

Evaluating Effectiveness of Employee Attraction Strategies

The Honors Program
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ABSTRACT

This project deals with the effectiveness of attraction strategies, specifically those utilized by corporate accounting firms at Bryant University. The primary concern of the research was to identify various aspects that influence the recruitment of college students and ultimately share this knowledge with the companies, subsequently rendering the recruitment process more efficient for everyone involved. In order to accomplish this task, several methods of data collection were used including surveys of companies, surveys of students, interviews, and participant observation. This data was then organized and analyzed to determine the strategies each firm engaged in, the effect of those strategies, and how well each company perceived their efforts to work. In the end, it was evident that some companies were proficient at the attraction game, while others believed incorrectly that their approach was highly successful. Hopefully by being alerted to the presence of these inconsistencies, companies will be able to refine some of their recruitment practices and be able to hire the right people with less spending in the future.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The business environment is constantly changing. This has been the story since the beginning of trade; however, never has that been more apparent than in our current age. Steps of business evolution that once took several years, decades, or even centuries to climb are now leaped in months. With the rapid advancement of technology and subsequently, the ever shrinking world due to globalization, these significant alterations are occurring at an exponential pace. A company cannot afford to stand still in this modern age or a rival will certainly replace their niche. Employees are the groundwork for competitive advantages in today's world (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005, p. 152). Due to this fact, hiring new talent that can keep pace with the current times is of vital importance now more than ever before. According to Randstad's 2008 World of Work Report, the number one personnel issue facing American companies is "hiring the right people with the right skills" (p. 8).

Existing Research

A majority of the existing research in this field has been conducted about retention of employees. There is substantial amount of research on turnover reduction (Whitcomb, 2008), benefits (Menefee & Murphy, 2004), job satisfaction (Dalessandro & Glister, 2008), management strategies (Burke, Greene, & Morrison, 2007), and cost of turnover (Alleyne & Campbell, 2002), all of which are associated with retention of employees. This area of course is extremely important due to the high cost of turnover, which one source estimates it to be up to 70% of a person's annual salary (Contino, 2002). What many overlook however, is the fact that attraction is the first step in retention because many of the same principals are utilized. Also, attraction is crucial to the retention process because a company needs to select personnel that will fit best with the company's objectives and ideals allowing employees to be productive, happy, and want to remain with this particular employer.

Although most of the literature associated with this topic primarily concerns retention, there are a few sources that deal with attraction aspects. The problem that arises with this limited selection however is that most of it is outdated, subsequently rendering its information irrelevant in these modern times. The source that most directly covers the topic of "attraction

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of personnel to public accounting firms” was published in the Journal of Accountancy in June of 1969 (Trump, 1969, p.57). Obviously, a tremendous amount has changed since that time in regards to not only the companies’ efforts, but also the attitudes and norms of the potential job candidates.

Attraction Strategy

These days there are several factors that go into the determination of who exactly constitutes the “right” person for a particular company. There are also numerous factors that make a company attractive to these specific candidates. The objective of a company’s recruitment efforts is to align the interests of the two parties by providing the most desirable candidates with incentives to apply and while eliminating the less qualified candidates from the mix. The most common methodology that organizations employ for recruitment purposes is to attract the most individuals possible and then filter out the select people that have the most potential and fit their specific criteria the best. Organizations that recruit the more qualified applicants are typically ones that have a larger applicant pool (Gowan & Zhang, 2008, p. 659).

Certain aspects that companies use to attract new employees are obvious, such as compensation and benefits. These two forms can become very complex due to the fact that businesses always try to account for their competitors while deciding what is best for their own company. The competitors and various industry factors are influences because a firm cannot afford to pay much below the benchmark without the loss of qualified employees. Therefore, most companies that compete in the same industry will offer compensation packages and benefits that are within a reasonable range of each other. Subsequently, this competition on financial matters complicates the decision process for perspective recruits who receive similar offers from multiple companies. There are, however, numerous other aspects that entice applicants and allow them to differentiate the firms from one another. These other forms focus more upon job satisfaction and quality of life once a person works at the company. This includes the corporate culture, company policies, and the general atmosphere of the work environment and thus is where candidates are able to differentiate between companies. According to Gowan & Zhang (2008), “scholars have suggested that because

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applicants have incomplete information about organizations, they interpret information they receive as signals about the organizations' working conditions" and also that "organizational attributes provide applicants with information about what it would be like to be a member of an organization because such attributes are interpreted as providing information about working conditions in an organization" (p. 660). This is essentially the basis of signaling theory, which attempts to explain communication through various signals. Since these factors vary widely from company to company and are extremely difficult to know without actually working at a specific place, especially for students fresh out of college, various attraction strategies are aimed to convey this knowledge to potential new hires. Some of these strategies include promotional giveaways, information sessions, direct advertising, and utilization of company websites. All of these actions are also known as employer branding, which is described as "the sum of a company's efforts to communicate to existing and prospective staff that it is a desirable place to work (Berthon et al., 2005, p. 153).

In order to implement the most effective combination of recruitment strategies, a company must first ascertain certain characteristics about its target individuals. Certain values are much more important to one demographic than another, therefore it is essential to efficient recruitment that these factors that attract a possible candidate to one company versus another are known and understood. These varying values are particularly evident when looking at the different generations of workers. According to the Randstad 2008 World of Work study, "Generation Y chooses to press for more from their work life...[and] many of the old rules of thumb do not apply" (p. 21). This signifies that employers must keep reevaluating their methods to ensure that they are still attractive for their intended targets. For clarification, the idea of employer attractiveness shall be defined as the "envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization (Berthon et al., 2005, p. 156).

Company Reputation

One of the best recruitment tools for attracting quality prospects to an organization is a good reputation. If a company is well-known for positive reasons, then that company's reputation precedes any possible HR activities. People are inclined to seek out job opportunities with that company simply because they have heard the name or are familiar with the products or

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services offered by the company. Having a strong reputation can potentially allow reduced recruitment spending and increased retention (Berthon et al., 2005, p. 154). Though reputations can be a tremendous asset, they are a fragile instrument. It requires a great deal of time, effort, and capital to build a quality reputation and it can be tarnished by a single person's irresponsible decisions. A number of things influence a corporation's reputation, but one of the most positive influences as far as prospective employees are concerned is earning "Best Employer" recognitions (Berthon et al., 2005, p. 155). These awards highlight the positive aspects of working for a particular company and publicize it to potential employees. Therefore, companies diligently strive to attain these types of acknowledgements because they are deemed a worthwhile investment. For example, in 2008 Deloitte was ranked 2 out of 119 companies by a survey completed by Business Week about the "Best Places to Launch a Career" (Gerdes, 2008). This type of press is extremely beneficial to the recruitment process and makes the company look attractive to college students.

Another action that is taken by companies to increase awareness and attraction to the company among customers as well as potential employees is participating in socially responsible behaviors (Gowan & Zhang, 2008, p. 660). Although these types of actions are excellent for retaining employees and maintaining a positive image in the community, it can only help recruitment if people know about it. This lead some companies to distribute brochures highlighting the company's philanthropic and environmental programs to prospective employees (Gowan & Zhang, 2008, p. 659).

Reputation is built the strongest through actual experience with the company because only this personal familiarity truly allows an individual to judge a company thoroughly. A source of evaluation that is trusted almost as much as personal experience however is the judgment of a friend or relative. This illustrates the point that sources differ in effectiveness because they differ in the quantity, type, quality, and realism of the information they provide (Allen, Mahto, & Otondo, 2007, p. 1698). This is one rationale behind the success of employee referral programs because the amount of valuable and believable information that the trusted company insider is able to convey to the new hire is superior to the communication attempts by ordinary recruiting personnel (Allen et al., 2007, p.1698).

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When the opinion of a friend or relative is not involved in the hiring process, another strong influence on a potential candidate is that of the recruiter. Dougherty and Turban (1992) noted that “perceptions of recruiter behavior and characteristics influence attraction to a particular organization” (p. 739). This is an important facet in the recruitment strategy because due to this observation, it should be apparent to companies that not just anyone can go out and recruit employees. Some people are talented at this particular task, but many others need training on how to effectively attract individuals to a company. This idea is consistent with the ideas of signaling theory that were discussed previously because candidates judge a company based on the recruiter’s behavior, attitude and self-presentation. Dougherty and Turban (1992) state that “a friendly recruiter is seen as indicating a warm, friendly work environment” to the aspiring employee (p. 740). Not only do recruiters give individuals the impression of the working environment, but they also effect the applicants’ outlook of making it through the interview process and receiving an offer (Dougherty & Turban, 1992, p. 740). This is critical to attraction because people are much more likely to seek out further involvement with an organization if they perceive that they will be rewarded for their efforts. Keeping this in mind, if well-trained personnel are sent to colleges for hiring purposes, then those individuals can use the interview as not only a selection process, but also as a recruitment tool.

Most companies with an established college recruitment program engage in a multitude of different promotional events on college campuses to reinforce their brand image and hopefully attract talented candidates. These events range from hosting information sessions about the company to organizing a competition that forces students to find creative solutions to a problem related to the company’s line of work. These events are important because they provide two avenues of information dissemination to the targeted individuals. The first avenue is the information that is directly presented to the audience. The absorption of this information is known as central processing (Dougherty & Turban, 1992, p. 741). The other avenue involves peripheral processing, which is when a person becomes influenced by associated environmental cues, such as attractiveness of the information source (Dougherty & Turban, 1992, p. 741). According to Dougherty and Turban (1992), there are some instances where this might even have a greater influence on an individual’s opinion than the actual

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information (p. 741). Some of these cues include age, sex, education level, company position, organizational skills, mannerisms, and general demeanor. Research has shown that students respond more favorably to people who are similar to themselves because they are more comfortable with this affirmation that similar people have made the same transition and are doing well (Dougherty & Turban, 1992, p. 744). This is one reason why organizations send representatives that are not only young, but that have graduated from the same school if possible.

Personal Preference

There are some aspects of attraction that companies cannot change at will. These are generally characteristics that have been developed over time for each company. These characteristics might be appealing to some and repulsive to others based on each individual's personal preference.

One factor which has varying levels of attractiveness based on preference is the company norms. Norms evolve uniquely for each company and are based on certain rules and precedents established through the years. One example of this is company dress code. Dress code norms play a significant role in establishing organizational culture. A survey of business professionals asserted that people felt the most "authoritative, trustworthy, and competent when wearing formal business attire, but friendliest when wearing casual or business casual attire" (Karl & Peluchette, 2007). Some people prefer a laidback work atmosphere, while others rather work in a more serious environment. In the end, the level of attraction that each company has is all up to the opinion of the people.

Another factor that has a different attraction allure to each person is location. Some people want to be in a city, while others prefer the country. Some people want to be in a specific region of the country and others don't mind working in a foreign country. The level of attraction again just boils down to personal preference. One source did note however that oftentimes these opinions fluctuate "based on an individual's life cycle, particularly in regards to the presence or absence of children" (Horner, Kim, & Marans, 2005).

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A third factor that is appealing to some and unattractive to others is the size of the potential company. Some people are of the mindset that working for a very large company is excellent because of the resources and number of opportunities that it presents. On the other hand, some believe that as the size increases, the “importance of individuals gets lost” and the employees just become a “resource to be managed” (Brown & Sale, 1999). Once again there is no set option that is better than another as far as attraction is concerned and companies typically do not alter these types of characteristics; therefore it all depends on the individual’s personal preference.

STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to identify and evaluate the various methods that accounting companies utilize to attract their employees. Data has been collected on both large and mid-sized accounting firms through interviews of HR representatives and by students interviewing for jobs in the accounting field. Also, online surveys of accounting majors and company representatives were administered to provide useful data for comparison.

This study focused on the recruitment efforts of accounting firms at Bryant University located in Smithfield, RI. Five firms were selected to be part of the study based upon their consistent recruitment practices at the target university. Also the size, geography, and recruitment methods of these selected companies were conducive to the study. PricewaterhouseCoopers and Deloitte are two of the so-called “Big Four” accounting firms. These firms have a strong presence on the university campus and therefore were chosen to take part in this study. Also, three medium size firms were selected to be a part of this study. These firms include Tofias PC, Blum Shapiro, and DiSanto, Priest & Co.

Several different sets of criteria concerning this topic were measured and analyzed. The first set of criteria that this study focused on was reputation. This is defined as the recognition of a company and an estimation of its character in the eyes of the public. The second set of criteria that was evaluated was campus visibility. This is defined as the awareness level of a company’s presence on the college campus. The third set of criteria that this study

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concentrated on was recruitment efforts. This set of criteria is vast and covers several topics of interest to this study including advertising, information distribution, interviews, and promotional products.

Objective

This research was conducted to provide beneficial information to students and employers on the topic of attraction and the recruitment process. Therefore, this project is primarily focused on exploratory research and does not focus upon proving or disproving a hypothesis.

Methods

In order to evaluate the desired criteria, several methods of data collection were utilized. The primary method of obtaining quantitative data concerning these companies and accounting students at the target university was surveys. Two separate surveys were conducted for this study. The two surveys implemented various Likert Scales and open ended response boxes in order to accumulate informative data. One survey was given to each of the five accounting firms; meanwhile the other survey was given to several accounting majors at Bryant. The primary focus of this study was concentrated on accounting majors in their junior or senior year. This stipulation allowed for an adequate level of exposure to the accounting firms involved in this study.

The first step in the process is to determine the different methods of attraction used by each company. This information was gathered through on campus information sessions, interviews of HR representatives, and inspection of companies' published material, both physical and internet based. During this collection of information, different categories of attractiveness were rated to determine perceived importance. Next, the characteristics that are most and least appealing to accounting majors were determined through interviews of potential employees for each company and an online survey. These students were asked rate the different methods of attraction used and not used by companies to determine what factors are most significant during job searches. Finally, the ratings of companies and students were compared to assess if each company places the correct emphasis on each attraction strategy or if some modification could be made to make their recruitment process more efficient.

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Survey Distribution

The student surveys were distributed to a majority of the accounting majors in the class of 2009 and 2010 via email and the assistance of Bryant University Accounting Faculty and the Executive Board of the Accounting Association. A copy of this survey can be viewed in Appendix A. A total of sixty-five individuals completed the entire survey and submitted the answers online. A filter was then applied to the responses to further ensure that the individuals who responded matched pre-defined criteria of the target group. The pre-defined criteria included the requirement of accounting as a major and that the respondents are either a junior or senior. These requirements are designed to ensure that the survey results accurately reflect the opinions of potential recruitment candidates of the target companies. Individuals that have at least two years of experience at the undergraduate level will have more exposure to the companies that recruit on campus and therefore are more likely to have acquired familiarity with the examined companies. Also, these individuals are at a point in their education where interest in corporate recruiting is extremely high due to the potential for internships and careers after graduation, which subsequently provides more focused and better informed students.

After the filter was applied to the original sixty-five responses, a total of fifty-eight remained that satisfied the necessary criteria. In addition to the year and major requirement, the academic performance of the individuals who responded was also a factor of concern. The target companies generally have a grade point average range from which their candidate pool is determined. The majority of these companies consider candidates with grades above a 3.0 on a 4.0 scale. After reviewing the respondents' self-proclaimed grades however, over 80% of the students fell within that acceptable range. Also, several of the students have had internships with one of the five companies prior to this survey. These consistencies help verify that overall this target group is an accurate measure of the companies' recruitment efforts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personal Preferences

A number of various factors were measured in the surveys that were distributed to the students and to the companies. Many of the factors dealt with personal preference. This is critical to attraction because often times these include factors that cannot be altered easily by companies. These factors, even though they cannot be controlled directly, are an important reason why people choose one firm over another. It is best to understand the reasoning behind individuals' decisions so that if an opportunity presents itself where a factor is under control of the firm, then they can address that particular issue. In addition, if a company better understands their target recruits, then the company can promote the aspects of their organization that are attractive to that potential applicant.

One important distinction among the accounting firms that is essential to the recruitment efforts is the size of the firm. Size includes not only number of people working for a particular company, but also the geographic area which is serviced by these companies. Obviously the big firms have advantages in certain areas of recruitment, but the mid-sized firms have some benefits to their size as well.

In regards to the geographic coverage aspect, people have different preferences when it comes to where they want to work. Location is a substantial issue when deciding if a particular company is an appropriate match. To some extent, this is a less important topic to the recruitment of college graduates than to the recruitment of experienced employees because most of them do not have many significant unbreakable ties that factor into the equation such as spouses, children, and houses. On the other hand, it does play a role because people have individual preferences. Location is one area where the large firms demonstrate their potential benefits. These firms are able to entice individuals to work for them on the basis of location because the companies have offices in several cities in the United States and even around the world. The mid-sized firms included in this research have 1 to 4 offices, all of which are in New England, while the two larger firms each have over 75 offices in the United States and more in other countries. Therefore, if a candidate would like to work or reside in a different region of the country, then the best opportunities lie with the larger firms. *Figure 1* shows the

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survey results of the student's relocation preference and it is in favor of the large companies. It is apparent that most people would work in the North East if possible, but a little over 30% of the respondents would consider elsewhere in the country and the world, which are not options provided by the mid-sized firms.

Unwilling to Relocate	New England	North East	East Coast	United States	World
20.7%	36.2%	12.1%	6.9%	5.2%	19%

Figure 1 – Table indicating percentage of respondents' willingness to relocate for a job.

A second recruitment factor that relates to size of the company is total number of employees. This is important to recruitment because it influences several key points. First of all, the more employees that a company has then the more job vacancies that it must fill when hiring either interns or full time accountants. This can lead to greater expectancy of positive results from the applicant's efforts, subsequently increasing the attraction to that company (Dougherty & Turban, 1992, p. 740). In addition, number of employees can have a significant influence on the general company atmosphere. People perceive smaller companies as more focused on individuals than large corporate giants. The rationale is that a person is likely to receive a higher degree of individual attention in smaller companies, especially from more senior management. This type of attention can lead to recognition of accomplishments as well as promotional opportunities.

The future plans of a potential applicant are also a determinant of attraction to a specific organization. This is the case because the recruit will probably concentrate his or her attention primarily on companies that are in-line with the person's long term agenda. One example of this is a person who would like to use an accounting firm as a springboard to launch a future related career. This new career could be anything from starting a company of their own to teaching. Generally, if a person would like to use the initial experience as a springboard, the person would probably focus more on the large firms with well-known names around the country. If the person's focus is not solely on an accounting career, then oftentimes a person wants a solid resume builder that will allow him or her to obtain the

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distant goal. Although the large firms have an advantage of recruiting these particular individuals, it may not be in the best interest of the firm, depending on the timeframe of their plans. A vast amount of resources are spent training new hires and developing their skills as they progress with the firm. If a person abandons the company after only a few years, then the investment could have been more expensive than the benefits that were returned.

Another future plan that is extremely high on the priority list of potential recruits is the furthering of their education. After completing an undergraduate degree, often racking up extensive student loans, students realize that they are not able to progress much further in the accounting field without additional, higher-level coursework. Therefore, it is critical for companies to realize the financial and time implications of attaining the required schooling and be flexible and helpful regarding them. According to the student survey, 50% of the Bryant respondents intend to balance work and school after graduation, while just about 25% want to work fulltime at first and the other 25% want to remain in school fulltime. This statistic relates the importance of a competitive tuition reimbursement program when it comes to recruiting college students. After looking at *Figure 2*, which depicts the results of a Likert Scale provided to the Bryant students, it is apparent that this issue could very well be the determining factor when a person decides upon which firm to choose.

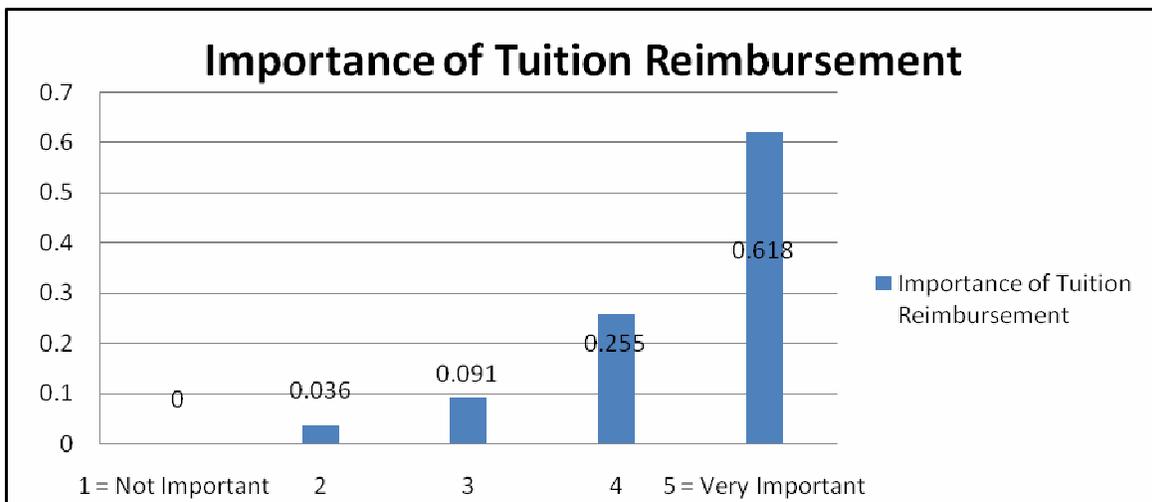


Figure 2 - Survey results regarding Likert Scale question on importance of tuition reimbursement

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The next aspect of student plans that is critical to recruitment efforts is the area of accounting that interests them. Typically, there are three areas of corporate accounting in which a person can choose to focus. These three main areas are advisory, assurance, and tax. Each area requires its own special knowledge and skill set. This gives a slight edge to the larger firms. This edge is derived from the fact that only PricewaterhouseCoopers and Deloitte have positions in the advisory area available. Therefore, if an individual is aspiring to work in this field of accounting, then the choice of firms is limited from the beginning.

The final subjects that shall be discussed regarding personal preferences and that are a major influence on recruitment are a few topics outside of the literal work about which a potential recruit might feel strongly. This includes the ideas of social responsibility, community service, and work environment.

Social responsibility is a topic that has grown immensely important within the last few years. It is the idea that a company's objectives be not only based on profit, but also aligned with what is good for society. This relates to recruitment because people not only want to work for a company that pays well, but they want to work for a company where they can proudly proclaim that they are an employee there making a difference. Individuals often have the need to feel good about their job in order to be a content and productive worker. In order to accommodate this feeling, many companies organize various trainings or initiatives to foster this sentiment in their employees. Actions that focus on ethics or that promotes a going green initiative all fall under this category. Some data that reinforces the idea of promoting social responsibility are exhibited in *Figure 3*, which shows that a majority of the respondents are at least somewhat interested in this topic.

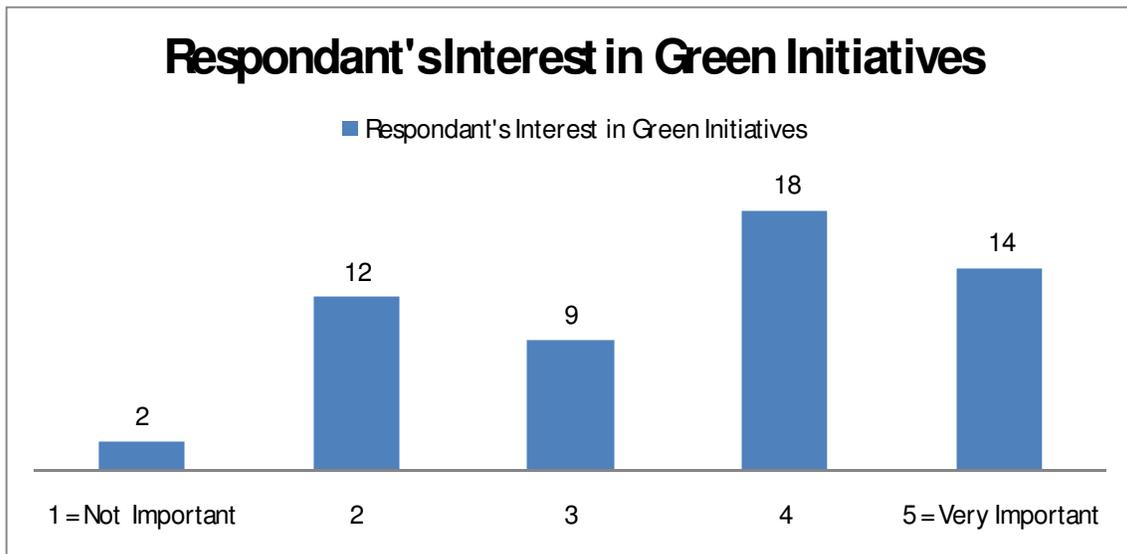


Figure 3 - Results to a Likert Scale question on importance of environmentally friendly practices at the respondent's future employer.

Another topic that portrays the company in a positive light and makes employees feel satisfied with themselves is community service. Community service comes in many forms. A company can raise money for certain charities, educate people in the community, participate in an event for awareness, sponsor a youth athletic program, or even help build a house. Regardless what path a company chooses, these efforts assist recruitment because it creates awareness of the company and demonstrates how its employees are a positive influence on the community. Similar to the green initiatives, the data shown in *Figure 4* confirms that community service is also an important factor to many individuals when deciding on a future employer.

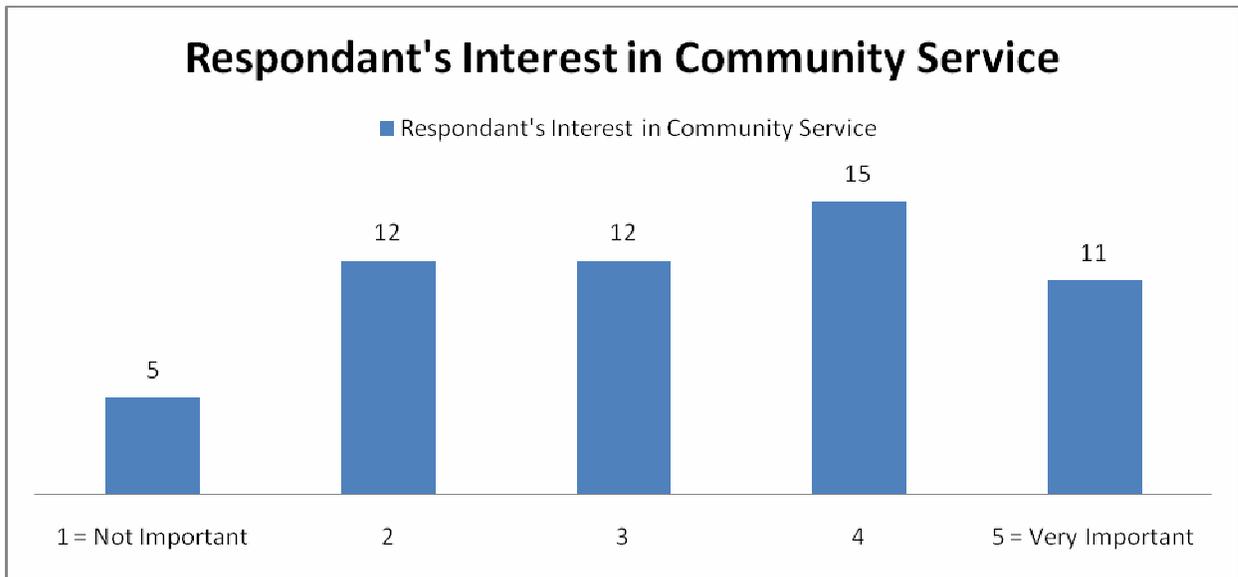


Figure 4 - Results to a Likert Scale question on importance of community service at the respondent's future employer.

Last, but not least, the topic that is essential to the attraction and ultimately retention of employees is a company's work environment. This category encompasses many factors including work atmosphere, work/life balance, and continuous learning opportunities. This is a personal preference aspect of attraction because some individuals desire different characteristics from their employer. Some people prefer a rigid work environment where they are given explicit directions and others prefer a more casual environment where the method of work does not matter as long as the end product satisfies the objectives. These are two very different ends of the spectrum and this is the reason why a potential employee must undergo a rigorous interview process to ensure the compatibility with the particular company's policies and environment. An employee should be comfortable with their work environment so that they are able to be productive at their job.

Although many of these personal preference topics are not able to be altered significantly by the company, the companies can ensure that the topics that are important to the potential candidates are addressed by the company. These are topics that should be discussed at info session and brought up during interviews. If a person's personal preferences align well with a particular company, then the chances of that person being a successful employee are that much better.

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Reputation

Reputation has a tremendous influence on the attraction of new employees. As mentioned in the literature review, a good name can be one of a company's most valuable assets. For this study, a question regarding the perception of the company's reputation on campus was given to both Bryant Students and a recruiting representative from each company. The question posed on each survey asked that the respondent rate each company's reputation on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the best. The purpose of this dual question was to assess the difference between the perceived and actual reputation of each company on the university's campus. The results, as seen in *Figure 5*, allow for several interesting observations to be made and a few conclusions to be drawn.

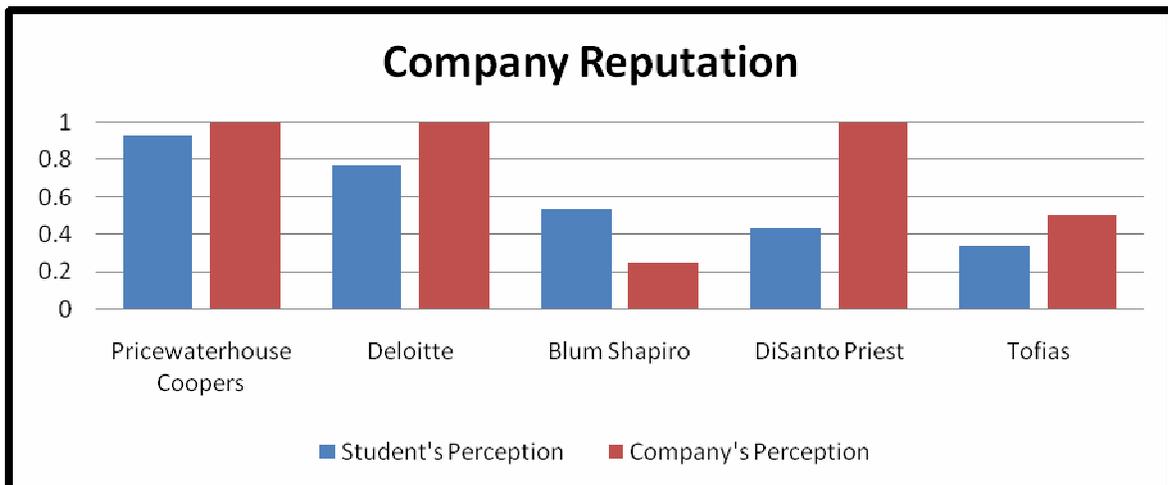


Figure 5 – Results of survey question regarding perception of company reputation on Bryant University campus

First of all, it is readily apparent that the two large firms have the best reputation on campus. This was expected since the companies are extremely recognizable across most of the globe. Although expected, this still presents a huge advantage to them right from the beginning as far as recruiting is concerned because people will seek out the companies due to their strong reputations. The three smaller firms have to work harder to compensate for this advantage when competing with the large firms; however, it is just an initial hurdle of informing people about the company, which can be overcome by various marketing strategies.

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Another point of interest is the discrepancy between the student's perception and the company's perception of their reputation on campus. The firm of PricewaterhouseCoopers is definitely the most aware of its own status on campus, which is excellent because it means their strategies are working well. Deloitte, Blum Shapiro, and Tofias all are relatively close as far as perceptions of reputation on campus. Even though Deloitte and Tofias overestimated their name on campus and Blum Shapiro underestimated it, each knows approximately where they stand in the minds of the college students. DiSanto Priest on the other is unusually far off the mark when comparing actual to expected perceptions of reputation on campus. This is not good because if a company does not know approximately where they stand, then they also will not know the amount of resources to put into marketing. Another possibility is that they are utilizing an unsuccessful marketing strategy. If this is the case, then some alterations can be made to either make the strategy more effective, or to save the money spent on them.

Visibility

The visibility of a company on campus is a huge factor when it comes to recruiting. One of the best ways for a company to acquire a large pool of applicants is to be visible to the student body. If a student does not think of a company, then it is unlikely that that person will pursue the possible job opportunities available for that company. For this study, a question regarding the visibility of each company on campus was also given to both Bryant Students and a recruiting representative from each company. The question posed on each survey asked that the respondent rate each company's presence on campus on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the best. The purpose of this dual question was to assess the difference between the perceived and actual visibility of each company on the university's campus.

The results, as seen in *Figure 6*, allow for several interesting observations to be made and a few conclusions to be drawn. One observation that is readily apparent from this graph is that PricewaterhouseCoopers is the most visible on campus, followed by Deloitte and Blum Shapiro. These top two firms are expected to be at the front of the list due in part to their advantageous size and reputation, which makes their presence more memorable. Besides the fact that the two large firms are the most visible on campus, however, they also are extremely aware of their presence on campus, each being less than 10% off from the aggregate students'

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perceptions. This means that these two companies are doing exactly what they want to do at Bryant and they realize the influence that their efforts are yielding.

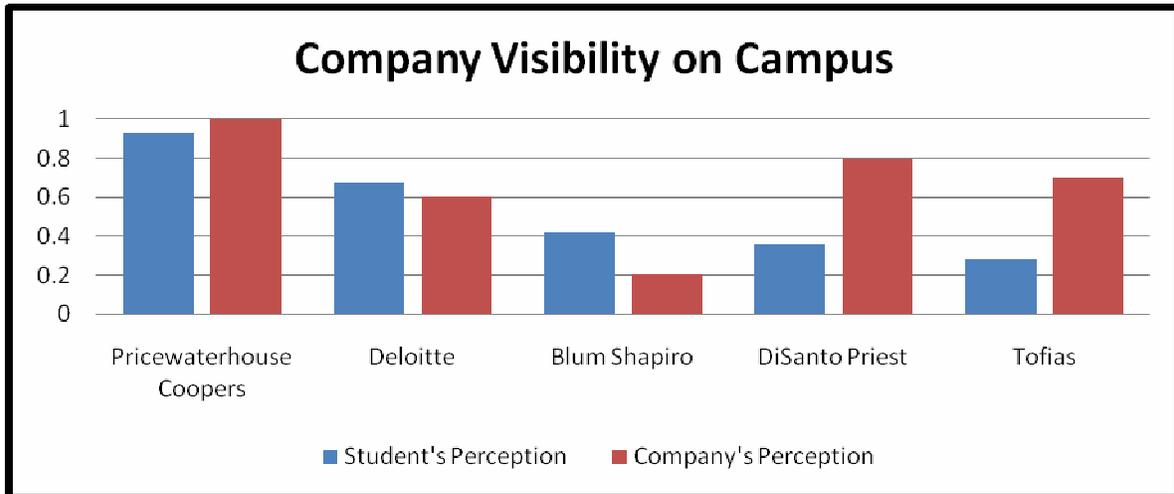


Figure 6 – Survey results from question concerning company visibility on the Bryant University campus.

Blum Shapiro rated in the middle of the selected companies as far as visibility is concerned. An observation that can be made regarding this company is that they are more visible than they believe with an average student rating of 2.10 out of 5 yet a self perception rating of 1 out of 5. This result indicates that the company's advertising strategy is working fairly well and actually better than expected. This is especially the case since this mid-sized company is almost on par with the two Big Four firms that recruit at Bryant even though there are size disadvantages to overcome.

DiSanto Priest and Tofias on the other hand are on the lower end of the campus visibility spectrum. This lower rating in itself is not a source of concern; however, the company representatives believe that they have a stronger presence than indicated by the students. This inconsistency is exactly what this project was meant to illuminate because something cannot be fixed if no one is aware that a problem exists. There are several possible reasons for the discrepancy among perceptions, but any attempt to pinpoint the exact problem without further research would be mostly speculation.

One possibility that could be examined further in regards to this discrepancy is that the companies' messages are not reaching the students effectively. There are many different

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channels of communication open to recruiters, but the various modes all have differing levels of influence on the audience that receives them. As seen in *Figure 7*, some of the best ways to reach potential applicants are through teachers' word of mouth, peers, through career center on campus, and by utilizing the Bryant email announcement system. Although any method of exposure to the company name or logo is beneficial to keep the firm fresh in one's mind.

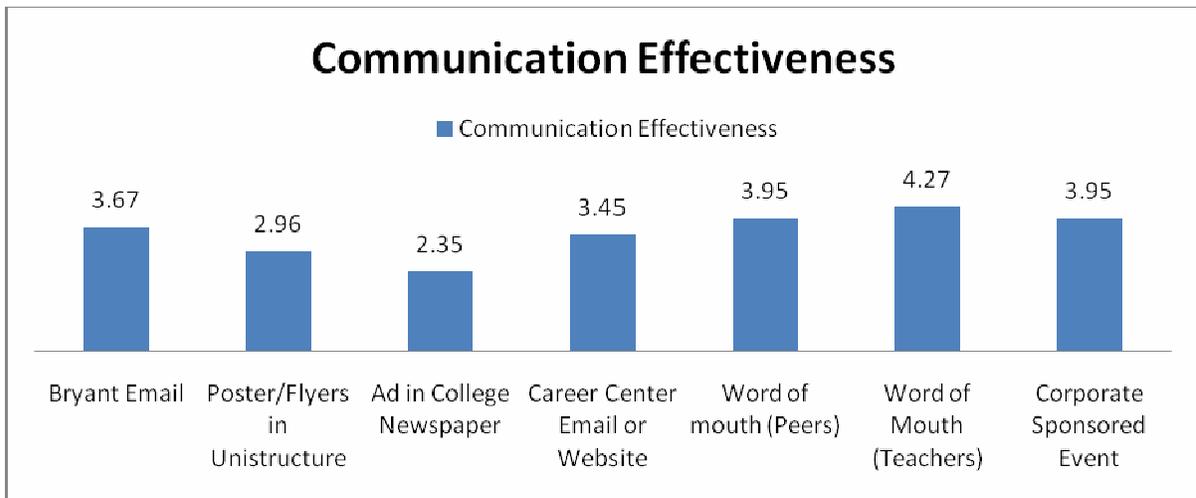


Figure 7 - Results from survey question rating effectiveness of communication forms at Bryant University

Promotional Products

There are several ways to build a strong corporate reputation. One way is to constantly have the company's name and logo on the mind of as many people as possible as much as possible. This corporate saturation of the population allows a company and their product or service to be instantly recognizable amongst anybody that receives an associated cue. In order to achieve this highly desired level of familiarity, companies place their name on certain products that are hopefully visible, functional, or appealing in some way in order to receive maximum exposure. Similar to many other strategies, there are some more effective and some less effective promotional products that are distributed by various companies.

According to the *Figure 8*, the top student choice as far as functionality is concerned was pens and highlighters. This was followed by drawstring bags, water bottles, and jump drives.

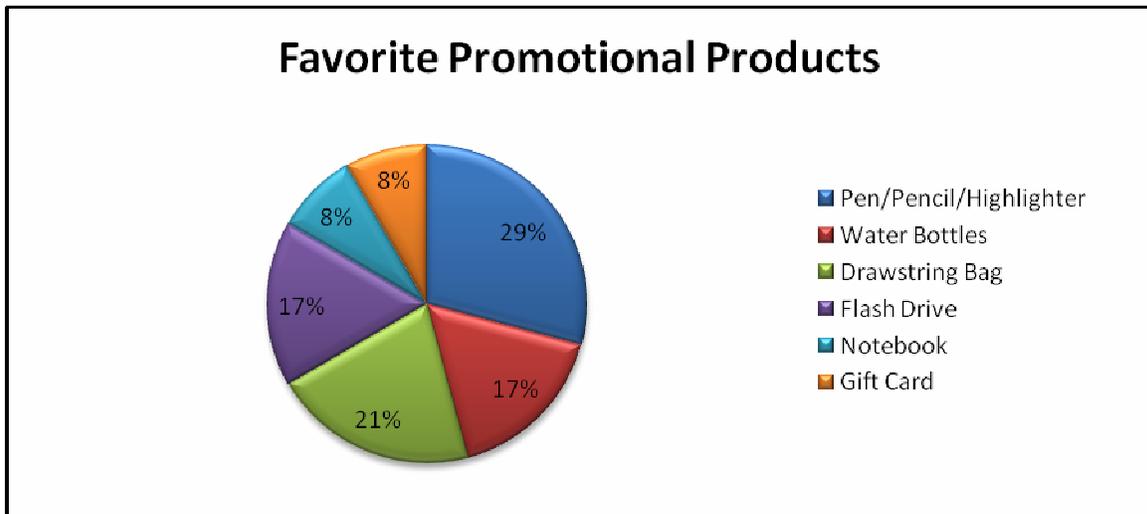


Figure 8 - Results from survey question regarding favorite promotional products

In a competitive marketplace, creativity also plays a role. One of the rather unique ideas that stood out among the rest was a laundry bag with the company logo. This kind of item is essential to college life and is also long lasting so it provides a long exposure lifetime. The promotional product that was by far the most creative however was a choice of “planting a tree, donating to help build a school, or donating to an animal shelter” given to individuals who attended a PricewaterhouseCoopers information session. Even though these gifts do not physically leave with the person, they make a considerable impression on the recipients because of their ingenuity. Also, this gift speaks tremendous amounts about the character of the company. Instead of squandering resources on items that are nice, but not necessary, they are contributing the funds to help make the world a better place.

Improvement Ideas

If a company desires to be better at recruiting, then it must adapt and change to meet the requirements of students they are trying to recruit. There is always room for improvement in any area of a recruitment program; the company just has to be open to implementing new ideas while simultaneously strengthening the practices of the past. Some possible techniques to improve reputation, visibility, and ultimately recruiting can be derived from this research study and are discussed below.

The first strategy that may be drawn on to improve recruitment on the Bryant University campus is to use the right kind of communication. Some forms of communication are more

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effective than others; therefore, a company should attempt to focus its efforts upon the one with the most influence. According to the research results, one of the primary focuses should be professors due to their position of trust and ability to connect with the aspiring accountants. This is especially valuable if attained because instructors are in an excellent position to recommend the most talented students that would fit best within a particular organization. One possible approach to curry favor with the faculty is to send them brochures about positive company attributes and what the company aspires to be in the future. Hopefully, a strong relationship with the faculty will be fostered out of these endeavors. If a solid enough relationship is established, this could even lead to a mutually beneficial information exchange. For instance, if the company recognizes an upcoming trend in the industry that would prove beneficial for the students to be aware of before they leave school, then the company could inform the teachers who might incorporate the topic into a lesson.

A second possible tactic is to utilize previous interns. Interns do not only have to work for a company over the summer. Many individuals who obtain internships at these select companies during the summer months are not only quality academic students, but also people of character who can influence their peers decisions and ideas. The right people for this job will be easily recognizable during their internship because of their behavior and general enthusiasm. In addition, most interns are motivated to prove their own worth to the company and want their future company to succeed. By “employing” these individuals part time during the year (with pay or not), it encourages them to provide an excellent first hand information source to other promising students. Besides several of the people with internships will be well placed to be campus representatives because they attend a classes with mostly other accounting majors and they might even hold an executive board position in the Accounting Association.

Another method that could increase visibility and bolster the reputation of a company on campus would be to increase the frequency of messages. According to a study completed regarding Super Bowl advertisements, both the “length and the frequency positively and significantly influence advertisement recall” (Henderson & Newell, 2008, p. 237). If a company wants to be constantly on the mind of students, then a person must be bombarded

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with stimuli. Although it is a lofty goal, a monthly reminder could not hurt and it might not even take that much additional effort. Some of the more common ideas that many firms on campus already use include: holding information sessions, volunteering to speak at an Accounting Association meeting about a typical day at your work, staffing an information table, and attending the annual career fair. Another promotional opportunity that gets a company's name out to the students is sponsoring an event. Previous events that have been held at Bryant include: a meet-and-greet BBQ, an etiquette dinner, and a tax case competition. Other ideas that are utilized include doing an "Intern Spotlight" at an Accounting Association meeting, which is basically where an intern describes what type of projects he or she completed and speaks about the experience in general. Also, a company could host an accounting faculty breakfast or give out free coffee to professors in order to build relationships. Meanwhile, as these events are occurring, the firm could proceed with a multitude of other smaller advertising simultaneously. This other advertising could include flyers being handed out, posters being put up in classrooms (which stay up for quite a while), advertisements in the campus paper, and occasional emails sent via the career center announcing upcoming events.

Fourth, a company needs to stand out from the competitors and play to its strengths. These companies, although unique in some aspects, preach many of the same qualities as the rest. Therefore, much of the reasoning behind the students' decisions lie with the firm's talent at marketing. The little things make a difference when it comes down to decision time. One example that was noticed during the research period for this project was the attention to detail that PricewaterhouseCoopers exhibited prior to interviews. This firm had a couple of younger individuals waiting in the reception area at the career center to greet the interviewees and try to relieve their stress a little. Another detail that stood out was the prompt response time of the Blum Shapiro representative when the company surveys were distributed. This gave a great impression of the company because it conveyed a feeling of significance and great personal atmosphere if a student survey could elicit that much importance.

Finally, companies must know what appeals to the target students. The best recruiting results can only be achieved if the individuals are interested in what you are selling. Therefore, HR

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representatives must cater their presentations, events, and even their promotional products to the preferences and interests of the students. This tailored marketing can be accomplished through the research completed for this project and by distributing surveys of your own to other college campuses.

Content Validity and Limitations

One validity concern that is evident from the research completed for this project is the size of the sample population. Although this research included a rather small sample of participants compared to the companies' normal candidate pool, overall the results yielded a fairly accurate measure. Most all of the participants for this study meet the requirements designated by the companies involved in the study. The reason for this level of adequacy is that the students surveyed attend a small business oriented university that has a focused academic program for this specific major. Another reason is that a large number of these respondents have already or will shortly participate in an internship with one of these companies, which signifies their capability.

One limitation regarding this research is the fact that all candidates surveyed were from same university. This university tends to have a rather homogenous population when compared to other universities with the same major. This factor might influence the ability to apply these findings to other recruitment sources.

Future Research

As far a future research is concerned, there is a wide range that can be explored further in this field. One aspect that can be looked into is whether the results yielded from this data is consistent with that of a similar study on a different major/industry. There is a possibility that these conclusions are non-transferable to other fields due to the fact that individuals that are attracted to the accounting field have unique characteristics that are not present in other groups.

If the data is transferable to other professions, it would be a benefit to analyze the practices of these companies as well to identify any methods that work extremely well or poor. In addition, if this study was expanded to different universities, then there might also be other anomaly that could be identified because this was done specifically at Bryant University.

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Also, an area of interest related to this topic that may be pursued to a greater extent is the influence of the recent economic downturn on company policies and attraction methods. These events may greatly influence on how the recruitment process is handled by different corporations. For instance, there might be a greater shift to web-based recruiting due to the fact that it can allow a company to provide vast amounts of information to an unlimited audience for a relatively low expense. The competition for positions at a reputable firm may increase as the same number of people vie for fewer position openings, subsequently reducing the need for some attraction strategies.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – (Student Survey)

Student Survey

Page 1. Background Information

Project:

The purpose of this survey is to identify and evaluate the various methods that accounting companies utilize to attract and keep their employees. This survey data will be collected and contrasted against data provided by the accounting companies and other sources. Hopefully, analysis of this data will allow for a more efficient and effective recruitment process for both employers and employees.

(Note - The results of this survey will be analyzed and distributed in the form of a honors thesis report to any interested parties, however, individual answers will not be shared, only aggregate data. Under no circumstances will any participants name be included in the report.)

1. What is your sex?

- Male
- Female

2. What is your class graduation year?

- 2009
- 2010
- 2011
- 2012
- Other (please specify)

3. Is your major Accounting? If not, please specify what your major is in the box below.

- Yes
- No (please specify)

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4. What is your home state?

State:

5. Please select your approximate cumulative GPA range?

- 3.5 to 4.0
- 3.0 to 3.5
- 2.5 to 3.0
- 2.0 to 2.5
- Below 2.0

6. Please rate how familiar you are with these accounting companies.

	Never Heard of Company				Very Familiar with Company
Blum Shapiro	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deloitte	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
DiSanto Priest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ernst & Young	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
PricewaterhouseCoopers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tofias	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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7. Please check all boxes that apply to you for each company. If none apply, please select the box in the N/A column.

	Attended Information Session	Interviewed with Company	Internship	Signed Full Time	N/A
PricewaterhouseCoopers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tofias	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blum Shapiro	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deloitte	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ernst & Young	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
DiSanto Priest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments

Page 2. Job Preferences & Future Plans

1. When you graduate, what size company would you prefer to work at?

- Large Firm
- Small to Mid Sized Firm
- Other (please specify)

2. What are your plans after graduation?

- Work Full Time
- School Full Time
- Work and School
- Other (please specify)

3. Where would be your ideal location to live after school?

4. Are you willing to relocate for a job? If yes, how far?

	No	Anywhere in New England	Anywhere in North East	Anywhere on East Coast	Anywhere in USA	Anywhere in World
Relocate for Job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. What area of accounting do you want to work in after graduation?

- Advisory
- Assurance (Auditing)
- Tax
- Any
- Unsure
- Other (please specify)

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6. How long do you plan on working for the first company that hires you after school?

- Less than 5 years
- 5 to 10 years
- Entire career
- Unsure
- Other (please specify)

7. Please rate these companies' presence on campus.

	Nonexistent				Very Noticeable
Blum Shapiro	<input type="checkbox"/>				
PricewaterhouseCoopers	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Ernst & Young	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Tofias	<input type="checkbox"/>				
DiSanto Priest	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Deloitte	<input type="checkbox"/>				

8. Are you or have you previously been involved in the Accounting Association at Bryant?

- Yes
- No

Page 3. Marketing Preferences (Last Page)

1. What corporate gifts have you received from firms recruiting on campus?
 (ex. water bottle with company logo)

2. What is the best or most useful corporate giveaway that you have received?

3. Do you read your @Bryant emails from the career center?

- Yes
 No

4. Please rate the effectiveness of the different forms of advertising on campus.

	No Effect				Very Effective
Corporate Sponsored Event	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Poster on Unistructure	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Word of Mouth - Teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>				
@Bryant Email	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Ad in the Archway	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Career Center Announcement/Website	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Word of Mouth - Other Students	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Other (please specify)

5. Please pick the three information session topics that most interest you about a company.

	Information Session Topics
Most Interest	<input type="text"/>
Second Most Interest	<input type="text"/>
Third Most Interest	<input type="text"/>

6. How important are these issues to you when considering a future employer?

	Not Important				Very Important
Community Service (Work in Community)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Philanthropy (Raising Money for Cause)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Environment Friendliness	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Tuition Reimbursement Program	<input type="checkbox"/>				

7. Please rank what you believe to be the three most important qualities that employers look for in a potential employee.

	1 = Most Valued	2 = Second Most Valued	3 = Third Most Valued
Ethics/Responsibility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Analytical Skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication Skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Innovativeness/Creativity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Grades	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leadership Ability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. Please rank the top three reasons why you would leave your job.

	1 = Top Reason to Leave	2 = Second Reason to Leave	3 = Third Reason to Leave
More Money Elsewhere	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unhappy with boss	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unhappy with work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advancement Opportunity Elsewhere	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unhappy with coworkers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other Reasons (Explain)

9. What is your primary concern when searching for a job?

- Enjoyable work
- Company's reputation
- Location
- Compensation
- Advancement Opportunities
- Other (please specify)

Appendix B – (Company Survey)

Corporate Attraction Survey

1. Could you please complete the basic information blanks below.

Name:

Company:

City/Town:

State:

Email Address:

2. How would you rate your company's presence on the Bryant campus? (1 = very low, 10 = very high)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Campus Presence	<input type="radio"/>									

Optional Comment

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3. Please rate the importance of each recruitment tool below to your company's recruitment effort on college campuses. If your company has other important tools, please list them in the comment field.

	Not Important				Very Important
Advertising	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information Sessions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reputation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sponsored Events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students Word of Mouth	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers Word of Mouth	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Website	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<div style="border: 1px solid gray; height: 40px; width: 100%; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid gray; height: 20px; width: 100%;"></div>				

4. Please rank what you believe to be the top three qualities of a potential employee in order of importance.

	1 = Most Important	2 = Second Most Important	3 = Third Most Important
Leadership	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strong Work Ethic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication & Interpersonal Skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ethics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Analytical Skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	<div style="border: 1px solid gray; height: 40px; width: 100%; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid gray; height: 20px; width: 100%;"></div>		

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5. What percentage of accounting juniors and seniors at Bryant do you believe will recognize and know something about your company?

- 0% to 25%
- 25% to 50%
- 50% to 75%
- 75% to 100%

6. Please rate the importance of the following idea to your company.

	1 = Not Important	2	3	4	5 = Very Important
Philanthropy (Raising Money for Cause)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Community Service (Work in Community)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Environmental Friendliness	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Optional Comments

7. On average, how many interns do you typically hire a year?

8. On average, how many entry level full time positions do you typically hire a year?

9. On average, what is the GPA range cut off for your company?

10. What types of corporate gifts, if any, do you give away at recruiting events on college campuses?



11. During a presentation to students, what are the three aspects of your company that you would most want to convey to students?

Examples:

Opportunities to Grow/Learn

Competitive Salary/Benefits

Attractive Corporate Culture

Work/Life Balance

Most Important

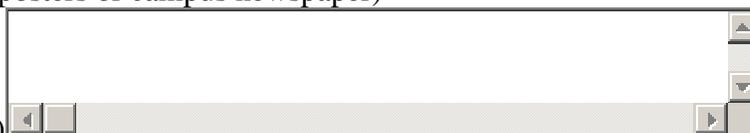
Second Most Important

Third Most Important

12. Please mark how your company advertises on college campuses. (Specifically Bryant University)

- Information Sessions
- Sponsored Events
- Information Table
- Speaking Engagements
- Career Fair
- Advertisements (posters or campus newspaper)

Other (please specify)



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13. Please mark the different areas of your company for which you hire accounting majors.

- Advisory
- Assurance
- Tax

Other (please specify)

14. What are the main differences between your company and other accounting firms?

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