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The Telegraph

BP ranked high for employer branding despite oil spill

As two oil giants - including BP - make it into Lundquist's top three rankings for employer branding, we ask what effect the Deepwater Horizon oil spill had on the sector's reputation as a place to work.



Rescue vessels attend BP's stricken Deepwater Horizon rig in the Gulf of Mexico Photo: EPA

By Eric Sylvers 5:26PM GMT 17 Mar 2011

As the BP oil spill unfolded in the Gulf of Mexico last year, more than one pundit weighed in on what this was going to mean for the company's brand. The first anti-BP reactions were swift and ranged from a much-followed fake BP Twitter account sending out sarcastic tweets ("can we just start calling it the oil ocean and move on please?") to boycotts of BP-branded petrol stations.

At Lundquist we had just begun some research evaluating how the 100 companies with the most valuable brands use their corporate websites to promote themselves to current and potential employees and we anxiously awaited the results to see how BP would stack up. Surprisingly well it turns out, which led to another question.

Are strong brands in unpopular or in some way troubled industries forced to try harder in their employer branding?

Royal Dutch Shell, another oil giant, won the ranking with 71.5 points out of 100. Mercedes-Benz, the German carmaker, finished second with 64 points while BP and General Electric tied for third at 63.5.

The ranking evaluated 58 criteria divided into three areas: what the company offered, its recruitment process and how easy their websites were to use.

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Two oil companies in the top three is statistically significant, but Mercedes with its sleek cars and irreverent advertising disproves the theory about who is populating the top of the ranking, right? Maybe not. The automobile industry is in decline, so if you're Mercedes and you want the best engineers who will create that next winner you just might have to work a little harder to coax that college grad to Stuttgart.

Five of the six other companies in the top ten are in financial services, another industry with its share of image problems and if JPMorgan Chase (5th) wants to be the pick of the brightest MBAs, the competition is not only Goldman Sachs (6th), but also all of Silicon Valley and venture capital firms from London to California.

What it comes down to is that companies in industries that are viewed suspiciously by consumers seem to be forced to work harder in all aspects of their communication because they are always putting out fires or getting ready to confront the next one.

This same trend has been seen in the three years we have done research about online CSR communications. That ranking was won this year by another oil company (Eni) and the top of the list is heavy with energy companies and those with particular communications issues (e.g. Nestle).

Companies with strong consumer brands that people are comfortable buying/using perhaps feel they don't have to invest so much effort and resources into communicating their employer brand. Google and Apple, two of the most sought after places to work in the U.S., ranked only 27th and 28th in our employer branding study.

The damage to BP's reputation is perhaps irreparable, but we can be certain the company is trying to make potential recruits forget it's responsible for one of the worst oil spills ever. Will it be enough to win next year's employer branding ranking, stay tuned.

For more details on the research including the methodology and the full results see www.lundquist.it

Eric Sylvers is head of employer branding at Lundquist, a Milan-based consultancy specialising in online communications.