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## Become an employer of choice - capitalising on the reversal of SA's brain drain

Once described as South Africa's 'ticking time bomb', the departure of SA's most skilled individuals or the 'brain drain', seems to be in rapid reverse. In the face of the global recession and drawn by the promise of higher income and a better quality of life, expatriates are now returning home as a wave of global job shedding gains momentum. It seems, since SA's economy is looking considerably healthier than most, a dramatic increase of international professionals is on the cards for SA in the near future. However the question now posed to prospective employers is how can local companies attract and retain talent, ultimately positioning themselves as employers of choice?

### Employer of choice

The concept of employer branding is relatively new to the SA market and while the term is somewhat understood, many local companies lack the resources or impetus to drive their own employer branding. Developing an emotional connection with potential and existing employees as well as classically marketing a business' brand as a sought-after and exciting company to work for, encompasses the essence of this soon to be growing trend. In the era of citizen journalism and social media, businesses that are to successfully draw potential employees, should implement and pioneer an interactive employer branding strategy, as this will undoubtedly affect their bottom line.

Basic examples of employer branding could include: participating in both local and mainstream industry awards, launching initiatives such as employee of the month and staff excursions, publicising employee testimonials, encouraging and incentivising employees to become ambassadors for the brand. Companies looking to attract a more forward-thinking employee could also utilise the digital landscape to promote their branding, perhaps using blogging, posting creative audio podcasts or videos of employees and building a social media platform through applications such as Twitter and Facebook.

### Attracting and retaining

Offering competitive salaries, sought-after holiday and vacation benefits and education reimbursement have ranked as the three highest retention factors amongst employees. To capitalise on the influx of skilled workers, companies are advised to revisit their retention tactics.

"Honing in on employee related issues, constantly innovating incentive schemes so as to keep employees motivated and creating a stimulating work environment for your staff, are some of the key factors that contribute towards team satisfaction," comments Managing Director of Lufthansa Global Telesales, Cape Town, Birgit Thümecke. The service centre, which scooped the coveted award for Best International Service centre, Lufthansa Global Telesales is renowned for attracting and retaining new talent within the service centre industry. She continues: "Growing from 50 to



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over 450 employees, my staff has always been my most important asset and I believe knowing your staff by name is an important personal touch that every employer should strive towards. Employers could also launch programs, such as our Life on Board program, encouraging employee engagement and satisfaction. Such programs focus on learning and development, reward and recognition, a healthy organisational environment and most importantly a work and life balance. These incentives invest much-needed time and resources to further equip and educate employees as well as providing for job development opportunities - these are all integral to the staff retention percentage. "

While the need for qualified professionals has decreased considerably amidst the economic downturn and although the hiring process has become progressively more rigid, the need for quality staff still remains. Skilled and productive employees provide a strong platform for the success of any business and, to attract these individuals, it is crucial that companies start addressing their presentation, their reputation and, ultimately, their brand.

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