



# My First Employer Branding Campaign

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Strategies and pitfalls when attracting  
technical talents

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Developers are in demand. As noted by recent [Dice](#) research, the United States will likely add more than 250,000 software development roles over the next eight years. If you look at the 2019 developer survey results, we see some developer types [earning higher salaries](#) than others.

So amongst the most sought after talents are experts who work with data (data scientists and engineers) and those who work in DevOps and site reliability. What does this mean for your organization? That it's not enough to simply post generic developer job listings. With demand outpacing supply, you need effective employer branding campaigns that specifically target developer expectations and clearly articulate the case for your company culture.

Not sure where to get started with your first employer branding campaign? In this eBook, we'll tackle the five steps you need to build a solid recruiting foundation, get your campaign off the ground, and attract top-tier developer interest. Let's get started.

# Step 1: Understanding branding in the dev space

Most developers already have jobs, meaning they're not on the hunt for new positions. As a result, typical employer branding won't work. While well-crafted job ads and employee word-of-mouth may get your brand noticed by devs, the security and salary of their current position makes this interest observational rather than active.

Consider the current compensation outlook for developers: As noted by [US News](#), salaries have been trending upward for the last decade. Today, the median annual payout for [full stack developers in the US](#) is around [\\$110,000](#) with top earners breaking the mid six-figures. And given the in-demand nature of development skills, devs often enjoy greater autonomy than other IT professionals, since without effective apps and services companies simply can't complete in a cloud-based, digital-first world.

Crafting an effective employer branding campaign to capture dev attention and prompt essential action means understanding four key concepts in the developer recruitment space:

## The value of content marketing

Content marketing matters. It's not enough to create detailed job advertisements and post them on popular developer forums. Your company also needs a content-driven online presence that tells prospective hires who you are and what you stand for. As noted above, most skilled devs aren't looking for work, since they already have steady jobs with decent benefits. Convincing them to switch means creating blog, tutorial, or video content that's relevant and riveting.

Consider: Recent data suggests that the human attention span is decreasing, falling from 12 seconds to just over 8 seconds over the past two decades. What does this mean for your recruitment campaign? Busy devs don't have time to slog through rehashed content for cognitive gems; you need attention-grabbing headlines, compelling narratives, and the supporting technology to measure how many people are reading and sharing your content.

### **The visibility of development teams**

Typically, developers don't chase the spotlight: They're content to do good work, get recognized internally, and then take on new tasks. But when it comes to employer branding that attracts developer attention, your team needs to be visible. This means highlighting their accomplishments on your own blog along and industry news sites. However, this should go much further than official product releases. Find a way to make your team visible offline and online that appeals to each personality. Not everyone uses Twitter. Encourage them to link to a GitHub or Stack Overflow profile. Share their talks or slides. Encourage them to become a mentor, or invite them to meetups at your office. This will help your brand profile and encourage devs to associate your organization with cutting-edge tech.

### **The vision of thought leadership**

Many developers pursue their own projects outside 9-5 jobs; 90 percent say they've taught themselves a new language, framework, or tool outside their formal education or training. Meanwhile, sixty percent of developers have pursued online training courses to enhance their skills, and one-quarter have participated in white-hat hacking events.

The result? Finding great devs means knowing where to look and then delivering content they care about. In practice, this could mean signing up to speak at popular tech conferences or posting open source code. It's all about relevant thought leadership in the right location: Discover where devs are spending their time, then deliver code and content that matters.

### **The virtue of giving back**

Is your company giving back to the community at large? Attracting the attention of up-and-coming millennials and Gen Z employees means doing more than making a profit. As noted by Forbes, millennials are especially engaged by companies that demonstrate consistent social responsibility.

Consider that 65 percent of professional developers now contribute at least once a year to open source projects to help bolster the amount of publicly-available coding knowledge and drive new innovation. If your company is private and proprietary with all software and service development, you probably won't get dragged through the mud, but you also won't get noticed by great talent either. Giving back is essential to get the team you want.

## Step 2: Developing the double-attractive approach

When it comes to developing your tech recruitment campaign, companies need to flip the script with a double-attractive approach. Instead of creating ads and publishing content that focus on what your business needs from developers, you need to showcase why devs would want to work for you, and ensure this information reaches developers. Even the best campaign in the world is not effective if no one is listening.

The double-attractive approach contains (you guessed it) two key components:

### 1. Become a great place to work for developers

Developers have choice when it comes to their workplace, which means it's not enough just to pay a decent salary and offer better-than-average benefits. To engage devs and encourage them to apply to roles, requiring them to potentially leave their current employers, you need to stand out from the crowd.

A recent survey highlighted some of the **most important factors for developers in the workplace**, which include:

- **The languages and frameworks being used (54.1%)** — Developers want to know what they'll be working with and what technologies they can leverage. Specificity is to your benefit; Devs won't make a move for vague assurances.
- **Office and company culture (48.5%)** — Toxic company cultures kill developer motivation and can quickly send projects off-track. Our advice? Get your house in order, then make it public knowledge; highlight the positive aspects of working for your company, and back it up with testimonials from actual employees.
- **Flexible scheduling (45.6%)** — Software projects often have tight timelines, but devs don't always respond well to fixed scheduling requirements. Giving skilled pros leeway to work when and how they want, so long as they meet deadlines, goes a long way toward attracting developer interest.

- **Professional development opportunities (43.5%)** — As noted above, developers are constantly looking for ways to improve their skill set; company-led training initiatives and budgetary support for professional training courses is critical to retain top talent. Choosing not to offer this option simply means devs will get training somewhere else, and then take their skills with them when they go.
- **Remote work options (31.7%)** — According to this study, 77 percent of staff say that working remotely boosts their productivity. While offering remote work means giving up a measure of control, it's a necessary trade-off to attract the best in the business.
- **Positive impact of work output (23.5%)** — Staff want to see the impact of their work in the real world. Convincing devs to take a chance on your company means demonstrating the consistent, positive outcomes of work both in-house and online.

## 2. Be omnipresent

Even if your business already checks every box when it comes to developer priorities, it won't matter if you're not getting noticed. To ensure prospective employees notice what you're doing and start paying attention, you need to be everywhere, without being overwhelming.

Starting with developer forums and code-contributing sites is a good idea, but it's also worth building out a social media presence, on sites like Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, that regularly deliver relevant and interesting content. Your goal? To get your brand noticed without oversaturating developers. Be omnipresent, not overbearing.

### **Ask your current employees to chip in.**

Many developers maintain personal blogs on which they write about the latest programming trends. Giving them the opportunity to do so on your official social media channels is a great way to encourage them to become brand ambassadors.

### **Monitor your brand mentions.**

By proactively searching for what others are saying about you on social media, you have the chance to respond yourself and either fix or supplement the message.

## Step 3: Identifying potential pitfalls

Here's the hard truth: Without the right approach to employer branding, your dev recruiting efforts will fail. To ensure campaigns deliver on expectations and don't break the bank, it's critical to consider potential pitfalls before rolling out new recruitment tactics. This allows your organization to identify and address any shortfalls before going live. It's better to work out the bugs in private than be forced to completely change direction under scrutiny of the public eye.

Without the right branding approach, three major missteps can occur:

**Fit failures** — Well-written job advertisements invariably attract some interest, but what happens if you hire the wrong person for the job because the candidates you wanted didn't apply? In the best-case scenario, you lose productivity while other team members bring the new hire up to speed. Worst-case? It costs you money. As noted by Business2Community, 41 percent of companies said it cost them \$25,000 to recover after hiring the wrong person, while 25 percent pegged the cost at \$50,000 or more.

**Wasted effort** — Employer branding costs time and resources. But if you're not getting noticed, or getting noticed by the wrong people, you're wasting effort and losing money. While it's often tempting to get branding and recruitment strategies up and running ASAP to outpace competitors, you're better served with a slow and steady approach. Determine the gaps your business needs to fill, then build out strategies to meet these needs. Start small, then build on success as it occurs.

**Missing links** — While bad hires and fit failures are the most obvious cost, companies can also end up spending too much if new talent doesn't have the right skill set. These missing links can mean big problems if current teams don't have the development depth necessary to bridge the gap, in turn causing project delays and introducing the risk of releasing unfinished applications. Better to map a clear path from objective A to outcome B than trying to steer new staff.





## Step 4: Making the C-suite case for a dev campaign

Employer branding campaigns don't happen in isolation. They're a major initiative with significant impact for your organization at large, which means they need sustained support from C-suite executives to be successful.

For many IT leaders, however, converting critical technology needs into actionable business proposals is well outside their area of expertise. While there's a growing push for the "soft skills" that help technology teams bridge the C-suite gap, making the case doesn't always come naturally. Ensuring that C-suite leaders are on-board and ready to support the long-term effort required for effective employer branding is a meaningful way for HR teams to set your company up for the future. Here are four areas where you should focus your efforts for the most impact:

### **Point 1: Digital transformations**

Digital transformation is now a top priority for the C-suite — but as noted by the [Harvard Business Review \(HBR\)](#), 70 percent of these transformation initiatives aren't successful. The disconnect? People, not technology, drive the digital revolution. As a result, it's critical for development teams to emphasize the impact of skilled personnel on achieving line-of-business goals and delivering on digital transformation efforts. If you establish the need, it makes it easier to ask for the resources you need.

### **Point 2: Detailed budgets**

The numbers matter to C-suite executives. By working with IT teams to create detailed budgets, HR can more effectively link recruiting to ROI and encourage management to allocate specific resources. For example, if tracking your team can demonstrate that the candidates come in not only through direct clicks on ads, but can attribute applications that came in elsewhere to your campaign, it will be much easier to argue for ad campaign spend. On Stack Overflow, for example, we are seeing candidates converting elsewhere within 30 days after seeing an ad is 6 to 9 times that of just the amount of clicks on the ads themselves.

### **Point 3: Direct benefits**

It's also critical to highlight the direct benefits of employer branding strategies. Given the often complex and convoluted nature of application and service development, it's easy for C-suite members to focus on the potential negatives of missed opportunities or excess spend. By highlighting the increased demand for developers and linking this uptick to the pervasive nature of both internal and public-facing applications, teams can highlight the essential role of recruitment in ROI and help break the myth of IT as budget line-item only.

### **Point 4: Driving long-term gains**

Applications are constantly evolving to meet emerging needs, and new projects are always in development to ensure companies stay on the cutting edge. As a result, it's essential for employer branding advocates to articulate the long-term gains of effective branding: Highly-skilled developers are able to deliver better results in shorter time periods and develop new strategies to meet changing business requirements.



## Step 5: Implementing practical ideas

You understand the fundamentals of branding in the dev space. You've developed your double-attractive approach, identified potential pitfalls and brought the C-suite on board. Now it's time for the final step in your first employer branding campaign: Practical implementation.

While specific implementation will depend on your immediate business needs and long-term goals, practical ideas for effective branding include:

### **Hearing from the experts — Create blogs and social media posts where they're encouraged to discuss both the ups and downs of working for your organization.**

Here's why it matters: No company is perfect. Prospective employees already have jobs at organizations that do some things well and other things not so well. Letting staff speak for themselves speaks to your confidence as an organization.

Also essential? Pay attention to third-party job and company review sites. If you start seeing negative feedback, don't look for ways to take it down or deflect blame. Consider new strategies to address potential shortfalls.

### **Showing devs what you're made of**

As noted above, developers want to know what technologies they'll be working with if they make the transition to your organization. This means being clear in both recruiting ads and via online content about the languages you're primarily using and the projects you're particularly proud of. Think of it as show and tell: Always start by showing what you've done before telling potential candidates why you're the best fit.

### **Highlighting developer culture**

Culture matters — but saying you've got a "great culture" on your website won't cut it. Back up claims with hard evidence such as career coaching programs, robust developer training budgets, flexible schedules, and family-friendly benefits. Communicate these cultural conditions clearly up-front to attract the right candidates.

### **Going outside the office**

Your current staff are doing their own work outside the office. Maybe they're working on pet projects, speaking at conferences or writing their own tech blogs. First step? Build a culture where staff feel comfortable sharing their outside experiences. Then, share those on your social media and corporate accounts to showcase the impact of developer talents both inside and outside the office. Make sure that your most engaged employees are also contributing their positive experiences to external reviews sites like Glassdoor, as prospective employees will conduct independent research there to get a better feel for the company culture.

### **Getting an inside perspective**

What really happens behind closed doors? What does a day at your company look like for junior developers, middle management, or senior IT leaders? Letting staff write and share their own "day in the life" stories or even creating video diaries of devs at work can help focus employer branding efforts. The caveat? Don't over-produce these projects; professionals are savvy enough to recognize when companies are trying too hard.

### **Monitor your candidate funnel**

If you've done the job right, your recruiting ads will attract ideal candidate interest. The challenge? Not everyone who applies is the right fit. As noted by Dev.to, it's worth spending on automated solutions to help quickly sort through CVs and identify best-fit candidates. On Stack Overflow, the targeting allows you to filter your audience on technologies and developer types, so communication is on point in the first place.

Creating your first employer branding campaign often seems complex and confusing — but it doesn't have to be. Follow our five-step model to build an effective, reliable foundation for developer recruiting and find the best-fit staff for your needs.



## What's next? Further reading.

### **Brush up on your tech knowledge.**

As a tech recruiter, you want to be able to speak to developers about their role and the trends. Here is our guide to cover the basics. [Developer 101 -Types, Technologies, & Tips](#)

### **Keep optimizing all your developer-facing communication.**

Get this hands-on e-book with tips about great developer job listings, writing great sourcing emails and an all-around look at [How to Communicate with Developers](#)

### **Identify what is working and what is not.**

As you build out more sophisticated branding and recruiting campaigns, it's essential to understand which metrics to track. Our e-book will guide you on [How to Measure Your Tech Recruiting Success](#)



At Stack Overflow, we'll partner with you throughout the entire developer hiring process. From understanding the developer market to sourcing the right talent, we help you reach the right talent right now.

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