

Expertise and insight for the future

Enoma Edevbaro

Developing and defining the employer branding strategy

How can employer branding be used to attract talent in the martech industry: Case Avidly.

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The objective of this thesis is to determine if employer branding can help Avidly become more attractive as an employer in the martech industry. The research is limited specifically to Avidly Agency.

A literature review was conducted to gain an overview of how marketing and branding have evolved and to help understand how employer branding can be used to increase Avidly's company attractiveness specifically in the martech industry. To understand how employer branding could help increase company attractiveness, qualitative research utilising the case study approach was conducted with a Finnish martech company Avidly, to gain insight into the company and the market.

The results of the study showed that employer branding if done systematically and implemented strategically, is beneficial for Avidly. There are certain matters to consider when aiming to create an efficient employer branding strategy but with the right management, measurement and implementation the benefits to company attractiveness, are clear.

The principal conclusion was that Avidly can benefit from creating an employer branding strategy, and when aligned with corporate strategy can become an attractive employer in the martech industry.

Keywords	Marketing, branding, employer branding, martech	



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1 Introduction

The landscape for companies in the marketing and technology industries is in constant evolution as the technologies backing the actions of these companies, keep developing. This change has thus brought with it a growing need for company employee skill development and the acquirement of new talent. To stay ahead of the curb in the everchanging scene, companies are finding new ways to get the attention of the best talent. The field of employer branding surfaced on the scene years ago, promising to be the rescuer of marketing and technology companies fighting for the best talent in a highly concentrated field.

The thesis focuses on defining the employer branding strategy and examines how employer branding can be used to attract talent in the martech industry in the case of a marketing technology agency Avidly. With over 230 experts in the Nordic countries and Germany, Avidly helps small and medium-sized companies in the public and private sector with their data-driven sales, strategic marketing, technology, creative design, communications, digital marketing, website design, copywriting, brand strategy, packaging and much more. Martech means the combination of marketing and technology and specifically applied to utilising technology to achieve marketing goals and objectives (MartechToday 2018). Employer branding can be defined as the infiltration of branding principles into human resources. It focuses on the management of the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees and related stakeholders through a long-term strategy whilst trying to define the identity of the company as an employer (Mokina 2014) (Sullivan 2004).

This topic was chosen because though employer branding is not a very new concept, its utilisation especially in the martech industry in Finland is fairly premature. For Avidly, the release of a new corporate strategy meant positioning changes, which lead them to seek new talent from the industry as well as set up career and skill development initiatives for current staff. Employer branding allows companies to further expand their marketing and branding efforts into creating an employer brand identity that is aligned



with the corporate and consumer strategy and aids them in both attracting new talent but also in retaining current employees.

This Thesis discusses the fields of marketing and branding and how they have laid the foundation for the creation of the employer branding concept. An interview with Avidly was conducted to gain more insight from the company point of view. This thesis aims to see if and how Avidly can benefit from the creation of an employer branding strategy and whether it can help them become a more attractive employer in the martech industry. The material used for this thesis is literature as well as an interview with Avidly's human resources manager, Leena Talvensaari.

The thesis material is gathered from Avidly's point of view, however, the topic can be useful for other companies considering the creation of an employer branding strategy. The methods companies use might vary but the aim remains the same; to become a more attractive employer that attracts the best talent.

2 Literature review

To get a thorough understanding of employer branding, it is first essential to review marketing and branding theory as they act as the foundation for the development of employer branding.

2.1 Marketing

The question 'What is marketing?' can be answered in a multitude of ways and as a field of study, it has certainly received many different definitions. The American Marketing Association's definition of marketing states: "Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large." (AMA 2017), highlighting marketing's responsibility and role in the everyday lives of consumers. Another definition, by Kotler, showcases how marketing is a tool used between consumer needs and services: "Marketing is about identifying and meeting



human and social needs. One of the shortest good definitions of marketing is "meeting needs profitably". Kotler further opens the definition of marketing through a couple of company examples where the private or social needs of consumers were turned into profitable businesses; how Google realised peoples' need for access to information on the Internet and thus created a search engine to meet this need efficiently; and of IKEA creating furniture for everyone at a lower price point (Kotler and Keller 2016, 26-28).

Kotler and Keller showcase the five core concepts of marketing, which are: Needs, wants, demands – Products and services – Value, satisfaction, quality – Exchanges, transactions, relationships – Markets. (Kotler and Keller 2016, 26-28). Which explain how it is firstly, important to understand what consumers need and what their demands are, then to realise the products and services available to them or which need to be created to meet their demands, then to see the value those products and services bring to consumers and at what level of quality, and then how the actual exchange or transaction happens, and finally how the relationship is nurtured and what the market is for all of this.

Thorough comprehension of what can be marketed and what marketers' market aids in understanding marketing further. Entities such as goods, services, events, experiences, persons, places, properties, organizations, information, and ideas can be marketed (Kotler and Keller 2016, 26-28).

Figure 1. highlights the four flows connecting sellers and buyers. The seller offers goods or services from their industry to the market to a collection of buyers leading to them receiving money for the transaction, providing the collection of sellers with information and leading to sellers communicating with the buyers. The model below showcases the exchange of money and exchange of information.



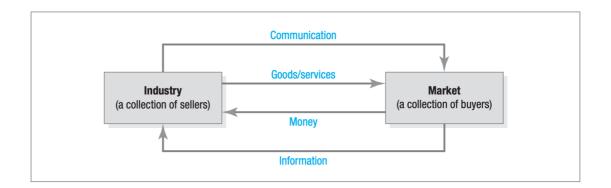


Figure 1. A simple marketing system explaining the marketing system. (Kotler and Keller 2016)

Efficient marketing efforts are framed by creating a marketing strategy. Kotler and Keller state the three building blocks upon which marketing strategy is built upon: segmentation, targeting and positioning, a combination driving high company profitability. Once customer segments are determined, marketers can direct their focus on scouting which segment(s) provides them with the best opportunities for success, and then look at ways to position their market offering in the target audiences' minds in the most efficient way within said segment group(s) (Kotler and Keller 2016, 26-28) as portrayed in figure 2 below. With a goal to offer them a clear path to understanding the key benefits of the marketed entity.

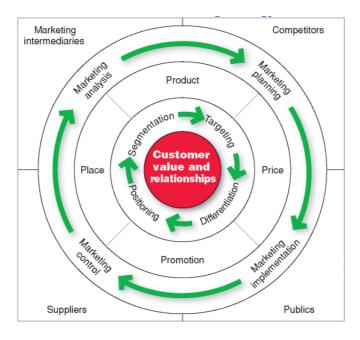


Figure 2. Model of marketing process. (Kotler 2000)



Positioning is a driving force in marketing, aiding a brand to become a memorable perception in the consumer's minds. Kotler and Keller define positioning as: "Positioning is the act of designing a company's offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the minds of the target market". The more clearly we can define the brand, can we locate it in the minds of consumers and take advantage of the benefits it provides to the company. The more value the customers feel, the more satisfied they become and the more likely they are to repeat their purchase, leading to higher profitability for the company. Thus, marketing strategy creation highly benefits from clear brand positioning as it guides defining the essence of the brand, the goals it helps consumers achieve and the differentiated ways in which these are done (Kotler and Keller 2016, 130-133).

The goal of marketing strategy is to drive profitability, thus, it is vital to define why the target market should buy a product or a service. The defined 'why' of a product or a service is defined as the company's customer-focused value proposition, an outcome of distinctively describing and designing the company's offer to create an image in the minds of consumers. The value proposition aims to satisfy the addressed needs of the customers by highlighting the benefits of the offer. Value propositions are intangible, and the combination of products, services, information and experiences is what makes it a physical offering (Kotler and Keller 2016, 130-133). Just as in branding, value propositions are also at the core of employer branding, titled as employer value proposition (EVP). EVP is used in talent attraction and employee retention, answering the question of how the company would like to be seen (Mokina 2014). The topic of EVP will be discussed more deeply later on together with employer branding.

Figure 3. showcases the value propositions of three companies within their target audience, displaying the product and describing the target customers and the created value proposition of the company and their product.



Company and Product	Target Customers	Value Proposition
Hertz (car rental)	Busy professionals	Fast, convenient way to rent the right type of car at an airport
Volvo (station wagon)	Safety-conscious upscale families	The safest, most durable wagon in which your family can ride
Domino's (pizza)	Convenience-minded pizza lovers	A delicious hot pizza, delivered promptly to your door

Figure 3. A value proposition example table. (Kotler and Keller 2016)

Aaker states that brands are a powerful differentiation tool of marketers' because differentiation of product features is becoming increasingly more difficult, particularly in the minds of consumers, thus the brand name and brand significance are gaining more traction as competitive assets. The trend of directing resources on brand building efforts in order to differentiate rather than on, for example, price competition has been recognised by marketeers as a sustainable way to develop a competitive advantage. And though the visible impact on sales is more in the long run rather than in the short-run this focus aims to ultimately shift purchasing decision-making from price to brand associations (Aaker 1991).

2.2.1. Branding

Branding is a marketing concept with more history than marketing itself, which focuses on the perceived image of a product or a service.

The American Marketing Association defines branding as: "A brand is a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or service as distinct from those of other sellers" (AMA 2017). Another definition of a brand is given by Stephen King from the WPP Group London:

"A product is something that is made in a factory; a brand is something that is bought by a customer. A product can be copied by a competitor; a brand is unique. A product can be quickly outdated; a successful brand is timeless" (as quoted in Kotler and Gertner (2002).



Barrow and Mosley (2005) note that for both employer and customer brands, in the war for talent and committed employees, understanding how to target the right audience with the right brand message and benefits is key when trying to beat the competition. Stating furthermore, that while typically the functional components of a service offering tend to give a brand their edge, it is in fact your people who are the most important factor in shaping the perceptions of a service brand (Barrow and Mosley 2005).

Figure 4 from Rosenbaum-Elliot et al. model of social psychology offers a clear look at the emotional and functional realms of brands. On the functional level brands keep their promise and offer satisfaction by delivering that promise. On the emotional level the brand attributes of authenticity, symbolic meaning, personality etc. offer the consumer a chance to truly experience the brand and self-position. Brands can ease consumer decision-making and alleviate uncertainty because when you know the brand, you know what you are getting. (Elliott, et al. 2011)

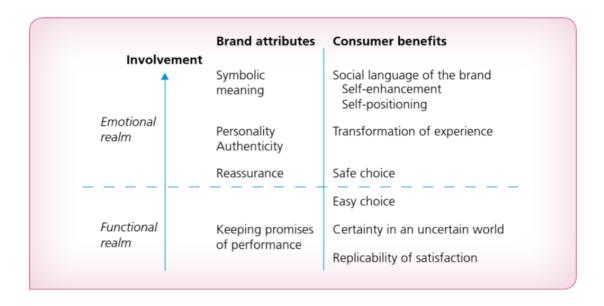


Figure 4. The social psychology of the brand (Elliott, et al. 2011)

To satisfy both the heart and the head, many marketers believe both rational and emotional elements should anchor brand positioning. Companies can develop brand mantras which help guide marketers to direct a coherent message to consumers about the brand, ultimately to strengthen brand positioning. The brand mantra economically describes and communicates the brand's core promise and essence in three to five



words, giving the consumer an idea of what the brand is and what it is not. A good brand mantra highlights the brand's uniqueness in its category of field in a clear, compact, meaningful way which sticks in the minds of the consumers. (Kotler and Keller 2016, 134-135)

To stand out from the crowd and hold a firm stance in the market, the ways of positioning a brand in the market are constantly evolving. To be emotionally and rationally satisfying, brands are focusing on brand narratives, storytelling and cultural branding in their positioning strategy. These provocative ideas highlight looking at brand positioning not only from a focus on specific product qualities but more on telling a compelling narrative or story.

The five key elements of narrative branding are listed by Kotler as follows:

- 1. The brand story in terms of words and metaphors,
- 2. the consumer journey or the way consumers engage with the brand over time and touch points where they come into contact with it,
- 3. the visual language or expression for the brand,
- 4. the manner in which the narrative is expressed experientially, or the brand engages the senses, and
- 5. the role the brand plays in the lives of consumers.

The combination of gathered cultural knowledge, strategy based on cultural branding principles, the hiring and training of cultural experts, is according to Douglas Holt the structure behind companies building iconic, leadership brands. (Kotler and Keller 2016, 136)

2.2.2. From branding to employer branding



2.2 Employer branding

The field of branding has mainly held its position within companies as a tool used for differentiating tangible products and for the development of products and corporate brands. Used by companies to assist marketers in telling the story of the uniqueness of the sold goods. "A brand can be defined as a set of tangible and intangible attributes designed to build the reputation of products, services or place, and to create the identity of the organization" (Sammut-Bonnici 2015). Over the years, though, it has expanded itself into the field of Human Resources Management to be used as a differentiation method for companies and people. This infiltration of branding principles into human resources management has been coined as employer branding. Companies are increasingly using employer branding in new talent attraction and in keeping current employees engaged in the company culture and strategy (Mokina 2014). Thus, it is vital to understand that employer branding strategy targets specific talents whose skills and expertise help the company meet its business objectives and goals, and is thus also a process where open positions and the job environment are promoted externally. (Mosley and Schmidt 2017)

One of the first definitions of employer branding comes from Ambler and Barrow (1996) who define the employer brand as 'the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company', highlighting its benefits. Taking the definition further, employer branding defined by Sullivan (2004) is "a targeted, long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm". Another definition comes from the Conference Board (2001) which proposes, "the employer brand establishes the identity of the firm as an employer. It encompasses the firm's value system, policies and behaviours toward the objectives of attracting, motivating, and retaining the firm's current and potential employees".

Employer branding is ultimately used by companies to differentiate themselves from competitors, aiming to highlight what is unique about the firm's job positions and environment, helping to specify the company identity to be distinctively its own from



others. Employer branding encompasses both external and internal communications, aiming to enhance both employment experience through consistency and employee engagement (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). One of the important focus areas of employer branding is the ability to attract the best employees through company reputation. The internal aspect focuses on employee devotion development towards the organization's values and goals, with an ultimate mission to retain current employees to stay within the firm. (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004)

The relationship between the company and its brand and employees is an intriguing wheel where just as a company focuses its efforts on creating a brand for itself, its services or products, it does so to create a brand as an employer both internally and externally. The importance of acquiring the best employees and retaining them for as long as possible is vital for companies when considering quality assurance and finance. Whether we are referring to customers or employees, it is far more profitable to try and retain the existing ones than to embark on a continuous process of recruiting new customers or employees. Typically the training and development invested in an employee are recovered only when they stay in the company until a return on the investment is evident. As an employee begins to develop a relationship with the employer or in other words with the 'brand', the connection between corporate and employee performance and positive attitude towards the brand and loyalty and trust in the 'brand' becomes clear. Because of this, Ambler and Barrow state that the company brand has significant power of influence on the success of motivated employees and on the company's results, which forms a single conceptual framework consisting of human resources (HR) and brand marketing. Simply put, high-level performance on all levels demands to have the best people. This is demonstrated in Figure 5 which looks at the link between the quality of employees and the quality of product or service. This virtuous circle captures what we are seeking. (Ambler and Barrow, The employer brand 1996)



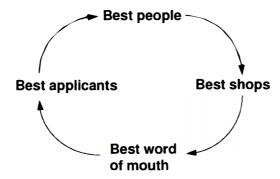


Figure 5. The virtuous circle. (Ambler and Barrow, The employer brand 1996)

Ambler and Barrow (1996) highlight, that employer branding is most beneficial and valuable for high value-added service where salaries are higher and employees are fewer and thus, the importance of the employee-employer relationship increases. Thus, to understand the employer brand concept contextually, the idea of a brand having a personality was highlighted by many scholars with a focus on how the brand-as-person concept increases the trustworthiness of the brand. The concept of employer branding showcases why it is so beneficial for companies. (Ambler and Barrow, The employer brand 1996)

What are then the differences between the employer brand and the corporate or product brand? Barrow (2007, 12-14) explains that the employer brand comprises the company's identity as an employer and is thus employment specific, directed for both internal and external audiences whereas the primary audience for corporate or product brands is an external one. Whilst there are differences between the two, employer branding is still seen as part of the corporate brand, assisting in increasing company attractiveness in internal and external labour markets through focusing on culture, employee motivation and attitudes, organisational values and communications. Figure 6. below comparing the corporate and employer brand to highlight their differing and



similar attributes.

Subject of comparison	Employer brand	Corporate brand
Management responsibility	Employer brand manager	Chief executive
Functional responsibility	HR department	Most/all departments
General responsibility	Employees of the HR, Marketing, Corporate Communications and PR Departments	All personnel
Disciplinary roots	Multidisciplinary (personnel management, marketing, branding, communications, PR)	Multidisciplinary (marketing, branding, communications, PR)
Brand generation	Medium to long (3-6 years)	Medium to long (3-6 years)
Stakeholder focus	Employees of the internal and external labor market (existing, potential, former)	Multiple stakeholders
Values	Real	Real
Communication channels	Mix of marketing and corporate communication. Primary: recommendations and reviews	Total corporate communications. <i>Primary</i> : performance of products and services;

Economics & Sociology, Vol. 7, No 2, 2014

Figure 6. A comparison table of corporate brand and employer brand characteristics (Mokina 2014)

Even more concretely, Mokina (2014) explains: "the components of product brand determine the "product as desired purchase" and components of employer brand determine the "company as desired place of work". Furthermore showcasing the impactful connection between the two by explaining how a strong brand image affects the strength of the employer brand and vice versa as employer brand aims to attract and retain employees who add value to the company and their offering, thus consequently making the product brand stronger. (Mokina 2014)

A study conducted by the Corporate Leadership Council (Corporate Leadership Council, 1999) states both product and employer brands have specific components which determine their totality (as portrayed in figure 6 below):

- Product brand components are: product features, quality and performance, value and price, innovation and design, image and prestige.
- Employer brand components are: work environment, company culture and environment, work-life balance, compensation and benefits, product/company brand strength.



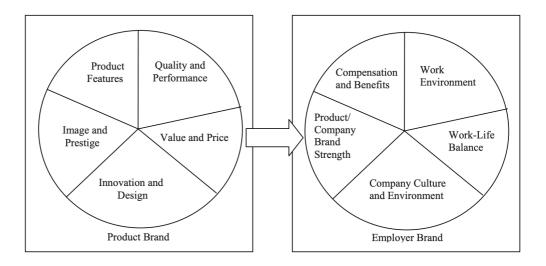


Figure 7. Showcasing the connectedness of a company's Product Brand and Employer Brand. (Mokina 2014)

EMPLOYEE VALUE PROPOSITION

A very critical area at the core of employer branding is EVP. It defines 'how companies would like to be seen' to determine the identity of the brand contrary to the employer brand which defines 'how companies are seen' to elaborate its image. When trying to attract the best talents, actively or passively, EVP is a critical tool in talent attraction, and predominantly showcases those features a company wants to be associated with whilst portraying reasons for employee retention and future acquirement. (Mosley and Schmidt, Employer Branding for Dummies 2017, 63-67) (Sjovall 2017)

Employees and employers expect certain things from each other, and EVP is a tool used to communicate those demands, also operating as the promise of something such as in customer value proposition when considering the quality and benefits of a product, EVP gives insight into what people can expect of the company. The positively understood identity of the brand is highlighted in EVP through showcasing positive experiences and the reputation of the company, operating as a differentiation tool when considering the company's offer. EVP acts in both internal and external employer branding initiatives and is thus an important area of focus for HR and brand management. A strong EVP can help clarify management activities within the firm once established. (Mosley and Schmidt, Employer Branding for Dummies 2017) (Browne 2021)



2.3 Benefits of employer branding

Research shows three key areas where employer branding is considered beneficial to business: enhanced recruitment, retention and employee loyalty (Barrow and Mosley 2005). This is according to research conducted by Hewitt Associates (2000), The Conference Board (2001) and The Economist (2003), where the brand's role of adding value is highlighted, showcasing how strong employer brands help reduce costs in recruitment both in attracting suitable new candidates but also in lowering the chances of current staff leaving on a regular basis. Research highlights that a company has a clear competitive advantage against competitors the lower their staff turnover rate is, supporting the theory that strong employer brands have stronger employee retention rates. (Barrow and Mosley 2005)

Research highlights that the benefits of employer branding are evident when discussing it as an initiative. Mosley and Schmidt (2017) showcase that a company developing an employer branding strategy has the chance to strengthen its current employees' loyalty and thus, decrease employee turnover, while at the same time increase company reputation and desirability, and consequently attract the best candidates. According to Mosley and Schmidt (2017), even though companies might show reluctancy in investing in employer branding due to it not showing immediate economic returns, the long-term positive effects of employer branding are evident when inspecting areas of recruitment, employee engagement, retention and competitive advantage as they highlight in the figure below.



ENGAGEMENT RECRUITMENT A fulfilling and supportive Strong employer brands attract working environment that the larger amount of qualified employees can be proud of, initiates engagement, which in turn drives higher levels of improving the quality of the productivity. High productivity often lead to high levels of customer satisfaction. RETENTION COMPETETIVE ADVANTAGE Workplace satisfaction means With the best and brightest talents of their industry desirability as an employer. employed, companies can gain Talented employees' devotion, is a great marketing tool to attract new talents.

Figure 8. The benefits of employer branding (Mosley and Schmidt, Employer Branding for Dummies 2017)

The benefits of employer branding can be labelled in similar categories as a product brand's to consumers in that the benefits can be functional, economic or psychological. The functional aspect offering the employee possibilities in development or otherwise useful activities such as career training, courses or education. The economic aspect meaning material or monetary rewards such as gifts, perks, salary and bonuses. And the psychological aspect offering the employee deeper meaning, direction, feeling of belonging and a purpose in life through their role. Symbolic associations, where a brand highlights its intangible benefits to a potential applicant, are key components of employer branding and branding (Ambler and Barrow, The employer brand 1996). When an applicant is seeking out new employment, understanding to what level the company represents their feelings or ideas or possesses certain employee-related attributes provides the applicant with a sense of meaning for their personal life. Symbolism is a powerful tool at the core of branding (Ambler and Barrow, The employer brand 1996).

A product brand can also be seen to have a personality much like employer branding can have a personality. Thus, the same positioning methods that are used in product branding can be used in employer branding and thus, traditional marketing techniques



such as research is applicable. Making employer branding an approachable method for employers to uplift the external and internal image of the company. Knowledge-based economies where skilled workers are in short supply have been emphasized to gain significant benefits from employer branding. (Ambler and Barrow, The employer brand 1996)

Barrow and Mosley (2005) state that especially new companies can benefit from having a clear employer brand proposition as it helps in attracting and retaining good candidates who match the growth plans of a relatively unknown business profile. Furthermore, they see the benefits of employer branding especially for companies wanting to expand internationally, as a strong profile with motivated employees can help smooth the settling into a new country. Also, highlighting the role of strong employer branding when a company rebrands or reinvents itself and adopts a new corporate identity. The employer brand ensures employees understand the new direction clearly and commit to the promise it creates, assisting the employees in comprehending the customer experience through employee experience. (Barrow and Mosley 2005)

Brand equity formulates through product or corporate branding. Brand equity is a valuable intangible asset for a company, determining the awareness of, attitudes and behaviours consumers pertain toward the product or corporate brand. Employer branding equity forms in the same manner as brand equity and becomes another intangible asset for the company in the minds of current and potential employees (Ambler and Barrow, The employer brand 1996).

The employer branding concept has faced some critique particularly in understanding it as a separate, individual concept of its own and how it differs from other similar concepts such as corporate culture. Ambler and Barrow (1996) note this in a study where they found that the boundaries between employer branding and company culture were unclear to the respondents. The study also highlighted that respondents found that though the employer branding concept provided companies with some benefits, mainly psychological and awareness, those benefits were of low importance and ranked other matters as being of higher priority. Many of the respondents also criticize the management of employer branding, finding it hard to manage the employee experience



as a whole and pointing out that if employer branding was to be managed holistically and coherently, it would need a senior management figure to do so. Especially stressing that a lack of top-level support, a weak HR structure and internal politics are big obstacles in building a working employer branding concept due to its long-term investment nature. (Ambler and Barrow, The employer brand 1996)

2.4 Employer brand attractiveness

The process of building a strong brand reputation and gaining the loyalty of customers has been the goal and striving force behind brand management, and the same discipline has been recognized by companies as useful and applicable to attracting new talent and retaining and engaging with current employees (Barrow and Mosley 2005). As the competition for highly skilled personnel increases, the competition for the best talent can become as fierce as for customers (Mahroum 2000) (Harari 1998). Gaining a competitive advantage in the marketplace and beating the competition can thus happen through attracting the best talent by organisations effectively focusing on 'employer attractiveness' (Berthon, Ewing and Hah 2005).

Creating a strong employer brand does not come without a purpose. Barrow and Mosley (2005) see the main purpose of employer branding being the attracting and recruiting of desired, most suitable candidates. Berthon, Ewing and Hah (2005, 156) define employer attractiveness as "The envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organisation". Employer branding's ultimate goal is to become an attractive employer through understanding what potential employees desire and value and what qualities they respect the most when considering an open position. An organisation's employer brand equity strength increases the more attractive potential employees find it. (Berthon, Ewing and Hah 2005)

Various studies argue that employer attraction is an internal marketing issue first and foremost, highlighting that an organisation's first market is its personnel due to viewing jobs as internal products and the employees as internal customers (George and Gronroos 1989); (George, Internal marketing and organisational behaviour: a partnership in



developing customer-conscious employees at every level. 1990). With Berry & Parasuraman (1991) supporting the concept of internal marketing in employer attractiveness by stating an organisation's overall objectives should be addressed through job products being attractive, always in development and motivational to employees, thus meeting and exceeding the needs and wants of internal customers. Kotler (1994) defines internal marketing as "the task of successfully hiring, training and motivating able employees to serve the customer well". Whilst the American Marketing Association offers another view "marketing to employees of an organisation to ensure that they are effectively carrying out desired programs and policies" (AMA 2017) (Ambler and Barrow, The employer brand 1996). The idea of employees being a second audience for company advertising is also noted by Gilly and Wolfinbarger (1998) in discussing how undervalued the employee audience is when considering advertisement, as organisations do not seem to understand that employees can be influenced by the advertisement as much as customers, hence the company should ensure that influence to be positive.

The internal marketing concept does not come without critique, though, as Ewing & Caruana 1999 argue that the efforts of external marketing are difficult and dire enough for managers to even consider and introduce the idea of internal marketing and customers into their strategy.

Some of the most common attractive employer characteristics suggested by Dyhre and Parment (2009) are:

- Quality working relationships (trust, respect, self-worth, and recognition)
- Leadership (good managers and team leaders)
- Participation (contribution to decision-making)
- Clear values (clearly understandable competitive advantage)
- Learning and feedback: (personal development goals and consistent feedback)
- Meaning and fun (a purpose and reason to work, which is enjoyable)



Research finds that the better suited an organisation's employer brand image is to a candidate's needs, personalities and values, the more they acknowledge that company as a fit for them. The attraction level for the candidate grows the better the match of their values are with the company (Schneider 1987) (Cable and Judge 1996). This link between employer brand image and attraction is also noted in social identity theory, which can be defined as 'people deriving their self-concept through belonging to certain social groups (Tajfel 1982).

The concept of symbolism in branding and employer branding is noted in Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) journal in a discussion mentioning studies on the subject by Lievens and Highhouse (2003), who found that companies competing in the same industry can find it difficult to differentiate their job offering as employers, and thus benefit from utilizing employer branding to highlight the symbolic benefits related to the job offering and can gain a positive stamp in their employer image. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) define terms such as innovativeness and prestige as attractive organizational attributes which are the symbolic traits an applicant could find attractive in the consider-phase. Lievens and Highhouse (2003) continued to support the argument in their study which found that "an organisation's symbolic trait inferences have incremental value over and above instrumental job and organizational attributes like pay or benefits in explaining a company's perceived attractiveness as an employer" (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004) (Lievens and Highhouse 2003).

2.5 Measuring employer branding: effective employer branding

After defining and examining what good employer branding is and what the benefits of employer branding are to the company, it is also sufficient to determine how effective employer branding can be measured to understand its application and process further.

To better understand what is effective employer branding, it is vital to understand what needs to be measured when creating a strong employer brand. Berthon, Ewing and Hah (2005) portray the five steps to building a strong employer brand created by human resources consultants at Hewitt Associates, which are:



- 1. understand your organisation
- 2. create a 'compelling brand promise' for employees that mirrors the brand promise for customers
- 3. develop standards to measure the fulfilment of the brand promise
- 4. 'ruthlessly align' all people practices to support and reinforce the brand promise, and
- 5. execute and measure.

Determining the components of what is considered a good employer branding message is key in forming an accurately conducted perception of the organisation in the mind of a potential recruit. Employer branding messages give a concrete overview of the pragmatic aspects of employment, and, thus act almost as a future promise to a potential candidate in the recruitment stage. The employer branding message must be as accurate and truthful as possible because if the statements made do not represent the reality when a new employee begins employment, their reality becomes distorted and can lower their trust and loyalty towards the company. Research has found a decrease in turnover rates, the more accurate and realistic a job preview is due to making expectations match reality better (Locke 1976).

A company portraying career advancement, learning development or unique opportunities in the recruitment phase, should be able to stand behind those promises to showcase the employer branding initiatives are not only for show but concrete steps implemented in strategy and processes. When realistic job previews are presented, realistic expectations follow, leading to higher job satisfaction (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). Thus, effective employer branding can be measured in its ability to portray true statements which carry on through to strategy, process and all levels of branding within the company (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). Accurate messages and communication of the company's organisational culture should also be portrayed as research shows it directly affects the applicant's decision-making (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). The role of organisational culture in employment decisions is also explored by Cable, et al (2000) as they found applicants to have formed misperceptions of an organisation's key values through employer-provided information on organisational culture. Applicants were



found to be more dissatisfied and likely to quit when their job choice was based on unbalanced information (Cable and Judge 1996) (Wanous, et al. 1992) (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004).

Mosley and Schmidt (2017, 267, 269, 275) give concrete examples of how employer branding can be measured ..."in the effectiveness of recruitment ads, social campaigns and the referral-effectiveness are all measurable." Furthermore, they discuss the clear role of investment in the process of getting a return on that investment, by looking at the number of applications, vacancies and the effectiveness of the recruitment processes.

When employer branding measures are activated within an organisation, the management of measuring its effectiveness begins immediately, and this requires an understanding of the measures employer branding creates and an ability to see how the firm's performance can be impacted by those measures. Keller (1993) sees two types of assets forming from employer branding: employer brand associations and employer brand loyalty, which can be measured using the same techniques as in marketing. (Keller 1993)

Ambler and Barrow (1996) question whether employer branding's efforts in helping a firm achieve better performance are even possible, and find it to be a difficult question to answer because of the vagueness of the link between human resource management programs and firm performance. The easier task, they claim, would be to see the impact of employer branding on specific resources such as human capital or on the general behaviour of the employees (Wright, McMahan and Mcwilliams 1994). This type of measurement requires an understanding of what mediators could operate between the employer branding initiatives and the organisation's profit margin and growth.

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) discuss this would include companies tracking changes in recruitment, retention and satisfaction in the long-term, before and after implementing employer branding measures. Furthermore, they explain, this could mean a company measures employer branding's success qualitatively by measuring the skills, knowledge and ability of incoming employees or also in a quantitative way by examining the turnover rate in terms of better retention since introducing employer branding. However, they highlight the importance of primarily focusing on how employer



branding measures affect employees behaviour at work, whether the individual or overall productivity has increased at the aggregate level (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004).

2.6 HR and employer branding: managing employer branding

The employer branding initiative within a firm requires management, just as branding requires management, to ensure thorough and effective implementation within the organisation. Employer branding management involves the coordination of people, talent management and performance, and looks at the development of leadership, recruitment and on-boarding, creating an increasing impact on growth and profit margin, greater than in other HR disciplines. (Mosley 2014, 4, 8).

Employer brand management is truly successful, as mentioned before when it saves the company money and resources by targeting the best, most suitable talents. It is also understood to be a distinctive part of the company and for it to be effective requires support from management throughout different teams within the company (Mosley 2014, 9, 11). To this extent, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) state that HR practices and activities from recruitment and training to career management should be integrated under the employer branding umbrella where HR managers would coordinate HR strategies.

Employer value proposition, which was discussed earlier, is a key component of employer branding management, with Mosley (2014, 4) stating "Employer brand management describes the measures, tools and techniques applied by companies to ensure people recognize, experience and trust in the key features defined by their EVP." Continuing, Mosley and Schmidt (2017) note that before an organisation can start developing their employer branding strategy, they should focus on understanding the HR agenda as the priorities and plans set in HR and talent management are an integral part of creating a concrete EVP. Furthermore, highlighting the importance of understanding what HR investment is available as it defines what promises and claims can be promised and updated when moving forward. This includes aspects of employee personal and professional growth and development plans (Mosley and Schmidt 2017).



Highlighting the importance of knowing what your target talent profile looks like, Mosley and Schmidt (2017) discuss workforce planning, defined by them as "...the process of ensuring the right number of people with the right skills are employed in the right place at the right time to deliver on your organisation's short- and long-term goals". Workforce planning aids in determining what different type of talent the employer brand needs to appeal to.

A study conducted by Ambler and Barrow (1996), found that respondents of various companies and their management staff, identify employer branding management to be best positioned under the HR function because of its close link to the Chief Executive of the firm. While others saw employer branding management to include functionality between senior management and HR, marketing and corporate communications. Employer branding practice can understand what HR and product brand marketing have in common and is thus able to recognize how each area can benefit from each other's functional skills (Ambler and Barrow, The employer brand 1996).

The link between marketing and HR is crystalized through employer branding initiatives as Tim Ambler (2000) explains: "The similarities and market-driving potential of employee-based brand equity should encourage HR and marketing to swap notes . . . Just as the provision of metrics for the Exec presents an opportunity to rethink the relationship between marketing and finance functions, so employer brand equity provides a challenge bridging marketing and HR skills and information." Seeing employer branding as a category to be managed alongside marketing and HR, driving organisational change.

2.7 Building an employee branding strategy

After determining the components of what good employer branding is and why and how companies can utilize it to their advantage, a clear and effective implementation plan or in other words, a strategy needs to be developed. According to Mosley and Schmidt (2017, 83), what all strong brands have in common is a consistently driven through application of a brand framework, which can also be utilized when starting to construct



employer branding into other business processes. Employer branding is not a process existing only on its own but should rather be fully aligned with corporate and customer branding initiatives. Employer branding success depends on there being clear coordination of activities throughout the organisation and thus should be aligned within the strategic company hierarchy as displayed in the integrated strategy model in figure 9. below. (Mosley and Schmidt, Employer Branding for Dummies 2017)



Figure 9. The integrated strategy models. (Mosley and Schmidt, Employer Branding for Dummies 2017, 23-26)

And just as the corporate brand identity should shine through all brand communication, so should the employer branding message as the effectiveness of delivering unified brand communications and experiences is measured in the alignment of the whole company brand including the corporate-, employer- and customer brand. (Mosley and Schmidt, Employer Branding for Dummies 2017, 84)

To begin aligning the corporate brand and finding a fit in the strategic hierarchy, finding a spot in the brand hierarchy is also needed. When discussing the term corporate brand, Mosley and Schmidt (2017) define it as "...used to describe the overall reputation of the company, as opposed to its more specific reputation as an employer". Figure 10. of the integrated brand model highlights the importance of having defined the company's purpose, vision and values as they give great insight into defining the employment offers and employer brand strategy whilst helping to align these clearly with the company's core beliefs. The company employer value proposition (EVP) must also



align with the core beliefs. (Mosley and Schmidt, Employer Branding for Dummies 2017)

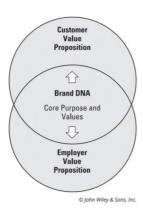


Figure 10. The integrated brand models. (Mosley and Schmidt, Employer Branding for Dummies 2017, 23-26)

A thorough understanding of the corporate brand first helps when starting to develop the employer brand. Establish efficient parameters to aid consistency in employer branding functions, which align with the overall brand hierarchy, are key.

When aligning employer branding with the customer brand, it is first important to determine the relative association of the corporate and customer brands. This step is then followed by looking at to what extent the employer brand and existing brand associations should be aligned, which begins by looking at what level of overlap there is between the customer and corporate brands and what the perception of their services and products is in the minds of the consumers. Also consulting the customer brand marketing team is a good idea to help understand what they are trying to promote. This helps in deciding the association with current corporate and customer brand identity. (Mosley and Schmidt, Employer Branding for Dummies 2017)

Organisational culture is also a major factor determining who and what type of talent is searched for when pursuing employer branding initiatives. Identifying a broad description of the qualities appreciated in a potential employee especially in terms of values and desired culture should be stated before starting to segment the workforce. The key to differentiated talent comes from defining which qualities among generally



positive ones does your organisation emphasize and in what dimensions do you aim to outperform. Diversity is a highly important and valuable asset when considering employer branding and the culture of the organisation as culture does not mean homogeneity. A diversified workforce is said to be superior due to a multitude of factors including broader perspectives and new approaches and the ability to serve a larger audience facing different challenges. (Mosley and Schmidt 2017)

Workforce planning can be utilized to help identify and determine key skills and competencies of the type of employees you want to attract. Workforce planning is defined as "the process of ensuring the right number of people with the right skills are employed in the right place at the right time to deliver on your organization's short- and long-term goals" (Mosley and Schmidt, Employer Branding for Dummies 2017). And whether or not a company has a workforce planning process in place, gathering information on what skills and competencies are most needed and critical, from leaders and managers of different functions is very important when building an employer branding strategy.

Understanding the HR agenda before formulating an employer branding strategy is key, as the company's HR plans have a direct impact on EVP. Especially looking at HR investment plans on, for example, employee personal and professional growth is an interesting aspect when deciding what promises employer branding strategy can make. Thus, aligning employer branding strategy with HR is an aspect not to be ignored.

3 Research methodology

Research looks at the process of examining and collecting study materials utilising scientific methods. Saunders et al. (2019) define research as "research is something that people undertake in order to find out things in a systematic way, thereby increasing their knowledge". The process includes identifying a research problem, determining a research design and method as well the phase of collecting and analysing data.

A research process itself consists of important activities, such as identifying a research problem; determining research design and research method; to collect and analyse data.



Research methods can be categorized into three groups; exploratory, descriptive and explanatory (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019). Exploratory studies are a flexible method used by researchers aiming to explain the situation entirely whilst giving insight into understanding new things. With the exploratory method, the researcher has to conduct the research according to the changing narrative, which takes direction from the results. Exploratory research is primarily conducted by gathering relevant literature, by conducting expert interviews of group interviews (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019).

A research type that requires a clear prior understanding of the phenomena at hand before data collection, is called descriptive research. Aiming to describe specific people, events or situations, descriptive research is typically used as an element in exploratory research, and very commonly seen utilized as a part of explanatory research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019).

A research method where both quantitative and qualitative data collection can be used, which aims to clarify and help understand the relationship between variables through looking at a specific situation or a problem, is called explanatory research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019).

The exploratory research method is used in this research as it seeks to explore and understand employer branding and through that examine how an employer branding strategy can help Avidly Agency attract employees in the marketing technology industry. An interview with the company's HR manager will be conducted to further the literature search. (Saunders 2009)

3.1. Research methodology

The thesis can take either a qualitative or quantitative research approach. The qualitative approach explains an event or phenomena through descriptive results, allowing the research to be more in-depth whilst quantitative research utilizes numerical models to explain an event or phenomena (Merriam and Tisdell 2015). The qualitative approach is more suited to this thesis due to its descriptive, more open nature as quantitative



research is typically structured around closed 'yes or no' questions, which are then measured and calculated to gain concrete statistical, factual information, requiring interviews from large groups of people. This thesis will utilize qualitative research and the case study approach, specifically semi-structured interviews to gain more in-depth answers and analysis. Qualitative research will be further discussed in the next chapter.

The research will gather results through semi-structured interviews with martech - the utilisation of technology forward tools and initiatives to reach marketing goals - company Avidly Agency's HR manager. The interviews aim to gain information on the company's branding and more specifically employer branding initiatives and efforts in the martech industry to determine how these initiatives are helping them become more attractive as employers in the martech industry.

Avidly Agency is a marketing agency operating in the Nordics and Germany with over 250 current employees. Avidly has recently renewed their corporate strategy to position themselves more specifically in the martech industry and as part of the process have updated their brand strategy and aim to create an employer branding strategy that is in line with the new corporate and brand strategies. This work aims to explore them and give insight into creating an effective employer branding strategy that helps their employer positioning in the martech industry to attract the most suitable applicants.

3.2. Qualitative research approach

The purpose of qualitative research is to gather descriptive insight of an interviewees opinions through interviews to gain an understanding of the point of view of the interviewee regarding an event or phenomena, as defined by Kvale (Kvale 1983) (Cassel and Symon 2004).

In qualitative research, the focus is on understanding the present, the current structure. It does not try to analyse the future but find answers to a current situation within the current context. Qualitative research examines the why what and how of things (Merriam and Tisdell 2015). In qualitative research, the relationship between the interviewee and the interviewer is a key feature differing from quantitative research



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because in qualitative research the interviewee is a participant with the power to shape the interview while in quantitative research the interviewee is a subject with no power to change the research (Cassel and Symon 2004).

Choosing to conduct a qualitative semi-structured interview provides the opportunity to ask open questions which require thorough explaining and describing. The interviews will follow structured questions which still allow space for adaptation and follow up questions. As the semi-structured method allows for more in-depth research, it is the most suitable method for this research (Merriam and Tisdell 2015).

3.3. Data reliability & limitations

Concerns about the reliability of the methodology of non-standardized qualitative, semistructured interviews may arise with this research due to the structure being dependent on the time of the interview and the assigned interviewee. Concerns of research bias also may arise, which of there are two of in this case:

- 1. Interviewer bias; the comments, tone or non-verbal behaviour of the interviewer creates bias by moulding the responses of the interviewee.
- 2. Response bias; the perceptions the interviewee upholds towards the interviewer or the interviewee's sensitivity to different parts of the interview (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019).

The question of the reliability of this research is solved by understanding that the findings of this research are not duplicable due to its focus on the current situation in the current context. The data collected in this research is prone to change due to the developing nature of the topic of this research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019)

4. Results & analysis

4.1. Avidly: company introduction



Avidly Agency is a fully integrated martech service partner with a broad team of creative experts who integrate the use of the right technologies to serve clients from a broad variety of industries (Avidly 2021). Martech is defined as: "Martech is the blending of marketing and technology. Virtually anyone involved with digital marketing is dealing with martech since digital by its very nature is technologically-based. The term "martech" especially applies to major initiatives, efforts and tools that harness technology to achieve marketing goals and objectives (MartechToday 2018).

Serving clients from both the public and private sector, Avidly helps clients with projects such as branding concept creation, social media strategy and community building, search engine optimisation, product package design, press release writing, media plan creation, digital campaigns on all media platforms, copywriting for TV or radio ads, blog and article writing, strategy crystallisation and much more.

Avidly's goal is to challenge the current ways of working, and through that, discover new solutions and innovations that build new foundations for long-lasting growth. Avidly is considered a pioneer in the martech industry and they are a global leader in the HubSpot ecosystem. Technology plays a key role in customer support, driving scalability and easing manual tasks, intending to free up more time to focus on more complex issues.

Avidly believes that technology is vital for accelerating impact but does not create it on its own. Behind the use of technology, there must be a strong strategy, creative content, solid processes, brilliant design and most importantly talented, motivated people, as they are the ones who understand the context in which technology needs to be used.

Avidly's services include result-oriented and data-driven sales, strategic marketing, technology, creative design, communications, digital marketing, website design, copywriting, brand strategy, packaging and much more. With over 230 employees operating in the Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark) and Germany, Avidly is a multifaceted organisation (Avidly 2021).



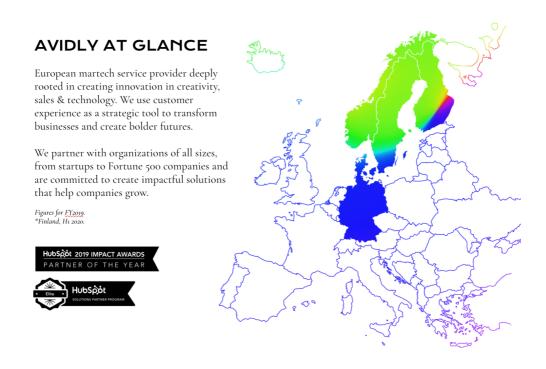


Figure 11. A screenshot overview of Avidly agency and their services. (Avidly, Corporate strategy 2021)

4.2. Avidly: Martech industry positioning

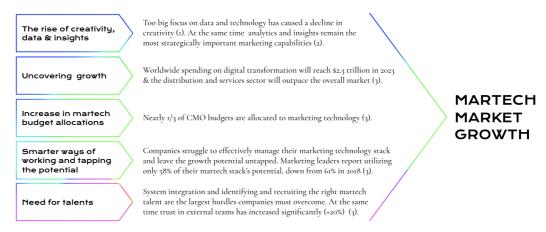
Avidly sees the martech industry as the next direction of growth for their business, and this positioning requires not only the sharpening of their offering and services but the acquiring of new talent and development of current staff's skills. To understand the positioning and stance, examining the martech industry and its development is key.

A study conducted by Avaus Marketing Innovations Oy shows that Finland is in fact a leading developer in martech, highlighting the market potential and readiness for Avidly's positioning. The study notes Finland to have over 120 identified martech companies with headquarters in Finland, which testifies to the changing landscape and is an indication of the importance of focusing on developing future technology skills of current employees and acquiring new employees with the skills needed (Syvänen 2017).



Globally, the martech industry is estimated to grow exponentially within the coming years, and factors driving that growth are global megatrends shaping various industries. The table below showcases the trends behind martech market growth.

TRENDS BEHIND GLOBAL MARTECH MARKET GROWTH



1: BDO, WARC & Bristol University: Martech 2020 & beyond | 2: International Data Corporation (IDC) Worldwide Semiannual Digital Transformation Spending Guide | 3: Gartner's CMO Spend Survey 2019–2020

Figure 12. A table listing trends behind global martech market growth. (Avidly, Corporate strategy 2021)

These trends and the martech industry growth highlight the importance of skill development and new talent recruitment. This is where strong employer brands will be at the forefront in acquiring the best talent. Avidly's efforts in retaining current talent by allowing them to develop and gain new skills and knowledge plays a key role in driving EB efforts also externally, as the more rapidly Avidly trains their current staff, they can answer the martech industry's service demands, which in turn leads to being able to share more external customer case studies, which finally help attract new talent with new skills from the martech industry. All strengthening their position in the martech field.

4.3. Avidly strategy: corporate, marketing & branding

With a renewed company strategy and brand look introduced at the beginning of 2021, Avidly begun to position itself more strongly towards the martech industry. Meaning, a sharpening of their service offering, training of current staff to meet the requirements of



the martech industry, recruitment of new staff who bring in in-demand skills and knowhow, and a clarified vision and direction of who the currents clients are and what is or can be offered as services to them, as well as outlining who their future target clients are.

An organisation's corporate strategy typically includes mission, vision, values and purpose statements which help define and communicate its core message. Defining the 'why' of the company, also called the value proposition, is vital as it aims to clarify why the target market should be interested in the company's offering and creates an image in the consumers' minds (Kotler and Keller 2016, 130-133). Avidly's mission is to help companies grow by providing them with co-tailored solutions and to become a globally recognized and most-beloved digital marketing & sales partner known for the impact they create. Values such as courage, respect and ambition are at the core of everything Avidly does. The purpose of the company is to create a positive impact by reimagining businesses, which is framed by a culture that is on a safe and inclusive playground. Avidly highlights that their objective is to challenge the current ways of working to find new solutions and innovations that create long-lasting growth.

Avidly utilises the 'Tomorrowave' wheel as a strategic tool to showcase their offering and service promise to customers. The wheel covers the different stages where the customer is met and by utilising the wheel, Avidly can create data-driven, customercentric growth for their clients' businesses. The Tomorrowave wheel is used throughout the company in different sectors such as in marketing and sales, to align various initiatives with the corporate strategy.



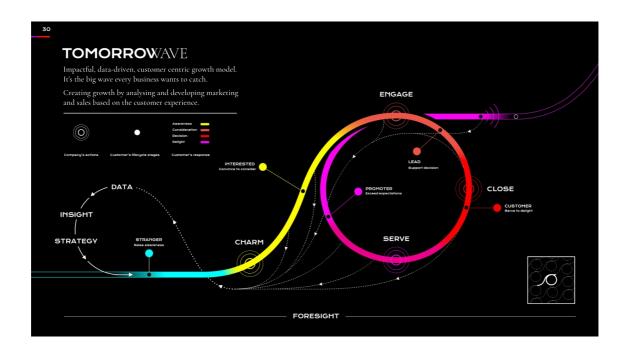


Figure 13. The Tomorrowave strategy wheel. (Avidly, Corporate strategy 2021)

MARKETING

Marketing is a tool that companies use for linking the consumers' needs with the right services. Three building blocks of building an efficient marketing strategy, according to Kotler and Keller (2016), are segmentation, targeting and positioning (see section 2.1). Avidly's marketing targets key decision-makers in the marketing and communications field positioned specifically in the martech field in all the market areas where they are present (Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Germany), primarily focusing on small and medium-sized companies. Avidly's marketing strategy is also clarified by using the 'Tomorrowave' wheel to help showcase their offering to the target audience in the right segment in the best possible way. The four stages of Avidly's marketing strategy include the 'Charm' phase where the aim is to create awareness, brand perception and thought leadership through events, webinars, impacts, communications and PR. The second phase is 'Engage' where the objective is to get leads through insight and inspiration, webinars, guides, articles, impacts, blogs and inbound tactics. The third phase is 'Close' where the aim is to convert the leads acquired in phase two to convert into customers through lead nurturing workflows, meetings, offers and closing the deals. The fourth and final stage is 'Serve' the focus is on account nurturing, serving



and delighting existing business clients, community-driven perspective and activities through impact actions and Avidly Academy which focuses on sharing knowledge and expertise externally and internally. Below is an image of the Avidly 'Tomorrowave' wheel used for marketing and sales.



Figure 14. The Tomorrowave marketing and sales wheel. (Avidly, Corporate strategy 2021)

BRANDING

Branding focuses on the perceived image of a product or a service. Brands are powerful differentiation tools since it is becoming more difficult to differentiate solely based on product features, thus the significance of the brand name and message is increasing (Aaker 1991). With the introduction of a new corporate strategy, Avidly changed its branding also. A new colour scheme, brand logo, typography and tone of voice were introduced, to make a stronger visual impact within the martech industry.

The right brand message directed at the wanted target audience helps in the differentiation process, and as Kotler and Keller state in section 2.2.1, both rational and emotional elements can aid in brand positioning. Also, figure 4. the model of social psychology in section 2.2.1 offers a deeper look at the importance of satisfying both the emotional and functional realms of brands and their role in easing consumer decision-making. Thus, developing a strong brand mantra that communicates the brand's core promise and essence in three to five words, is essential (Kotler and Keller 2016). Avidly's redefined brand message is coined in their 'Tomorrowbound' philosophy,



which they define as "Tomorrowbound is our philosophy that manifests in our company values and works as a moral compass that guides our everyday work and inspires us to think forward. Tomorrowbound is about challenging the present." The 'Tomorrowbound' philosophy tries to highlight the brand's uniqueness in its field of category in a clear, compact, meaningful way that sticks in the minds of the consumers (Kotler and Keller 2016, 134-135).

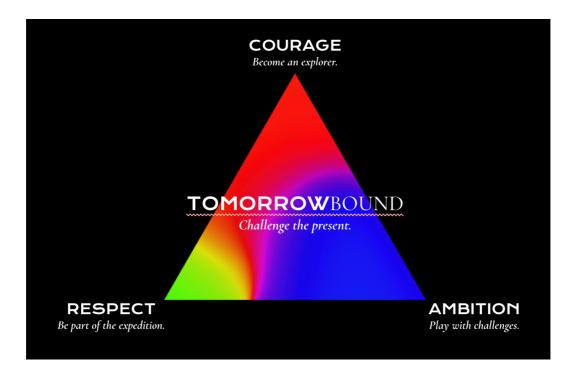


Figure 15. The tomorrowbound philosophy. (Avidly, Corporate strategy 2021)

Avidly's brand tone of voice has three layers. The first one is to always respect the audience, meaning to simplify the marketing and technology jargon and make it as understandable as possible and talk on the same level with the audience without condescending them. The second layer focuses on captivating the audience with courage, meaning to bravely urge the audience into discussion and to break the norms. The third layer aims to entertain with ambition, meaning to appeal to the audience through emotion, to make them feel, laugh, cry and think.

4.4. Avidly: current status of Employer Branding

Employer branding ties together an organisation's marketing and HR concepts to polish the corporate image externally and internally, to uplift and increase employee



motivation and satisfaction, ultimately also leading to profit gains for the company as highlighted in section 2.6. Avidly's employer branding initiatives have started to take form in the last year, with the company's HR Manager Leena Talvensaari taking concrete action in the area.

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) showcase in section 2.2 that employer branding aims to enhance employee experience through consistency and employee engagement, and as such encompasses both external and internal communications. Furthermore, highlighting how employer branding aids organisation's in attracting the best talent through building a strong company reputation while at the same time focusing on developing current employees' devotion towards the company's values and goals in hopes of retaining them for a long period of time. We see these same factors at the core of Avidly's EB initiatives.

The current EB status at Avidly is active, and multiple processes and initiatives which were not discussed a year ago have now been introduced and are being implemented. Talvensaari states that internally, currently many of the basic processes such as clear onboarding and exit interviews have now been utilized more systematically. Highlighting the importance of giving a new employee a thorough introduction and welcome to the company when they start, as well as the importance of sending off a resigned employee by having an exit interview and gaining vital feedback and improvement ideas through it. Internally, the focus is also on ensuring current employees are motivated and satisfied with the work they do, and on ensuring they can educate and sharpen their expertise further. This happens through company introduced workshops where the focus is on employee health and wellness, career aspirations, leadership training and on finding work-life balance. Externally, Talvensaari sees the focus direction being on sharing interesting customer case studies, thought leadership blogs and webinars as they highlight the projects a new employee could become a part of. Also, incorporating new, more inclusive recruitment methods such as anonymous recruitment to the process is a big factor in increasing the employer branding image, as it externally also communicates Avidly's company culture and values: respect, courage, ambition.



Ultimately, Talvensaari believes that good employer branding starts from the organisation's ability to handle internal and external matters in a good, fair and clear manner, which increases current employees satisfaction and motivation, which in turn means they serve clients in a more motivated way meaning more business, which leads to more recognition and becoming attractive to new talent. Studies show strong employer branding strengthening employee engagement and, thus customer experience as an employee truly committed to the brand serves customers in a more motivating way (Barrow and Mosley 2005), see figure 8. on page 10. This link between employee engagement and customer satisfaction supporting financial gains for a company has also been highlighted in many studies such as with Sears who saw the effect of a 4% increase in employee satisfaction which translated into more than \$200 million in additional revenue and the IES From People to Profits study of a UK retailer showcased how an increase of one point in employee commitment to the organisation (on a five-point scale) delivered a 9% increase in per-store sales, valuing at £200 000.13. (Barrow and Mosley 2005)

Talvensaari states that Avidly also understands the benefits of employer branding when discussing decreasing employee turnover rate, and is thus actively creating new ways to develop current staff's devotion as well as utilising metrics to measure the engagement status. Continuous effort towards increasing employee satisfaction is key when wanting to retain the current top talent. This argument was also noted in a study by AON (2000), United States at Work, human capital consultants, where results indicated that replacing an employee costs half of his or her annual salary, and further noted in another study by the US Conference Board, where they found the results to be similar in entry-level positions but vary for middle managers where the estimate was closer to one and a half times annual salary and two and half times when discussing senior management

4.4.1. Avidly: Measuring Employer Branding

Employer branding measurement is an important part of developing efficient and effective EB processes and is especially vital, according to Talvensaari, when analysing



the cause and effect and trying to get investment from the top for EB. Once objectives for EB have been set, they must be measured and followed, to understand what the return on investment is, what improvements need to be made and how. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) (see section 0) urge companies to do just this by tracking long-term changes in recruitment, retention, before and after implementing employer branding measures. And explain that EB success could be measured qualitatively by measuring the skills, knowledge and ability of incoming employees or also in a quantitative way by examining the turnover rate in terms of better retention since introducing employer branding.

Externally, recruitment ads and campaigns need to be accurate in their job description, career development opportunities and organizational culture, as their accuracy directly affects job satisfaction and decision-making (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004) as highlighted in section 17. Meaning EB initiatives must be communicated clearly and implemented across company strategy, not only be an abstract concept without concrete steps. Avidly measures EB also by gathering feedback on the recruitment process from applicants via surveys and questionnaires. This includes the use of the Net Promoter Score (NPS), a market research metric used to measure how likely someone is to recommend the company or brand to others (NetPromoter 2021). The NPS is a popular tool used especially by agencies who have multiple customers from different industries, and it gives insight into the level of satisfaction a client feels with the quality, customer experience and service and overall delivery of the project. Avidly also inspects the amount of received open applications, which Talvensaari says communicates the level of interest towards the company. Avidly also utilises knowledge they garner from reviews left on Glassdoor, a world-leading platform, offering people insight, where they can leave honest reviews about companies and their work experience (Glassdoor 2021). These reviews can have a significant impact on a candidate's view of the company and can negatively, or positively affect their job decision, thus Talvensaari sees the importance of both external and internal EB. The connection between company reputation and company attractiveness was discussed by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) in section 2.2.



Internally, to measure employee satisfaction and motivation Avidly uses Officevibe, which is a tool measuring employee well-being (Officevibe 2021). Officevibe sends out weekly or bi-weekly questionnaires via Slack with questions such as "How satisfied have you felt in your workplace in the last week?" or "I feel like my organisation trusts me to contribute to our mission?" and Avidly measures the engagement rate to determine the level of satisfaction within current employees. The tracking of EB effects of employee engagement being highlighted by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) as being one of the most important factors in determining whether or not the individual or overall productivity has increased at the aggregate level. Officevibe also allows employees to write open answers to questions anonymously and then receive an answer directly on the platform from their supervisor, further enforcing an open communication culture that drives employer satisfaction, Talvensaari explains. Employee Net Promoter Score (ENPS) is also used by Avidly to measure employer branding. It is the same as NPS but measures how willing current employees would be to recommend the company they work for, to their acquaintances or friends. Avidly utilises this metric by checking how many internal recommendations of candidates are received per open position by setting a numeric goal of how many recommendations they expect and then comparing this to the result. The ENPS metric is a useful tool for gaining an understanding of what the current employees feel about the organisation; "is the organisation good enough for me to recommend it to a person I know?", Talvensaari explains. Similar thoughts were highlighted by Wright, McMahan and Mcwilliams (1994) in section 2.4. where they claim that a fairly easy EB measurement was to focus on looking at the impact of employer branding on specific resources such as human capital or on the general behaviour of the employees, meaning there needs to be an understanding of the mediators operating between EB initiatives and the organisation's profit margin and growth.

4.4.2. Avidly: How is employer branding managed?

Managing employer branding is a key factor in its success. It includes the coordination of people, managing talent and performance whilst helping create a positive impact on growth and profit (Mosley 2014, 4, 8). Employer branding's success is also strongly dependant on its position and role within the organisation; under which team(s) is it



managed under and by whom. It requires a strong sense of support throughout different management teams within the company as highlighted by Mosley (2014) in section 2.6.

At Avidly, EB is currently primarily managed by HR and positioned under the HR umbrella, and current external EB initiatives, such as recruitment campaigns receive aid from marketing and communication teams. The importance of this unity between HR practices and EB has been noted by many scholars as discussed in section 2.6, and thus HR is claimed to be a clear driver of EB strategy within companies (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). Talvensaari notes that the current management of EB at Avidly needs tweaking, and aims to strengthen EB's position by tying it more together with the corporate strategy and introducing EB initiatives to all management groups and processes.

Talvensaari stresses how important it is for EB to be noted as an integral part of the corporate, marketing and communications strategies because EB work demands systematic consistency internally and externally in content, communication and measurement. This idea is supported by Ambler and Barrow (1996). in section 2.6, who highlight that EB practice can understand what HR and product brand marketing have in common, and is thus able to recognize how each area can benefit from each other's functional skills.

Talvensaari does not think there are any negative effects to EB in general but highlights how important it is to first inform and educate everyone in the organisation, especially decision-makers, about the benefits and results of EB. This can then generate concrete discussions about necessary investment and initiatives.

4.4.3. Avidly: Company attractiveness

One of the ultimate goals of EB is to drive employer attractiveness. EB can assist companies to best communicate the benefits of working for the organisation and in turn help attract and recruit the most suitable candidates for the role (Berthon, Ewing and Hah 2005) (Barrow and Mosley 2005) section 2.4.



Avidly's current attractiveness as an employer in the martech field is only starting to take form but the EB initiatives currently in place and the measurement tactics used will help them understand their attractiveness. From internal processes in measuring employee satisfaction, exit-interviews to external processes such as highlighting customer case studies, they all aim to increase Avidly's attractiveness for them to gain the best talent over competitors. As the marketplace where Avidly is positioned is quite concentrated, it is important to highlight the differentiated job offering by focusing on the symbolic benefits the position offers accurately, giving the candidate the full scope of knowledge on what it would be like to work for the organisation (Lievens and Highhouse 2003).

To strengthen their employer attractiveness Avidly is strongly focusing on the internal areas through career well-being workshops, development and advancement initiatives in place to drive employee motivation and loyalty, as well as the fun side of the process of award systems, where employees receive candy, treats or other rewards at home for a job well done or otherwise during bank holidays etc. Avidly has already taken concrete steps in positioning themselves further in the martech industry through trainee programs aiming to coach the best future talent. This is seen as a direct action affecting what type of talent Avidly will attract in the future as the more opportunities in martech they provide, the more known they become as employers in that field.

The importance of the internal marketing aspect of EB was noted in many studies in section 2.4, stating that employees can be considered to be the first market who need to believe in the product or service offering, particularly when recommending the service, product or workplace forward to others. The NPS, ENPS and Officevibe metrics are used by Avidly to measure this likelihood of recommending and the engagement of employees. Dyhre and Parment (2009) listed fun, meaning, learning and feedback as some of the most attractive employer characteristics, discussed in section 2.4., which can be seen incorporated into Avidly's current initiatives. Being highly important as also Berthon, Ewing and Hah (2005) highlight that an organisation's employer brand equity strength increases the more attractive potential employees find it.



Because Avidly is located in multiple different areas and markets, there are distinctive differences in their attraction level, Talvensaari explains. It is possible, for example, that in smaller cities in Finland, Avidly is a very well-known big player but in highly concentrated areas, where competition is high, it might not be the case. Thus, it is vital to focus on moving ahead with EB initiatives, which create an overall positive company reputation both internally and externally.

Systematic following of sites such as Glassdoor and the reviews left there is part of seeing how attractive Avidly is, but also the number of applications, the employee turnover rate, the competitions and awards all affect. In the last year alone, Talvensaari has seen a significant positive change in the way Avidly is perceived by candidates and stresses that the actions taken so far have made a significant change. With a stronger link to the company strategy in mind and a clear market direction, a cohesive EB strategy can be created for Avidly.

4.5. Avidly: employer branding strategy

The employer branding strategy aims to reach talent with the right skills needed to help a company meet their business objectives and goals as highlighted by Mosley and Schmidt (2017) in section 2.7. An organisation which has clearly stated their strategic goals and vision, mission and values, can lay down a solid foundation for the creation of an employer branding strategy. Furthermore, strong brands that can utilize a clear brand framework to introduce an employer branding strategy that aligns with the corporate strategy and works in unison with the HR, sales, communications and marketing teams internally and externally, can successfully drive the initiative forward (Mosley and Schmidt, Employer Branding for Dummies 2017), as highlighted in the strategy integration model in figure 9.

Mosley and Schmidt (2017) go further to stress that before aligning the employer brand with the customer brand, it is first important to determine the relative association between the corporate and customer brands, followed by examining how the employer brand and existing brand associations should be aligned and then looking at how



consumers perceive the company's services and products. This phase of understanding your organisation is a key component for Avidly as it helps to ensure the employer brand is a cohesive "product" supporting and supported by corporate strategy.

Berthon, Ewing and Hah (2005) portray the five steps to building a strong employer brand created by human resources consultants at Hewitt Associates discussed in section 2.4. which we can see Avidly has already at least partly incorporated into their EB actions.

It is from the core of the brand, its identity and DNA where both the corporate value proposition and the employee value proposition arise from as highlighted in figure 10. in section 2.7. Avidly must create an EVP that aligns with the corporate level values, beliefs and objectives (Mosley and Schmidt 2017). This way, the actions are cohesive and both current and potential new employees have a clear understanding of who the organisation is. And when considering how important tool EVP is in attracting the best talents as highlighted in section 2.2, it is vital for Avidly to communicate in a way that supports their market positioning, which in this case is in the martech industry. Thus, a definition of the target audience and writing down the qualities looked for in an ideal candidate, is one of the first steps in creating an employer branding strategy.

As mentioned by Talvensaari, the management of current EB practices mainly fall under the HR department, especially when discussing internal EB actions, but this aspect will take a new form once an EB strategy, that aligns with the corporate and brand strategies, is formed. Because HR actions, such as workforce planning, HR investment plans, for example on employee training, all have a direct impact on EVP, it is a logical path to align HR with EB, and then let it assist in creating an EB strategy, as highlighted by (Mosley and Schmidt 2017) in section 2.7.

The goal, for Avidly also, is to surge different EB initiatives through multiple teams and their leaders, all across the company's various locations, Talvensaari explains. She also sees that whilst an overall EB strategy is needed, it must have room for flexibility for different locations to be able to create the most useful variants for teams on local levels. To this extent, to list another concrete step in creating an EB strategy Avidly has



conducted a competitor analysis to determine how, where, when and in what ways competitors are communicating about their EB practices, if at all.

Currently, Avidly utilises external and internal materials to communicate its corporate culture, strategy, values and needs. Talvensaari notes that consulting with the marketing team regularly, enables Avidly to create recruitment campaigns and ads which support and communicate the brand beliefs. This process needs to become more systematic and will happen once an EB strategy is formed, as it is then possible to decide what content, events, training need to be produced.

The measurement metrics and methods are an integral part of the development which the EB strategy has to take into consideration. For example, the feedback received from exit interviews, Officevibe, NPS and ENPS, etc. can help create new avenues to drive EB and company attractiveness initiatives.

Avidly's newly introduced corporate and brand strategy or rebranding demands current staff to understand and internalise the brand's core message and be able to not only serve clients externally but also to understand the effects of their position. A solid employer brand has been shown to help employees understand an organisation's new direction more clearly and commit to the brand promise, creating a chance for employees to understand the customer experience through the employee experience (Barrow and Mosley 2005) as highlighted in section 2.3.

The Martech positioning will require Avidly's EB strategy to include more thought leadership work in content and communications, activation of current employees as brand ambassadors, enforce new career development paths and opportunities for employees to grow their skills and have clear objectives for what is measured to become an attractive employer in the martech industry. Utilising Avidly's current strategic framework, an EB strategy has a solid basis to build upon, in a way that fully aligns with the company's corporate, business, HR and marketing strategies. A strong employer brand is difficult to build, if done solely on its own, hence through gaining the support of the whole organisation, can an effective EB strategy be created to help Avidly attract the best talent in the martech industry.



5 Conclusion

This thesis was conducted to research if and how employer branding could help Avidly become an attractive employer in the martech industry. To fully understand the topic of employer branding, the basis of marketing and branding were examined.

To gain full knowledge of the subject, a comprehensive literature review was conducted and to understand the current status of marketing, branding and employer branding at Avidly, an interview was conducted with Avidly's HR Manager. Employer branding is the unity of branding principles with human resources and it concentrates on the management of the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees and related stakeholders through a long-term strategy whilst trying to define the identity of the company as an employer.

Employer branding initiatives should be incorporated within all companies trying to appeal stand out in the competitive talent acquisition field. The employer brand's success lies in understanding the organisation and its needs, relating the brand's promise to customers with the brand's promise to employees in a cohesive manner, creating measurement methods to evaluate the promise, getting the whole organisation on board by integrating it in all teams and processes and creating an execution plan with specific measurement tactics. Creating an effective employer branding strategy is of particular importance to Avidly right now, due to their recently released new corporate strategy which aims to position them more specifically in the martech industry. As their corporate strategy evolves and begins creating services to customers directly seeking martech services, also their employee profile needs to evolve internally and externally. Thus, the employer brand concept has a natural pathway to enter.

There are, both internally and externally, multiple ways in which employer branding methods and ideologies can aid Avidly in becoming a more attractive employer in the martech industry. Internally, a focus on training and development of new skills for current staff means that by investing in already loyal employees' professional growth, Avidly is showing their appreciation towards the top talent they have. Employee



retention is one of the main goals of implementing employer brand processes. Internally, understanding what motivates the staff is at the forefront, and we can see that by using tools such as Officevibe to measure employee engagement, Avidly is committed to bettering and ensuring their staff's well-being. The external process of employer branding sprout best from motivated, engaged, satisfied employees who are willing to not only speak well of Avidly as an employer when they work there but also afterwards, which Avidly has begun focusing on through utilising the ENPS metric. The internal employer branding work also shines through externally when considering the external content created to lure in the best talent from the martech industry, meaning the winning of awards, sharing intriguing customer case studies, thought leadership blogs, webinars and events. All of this can only be created by loyal staff who themselves believe in the product the company is selling.

By comparing the literature review and the results from the interview with Avidly, the creation of an employer branding strategy which more strongly aligns with the current corporate, marketing and HR strategies can only be beneficial to them. Utilising the already available strategic frameworks, an employer branding strategy that correlates and supports all other business goals and objectives can be created. The martech industry is highly concentrated and the best talent is being fought for, thus companies must understand both the internal and external methods they can utilise to retain current talent and to attract the best new talent. Which will ultimately help them differentiate from the competition as an organisation.

This research shows that Avidly will benefit from introducing a strategy aligned employer branding strategy if all teams and management throughout the organisation are willing to put in the time, effort and be systematic about it. Avidly is a great example, as they are in the beginning phases of it and have already benefitted from it in some ways but still have multiple areas where a more thorough investment can help make it more efficient. Avidly has already been able to create parameters for measuring employer branding, has crystalised their corporate, marketing and branding strategies, has introduced career development workshops and paths, trainee programs and more, which will all aid their position as an employer in the martech industry. Even though the



literature review, as well as the data collection, showed some risks for both methods, the benefits outweigh them.

For companies that are seeking to work with employee branding, there are some things to consider. Employer branding should not be thought of as something separate from the corporate, business, HR and marketing strategies, it should be, right from the beginning, aligned with them and thought of as a key player for determining the company's identity as an employer. Employer branding will need to be introduced to all teams, processes and initiatives and looked at as another supportive driver for reaching company goals and objectives. Also, employer branding should not solely focus on external marketing or communications, it should first and foremost always begin from the inside and concentrate on ensuring the current employees are happy where they are.

As the research topic is fairly explored, broad and continuously changing and can be studied from the company's, employee's and potential employee's point of view, new research can be conducted. This thesis was conducted to answer if employer branding can be utilised by Avidly to increase their attractiveness as an employer in the martech industry.

The research topic was answered, yet the substance is bound to change according to the company and industry. Because the subject is broad and somewhat researched, the need for a more broad, martech industry-wide research on the topic of employer branding could be researched in the future.



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