



Attracting community builders



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WHITE PAPER

The exhibition, business events, B2B media - enter your favourite name here - industry has long had challenges in focusing its identity. The purpose of this white paper is to help organisations in the industry unite on a common talent narrative and suggest central threads for customising their own "people story". This document discusses: key industry-wide narratives, the Gen-Z perspective on talent and suggests a series of adaptable story elements for an organisation to develop their own unique Employee Value Propositions (EVPs).

The exhibition, business events, B2B media -enter your favourite name here- industry has long had challenges in focusing its identity. Whilst there are major advantages to us not being pigeon-holed into a single track - adaptability and transferability of channels and solutions-based customer focus being two prime examples - it also has drawbacks, such as being undervalued or unseen by investors and governments because our true size and scope is hard to pin down.

One of the most significant challenges to our non-identity has been talent attraction.

We have perennially struggled with:

Explaining to new talent exactly what we do. Are we creating connections, hosting marketing places, or delivering marketing services? Then, how does that match to an entry-level role where they are designing an email campaign, entering data into Salesforce, or checking an exhibitor has ordered their electric package?

Selling the future. Many of our organisations have evolved from a history of publishing and traditional media, and while it is one of our hallmarks that we are an industry of evolution, it also makes it a challenge to map career paths and progression in an industry that is going to continuously change. The experiences that got today's executives to the top will not be the same ones new talent will have as they succeed in the future.

In addition, we are at a moment in time where we have added challenges due to the pandemic and post-pandemic work trends. In this period of slowdown, or even inactivity due to Covid-19 in many places of the world, we lost a significant amount of entry-level talent. Many organisations were forced to furlough or make people redundant to stay solvent, as well as had talent that chose to make career switches to other industries where it was easier to see a future path for them.

Therefore, in today's talent environment, we are also struggling with:

Rebuilding our attractiveness. We have lost some credibility as an industry that is 'all about people' when we were not able to protect our workers during the pandemic and have struggled to rebuild quickly when demand reemerged. Coupling this with more typical, though no less important, world or work pressures like economic uncertainty and the continuing lack of diversity in senior positions, puts us on the backfoot for being seen as an attractive industry for emerging talent.

Management pipeline. As we lost significant amounts of our entry-level talent, we are beginning to face progression challenges in our organisations. The typical cycle of promotions has been disrupted by this talent gap and we now face new internal challenges at both entry and manager levels where we don't have the people.

As has happened many times in our industry, we are at a milestone moment of evolution, though with much reason to be optimistic. We are welcoming into the workforce a generation that is more open to flexibility and fluidity, bailiwicks of our industry, and therefore perhaps now is the perfect time for our industry to capitalise on the reluctance to be 'just one thing' when our DNA has long been to be malleable.

The purpose of this document

In this document, we aim to address the talent attraction challenges outlined by sharing an industry-wide talent narrative, a view on what matters to the new-to-the-workforce generation, Gen-Z, delivered by the Next Generation Leaders class of 2022, and a series of adaptable story elements for organisations to develop their own unique Employee Value Propositions (EVPs).

We are community builders

We exist to bring people together. We are community builders.

Solid purpose.

When we talk about 'purpose' in terms of talent, that is simply a fancy way of saying 'what drives us' or 'what gives our work meaning.' For everyone in this industry, that is demonstrated in the communities we build. Everything we do is ultimately in aid of bringing people together.

This manifests in hundreds of different ways, at exhibitions, conferences, awards, 1:1s, roundtables, webinars, online marketplaces, in apps, summits, roadshows... In the metaverse, on a mobile device, on a laptop, in a magazine, or in person, we are bringing together innovation, information, products, services, passions,..., but ultimately, simply and significantly, we are bringing together people, we are building communities.



There are a few core elements that unite us as an industry. Things you'll be able to see reflected in any team, doing any role, anywhere in the world. These are the key messages we can use as an industry to set us apart.



Confident adaptability.

It is doubtful that there is any single required skill more prevalent in job descriptions throughout the industry than 'adaptable.' Our roots are in change. The transition of content from print to digital, of meetings from physical to online, of an event in Chicago to Hong Kong. We are always thinking about how to take the good of what we know, of what came before, and transform it into something new.

We exist in every country, in every sector and in every format where people come together around the world. This inherently means we are led by change, and it is what fuels our passion, our purpose, as well as the need for our communities to come together. We are proud of the work we do in bringing these groups of people together, and of the way our work affects local communities, industry sectors, and global business. We are at the forefront of 'what's new' in every industry around the world, bringing people together to talk about trends, changes, and the latest thinking. We are problem solvers and instruments of change.

It is through the communities that we build that business - culture, global economies and societies - thrives.

What matters to Gen-Z

As part of the 2022 project, the Next Generation Leaders (NGLs), a selected group of cross-industry high performers, were asked to consider the talent narrative for our industry. They took their lenses, as high-potential developing talent, the kind of folks anyone would be glad to have in their organisation, and shared three core areas that need to be front and centre of recruitment efforts if you want to attract people like culture, career development and compensation.

CULTURE

Authentic belief and commitment to diversity. The bare minimum equal opportunity statements and messages that say an organisation celebrates diversity are not enough. Attracting Gen-Z talent requires businesses to have a clear and comprehensive DEI plan that is authentic, intentional and demonstrates progress.

Consideration for the whole person. The relationship between an employee and an employer is not simply transactional. Gen-Z is not interested in simply trading time worked for wages. It is well established that they are looking for a purpose in their careers and as such wellness needs to be at the forefront of your performance culture plans. You should be setting up your talent to produce the best possible output with every element necessary to support it. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on the whole person, so consider things like flexible time, wellness programmes, mental and physical health as well as belonging and engagement.

Leadership modelling. Leaders in our organisations set the tone. Their behaviours, words and actions determine the culture of an organisation. If there is a mismatch between a leader saying, 'Everything we do focuses on the customer,' and then implementing huge budget cuts because they're trying to drive margin or 'We care about work-life balance' and then emailing and texting over the weekend, there will be no trust or belief in the culture, no matter how well articulated.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Teach. The talent you want to attract is aching to learn and grow. Develop programmes, coaching, on-the-job opportunities, shadowing, sharing forums, and anything you can to facilitate different ways for people to progress in their careers in the industry. Traditional career paths won't cut it as our industry is in constant evolution, which is no different from before, so discuss examples of how people have moved non-linearly within your organisation as well as more broadly in the industry.

Listen. The emerging talent in your organisation is trying to prove themselves. They joined the organisation to feel a sense of purpose and meaning in what they do, so your recognition of those efforts is critical. Big annual awards and recognition programmes are well and good, but this is about the sustained acknowledgement of effort over output. These can be teaching as well as praise moments, it is about letting your team member know you see them.

Trust. The talent coming into an organisation is more educated, worldly, and experienced than any prior generation. They have skills and a way of looking at the world that is completely unique and demonstrates broader cultural change. They were not raised with a 'pay your dues' mentality and are accustomed to a rapid speed of change. You need to give them opportunities to be empowered and to make meaningful contributions from day one. And most important, promote potential, not tenure or performance. This is the fastest way to build trust and loyalty and demonstrates your organisation's value of attitude, talent, and effort.

COMPENSATION

Benchmark. In the data age we live in, it's expected that you are benchmarking salaries, both in your local market as well as through the industry. Talent expects you to be doing this and to be transparent with the results of your assessment. The recruits you're interested in are definitely knowledgeable about their worth on the open market, so things like 'competitive salary' on a job description simply won't cut it any longer.

Act on change. If there is anything this generation understands it's 'unprecedented times.' When inflation goes up, when recessions bed-in, when your organisation is doing well, whatever the circumstance your talent is invested in it and expects you to act on changing compensation along with the head or tailwinds.

Actively address gender parity. Whether or not you are legally required, Gen-Z expects you to be transparent about any gender pay gap in your organisation and be actively working to improve it. Be open about your plans and involve them in developing actions.



How to use this to develop your employee value proposition (EVP)

The talent you're looking to recruit and develop wants to know about the people behind, within, and alumni of, the organisation for which they are applying to work. They of course want to know things like benefits, compensation, development opportunities, and also, they want to see why others work for that organisation and if their values, attitudes, and beliefs align. Therefore, it is critical for all organisations to develop and distribute authentic employer branding, and employee value proposition, that would ring true from any stakeholder to any current or future recruit or colleague.

Below are some of the critical areas to explore when developing your EVP with consideration to the 'community building' talent narrative and the culture, career development and compensation key threads the NGLs outlined.

Topics

- **DEI.** Amplify underrepresented voices, including things like non-traditional careers, education or experience, paths, diverse backgrounds, and unique working practices or patterns.
- **Sustainability.** Show what you're doing – with real examples – of working toward sustainable goals. Sharing some statements and policies is not enough. Organisations should share the stories, the achievements, and even the challenges or setbacks, so long as it's authentic and shows true commitment.
- **Flexible work.** Whether its location, holiday allotment, flexible hours, flexible days, project choosing, whatever it is that can help you demonstrate your commitment to output-based work.
- **Development.** Whether you are in the first few months of your first job or you're the CEO, development is crucial to talent. Address learning and development and growth opportunities, as early as onboarding and regularly after.
- **Compensation.** Address total reward, and show the impact individually not just 'what you offer' but how it benefits that individual person.
- **Share passion and drive.** People are joining our industry because there is a solid purpose of being community builders, even if you aren't articulating that message yet. The best way you can excite candidates about joining your organisation is if you are able to get your colleagues to share their passion and drive for why they love their role, their job and this industry.

Key channels

Candidates are exploring what your company stands for through many channels. Some of the key ones to consider regarding how your EVP is represented include:

COMPANY-OWNED CHANNELS

- **Website.** Make sure you have dedicated talent pages on your website.
- **Social.** You need to have a presence on social media. This may be talent-specific or simply company brand channels.
- **Job ads and descriptions.** Check how you're positioning your company and the individual roles in your job ads and job descriptions.

COLLEAGUE-OWNED CHANNELS

- **Personal social.** Candidates will look to their new manager, or their new colleagues, to see if it looks like they enjoy their jobs.
- **Word-of-mouth.** There is nothing more powerful than a recommendation from someone you know that this is a good place to work.

RATINGS/REVIEW SITES

- **Glassdoor** - There are many sites where people can discuss employers, recruitment experience, work experience. Glassdoor is probably the most well-known and influential. Regularly check on how your company is being portrayed on this site.

INDUSTRY CHANNELS

- **Partners.** Similar to colleague recommendations, your partners can be a huge influence on our candidates. It is important to have good relationships with everyone you work with as this could be very helpful for your talent pool.
- **Events and industry news.** Both commercial and association-organised events and news are a great opportunity for your organisation to speak, share thought-leadership, feature initiatives, network, and generally demonstrate what it's like to work at your company, who some of your colleagues are as individuals, and why your company is great.



About the Next Generation Leadership Grant (NGL) Programme

Launched by UFI in 2016, the annual NGL programme is the premier talent accelerator programme for the exhibition industry.

Interested high-potential professionals apply for the programme each spring. Their applications are reviewed by a committee of leaders from the sector and once applicants are selected, they begin a group project that culminates with a presentation during the UFI Global Congress in November. The annual collaborative project is designed to help the NGLs develop skills, experience new ways of working and thinking, and introduce them to more people and aspects of the industry. It is the aim of the NGL programme to help develop our industry leaders of the future. Along the way, the cohorts are coached and guided by members of UFI team and senior leaders from the industry.

Since 2016, there have been 37 talented professionals who have gone through the NGL programme, and we're so pleased and proud of the work they did during the programme and afterwards as NGL alumni. We look forward to continuing to develop the leaders of tomorrow during their NGL year and to working with the NGL alumni as mentors and ambassadors for the industry.



More information at www.ufi.org/ngl

About UFI – The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry

UFI is the global trade association of the world's tradeshow organisers and exhibition centre operators, as well as the major national and international exhibition associations, and selected partners of the exhibition industry. UFI's main goal is to represent, promote and support the business interests of its members and the exhibition industry. UFI directly represents more than 50,000 exhibition industry employees globally, and also works closely with its 60 national and regional association members. More than 820 member organisations in 85+ countries around the world are presently signed up as members. Over 900 international trade fairs proudly bear the UFI approved label, a quality guarantee for visitors and exhibitors alike. UFI members continue to provide the international business community with a unique marketing media aimed at developing outstanding face-to-face business opportunities. For more information, please visit www.ufi.org

