

**CHA**

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# Dream jobs

Strategies for attracting talent into hard to fill roles

**A CHA report**

Winter 2008

# Foreword

For employers anxious to fill vacancies for scarce engineers, scientists, accountants and IT professionals, this report brings welcome news: all these jobs feature in the nation's top 20 dream jobs. The trouble is that we are also a nation of career drifters, most of us meandering into a job instead of fulfilling our original aspirations. Fewer than 40% of us set off with a plan and stick to it. This sends out a clear message to employers: to reduce skills shortages the best answer may also be the simplest: guide people into the jobs they dream of doing before they drift away.

That's why employers must build their relationship with future candidates early on; their offer needs to resonate with the lifestyles and aspirations of those they want to recruit. They need in effect to go steady rather than take the one-night-stand approach of recruitment advertising.

Once we have settled on a career, our experience as customers has a profound impact on our choice of employers, which is why Apple tops the list of brands we would most like to work for and British Gas tops the list of those we wouldn't. Self-evidently, industry-wide events such as the dramatic price rises from utility companies or the fall from grace of the banks will have a knock-on effect on our willingness to work for individual companies in those sectors.

Competition within sectors is a further challenge. Brand differentiation is of course key. This is really about brand behaviour: whether companies understand candidates, how they talk to them and how they treat them. It is behaviour that will set you apart and ahead of rivals.

It becomes harder and harder to separate the consumer brand from the employer brand. The report's findings are a call to action to companies to close the gap between functional departments focused on customers and those focused on employees. Organisations should tell one consistent credible story to their stakeholders—in or out of hours—and start early to catch the drifters.

Colette Hill  
Chairman

## *Report methodology*

An online survey was carried out by OnePoll.com, an independent market research company in September 2008 with a representative sample of 2000 employees.

## Executive summary

### The power of the consumer brand

The companies people would most like to work for are all household names, an eclectic mix of young and mature brands from a variety of sectors. What they have in common is their strong consumer profile, confirming that the best consumer brands also have the strongest appeal as places to work.

*“The Apple Store’s staff are truly, madly, deeply convinced that their store’s products are not only cool, but the very best that the industry has to offer. If you know of any other retailer that can motivate its staff like this, stop reading now and go buy its shares.”*

*John Naughton, The Observer*

The top five (see Table 1, below) is dominated by IT and telecoms, with HSBC an honorable exception despite the instability of the banking sector. Together, they attract an extraordinary 30% of the vote of which Apple attracts an outstanding 14%.

### The payback of poor reputation

We also asked respondents which company they would never work for. Topping the thumbs-down pole is British Gas selected by almost 10% of respondents, with BT coming third. This disappointing news for these two British giants is no doubt linked to consumer fury at the rapid rise in utility bills that dominated the headlines in early autumn 2008.

McDonalds will also be disappointed, coming a close second to British Gas, despite its investment in employer brand marketing over the past year, including its campaign to change the definition of the McJob in the Oxford English Dictionary.

The financial sector inevitably features strongly with votes for the Halifax, Barclays, Abbey and Northern Rock.

There are also votes against brands with controversial reputations: Nestle, KFC, Bernard Matthews, BAE, BAT, Primark.



### Simply O<sub>2</sub>

At O2 the integration of the consumer and employee brands is a given. Annabel Sweet, head of people strategy and employee experience, describes them as two sides of the same coin: “If we treat our employees brilliantly, they treat customers brilliantly. If we treat our customers brilliantly, our employees feel proud of the company they work for.”

The philosophy permeates all communication at O2 and the evidence is everywhere. The company developed its brand values—bold, open, trusted, clear—with both internal and external audiences in mind.

The HR and corporate communication teams work closely together on all aspects of communication. They act on consumer trends, such as the growing power of word of mouth communication and the dramatic increase in online shopping, to plan their interaction with employees as much as with customers.

The IT team develops processes that make dealing with O2 easier for the customer, simultaneously making responding to the customer easier for employees at the frontline.

The creation of ‘The O2’ in London has provided a unique public space that not only gives customers a great and truly O2 experience, but is also used for staff recognition and celebrations. O2 is the only company of its size in the UK that can accommodate all its employees in this way.

O2’s community programme offers grants to both customers and staff for local initiatives. Its ‘better connected’ mantra touches employees as much as customers, using technology to keep its teams in touch wherever they are.

“It’s a simple philosophy,” observes Annabel Sweet. “But it requires rigorous discipline in its implementation. You need all departments to get it and to commit to it and you need to be absolutely consistent in your approach. But if you get it right the pay-off is enormous in business prosperity and satisfaction in a job well done for employees.”

**Table 1: The nation’s favourite employers**

1	Apple	6	BBC
2	Google	7	E.ON
3	Microsoft	8	Marks & Spencer
4	HSBC	9	John Lewis
5	O2	=10	Innocent / IBM

## Changing energy at **e.on**

E.ON, one of the UK's leading power and gas companies, has taken great strides to know exactly how colleagues and external candidates perceive it as an employer.

Employer branding and attraction specialist Alan Davies led the project.

“As a business we have an enormous and exciting challenge ahead in helping the UK become a low carbon economy whilst ensuring security and affordability of energy supply. To do this we need the right people with the right skills, such as engineers, who can innovate and develop new technology to help E.ON literally change the way energy is generated and used.”

Given this business context, it is vital for E.ON to understand and develop a compelling employer brand. It needs to know exactly why candidates are attracted to E.ON and be able to leverage these reasons to create a strong Employer Value Proposition (EVP)—the qualities and behaviours people will associate with E.ON as an employer.

The process began in 2008 with a series of interviews, focus groups and workshops undertaken with colleagues across E.ON, as well as among critical talent pools. The research identified how current and potential colleagues view the energy sector and E.ON itself. The next stage is using the feedback to develop a clear proposition for staff and new recruits.

“The work has helped us identify where we are missing a trick in reaching potential employees and develop the values that really differentiate E.ON as an employer. It creates a vision from which we can engage existing colleagues and attract new ones.”

**Table 2: The top 10 employer brand builders**

- |                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| 1 Experience as a customer | 6 Advertising                          |
| 2 Family discussion        | 7 Events                               |
| 3 The influence of friends | 8 Careers service at school or college |
| 4 Company website          | 9 Recruitment agencies                 |
| 5 Press coverage           | 10 Blogs and other online media        |

» A number of respondents comment that they would never work for companies associated with gun manufacture, animal testing or the use of low-paid workers.

### The laws of attraction

People develop their views of organisations as potential employers over time and a whole range of factors influence those views (see Table 2, above). Right at the top of the list is their experience as customers which is cited by over 75% of respondents. Blogs and online media, at the bottom of the list, are cited by a significant minority, just under 40%.

Over 65% rely on family and almost as many rely on friends.

The company's own website and the coverage it achieves are also critical factors—both cited by almost 60% of respondents.

Women are more likely to be influenced by their experience as customers than men—over half say it is a very important factor and a further 30% say it affects their views. They are

also particularly likely to be influenced by press coverage and by company websites.

Professional advisors at college and in recruitment agencies currently play only a small part as employer-brand influencers—perhaps an area for greater focus as companies strive for best employer status.

Age matters:

- Company websites are most influential to those between 22 and 35 years old, least influential to those under 18
- The customer experience becomes increasingly important as we grow older, reaching a peak at 31–35 years old and staying important thereafter
- The youngest respondents are the least influenced by advertising
- The majority of all ages groups, except the under 18s, say press coverage is important
- The 19–35 groups are most likely to be influenced by blogs and other online media



## » Safe dreams

Today's workers appear to play safe choosing traditional careers and their top 20 career choices are surprisingly conservative.

Professions that offer financial security and a clear career path for the ambitious feature strongly: accountancy, law, IT, science and engineering. This is good news for organisations concerned to attract scarce workers in these fields.

For many, the motivation to serve others remains strong: teaching comes a firm first and nursing second. Teach First, which campaigns to attract top graduates into a first job in teaching, says this option has become one of the most prestigious on offer, evident through its entry into the top

10 of the prestigious Top 100 Graduate Employers.

Looking after animals is popular: veterinary practice came third and others dream of being zoologists, zookeepers or working with horses.

The armed forces remain a popular option despite recent coverage of low morale, with the army pulling in more votes than the RAF and Navy together.

No maverick career makes the top 20. The more adventurous respondents claim to have dreamed of becoming a fighter pilot, FBI agent, spaceman or stunt man. There were whimsical answers too: working in pic-and-mix at Woolworths, kennel maid, dressmaker, and paleontologist. Some were risqué: pole dancer; some artistic: film director, »

## An early start at

The acute shortage of skilled IT people creates great competition between companies for the best IT staff. They need to do everything they can to raise their profile, build relationships and engage with potential candidates whether they are actively seeking employment or just open to opportunities.

RM, the UK's leading ICT supplier to education, aims to form relationships with potential employee candidates as early as possible.

It is launching an apprenticeship programme and has a summer placement scheme for 15–16 year olds co-ordinated with local schools, to actively start building a relationship with students at a young age.

It has close relationships with universities such as Manchester, Bath, Warwick and Southampton. It also has a strong presence at the 'milkround' graduate recruitment fairs and advertises vacancies for the graduate programme on websites frequented by graduate job-hunters.

Deborah Moore, recruitment manager at RM, says: "A student might join us for a summer placement and may then return to work with us at the apprentice or graduate level, or later in their career as an experienced IT professional."

The RM brand is familiar to students as they will have used RM computers in primary school; the main challenge for RM is to link this customer brand recognition to the idea of working for the company.

Deborah continues: "Working in IT can be very exciting and fast-paced. At RM you have the opportunity to work on important projects using cutting edge technology and our goal is to make life change for people through education. It can be a very innovative and inspiring environment in which to work and there is added satisfaction in knowing that you can make a difference to people's lives."

**Table 3: Top 20 early dream jobs**

1 Teacher	11 Armed forces
2 Nurse	=12 Engineer
3 Vet or veterinary nurse	=12 Footballer
4 IT/computer technologist	=12 Hairdresser
5 Lawyer	15 Fashion designer
6 Accountant	=16 Pilot
=7 Journalist	=16 Scientist
=7 Policeman/woman	=16 Musician
9 Doctor	19 Midwife
10 Retail assistant	20 Cabin crew

## Owning the shop

### *John Lewis Partnership*

At the John Lewis Partnership, employee and customer experience go hand in hand. The partnership is co-owned which means that all 69,000 employees—known as partners—own the business, are involved in running it, take responsibility for its success and share profit. Employee experience is integral to the partnership: its ultimate purpose is ‘the happiness of its members, through their worthwhile and satisfying employment in a successful business’.

Everyone receives an equal percentage of their salary as an annual bonus, 20% in 2007/08. This gives partners a shared purpose and a tangible reason to serve customers to the absolute best of their ability. In addition, six elements of behaviour, known as ‘Powered by our Principles’, define its approach to treating employees, suppliers and customers—being honest, giving respect, recognising others, showing enterprise, working together, and achieving more.

The high level of employee engagement supports the aim in both John Lewis and Waitrose to provide excellent customer service. In the Verdict and Which? surveys of customer satisfaction, shoppers have consistently ranked John Lewis and Waitrose in the top two positions for the past three years.

The interaction of employee engagement, customer experience and commercial success creates a virtuous circle: Partner, Customer, Profit. Partners aim to provide outstanding service to customers, which generates profit, which is shared among partners and acts as an incentive to provide great customer service.

» writer, soundtrack musician. One pragmatist suggested undertaker.

### Early settlers

Over 60% of respondents say they drifted into their current career. Fewer than 40% say they made a conscious decision about the career they wanted to pursue.

The average age at which people settle on their dream job is just 17. By the time they are 20 years old, 70% of people have decided what job they want. For employers this means starting employer brand marketing early to catch the dreamers before they drift away: 10% of people say they had decided on their career by the time they were 11; a further third decided between 12 and 16 and a quarter between 17 and 19.

Younger people are planning their careers more rigorously than other generations have done. More than 50% of respondents under 18 says they have already made a conscious decision about the career they want to pursue; that figure drops to just 30% over people of 46.

Jim Hillage, director of research at the Institute for Employment Studies, observes:

“Most of the dream jobs are in professions for which people need a lot of training. You can’t just become a lawyer or a vet; there is a long lead-time. Employers who want to attract people to enter accountancy, law, IT, science or engineering need to influence them early so they make the right subject choices at school and at university.”

### A matter of pride

Employees across the UK are generally positive about their current employer. Just over 60% say they are proud enough to recommend their workplace to a friend—a strong indicator of employee engagement. They are also clear about the four factors that are key to building employee pride (see Table 4). All four focus on the organisation’s behaviour—towards employees, customers and the local community—rather than on its products or financial success.

Women put most store by the customer experience and how the company treats employees while men are twice as likely to cite the products or services the company sells.

Respondents also mention the team they work with and the enthusiasm of their colleagues.

### ***Table 4: Top 4 builders of employee pride***

- 1 How the company treats employees
- 2 What we do for our customers
- 3 Our reputation as a place to work
- 4 The work we do in the community

### Location, location, location

Where a business is based will have a major impact on its magnetism as an employer. Almost 80% say that the location and therefore the commute to work is a key factor even before they look at the specific vacancy.

Parochialism is common. Over half would prefer to work for a local company or for a UK company. A third of women and a quarter of men want to work for a local company. Nearly a quarter would like to work for themselves. Just 15% would like to work for a global organisation and fewer than 7% would like to work for a European business. Men are more likely to be attracted to an international organisation than women.

Overall, the younger the respondent the more likely they are to be interested in working for an international organisation: 30% of people under 22 years old would like to work for an international organisation; that figure drops to just 15% of people aged 46–60.

## Conclusion

To prepare for this study, we interrogated 2000 people across the UK. Their answers to our wide-ranging questions offer compelling insights and recommendations to employers:

- Clear and consistent early communication can play a vital part in reducing career drift. Work closely with career services both at school and at university to improve their effectiveness
- Revisit your career website through the eyes of a potential employee and benchmark your site against those of your rivals
- Take a proactive approach to media relations to build the employer brand through articles in the press and presence online
- Use viral marketing to reach the widest possible consumer audience for the employer brand, the influencers—friends and family—of the career decision and well as the decision maker themselves
- Sainsbury's clever ad campaign featuring a busy mum who both works for the supermarket and buys from it is a neat reminder that the individual as customer and the individual as worker are inseparable. Which doesn't stop companies separating them, of course. It may be a useful administrative convention to split HR and customer service or internal communication and marketing but it is essential that these departments collaborate well to ensure companies speak to their stakeholders holistically.

## About CHA

CHA works with the HR, marketing and communications teams of major employers to help them explain their purpose, energise and motivate their staff and build their reputations as great places to work.

We also work with the specialist consultancies that support them and the campaigning organisations that influence them.

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For copies of CHA's earlier reports, *A Little More Conversation*, *Business Behaving Badly*, *Straight Talking*, *Talking In The Dark* and *Worthwhile Work*, please visit our website, [www.chapr.co.uk](http://www.chapr.co.uk)



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