

Companies that recruit successfully are those that are able to leverage their employment brand to attract the best talent in the market. Factors such as rewarding career paths, career development and training opportunities strengthen the employer brand & are seen as a cure for key organisational problems such as skill shortages, retention difficulties and effective talent management.

SMD, winner of the 2011 CIPD North East branch recruitment practitioner award, is one company that was able to attract a high volume of staff through promoting its company ethos and success story to the market. As HR Manager Steve McAulay explains *'we grew very quickly in 2009 and as such we needed to double our workforce. We don't have a very well known brand, yet by telling the market (via newspapers and relevant trade magazines) about our philosophy of empowering people to succeed, our culture of autonomy and ability to safeguard jobs, we were able to increase the number of applications we received for roles.'*

At the same time the business formed relationships with local universities as well as engaging with prospective candidates on industry chat boards, to create as much noise as possible about the SMD proposition.

It is important to ensure there's a positive link between employer branding and employee expectations. Research conducted by Nigel Wright and a leading international business school found that employer branding can also have a negative impact on employee behaviours and attitudes if there is a perceived mismatch between the employees expectations and what the employer actually provides in terms of support and development.

SMD have worked hard to avoid a situation like this emerging. For example, the business hired a number of graduates who have all been placed on a scheme whereby they *'gain experience in different aspects of the business – Projects, Production, Engineering, HR and Finance. One of the young project managers is now the face of SMD - he goes to all of the university recruitment events and promotes the benefits of working for us.* By making sure that new employees are fully engaged in the business from the start and giving them the opportunity to have an impact on the future of the organisation, their experiences of SMD are fully aligned with the businesses values and brand. *'New employees also spread the word amongst their friends and people they studied with, who might themselves become interested in SMD.'*

Since winning the award, SMD has grown from around 140 staff to over 400. Steve McAulay noted that they have basically stuck to the same successful formula to achieve this. *The demand is very high so we have expanded our search to Europe, looking for candidates with mechanical design skills. To support this we have started to engage with people via web recruitment pages, social media sites and also advertising on webpages in Eastern Europe.* We also have good relationships with a small number of consultants - *local market knowledge in particular, is very important to us.*

The business is continuing to recruit and will see the number of employees increased from 140 in January 2009 to an expected headcount of over 450 by the end of August 2012. You can download the full report on Employer Branding from nigelwright.com.