



GANGWAY

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Welcome to Issue 7 of *Gangway* – seagoing recruiters are engaged in a war for talent. In this issue we will examine the importance and relevance of “**employer branding**” for seagoing recruiters.

Why do you work for your company? Do seafarers know just how good an employment opportunity your company offers?

If they don't then you need to take another look at your employer brand.



Anneley Pickles
Managing Director Shiptalk Recruitment Ltd

Do you see what I see?

With the supply and demand of seafarers at such critical levels – companies are quickly realising the importance of distinguishing themselves from their competitors as they struggle to recruit. While it may sound simple, making an employer really catch the eye takes concerted effort, and is increasingly dependent on the concept of “Employer Branding”.

While “brand awareness” has long been seen as the way to make any business stand out to customers, “employer branding” is increasingly being seen as an extension of this, and is an effective and important step to recruiting and retaining the best employees.

Most HR experts agree that employer branding is important, and can be a formidable weapon in winning the “War For Talent”. According to Professor Graeme Martin, of Glasgow University, “Employer branding begins with the creation of an employer brand

image”. This is a company image that communicates the “functional, economic and psychological benefits” it offers employees...or put simply, “the job, the cash and the smiles along the way”.

There are many strong ‘employer brands’, and some of the leading ones are the Royal and US Navies. Their advertising campaigns make clear what it means to join them, and they give an unmistakable sense of the variety and excitement on offer, along with the grit and danger. They know their target audience, and they do everything to bring their needs into line with the lifestyle and opportunities navy employment can bring.

Perhaps with so many shipowners now trapped in a life and death business struggle to attract staff, commercial shipping can learn a thing or two from employer branding. People have a choice to work for a specific company or to look elsewhere, and companies need



to act positively in order to influence this decision process.

While money is always a hugely important recruitment factor, there are increasingly other more subtle features coming into play, and it is important that these are recognised, understood and managed effectively. Across all shipping companies, employer branding can be an extremely powerful tool in making people look to them for employment.

Looking back to many an officer's earliest days in shipping, cadets were very much viewed in relation to their sponsoring company. There was a definite pecking order based on people's perceptions of the quality of the company they were working for. Unbeknown to many at the time 'employer branding' was heavily at play – and it continues today.

So can employer branding make a company more successful than its competitors? It seems the answer is 'yes', but only if the organisation starts with the right definition and philosophy. Employer branding is not simply a side project, nor is it a rush to breathe life into old recruitment advertising. Employer branding is about

understanding what engages people and of what an organisation can provide to employees. Companies, who understand what they offer and the inherent value therein, are more likely to recruit and to retain the right people.

Culturally of course, shipping is very different from the employment model used ashore. Recent studies ashore showed that 60% of CEO's were, "lying awake at night", worrying about the need to attract and retain the best people, while wrestling with the problems of making employment an attraction.

Out in the 'manning malls' of Manila, Mumbai, Myanmar, etc, etc the patterns have been rather different. Many shipping companies have simply turned their problems over to someone else. A problem outsourced is a problem halved it seems...or is that a problem ignored?

Employers who have taken their eye off their people, and simply buy them 'ready made', have something of a 'branding' quandary to tackle. Where there is no bond between employees and the company there is no chance to grow together, and no way of tapping into loyalty, enthusiasm and of getting more

from people.

Understanding employee perceptions and developing a brand identity to tap into is now one of the biggest challenges in the regeneration of employee attraction. "All too often branding and marketing is bland and generic," according to Anneley Pickles, MD of Shiptalk Recruitment. "The one-size-fits-all approach to employer branding or marketing just won't work, and while an employer's brand is of enormous importance in terms of attracting talent it must be rolled out to truly represent the company and their ideals".

Marketing experts never tire of telling us that people like brands, and the shelves in most supermarkets attest to this. Clearly customers stay loyal to the brands they value. It would seem this applies as much to the workplace and the jobs market as it does to the groceries. Brands are therefore valuable, to both employer and employees, because they build loyalty and strengthen the bond between both parties. Employees lacking the "career anchor" of genuine close company attachment see themselves as being free to roam, and when an attractive proposition comes from elsewhere they take off.

The importance of employer branding and its attraction to employees was highlighted in a recent survey of more than 500 HR executives carried out by the global talent management firm the Bernard Hodes Group.

The survey found that a company's brand - in the shape of its reputation and workplace culture - were even more important when it comes to attracting top talent than pay and benefits. Granted this was a survey looking at employment ashore, but some of the lessons can still be applied once the mooring lines are slipped.

So if brands are so important to employees, do employers value brands highly enough? Sadly it would seem not. The survey went on to state that 40% of employers did not have formal programmes to promote their employer brand to new recruits and top talent. One possible reason for this problem, identified by the survey, was that employer brand programmes have traditionally been notoriously hard to justify to the bottom-line.

It's that dreaded bottom line again – but is this a false economy? It certainly appears so according to Anneley Pickles, “Without the right employees in place there may eventually be no bottom line to worry about, and so employer branding does require something of a leap of faith”. A leap made all the more important with employees asking increasingly tough questions of their employers, and thinking harder about the implications of their own long-term career reputation. With a more savvy and sophisticated target market, companies need to consider how they can convince top talent that they are the right company to join.

If a Master were offered two jobs tomorrow – one with a highly reputable company, the other with one splashed over Lloyd's List for abandoning seafarers, or colliding and alliding all over the place – which would seem more likely to offer a stable, rewarding career? The answer seems simple to us, and will also be clear for potential employees.

As the war for talent intensifies, employers must offer more and more to stand out from their rivals. Research has shown how employees who respect a company are happier at work and they reciprocate in kind. They demonstrate higher levels of commitment, they are more willing to 'go the extra mile' in their work, and they are less likely to be tempted away by rivals.

Across shipping there is a perception that “poaching” of staff is rife. This means that companies need to work harder to ensure that employment is a truly mutually beneficial experience. Employees can form emotional bonds with their employer, and this can have a profound effect on levels of engagement, motivation and loyalty. In other words, employees start to 'live the brand' in a genuine, proud way...and will stick loyally with it.

Employer branding is about effectively communicating all that is good about a company and employment within it. It is about linking employees (and potential employees) to a message of success, of assuredness and stability, and of shouting out “we are the company you want to work for...come and join us!”

Shiptalk's top tips for employer branding:

- **Look at your company – what are the reasons someone would work for you?**
- **When employees talk to family, friends, and peers what makes them proud to work for you? Develop these themes and promote them.**
- **Ask tough questions, “How can we make our company stand out?”, then act on it.**
- **Changing employer branding perceptions is a long-term commitment – prepare for this;**
- **Employer branding only works with commitment and involvement from the top tiers of the company...without their buy-in branding has failed;**
- **Be prepared for criticism – not everybody will understand why it is important to improve;**
- **Tell people about the progress you intend to make and why it is important;**
- **Don't presume you know what people think, ask them...a few home truths can be healthy. Tesco chief executive Sir Terry Leahy has said: "Your employer brand isn't what you say it is. It is what people tell you it is."**
- **Look for best practice examples and learn from them – what are other industries doing, what are your competitors doing?**



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Seafarer Attraction and Retention – what the seafarers are saying

While ninety-five percent of goods moved around the world travel by sea, hardly anyone knows anything about the lives and views of the people who move them. Even though manning levels on modern ships are a fraction of the numbers employed at sea in past decades, there remain around 1.2 million seafarers serving on approximately

50,000 ocean-going merchant vessels.

Despite the fact that shipping urgently needs to know the real thoughts of those serving on ships today, the modern merchant mariner is almost completely out of sight and mind. Regrettably, instead of dialogue and proper feedback, there has long been only speculation and

second-guesses filling in for the unheard voices of those out at sea.

To counter this dearth of information online recruitment company Shiptalk Recruitment Limited has begun a human element initiative with Market Research Company Gilmour Research (GRS), to find-out exactly what serving seafarers



think about their lives at sea. The initiative takes the form of five separate surveys running through late 2007, into 2008, and this first report looks at seafarer attraction and retention and provides some shocks.

While some of the findings will come as no surprise, such as highlighting the aging demographic among skilled officers, or the importance of money in keeping people at sea – what was most surprising was the fact that even in this day in age, with paperwork, fatigue and criminalisation lauded as career killers, it remains as true today as centuries ago that people just miss contact with families and friends.

With voyage lengths, shore leave and family contact so important to so many seafarers it follows that even in this so called Internet age that telephone access was still deemed by the survey as a key to keeping people happy.

The "Life At Sea" surveys have been designed to obtain up-to-date perspectives on the issues that most concern modern seafarers, and contains vital intelligence for ship operators, legislators, manning agencies, academics, training establishments and anyone concerned with real-life contemporary conditions at sea. The findings make compelling reading for anyone looking to attract, retain or manage people at sea today, showing vividly how active seafarers view their trade and provides essential information for anyone contemplating a sea-going career.

The survey report is the result of the contribution of serving seafarers whose views and responses have been compiled confidentially over the past three months. The first in the series of "Life at Sea" surveys can be viewed freely online at: www.shiptalkjobs.com/survey_results

Bound copies of the survey report are available to purchase from www.shiptalkshop.com/las1.asp priced at £25/copy.

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New Software Provides Full Ship Simulation for Cruise Industry



The cruise industry is set to benefit from integrated ship simulation training for the very first time thanks to South Tyneside College.

In another global first, the College is developing new software, in conjunction with Kongsberg Maritime, which will allow a live connection between the engine room and the bridge in a simulated cruise vessel.

This will enable engineers and bridge staff from cruise ships to be trained together in live realistic exercises so that they can experience the implications of their actions in a safe environment.

The maritime and port industries already benefit from integrated ship simulation training for a range of crew resource management courses.

As well as offering tangible financial

benefits from insurance savings, the integrated courses can vastly improve communication and understanding between the bridge and engine room and allow ship personnel to operate more effectively as one team.

Chris Thompson, Head of Marine Simulation at South Tyneside College, said: "This new software will revolutionise operational training for the cruise industry. Although training programmes already exist for bridge and engine room cruise vessels separately, there really is no substitute for training exercises which simulate a real-life situation in real-time with the entire ship's staff working together.

"This training will ensure that engine room and bridge personnel from cruise vessels learn to function more effectively as a cohesive team and gain a much

greater understanding of the challenges and demands facing each other's working areas.

"Hopefully this will have a tangible financial impact for the sector, as well as reducing the number of accidents and incidents at sea."

The integrated ship simulation training should be available for the cruise industry from March 2008.

South Tyneside College is one of only a handful of training organisations across the world to offer a live link-up between the bridge and the engine room.

To find out more, please contact the information centre at South Tyneside College on:

Tel: +44 (0) 191 427 2900

Website: www.stc.ac.uk



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The company provides a comprehensive range of individually structured ship management services to meet the needs of ship owners and operators. The range of management services offered extends to but is not limited to technical management, new building supervision, provision of personnel, purchasing, vessel commercial management, accounts and consultancy.

Northern Marine Management manages a diverse fleet which currently comprises of 121 vessels consisting of VLCC Crude oil tankers, Shuttle tankers, Product /Chemical tankers, Ice Aframax tankers, RoRo vessels, and Offshore support vessels. The company is expanding the managed fleet in early 2008 to include V LPG carriers, and with the management of an aggressive new build programme.

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Northern Marine Management (India) Private Ltd is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Northern Marine Management Group.

In recognition of its continued growth and strategic importance to the NMM Group and its clients, in February 2005 the company purchased new larger premises at Hiranandani Business Park in Powai, Mumbai. The modern 20,000 square feet office employing 75 shore staff, delivers a range of human resource management, technical support and administration services. NMM(I) presently manages in excess of 1200 Indian nationals on behalf of the following client groups;

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