

Acquisition Employer Branding and Talent at the Company "Autohellas"

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Abstract:

In order to attract and retain employees, many companies have begun to strategically manage their employer brand, both externally to potential candidates and internally to existing employees. Competition among companies is intense when it comes to human capital. In the so-called "war for talent," companies are competing to attract and retain talent, seeking a competitive advantage as the role they play in organizational performance and company success is recognized. The "war" for talent requires companies to differentiate themselves as employers in order to attract the best available candidates. Companies are looking for the best trained human resources and recognize the employer brand as a significant advantage in attracting, recruiting and retaining talent. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to analyze the contemporary literature in this area, as well as to present an example of good practice of a company in Greece.

Keywords: human resources; brand; war for talent; employer brand.

JEL Classification: M12; M54.

Introduction

Autohellas has been active in the automotive sector since 1974 and has been listed on the Athens Stock Exchange since 1999. It is the original company and a member of the wider Th. Vassilakis Group, which is also active in the air transport sector with the also listed Aegean. The main pillars on which the group's activities are based are: Car Rental (Short- and Long-Term Lease); International Activity (Short-term, Long-term Car Leasing and Trading); Car trade (Import/Distribution/Retail) As a service provider, Autohellas attaches great importance to its human resources, which now exceed 1,300 people and constitute its core operation. It owns a large fleet of privately owned vehicles that exceeds 48,000 vehicles and with over 143 service points in Greece and abroad offers integrated and innovative solutions that meet the needs of customers and continues to innovate, constantly offering new services.

The fact that Autohellas is a large company based on Greek data, and its employer brand contributes to the attraction and retention of its talents, were the reasons for choosing to approach Autohellas for our work. Our initial contact with the company was made through a network of personal connections with the Leasing Director of foreign countries (Leasing Director International Segment). Mr. Giakoumelos, in response to our request for information regarding the employer brand and talent acquisition at Autohellas, showed a particular willingness by answering questions of the semi-structured interview, during which a constructive dialogue was conducted to meet the job requirements. Additionally, information was gathered through online links and the company's files.

1. Employer Brand and Talent Acquisition

Competition among companies is intense when it comes to human capital. In the so-called "war for talent," companies compete to attract and retain talents, seeking a competitive advantage as the role they play in organizational performance and the success of a company is recognized. The "war" for talent requires companies to differentiate themselves as employers to attract the best available candidates (Reis et al., 2017). Companies seek the best-trained human resources and recognize the employer brand as a significant advantage in talent attraction, recruitment, and retention.

Great attention is paid to the employer brand as a tool for attracting and retaining customers. When this concept is applied in Human Resource Management (HRM) for candidate attraction, it is referred to as the employer brand (Tanwar and Kumar, 2019).

According to Ambler and Barrow (1996), the employer brand is a Human Resource strategy, where employers can differentiate themselves from their counterparts by offering a package of psychological, economic, and functional benefits to employees provided for their employment and identified with the employer-company. The functional benefits imply the developmental and useful activities the company provides, such as growth opportunities. Economic benefits represent material and monetary rewards such as a competitive salary. Psychological benefits are related to the sense of belonging, direction and purpose of the company such as a good working environment (Reis et al., 2017). These benefits are offered by a company to potential employees with the aim of attracting and recruiting the man to existing employees with the aim of retaining them. The employer brand is a general term that can encompass any characteristics or behaviors associated with an employer (Wang et al., 2022). To attract and retain employees many companies have begun to strategically manage their employer brand, both externally to potential applicants and internally to existing employees (Tumasjan et. al., 2019). According to Mr. Giakoumelos, the employer brand is particularly important in recruiting talents because it reflects the company and is showcased during the job search process by prospective employees. When the company needs to provide them with information to inform them about its operations, the employer brand serves as a mirror for the company. It aids in both the quantitative and qualitative attraction of candidates by offering more candidate selection options.

Autohellas places special emphasis on talent attraction and retention as its human resources are its driving force. In this context, its employees are at the center of its operations and form the core for achieving its business goals. The company strives to be recognized as an employer of choice when it comes to recruiting talents. The contribution of the employer brand is highly significant in achieving these goals, as it serves as a mirror for the company, as specifically mentioned by Mr. Giakoumelos. It operates positively in attracting suitable candidates by providing relevant information about its operations. However, it could also include other characteristics or behaviors related to this specific employer, such as the attractive job features valued by employees.

Employer Brand Segmentation

The employer brand is divided into external and internal. The former relates to talent attraction and focuses on the strategies of the employer brand towards prospective talents. The latter relates to talent retention within the company and focuses on existing employees.

The external employer brand represents the identity, status, job descriptions, and prospects of employees through strategic advertising and marketing. It can be found on websites, social media, corporate social responsibility, seminars, advertising agencies, television, and radio. It serves as a source of information for candidates about a company. It can influence candidates to apply for specific job positions as it enhances the company's reputation and familiarity among them (Wijaya et al., 2022).

According to Mr. Giakoumelos, the external employer brand represents the identity of the company as well as how it operates. Prospective employees can learn about the job positions offered by the company through social media, its corporate website, LinkedIn, and also through "Career Days."

The external employer brand has been designed to attract candidates and is memorable, substantive, and adapted to the modern era. It enhances the company's reputation, and candidates can obtain relevant information about job positions. It is present on social media, the company's website, and LinkedIn. However, it could also be further promoted through advertising agencies, television, radio, and organizing seminars.

The internal employer brand pertains to the existing employees of the company and aids in their retention by building a relationship of trust between the employees and the leadership. The positive attitude displayed by existing employees towards the company becomes the point of interest for potential candidates, which later shapes the external employer brand (Wijaya et al., 2022). Mr. Giakoumelos, regarding the internal employer brand, mentioned that the assessment of employees for more effective utilization of personnel, meritocracy, and objectivity in their management, respect for individuals' personalities and needs, as well as providing equal opportunities,

enable the development of relationships based on mutual trust and the creation of strong bonds among them. These factors, in turn, contribute to building the company's positive reputation.

Autohellas places great importance on its internal employer brand for talent retention. The company strives to enhance the sense of belonging to solidify employee commitment by fostering strong bonds related to individual, team, and organizational engagement. The company's values play a significant role in strengthening trust relationships among employees.

Benefits of Employer Branding

Attracting and retaining new, skilled employees is crucial and often challenging for today's businesses. Employer branding helps improve both external and internal company reputation, organizational attractiveness, and talent retention. High levels of focus on employer branding increase the effectiveness of hiring, as the pool of candidates consists of more qualified individuals, ultimately leading to less time and cost for filling positions. The higher quantity and quality of applicants will lead to more favorable levels of recruitment efficiency (Tumasjan et al., 2019).

According to Mr. Giakoumelos, the opinions and evaluations of the company's employees contribute to shaping the external employer brand, which is considered essential for its improvement and development. Achieving this requires positive feedback from employees, mainly gathered through surveys conducted by research companies targeting managers and employers to highlight the company's internal positive testimonies.

An employer branding focus facilitates the creation of a distinct and attractive external image of the employer, which can lead to hiring effectiveness and positively affect the working atmosphere of current employees. Gathering positive feedback from employees through surveys conducted by research companies plays a significant role in promoting the employer brand. To strengthen the employer brand further, the company could periodically distribute surveys directly to employees, and the results could be posted on the company's website.

2. Relationship between Employer Branding HRM and Marketing

Employer branding, grounded in marketing principles, emphasizes the importance of adopting a strategic approach to talent acquisition. This approach facilitates the connection between talent acquisition practices and the overall human resource management strategy, as well as the competitive advantage of the company (Yu et al., 2022). It encompasses all the functions of HRM, from the organization's needs to employee productivity. The creation, retention, and engagement of specialized workforce are crucial for an organization's success and therefore among HRM's most important objectives (Tumasjan et al., 2019).

Employer branding, as a marketing practice, aims to attract and retain talents by highlighting the employer's value proposition. This encompasses all the benefits the organization provides to its employees and describes the reputation of an employer as a place to work and the value proposition of its employees. The employee value proposition helps companies draw attention to the needs of their employees (Wijaya et al., 2022). The intention of candidates to apply for a job depends on their needs, which should be met by the company's offerings.

Relationship between HRM Employer Branding and Marketing at Autohellas

The employer branding of the company is connected with Human Resource Management (HRM) because, through specific evaluation methodologies such as the annual assessment across the entire workforce, it highlights and externalizes the company's profile, as mentioned by Mr. Giakoumelos. The evaluation processes are conducted with a specific methodology for externalizing the profile. Marketing is used to promote the positive aspects of the employer brand. Marketing contributes to talent attraction by utilizing and promoting the positive elements of the employer brand, such as during Career Days.

The Autohellas employer brand challenge is being addressed through new techniques that combine HRM and Marketing strategies. The HRM of the company systematically works on attracting new talents and retaining existing ones. Employer branding and talent acquisition are two fundamental elements of this strategy. All HRM processes are developed with the aim of reaching more candidates. Marketing contributes to talent attraction by leveraging the employer brand. It includes the proposition of employee value, which is an effective means of building the company's reputation. Autohellas employs a targeted, long-term strategy for managing the awareness and perceptions of potential and existing employees.

2.1. Dimensions of Employer Brand

Employer branding plays a crucial role in the job decisions made by candidates. A company needs to have various attractive characteristics that will not only attract candidates to work for it but also make them choose it as their top choice and encourage them to join and stay. The process of labeling a company as attractive starts with developing the value proposition and is completed when the specific promises made to employees are promoted internally and eventually realized.

Compensation and benefits, corporate social responsibility, employee training and development, and workplace culture are dimensions of the employer brand.

A company that offers competitive compensation and benefits can attract and retain candidates effectively. Candidates choose a company and stay with it when it provides them with high salaries, incentive packages, and addresses their salary needs. Compensation and benefits reflect the attractive salary and competitive benefits a company offers to its employees. An effective benefits package helps a company not only to be competitive in the market but also to attract and retain talent. A company that offers a competitive compensation package can attract and retain high-quality employees. The benefits package may include additional perks such as health insurance, leaves, reward programs, and salary increments.

Compensation and Benefits of Autohellas

Regarding the financial benefits provided by the company, Mr. Giakoumelos mentioned, "The truth is that in the modern market and the overall system, one cannot deviate from the average of the salary reality. So yes, I consider that the company operates competitively in this aspect, and even the starting salary is competitive."

Regarding financial incentive packages, he stated, "Depending on the services an employee provides, there are appropriate financial incentives. For example, a salesperson who is required to go out and attract customers needs to have their transportation and communication secured. The same may apply, though not in the same way, to some managers. Someone like an accounting employee, who does not need to move around, also seems to require financial incentives." He also mentioned the additional group pension plan for employees.

Autohellas can remain competitive in the market by providing satisfactory salaries to all its employees. Additional benefits are offered to employees beyond those required by the legal framework. Furthermore, there are benefits tailored to the positions of the employees. The company caters to the needs of employees on both an individual and collective level. However, in addition to financial benefits, it could consider providing some additional days of leave as a reward to its employees.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) encompasses the social concerns of a company, both regarding its employees and the broader society (Yu et al., 2022). It includes environmental programs, social development programs, and actions aimed at improving the quality of life for both employees and the community in which they operate.

Individuals do not only seek financial rewards in their professional choices; they want to engage in ways that align with their values and beliefs (Reis et al., 2017). People looking for employment prefer companies that emphasize social values (Wijaya et al., 2022). Employees prefer to be part of a work environment guided by certain ethical values, especially when these values align with their personal lives.

Autohellas' Corporate Social Responsibility. Mr. Giakoumelos mentioned that the company has adopted various CSR actions and programs, many of which are posted on the company's website. Specifically, he said, "I could mention the management of used motor oils (you understand that we have to manage a large volume of engine oils) and the focus on recycling materials, such as paper. Additionally, there are actions of providing services to social organizations, such as 'The Smile of the Child,' to which we have provided vehicles to meet their needs."

Justice, meritocracy, transparency, objectivity, respect for employees' personal integrity, and, more broadly, a humanistic approach to work are the principles that govern the company according to Mr. Giakoumelos.

Autohellas supports both the wider society and local communities through programs and initiatives related to environmental protection and the assistance of vulnerable social groups. The company's values and principles are based on respect for employees and a people-centered approach. All of the above are posted on the company's website, contributing to the creation of an employer brand and the attraction and retention of talent.

2.2. Training and Development

Continuous training and development of employees through various training programs contribute to increasing the attractiveness of the employer brand and higher rates of employee commitment. Employees who feel personal and professional growth in their workplace tend to stay with the company for longer periods. Employee development can include offering training, education, and growth programs in various fields.

Mr. Giakoumelos mentioned, "We regularly organize seminars on various work-related topics with predefined themes, collaborate with external training partners (contract work for training), as well as provide in-house training sessions conducted by the Human Resources department for our employees. Additionally, we offer online training courses. Especially during the COVID period and beyond, online training has proven to be essential. Employee development is an ongoing process necessary to meet the changing needs in contemporary business activities. We also provide safety training to employees through seminars, tailored to their specific needs".

The company effectively utilizes both in-person and remote training for its employees through seminars conducted by both external and internal specialized trainers. Acquiring knowledge, improving skills, and adopting positive attitudes are deemed necessary for the company's employees to meet the company's demands and those of the broader business world. Additionally, safety seminars are conducted to enhance workplace safety. Autohellas not only focuses on job-specific training but also invests in training related to employee well-being and safety.

Workplace Culture

The dimension of workplace culture implies a friendly relationship among colleagues, flexible working hours, and job security. People seeking employment tend to connect with companies where their personality aligns with that of existing employees (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

A friendly work environment can create a perception of support, making employees feel comfortable and perform at a high level. Individuals looking for employment develop a high level of person-organization fit perception for companies that offer flexible working hours and good work-life balance policies and practices, as employees prefer them. Good working relationships with superiors can reduce employee stress and create a favorable work environment (Wijaya et al., 2022). According to Mr. Giakoumelos, flexible working hours and remote work options exist to meet the needs of the employees rather than the company. Specifically, he stated, "We are very careful about this because our logic is that the employee should be in their workplace."

Furthermore, the company implements work-life balance practices and has adopted the concept of work and life balance. Mr. Giakoumelos mentioned, "We consider it a significant factor in an employee's choice of the company, and it enhances the employer's reputation, the expectation of a balanced distribution of time between work and life." All of the above, along with creating a positive work atmosphere and ensuring workplace tranquility, contribute to the professional satisfaction of employees.

Autohellas enhances its attractiveness for attracting and retaining candidates by creating a positive work environment and enabling interaction among employees and company executives. Their priority is the professional satisfaction of employees, focusing on achieving a work-life balance and meeting their needs.

Open communication, direct information sharing, and encouraging employee interaction foster trust-based relationships that contribute to the employer brand for attracting candidates and retaining talent.

3. Employer Brand and Millennials

Millennials (Generation Y & X) believe that companies need to prioritize their employees as much as they do products and profits. Developed countries must take significant action and make changes if they want to attract, acquire, and retain Millennial talents. Millennials show a greater interest in new technologies, desire self-development programs, continuous education, and rapid career advancement. They prefer collective management and teamwork and seek a work-life balance.

The Internet is one of the most popular sources of job information for Millennials. They often view company reviews online before applying for a job. They want to be sure before connecting their professional life with a company. They tend to recognize a modern and different employer brand on social media platforms, which familiarizes them with the company and encourages them to apply (Wijaya et al., 2022).

Mr. Giakoumelos believes that there are differences between Millennial candidates and candidates from other generations. "In this generation, we increasingly see the demand for work and life balance without much patience for goal achievement, as well as planning for the future. They want answers and results here and now".

Popular sources of information for Millennial candidates regarding job positions at the company include online platforms, CV promotion companies, LinkedIn, and talent recruiters.

Autohellas encourages the hiring and retention of individuals belonging to this generation. Millennial candidates prioritize work-life balance, set professional goals but desire to achieve them in a short time frame. They show a particular interest in New Technologies and have a team-oriented spirit. Millennials find out about the company's new job positions through modern means and consider the company's reviews before applying.

3.1. Employer Brand and Social Media

Employers can develop a sustainable competitive advantage through employer branding practices for talent acquisition. The framework surrounding this practice presents numerous unique challenges for recruitment organizations.

The advancement of digital technologies and social media platforms that facilitate the relatively free creation, editing, sharing, and exchange of information in multiple forms has fundamentally changed how employees perceive and process information about companies (Yu, 2019).

Managing an employer's reputation on social media represents a significant departure from traditional methods. Companies that once controlled the type of information presented about job positions and their work culture through public relations and/or their human resources departments now face widespread public use of social media for generating and disseminating information. Social media allows individuals to exchange public experiences and opinions. Additionally, social media can influence employees' knowledge, emotions, and behavior towards a company (McFarland, Ployhart, 2015).

The rise of social media is changing the way reviews and assessments about companies are generated and spread (Etter et al., 2019). Moreover, online evaluations of both work experience and company culture are easily accessible to nearly all potential candidates. Communities on these digital platforms enable the simultaneous coexistence of multiple narratives about an employer's reputation (Yu et al., 2022). Employees use social media websites to share their work stories, providing an internal perspective on their work environment and other aspects of their company. Each company must deliver on its promises to existing employees to increase retention levels and attract prospective talents. The practice of using social media for talent acquisition includes online job advertisements, company websites and social media platforms, job postings by employers, as well as third-party sources on social media.

3.2. Employer Brand and Social Media at Autohellas

According to Mr. Giakoumelos, the company minimally uses traditional methods to provide information about job positions and the work culture, such as public relations. Instead, it predominantly relies on modern approaches like online job advertisements, the corporate website, and LinkedIn because they are more direct, comprehensive, and effective. Employee reviews and general agreement on social media platforms, when positive, can influence candidates to apply.

Social media and the use of electronic platforms play a significant role in shaping Autohellas' employer brand and, consequently, in talent acquisition and retention. This is achieved through both showcasing the company and providing information about job positions, as well as through employee narratives, comments, and reviews. The company utilizes social media, its website, and LinkedIn to enhance its reputation as an employer for talent acquisition and retention. To further enhance both the quality and quantity of applicant attraction, it could also consider incorporating online job advertisements and utilizing third-party sources on social media.

Conclusion

Autohellas' primary objective is to be recognized as an employer of choice for both candidates and existing employees. It places emphasis on attracting well-trained candidates who have creative and innovative ideas, possess a team-oriented and collaborative work spirit, and align their personal values with those of the company. The comprehensive approach of its HRM department, referred to as the employer brand, aims to promote a clear view of what makes Autohellas different and desirable as an employer, both internally and externally.

As its human capital is its driving force, Autohellas places special importance on both external and internal employer branding. The dimensions of the employer brand contribute to the attraction and retention of its talent pool. The use of social media and electronic platforms helps promote the employer brand, and narratives from its employees contribute to more effectively attracting candidates and retaining talent.

Conflict of Interest Statement

Authors declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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