

The Ultimate Guide to Employer Branding for Startups



Level up your employer branding strategy at every stage of growth

Wait — before you begin, have you taken our quiz? It'll help you figure out where to start: Level 1, 2, or 3.

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About your score

At the end of 2021, we pulled together the top 100 roles that had the highest interest rate above benchmark on our platform. Interest rate is the percentage of passive candidates who respond positively to a cold email about an open role. Our benchmarks are an aggregate of all interest rates across a specific persona — on Dover's platform, that's hundreds of startups.

What we found was super interesting: **a solid employer brand directly correlates to higher interest rates.**

- **Our top performers** were Series B and above, scoring between a range of 60-66. On average, they had 6-7 roles with interest rates above benchmark.
- **Mid-range performers** were Series A and above, scoring between 49-58. On average, they had 3-4 roles with interest rates above benchmark.
- **Our lowest performers** were seed companies, scoring below a 46. On average, only had 1 or 2 roles with interest rates above benchmark.

This makes sense: larger companies typically have a person devoted to employer branding, or they delegate this task to recruiting, marketing or HR. At smaller companies strapped for time and resources, employer branding is low on the priority list, but that doesn't mean it's impossible. **Our quiz and score isn't meant to make you feel like you're not doing enough, but to be a barometer for where you can start.**

In this guide, we'll outline steps you can take at every stage of growth, from the basics, all the way to creative ideas that can help you level up and stand out.



Next - what is employer branding?



What is employer branding?

Your employer brand is different than your company brand (your logo, product or the problem that you're solving).

Put simply, it's how you're viewed as an employer. It encompasses:

- Overall values,
- Company culture,
- Benefits and,
- Public perception

For startups, it matters way more than you'd expect. In fact, research shows that a whopping **75% of jobseekers** consider an employer's brand before even applying for a job. And considering that **23% of startups fail due to not having the right team**, a strong employer brand can help you attract and hire the best candidates, and greatly improves your chances of getting to that IPO.

You can divide employer brand into three distinct categories:

- **Things you can control:** career page, job listings, website and blog, culture and corporate values, candidate communication
- **Things you can directly influence:** company reviews, employee stories and advocacy, social media activity
- **Things you can indirectly influence:** public perception, awards and accolades

Employer branding is vastly important when it comes to recruiting and retaining talent. A LinkedIn study found that when employer brand was strong, recruiting costs **plummeted by 43%**. In other words, you'll experience less friction attracting top talent and getting them to the offer stage. This makes sense, as candidates are **valuing work-life balance and company culture** above comp and benefits in the wake of the pandemic.

Level 1:

5 steps to build your employer brand from the ground-up

Employer branding has the potential to be creative, and should in some way set you apart from other companies like yours. That being said, building a foundation is key before adding unique elements into branding strategy.



01.

Write your employee value prop. Your employee value prop explains what you offer to candidates and what you expect in return. It also sets the tone for more employer branding materials moving forward. It's not a tagline, but instead serves to align what your company is looking for with your target candidate audiences.

An effective EVP will be shaped by feedback sourced directly from current and prospective employees and revised as your needs and values shift. Consider surveying past and current employees every six months or so, and ask questions like:

- 1. Who are we as a company?
- 2. What do we do?
- 3. Why does it matter?
- 4. Why do people work here?
- 5. What do people like or dislike about working here?
- 6. Why do people leave?

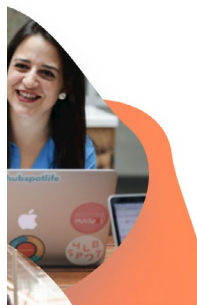
Your EVP is typically placed at the beginning of a job description, on a careers page, or highlighted during the interview process. If you're pursuing talent in several diverse functions (say, accounting and design), consider developing separate EVPs for each group.

It should encompass at least two of the following:

- **Company culture** – What are your values around team spirit, ethics, inclusion, and socializing?
- **Work environment** – How you describe your office or remote work atmosphere and autonomy level?
- **Benefits** – What compensation and perks do you offer beyond wages?
- **Career advancement** – How do you help teammates grow professionally?

Your best work starts here.

ask what it's like to work at HubSpot, you'll usually hear the same few sentiments.



There's no inner circle.

Everyone from the C-suite to interns share information, knowledge, and ideas. Being radically transparent helps us all think like founders, and stay focused on solving for our customers.

Everyone's empowered to work autonomously.

We trust amazing people to do amazing things. At HubSpot, you have ownership over work that directly impacts the business. You can move fast, and learn even faster.

EVP Template

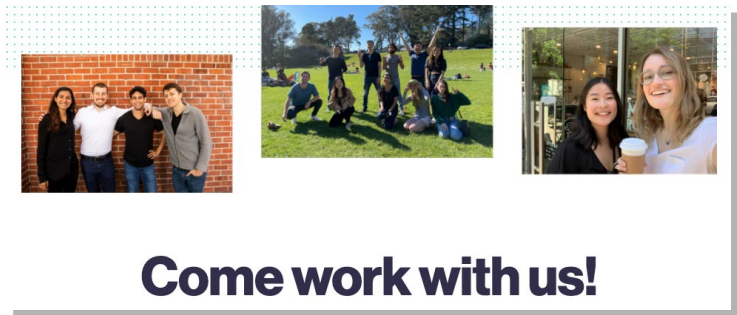
(Company name) offers (job title and desired attributes) the opportunity to achieve/earn/develop (key factors uncovered during Discovery and Analysis phases) and we reward those who (stated company goals).

Acme Startup Co. offers motivated and creative software engineers the opportunity to work on innovative projects and train on the latest programming languages and we reward those who are devoted to shipping excellent code on schedule.



02.

Create a Careers Page on your website. The first place candidates will go if they receive a recruiting email or come across a job posting is to your company website. Having a team page that talks about your employee value prop, has photos of your team, and outlines your benefits will help talent visualize their potential future at your company and lead to more applications. It'll also show that you value your employees and their commitment to your mission.



03.

Revamp your job descriptions. While it may be tempting to copy and paste from another job ad, it's vital to carefully think about and craft a message that resonates with your employee value prop. Job descriptions are arguably the most important part of your employer brand — they're also the only place where you are directly asking candidates to apply. According to an Indeed survey of over 2,000 job seekers, **more than half** say that the quality of a job description is “very or extremely influential” on their decision to submit an application

Look at your job postings as a one-stop shop, where candidates don't have to leave the page in search of extra information. They should contain a short mission statement, the projects the new hire will work on or day-to-day aspects of the role, necessary skills and competencies, and the organization's culture. Download our [How to Write Great Job Descriptions Ebook](#) for best practices and standout examples from other top startups.

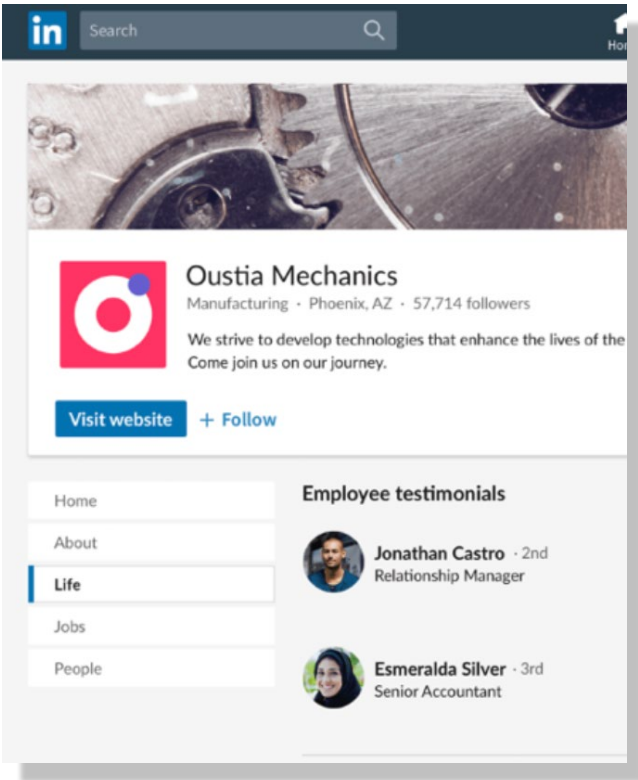
04.

Set up a Glassdoor/Comparably profile and have team members leave reviews. Remember when we said that candidates will do their due diligence before applying to your company? That's more true now than it has ever been before, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Asking your team to leave positive reviews on sites like [Glassdoor](#) and [Comparably](#) isn't only something that's nice to do, it can reduce your cost-per-hire by **almost 50%**. That's because candidates are 75% more likely to apply to a job if you're actively managing your reviews by responding to both positive and negative comments.

05.

Advertise that you're hiring on social platforms.

Social media is an easy way to reach the audiences you're trying to get in front of. In fact, LinkedIn states that completed company pages (where you can even incorporate a Life at X section) get **twice as much traffic** as an incomplete profile. Plus, **68% of Millennials** indicated they visit an employer's social media profiles specifically to evaluate the employer's brand. Include recent press or your careers page in your “Featured” posts, and include “we're hiring” in your title. Incorporate team photos into your feed.



Level 2:

4 ways to level up your existing branding

So you've created a team page, written your employee value prop, polished your job postings, and monitored online reviews — you're done, right? Not so fast. You need to consistently update your employer branding to reflect your values as your grow and company needs shift.



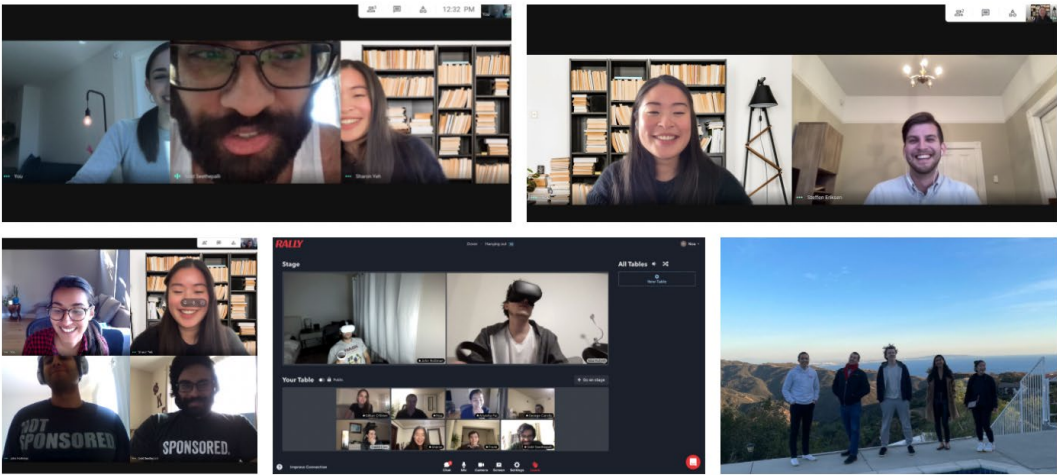
01.

Use employee testimonials on your website and social platforms.

A great way to tell your brand story is by leveraging employee testimonials whether short posts or longform content. These act as **social proof**, or the idea that people want to engage in similar things to their peers.

Employee testimonials can be a review of what it's like to work for the company, the onboarding experience, the team culture, or how the company assisted in professional development. This is also a great opportunity to highlight diversity, and showcase members from different departments and teams that you're hiring for.

If you have a content or marketing team, you can enlist them to ghostwrite blogs for your employees about how they found your company and why they decided to join — you can even host them on an employee specific blog site. You can also take positive reviews from Glassdoor and turn them into images or GIFs that you post on your site or social platforms.



My first few months at Dover: what it was like to join a new company remotely



"I started out as an intern at CareerPlug during my last semester of college and immediately felt welcomed throughout the entire office. Upon graduating, I found myself in my first full-time opportunity working with an amazing company, doing something I enjoy, and progressing my career professionally and personally."

— Zach Garcia



02.

Audit company or product reviews. Managing the public perception of your company is also a key part of employer branding — it's hard to motivate a team if your product is poorly reviewed. It's worthwhile to do a quick Google search and see if you appear on any public review sites and take the time to respond to negative reviews (if any). If you're a SaaS company, you should also audit your profile on [software-related review sites](#) to make sure you've covered your bases.

03.

Have employees advertise open roles on social media. Since your employees are your unofficial recruiters and marketers, it's important to leverage their LinkedIn and other social media networks to represent themselves and spread the word about your company. Plus, 75% of U.S. respondents believe that companies whose C-Suite executives and leadership team use social media to communicate their mission, brand values, and purpose are more trustworthy.

If you have a marketing team, you'll want them to send graphics and guidelines to your team that they can upload to their header to advertise that you're actively hiring. If you don't have a dedicated content team, there are tons of free no-code tools, like [Canva](#), that have graphic templates with dimensions for nearly every social platform. Ask your team to take five minutes out of a stand-up or all-team meeting to upload the graphics and update their name to include "we're hiring!"

Jared Guest (He/Him) · 1st

Customer Experience at Dover – We're Hiring!

Cumming, Georgia, United States · [Contact info](#)

04.

Audit your recruiting strategy. Every recruiting touchpoint with a candidate needs to speak to the type of team and values you're cultivating, and your recruiting strategy is a way to directly influence your employer brand. From the time they see your job ad or read about you until they are recruited or rejected by you, you have a huge opportunity to provide every applicant with a smooth and friendly conversation and enhance your brand name. There are a few nice touches you can incorporate that convey you value a candidate's time:

- **Social hangs in your onsite interviews**, like lunch or coffee with a teammate a great way to make candidates feel included and comfortable during what can be a long day. You can also better determine culture fit and help talent visualize themselves as a real member of your team.
- **Have team members send messages of congratulations after you've extended an offer**, especially if they spoke with the candidate during their interview process. Knowing they already have champions on the team could be the variable that gets them over the line.

Level 3:

3 creative ways to level up and stand out

If you scored above a 51 on our quiz, first off, congrats! It sounds like you’ve really got a grasp on what matters in your employer brand. While the following strategies aren’t always under your control (like awards), these can become goals for your marketing, content or recruiting team to reach toward as a way to stand out from the competition.



01.

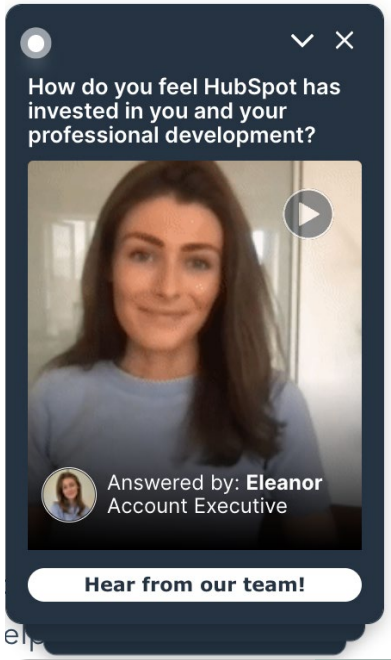
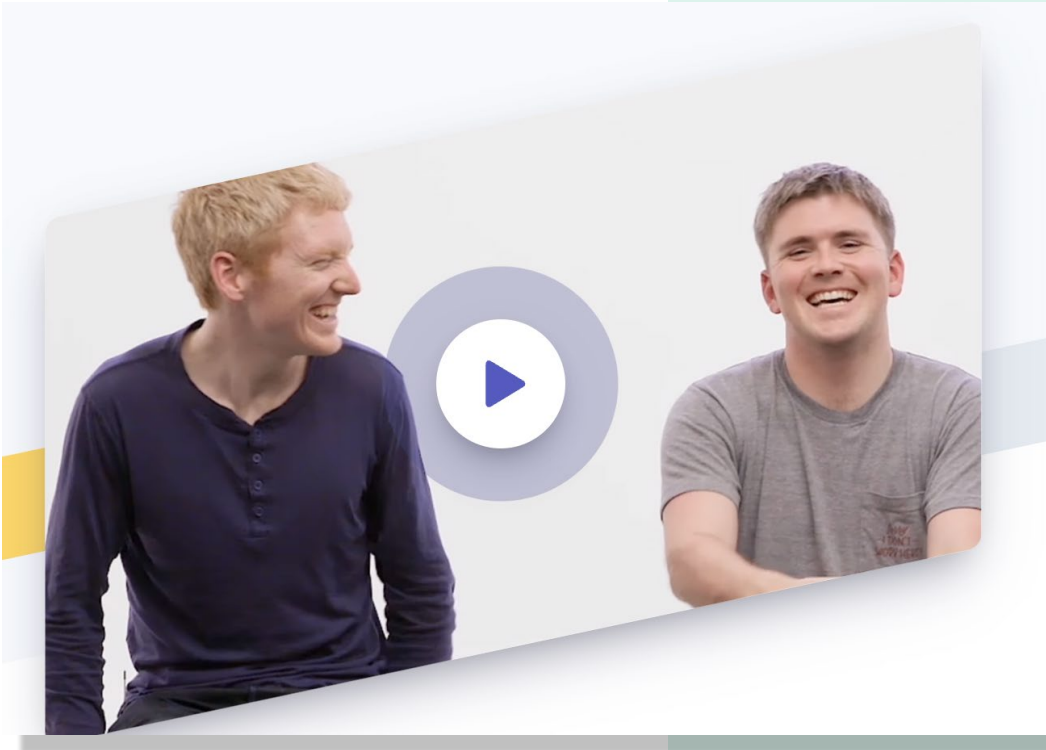
Showcase your team with video content.

Consider creating and sharing employer branding videos to show potential candidates what your company is all about. According data from CareerBuilder showed that job postings with an icon to watch a recruitment video were viewed 12% more than postings without video and, on average, receive a 34% greater application rate.

You can interview employees, do an office tour, or showcase your company’s beginnings. An excellent example comes from Stripe’s founders and is featured prominently on their Careers page.

In addition to your careers page, you can increase your reach by sharing your videos on multiple channels like:

- 1. YouTube
- 2. Your social media platforms (LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, etc.)
- 3. Instagram through IGTV, stories, and highlights





02.

Create department-specific branding websites. If you're scaling up a specific team, consider creating a separate webpage or video to showcase what it's like to work in a specific department. You can follow all the strategies laid out in this playbook, like longform blogs, video content, social media posts and writing a specific and unique EVP that speaks to the values of that team.

If you need inspiration, check out Hubspot's Department pages, which highlight specific teams like [marketing](#) or [sales](#) or [Stripe's Engineering blog](#).

Marketing Careers

Marketing changes every day. We see that as an opportunity to innovate. If you're someone who's not afraid to try new things, finds joy in data, and is deeply curious, you've come to the right spot.

See open positions in Marketing

stripe

ProductsUse casesDevelopersCompany

Blog

Engineering

We love the web, and care deeply about beautiful code, APIs, and documentation. This belief is as true today as it was when we first wrote this line on our website when we were ten people. Our engineering blog captures how, what, and why we code at Stripe.



03.

Apply for employer branding awards. While securing an employer branding award is largely out of your control, if you have a talent team, you should ask them to apply employee recognition lists as often as possible, as these lists come with a huge host of benefits, like:

- Boosting your company's reputation by serving as great social proof of how you're supporting your employees
- Gaining a competitive edge when recruiting candidates
- Increasing awareness of your company and brand through cross-marketing

For startups, the most relevant awards include:

- [BuiltIn's list of Great Places to Work](#)
- [Comparably](#) and [Glassdoor](#) Awards

For a great list that provides pros, cons and application requirements, check out [this guide](#).



Want help with your branding strategy?

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to learn more.

“

“Working with Dover has meant we get support on all fronts, and from every angle of recruiting including sourcing, optimal channel usage, and interview best practices.”



Sofi Pechner
Head of People Operations
Mozart Data

Helping some of the
world's best startups
recruit top talent

stripe



Lattice



Benchling



INSTABASE

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