

**MEDIA COVERAGE**

**PUBLICATION:** PROFESSIONAL MARKETING  
**DATE:** JUNE \ 2007  
**PROJECT:** BEVAN BRITTAN LLP (BRISTOL)

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Case study

# Talent shows

That the workplace is now an important part of the marketing mix is now beyond dispute, but how can it also reflect a firm's brand values?



By Sarah-Jane Osborne

As with so many things, the idea of the employer brand was with us for a long time before anybody saw fit to give it a label. In the past, the concept has been most obvious in the military, where a strong sense of identity, loyalty and culture must become ingrained in troops for them to function effectively. Up until fairly recently that same mindset was not always apparent or even necessary for a workforce that didn't have the business's main assets locked up in its own brain-cells.

The importance of the employer brand in its contemporary the new knowledge economy was highlighted by a 1997 McKinsey report called *The War for Talent* and awareness of the whole idea has been growing ever since. It is increasingly difficult to pick up a HR journal without seeing the subject discussed. The idea has its own literature, notably in a book called *The Employer Brand* by Simon Barrow and Richard Mosley, which highlights the different aspects of the employer brand mix which includes brand values, reward and recognition, recruitment and retention, and external reputation.

One of the most important effects of employer branding has been the way in which it has drawn a number of professions together. Most obvious has been the closer bonds between HR and marketing which has seen the core values of brand extend beyond being almost solely about the message sent to customers and become also about the message sent to employees and other stakeholders. Hence the increased focus on internal communications over recent years.

But there are other professions that have a role to play in this, notably those directly involved with the most obvious manifestation of corporate identity and togetherness, the workplace. That is why it is now common to see multi-functional teams of people come together to address the ways in which buildings meet the demands of corporate identity and serve the organisation's wider business interests, especially with the recruitment and retention of staff, not to mention winning over their hearts and minds so the workforce can become an effective marketing tool in its own right.

That the workplace is now an important part of the marketing mix is now beyond dispute. Of course, firms have always branded themselves through the buildings they occupy. In the past this has often been done on a monolithic scale, relying on literal manifestations of the brand, the overuse of corporate colours, logos in the carpet. Now there's nothing inherently wrong in all of that and suppliers have done well to develop the materials and manufacturing techniques to allow firms to do it. But it's not necessarily the right solution and the literal can be very literal indeed. At EasyJet's offices at Luton Airport, pretty much everything is vivid tangerine, from the walls to the clothes people wear. At the Longaberger Basket Company in Newark, USA, the entire office building is shaped like a basket - seven floors high. Just in case you had any doubts about what they do.

These are over the top examples but they make a valid point and they highlight how it is now increasingly likely that firms will take a more holistic view of the design of the workplace to reflect their brand values as much as their identity. There is no need for the offices to be painted bright orange, because colour has a potentially more important role to play in establishing mood and in defining space. For most organisations, the challenge is to help them live the brand so the design of the branded workplace must focus on the cultural, the graphical. And it must provide an emotional kick for the organisation and its employees as well as an intellectual one.

Now this kind of thinking extends across all sectors but seems to be more important for some than others, especially in those professions where there is a war for talent. A good example is in the legal sector. Law firms in the City of London alone are expecting to take on an additional 7,000 people over the next two to three years, a pattern that is repeated up and down the country especially in the principal

12 June 2007 pm

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legal enclaves such as Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds.

Unfortunately the demand for talent far outstrips its supply at the moment. So whilst this is great news for fledgling lawyers; it may be a bit of a headache if it's you that has to recruit and retain a new brood. So while the main battleground may be drawn around the hearts and minds of prospective employees, firms also have to worry about where and how all these new people are going to work.

My own firm has been fortunate to work on a number of interiors projects with major law firms and the one thing all of these projects have in common is the focus on culture and identity as a way of attracting the best people to work for them. A good example of this is a recently completed project for Bevan Brittan, a large Bristol based practice (pictured above and below), where the focus is very much on team working and identity. It is a very contemporary space in the way it is designed to not only bring everybody together physically but also in common cause through the identity that has been developed for the



coloured 'fractals' to subtly and intelligently reflect the firm's brand. Colour-change lighting in the building's 'light house' creates night time visibility for the building on the approach in to Bristol and is synchronised with sequenced colour changes on the reception desk itself. The fractals themselves are interpreted in elements throughout the building and reinforced with a different 'signature' colour for each floor, taken from the fractal designs.



Such an approach is typical of the way law firms use their premises. Some are reaching out to their clients in other ways too. For example, Eversheds has a wireless, branded network supplied and content managed by AirAngel which offers customers not only access to their emails and the internet but also information and guidance. And, like Bevan Brittan they offer clients spaces in which to work. They're throwing their doors, portals and arms wide open to the outside world.

Of course such a sophisticated approach can only work when everybody understands not only the physical brand but the values that underpin it. So the challenge for everybody

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One of the most striking features of the new office is the use of