

How to build a strong brand that attracts Gen Z



Contents

1	Introduction
2	Which comes first: your talent brand or your employer brand?
3	Common challenges with promoting brands to early talent
4	Integrating your brand across touchpoints
5	What Gen Z looks for in brands they're exploring
8	Engaging early talent in your employer brand
9	Metrics to consider for measuring brand resonance
10	Key takeaways
11	Employer success stories

Introduction



What does it take to attract Gen Z candidates to your company?

There isn't one right answer—elements like your company culture, advancement opportunities, and of course compensation and benefits all carry weight with any prospective employee.

When it's done well, your employer brand highlights your values, catches the attention of top talent, retains employees, sustains loyal customers, and stands out from the competition.

A strong employer brand can capture Gen Z's attention—even if it's a brand they've never heard of before.

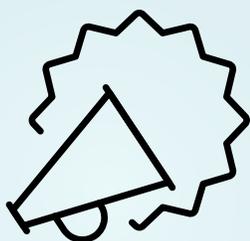
Gen Z has more access than ever to find out what a company truly stands for. In fact, 63% of Gen Zers believe it's important to work for an employer with shared values.

This guide will help you understand how the candidate experience is rooted in branding, ways to improve how your brand shows up and stands out, and why attracting qualified Gen Z candidates with a strong brand is critical for your company's future.

Why your employer brand needs to leverage your talent brand

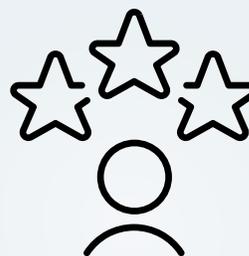
You might hear the terms “employer brand” and “talent brand” used interchangeably, but they’re actually different (though complementary) concepts:

Employer brand



The narrative about your organization you can control through mission statements, values, benefits, and more.

Talent brand



The employee experience forged by honest voices inside your organization. It’s how your culture lives internally.

Which should come first? Your talent brand—which then creates the foundation for your larger employer brand.

When you leverage the voices and experiences of real employees as part of your employer brand, you're able to increase authenticity and build trust. Research shows that, when it comes to getting credible information about what it’s like to work somewhere, candidates trust a company’s employees 3x more than the company itself.

Common challenges with promoting brands to early talent

- Your employer is small with a brand, products, or services that are unfamiliar to Gen Z
- Your employer is large with a lack of clear career growth trajectory and clarity for students about where they can fit in
- Your employer brand is known so you have a high volume of applicants, but struggle with finding the right candidates
- There is strong brand affinity with your employer but the industry isn't as attractive as others
- The opportunity for career development is great, but the brand doesn't resonate with Gen Z
- Your employer is small and there's a lack of opportunities for early talent within the organization
- There is misalignment between basic job qualifications and preferred job qualifications

Do any of these sound familiar, or do you perhaps face other challenges?

[Reach out to our team](#) for tactical solutions and Gen Z insights to tailor your candidate experience and boost your qualified pipeline.

Integrating your brand across touchpoints

Your digital footprint must have accessible information and be cohesive across channels (for instance, candidates shouldn't get a completely different impression from your company's Employer Page on Handshake than they do from your careers page on your website). Whether you offer a candidate experience that is virtual, in person, or hybrid, your brand needs to provide a human touch.

On your Employer Page and across your storytelling, sharing experiences of real employees is authentic content that students want to see. Handshake Premium partners can customize their Employer Page with dynamic content, photos, and multimedia. Use the "Employer Perspectives," "Interviews," and "Q&As" sections of your Employer Page as ways to provide information, insight, and career advice. **Your Employer Page might be where you're making the first impression!**

To reach the right audience, at the right time, with the right message, and the right tactic, consider all of the touchpoints or channels where Gen Z can engage with your brand, and which candidates consider when they explore a new brand or pursue one they know:

- Website
- Handshake Employer Page
- Social media
- Handshake messages
- Virtual career fairs
- Interviews
- Emails
- Experiences
- Swag
- Blogs
- Peer reviews
- Word of mouth
- Career services
- Employer events

What Gen Z looks for in brands they're exploring

With virtual recruiting here to stay, an employer brand that is attentive to its digital presence helps your company meet students where they are: online (and on Handshake).

Gen Z has high standards for social accountability and consistency. Known for building social capital through values-based communities, such as groups dedicated to environmental causes, Gen Zers want to engage with brands that engage those communities to demonstrate their employer values. Employer brands should give early talent insight into your values and your overall employee experience so they can decide if their own goals are in alignment.



To authentically tell your company's story, you must evaluate, 'What is most important to the candidate I'm seeking to engage with?'. This is achieved through *personalization, authenticity, and transparency through your talent brand and storytelling*. These elements are the secret sauce to make your employer brand resonate and attract a diverse pipeline of candidates in this competitive landscape."

– **Cat Pastuhov, Senior Talent Brand Manager, Handshake**

From opening an email to meeting with an Ambassador from your employer, personalized outreach and customized interactions are how Gen Z feels connected to your brand.

Audit the following facets of your talent brand to stand out from the competition:



Your brand's visual identity is a candidate's first impression, which carries a lot of weight. Gen Z is most attracted to brands that seem “cool” and “fun”—even over ones that are endorsed by celebrities.

Look & feel

- Is the visual brand unified, appealing, and easy to scan?
- Does the brand lean into its logo, and use images and engaging videos?
- Are messages and digital content bold, short, and to-the-point?
- Is the mission and value statement authentic or just for display?
- Do current employees act as brand ambassadors?



Diversity & inclusion

Gen Z is more diverse than previous generations, and they care deeply about representation—more than half of students surveyed by Handshake said they wouldn't apply to a job at a company that lacked diversity.

- Do photos and videos showcase representation?
- Is inclusive language used throughout job descriptions and the candidate experience?
- Is there any information on how the employer supports local nonprofits or volunteer opportunities that align with their mission and advance DEI goals?
- Are there Ambassadors or alumni available for me to talk to—who look like me or share my background?



Culture

Gen Z isn't looking for stocked snack counters and ping-pong tables. They're paying attention to your core values: 70% of Gen Z workers say they want to work for a company whose values align with their own.

- Are my values aligned with how this brand positions itself?
- Are testimonials positive and relevant to me?
- Is this a place where I feel like I'll be able to bring my full self to work?
- Is this a company that champions community building/creating safe spaces for people like me?



Pay & benefits

While Gen Z candidates are hungry for growth and meaning, money still talks. Gen Z ranks salary as the most influential factor when making employment decisions.

- Is an employer signaling transparency by mentioning compensation?
- Is there a 401k plan or other financial options, so I know this is a place where I can grow financially?
- Are there benefits that are meaningful to me, such as flexible time off, inclusive health coverage, or mental health assistance?



Learning & growth

Gen Zers actively look for employers who will support them in acquiring new skills; in fact, 76% of Gen Zers see learning as key to their career advancement.

- Are there professional development opportunities?
- Is there tuition reimbursement or a learning and development stipend?
- Have current employees been promoted?
- Is skill building/training integrated into early career roles?
- Does this company celebrate internal mobility?



Connection building

Gen Zers place a high priority on relationships and connections, with over 90% preferring to have a human element to their teams.

- Are there folks I can reach out to other than recruiters, like alumni or ambassadors, who will give me more perspective on what it's like to work there?
- Do interactions with recruiters feel personalized?
- Does networking seem approachable here, with a possibility of finding a mentor?

Engaging early talent and Gen Z in your employer brand

So how do you capture the attention of Gen Z with your employer brand? There isn't one right answer or formula, especially since the main purpose of your brand is to highlight the aspects that make your employer unique and original—and there's no template for that.

The objective is to help students see career paths within your company, no matter where they start. You need to adapt your strategy specifically to Gen Z for them to understand you are invested in them joining your workforce.

Leverage Ambassadors to engage Gen Z in your employer brand no matter how big or small your team is:

- Ambassadors are employees other than recruiters who are willing to contribute personal storytelling and authenticity to your brand's early talent program.
- Any professional with work experience has a perspective that can be useful. It's valuable for early talent to learn from any level of employee that career paths aren't always linear, and that skills and relationships can be built in any first internship or job.
- Gen Z is hungry for mentorship, and cares about the opportunity to cultivate unique relationships with people in whom they see themselves, whose career paths they aspire to, and who can offer real talk. Think of Ambassadors as a way to incorporate mentorship into your early talent programming.
- Ambassadors are a signal that your employer will set early talent up for success and help them find the right career path for them.
- You can scale your use of Ambassadors whether it's 1 or 100!

[Learn more about incorporating Ambassadors into your program.](#)

Metrics to consider for measuring brand resonance

How do you evaluate the success of your employer brand? There isn't a one size fits all approach. Brand resonance comes from an umbrella perspective and depends on business needs; a large company with a known brand will have different goals than a small startup.

Consider the following metrics for success, among others that are meaningful to your employer:

- Quality of your applicants or hires
- Volume of applications
- Applications from targeted segments
- How your holistic employer brand supports key employer and recruiting initiatives
- Engagement of alumni networks
- Event or virtual career fair RSVPs
- Employee pulse surveys
- Boomerangs (returning employees)
- Brand awareness (visitors & page views)
- "Talent flow" (attracting talent from competitors and "gold star" companies)
- Ambassador engagement
- Brand awareness on key social channels



Key takeaways

To be successful at attracting Gen Z talent:

- Make sure your employer brand is integrated with consistency throughout your touchpoints with candidates.
- Use human relationships to help early talent understand that your talent brand is welcoming, that there are people who will set them up for success throughout their journeys, and that there are career paths to be discovered.
- Embed your employer's values into the candidate and employee experience.
- Communicate authentically, inclusively, and transparently.
- Start early in a student's college career, and leverage virtual recruiting for an "always on" strategy.

Fundamentally, your employer brand should be unique to the values lived within your company. This is how your employer can truly stand out to a generation of job seekers who are looking for authenticity—a place where they can bring their whole selves to work, find community in whom they trust, and grow in their careers.

Employer Success Stories



When you're responsible for helping create an experience for candidates who may be unfamiliar with your organization, here are some contextualized examples of how some Handshake customers have leveraged branding to attract top early talent. While these are well-known brands, consider how you might adapt any of these proven strategies to your team (after all, a success factor that you already have in common is: you are all using Handshake!).



Mastercard's emphasis on the power of mentorship

For early talent, entering the workforce for the very first time can be an incredibly daunting experience. Gen Z talent is eager to find employers that will provide guidance as they start their careers, which means companies should emphasize mentorship as a critical strategy and investment for setting their brands apart from both an attraction and a retention angle.

Take the [Mastercard Launch](#) program, for example, which leverages mentorship specifically for underrepresented and female recent graduates who want to pursue a career in technology (or are still undecided about their career plans). By using Handshake Premium Campaigns and 1:1 messaging to personally invite students to apply to the Launch program, Mastercard has achieved a 4% increase in their diversity metrics.

The program is essentially Mastercard's way of coming alongside young talent to develop their skills, support their early career learning, and offer feedback to help them thrive in their careers. All the while, mentees learn all about Mastercard's business, customers, and culture—and ultimately launch their Mastercard careers.



Epic’s “all majors are welcome” approach

Epic, a healthcare information technology company based in Madison, WI, needed to expand their brand awareness within the competitive tech industry that opportunities exist outside of Silicon Valley.

To attract top talent, Epic is open minded about students’ backgrounds and uses Handshake to reach out to majors from A(nthropology) to Z(oology). Through info sessions, events, and 1:1 virtual relationship building, Epic helps students understand how their degree would translate to a career that doesn't match the job title that they might have expected. This is a smart brand play to underscore that candidates would find belonging and inclusion at Epic, in addition to fulfilling learning and growth in their careers.

To further demonstrate how candidates from all backgrounds can find a welcoming work environment, Epic tries to staff events with school alumni and a diverse group of employees from different backgrounds and jobs to participate. Not only does this reinforce relationship building in the candidate experience, it’s also a way for students to see themselves working at a place where others like them are thriving—part of what a strong brand is all about.

After upgrading to Handshake Premium, Epic dramatically boosted their brand awareness among qualified talent through personalized messaging and virtual info sessions. They achieved a 4.7X increase in the number of Employer Page views and 4.8X increase the number of job views compared to their tech industry peers.



Workday’s unique recruitment program

Workday’s university recruitment program, Generation Workday, is different because it doesn’t feel like a recruitment program. This 12-month development program gives young talent hands-on experience through internships, skill-building opportunities, networking, and more. The goal is to add value to these candidate’s job searches and help them successfully navigate the transition to the working world.

The rotational program, through which candidates get to experience different roles, working styles and leadership styles without making the commitment to a "defined" career path, stands out because it empowers candidates to find their path rather than Workday having to decide "the best fit" for candidates. By focusing on what early talent needs from employers—and not what Workday is looking for from early talent—Workday has eased any pressure by removing recruitment from the conversation. Instead, they serve early talent with knowledge, resources, and experience.

This branding strategy fosters a high degree of trust and brand loyalty, which Workday continues to maintain through ongoing networking conversations with Generation Workday participants—who are primed for Workday’s full-time positions when they graduate.



Handshake is the #1 way that early talent (0-3 years of experience) finds jobs. It is a networking platform that connects 650,000+ employers—including all 500 of the Fortune 500—with nearly 1,500 colleges in the US.