into our RPO offering.

We have not collected consulting capability by chance; we have listened to our clients and have built an integrated business with both outsourcing and consulting skills, side-by-side. We will continue to develop both our outsourcing and our consulting services; while some clients want access to intellectual property, some want this plus operational support. We can deliver both.

As part of our business strategy, it was our clear intention to build deep vertical industry knowledge and expertise. Our global clients now cover a wide range of industry sectors, including: defence, engineering financial services; FMCG; professional services; information technology investment banking; public sector and pharmaceutical & healthcare.

Our unique global infrastructure has been specifically designed to deliver in-country, on-site, high-touch support to clients while leveraging a range of operational centres across the world. This enables AMS to offer clients a unique blend of recruitment and resourcing expertise, recruitment processing capacity and scale, combined with the benefits of wage arbitrage through shared service centres. Today we have over 400 staff working at our Global Client Services Centre in Poland. Establishing this infrastructure five years ago was a bold move, but one that has paid off and continues to evolve.

In all, we are active in over 60 countries globally, and employ over 1,500 people. At any hour, on any day, in any time zone, our people are delivering talent services to over 45 outsourcing clients and an even more extensive range of consulting clients, across these 60 countries. Scale for us means delivering to world-class brands, across the end-to-end process, across the full talent lifecycle and on a global basis.

For more information, please visit our website:
<http://www.alexandermannsolutions.com>



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