

The vital role of employer branding in the energy industry

Having a solid brand reputation is particularly important in the oil and gas sector, since it makes attracting the right people much easier. You will have great difficulty finding talented people if your company hasn't built a strong image as a socially responsible and likeable stakeholder.



In the first part of this special report, John Egil Mæland, head of Mercuri Urval's Oil and Gas recruitment division, explained the global drivers behind the severe lack of qualified oil and gas personnel, and how providing training and work experience to inexperienced candidates must be a part of a socially responsible company's recruitment strategy. In this second section, he builds on the six-point guide in the previous article in order to outline how employer branding is one of several factors companies should consider when recruiting experienced oil and gas personnel.

First, if you want to be considered an attractive employer in this industry it's of paramount importance for your organisation to have a solid Health, Safety, Environment and Quality (HSEQ) profile.

A high-profile oil spill or accident involving human injury will tarnish any energy-related company's reputation as a desirable place to work.

Bad press and a poor environmental image have put many young people off studying degrees that will lead to a career in the energy industry.

From a long-term recruitment and competence perspective it is therefore vital that oil and gas companies build a strong reputation by doing their utmost to reduce their negative environmental footprint and extract the energy the world needs as efficiently as possible. Embracing the values of the next generations will motivate them to help solve the world's energy needs.

It is not enough merely to state that "we focus on HSEQ"; management must ensure that the whole company functions in accordance with high HSEQ standards on a daily basis.

Money is not enough



Building a positive, dynamic and supportive work environment is essential to attracting the best candidates. People want colleagues they can identify with. Leaders should, therefore, work hard to build and maintain a strong identity and culture within their company.

There is a positive knock-on effect for companies that are known for building a pool of talented and amiable people: professionals outside their organisation want to work

with those who are equally talented and are therefore drawn to organisations with other good people.

When recruiting key personnel, such as an exploration manager, candidates should be analysed and profiled in order to find a person who is admired and has a good reputation among their peers. With such a candidate on board, their good reputation can be used to attract other candidates.

Dynamic organisations with challenging projects are attractive



The best technical specialists in the energy industry are often science and technology “geeks” who get bored if they aren’t given tasks where they can use their knowledge and abilities to the full, while learning more about the subjects they are passionate about.

A company in the oil and gas industry – particularly its owners – must therefore build a reputation as a dynamic organisation that actively searches for new and exciting licences and projects that will keep their specialists stimulated.

A long-term lack of interesting projects and challenges could result in the migration of

a company’s best people to competitors offering more dynamic work. Professionals know each other across companies, and rumours spread fast within the industry. Thus, a company that has gained a reputation as “static and boring” could well have problems recruiting new people to fill any void.

Challenging work and a good working environment are factors that are often of equal or more importance than financial compensation, as specialists are well paid virtually wherever they choose to work.

Avoid erratic redundancy practices



In the past, employer brand reputations have been severely damaged by the way employees have been hired and fired during peaks and troughs of activity. This was particularly true during the 1990s, when record low oil prices halted projects and led many companies to downsize their workforces and stop taking on graduates.

This was damaging, since it gave young people in particular the impression that the oil and gas industry was an insecure option that would not provide them with stable,

long-term jobs. Consequently, they opted for careers in other sectors. One reason for the dire lack of qualified professionals today is that the slump in activity in the 1990s drove many students away from studying subjects related to oil and gas careers.

The oil and gas industry is a cyclical business, and ups and downs are likely to remain part of the game in the years ahead. With this in mind, it would be wiser for management to have a recruitment and retention strategy that looks to the long term,

while continuously focusing on whether their company is the right size. However, recruitment considerations should not deter companies from dealing firmly with any employee who poisons the work environment or fails to up their game after being given every opportunity to improve.

A continuously, appropriately updated and lean organisation will secure profits in the long term, giving management a good chance of avoiding sudden, large and dramatic redundancy processes that may damage the employer brand.

Cultivate and maintain relationships wherever you go



The energy industry is truly global: the major service companies, drilling operators and private oil and gas majors (and even several national oil companies) recruit internationally and move their people around

the globe. This means that throughout your career you will often come across the same people in different locations. That's why it makes sense to maintain good relationships with professionals in any oil hub.

So here is our 10 point plan for successful employee branding in recruitment:

1. Continuously look for talent through all channels

Many companies have benefited from inviting oil and gas students to networking dinners, company presentations, courses and case study seminars, as well as sponsoring their journeys to international company headquarters. Establishing contact with top talent early on is seen as an essential part of building a strong employer brand. Proficiency in social media is now also a pre-requisite. Is your organisation continuously looking for talent?

2. Start the recruitment process early; and be discerning about which recruiters you trust your brand to

Companies in this industry often leave it far too late to start thinking about their future recruitment needs. A company may know that they need, say 100 new people to man a new operation 12 months down the line, then, too often, they will suddenly start a panicked recruitment process a few months before the planned start of the project. The recruitment strategy should instead be in place as soon as a new contract or project is secured.

When choosing partners to help in the recruitment process avoid those who are mere CV pushers. Instead, pick a recruitment partner who actually knows their candidates and finds people whose values are

compatible with those of your organisation. There seems to be evidence that a candidate with compatible values will identify with your company, and will be a more loyal employee. Who is representing your brand to candidates?

3. Ask the right questions before you hire

A classic error companies make in the recruitment process is not giving enough thought to exactly what type of people and competencies they need. Solid pre-recruitment analysis will prevent the need to adjust candidate profiles and job specifications during the recruitment process.

So, before embarking upon a recruitment process a company should ask: What competence do we already have in-house that could solve the task ahead and meet our needs? What other existing talents do we have in-house that can be trained and developed into a new role? What talent do we need to recruit externally?

4. Focus on the right things during the recruitment process

The main focus of your communication with candidates should not be your company's needs – the candidate and what you can offer each one on an individual, personalised level should be the key focus. We have moved from selecting the best candidates to having them select us. Or not. How attractive are you?

It is also important that your candidate is given the chance to shape and influence his or her own job. People will feel more attached to their job – and your organisation – if they feel they can influence the development and the direction of their own work tasks and career path, and use their own strengths and talents to the full.

5. Speed is of the essence when recruiting

Respect the candidate by acknowledging that a recruitment process is a stressful time for them.

Candidates in this industry rarely have the patience to wait around for an extended period when they are eager to change jobs. If a company has entered into a dialogue with a candidate it would be a mistake to wait too long to make them an offer. A slow process can make the candidate think: "Is this slow and bureaucratic decision-making typical of this company? Then I wouldn't want to work there!"

Also, taking too long to make a good candidate a financial offer puts you in danger of losing them to another company hunting for the same talent. Top management should be available to meet the candidate and move the process along in order to close the deal as swiftly as possible.

Once he or she is on board, you should also ask: How can we get the most "mileage" out of the new recruit?

6. Don't treat everyone the same

Take into account personal and cultural differences between what candidates are looking for in their work package. Individuals from some cultures go for long-term job security, while those from other cultures tend to be more opportunistic, trying to maximise profit here and now, without worrying about the long term. Some expect their career to be the absolute focus of their life, while others value family time highly, and will not accept working long hours at the cost of their family.

Signalling that your company emphasises a balanced lifestyle, that allows for flexibility and a full life outside the office can be key in attracting many candidates.

However, one size does not fit all: what is the right mix of terms for one person might not be right for the other. Candidates have to be understood as individuals in order to ignite their interest and secure their commitment to joining a new company. Ask your candidate: How can I meet your needs so that I get 100 per cent out of you in your new role?

7. Consider the right things when recruiting internationally

Recruiting personnel from abroad requires your organisation to be set up to receive newcomers and help them solve the practicalities of getting established in a new country. This includes taking care of work permits and housing needs, and sometimes finding schools for their children.

Social integration is also key to making sure that international recruits stay on for the long term. With a limited social network in their new location, staff recruited from abroad might end up moving on to another destination and company if life outside of office hours is unrewarding. To avoid this, an energy industry company should facilitate social integration in the new location. This requires a concerted effort and investment. Another solution is to source new international recruits from the same countries, creating an ex-pat community of fellow nationals, like a home away from home.

8. Once onboard engage them in their new future

Particular attention must be given to integrating new recruits into your organisation

at all levels. Make sure they are taken care of with regard to development and follow-up, and that their role and work tasks are clearly defined for them. Outline expectations and goals, and give feedback on the job they are doing.

9. Don't forget about your untapped talent

Recruitment experts also suggest that some companies should take better care of the talents already on board. It is wise to implement talent management and career planning in your company. If you neglect or underuse talented personnel they will eventually migrate to other companies where their talent is recognised.

10. Take advantage of the recruitment advertising 'spinoff effect'

A lot of people see and read job advertisements. This is a way of profiling your company to both clients and suppliers, as well as current and potential employees. It is a great tool for communicating your company's strategy to such stakeholders. This is why it is wise to consider the total cost of the recruitment process and subsequent marketing material as a part of your employer branding efforts. Create recruitment ads that make a statement, and that are based on a holistic, well thought through brand and marketing strategy. It is therefore worth investing time and money in attractive and informative ads in print and online.

Don't miss out on our first article in this series "A socially responsible recruitment strategy will drive sustainable growth", where John Egil Mæland explains how providing training and work experience to inexperienced candidates must be a part of a socially responsible company's recruitment strategy.

Feedback or questions?

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Before joining Mercuri Urval, John gained broad experience at senior management level in the process industry and the drilling and well services sector. He is also a highly experienced consultant in areas such as general management, supply chain management and business development. He has worked in the United Arab Emirates, the Netherlands, Scotland and Norway.

About Mercuri Urval

As pioneers in predicting the impact of people's capabilities and personality on business results, we have always considered the recruitment, selection and development of people to be extremely important, and that continues to be the core of our business.

Today, Mercuri Urval has grown organically to become a leading consultancy, working with more than 3,000 clients in over 50 countries every year. As we have grown, our services have expanded to include a range of Board and Executive, Talent Management and Business Transformation solutions, designed to meet our clients' needs to strengthen their people's performance.