

## **Employer Branding Concept in Polish Retail Chains In the Era of Generations Y and Z**

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### **ABSTRACT**

For business enterprises, also for retail chains a positive employer brand is becoming an important competitive asset. In the market, it allows them to obtain resources of particular significance, i.e. employees with required skills, competences and predispositions, and to retain those already in employment. The retail sector in Poland is perceived as a strongly disliked employer. Especially a problem is to enhance young to enhance for working in retail chains. Thus employer branding can be an important element in the strategies enhancing young people to work in retail chains.

The main objective of this paper is to identify the development of employer branding strategies by the chosen retail chains operating in Poland and to characterize their activities against young generations.

Literature analysis regarding theoretical deliberation has been followed by an empirical verification (based on case study method) of best practices introduced by discounts retail chains in Poland.

The paper is based on the assumption that retail chains use employer brand concept by developing employer brand strategies dedicated to young generations.

Continuing strategic activities in the field of employer branding is very important for retail chains. Decision makers need to pay special attention to the promotion of their retail chains as a good workplace, using employer branding techniques.

**Keywords:** Employer Branding, Young Generations, Marketing Strategies

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MANAGEMENT AND ECONOMICS****1. Introduction****1.1 Retail chains as the employer on polish market**

The largest European retail trade chains operate on Polish market. With respect to economy, some commercial chains compare better than many countries. Annual incomes of Wal – Mart are comparable with GDP of Poland and Jeronimo Martins, the owner of Biedronka chain, has the turnover that is comparable with GDP of Albania. Recently commercial chains have been in better condition than the largest world economies. Since 2006 they have been able to increase turnovers on average by at least 5% that is remarkably faster than GDP growth in developed countries (www1).

Analysing the structure of foreign retail trade enterprises, we can state that the largest activity in conquering new markets is observed among French, British and German commercial chains. Retail trade chains can be divided with respect to their nature (size of the selling area, location and range of offered assortment) into three groups:

1. Hypermarket chains – this group may include the following entities: Auchan (Auchan Group), Carrefour, Real (Metro Group), Tesco Poland, Kaufland (Kaufland Markets), E. Leclerc (E. Leclerc group).
2. Supermarket chains: - Tesco Poland, E. Leclerc, Carrefour Market, Simply Market (formerly Elea, Auchan owner, it has also taken over Billa chain), Savia Tesco.
3. Discount chains: - Biedronka (Jeronimo Martens – Portugal), Lidl (german), Netto (Danish chain), Aldi (German chain).

The largest European retail trade chains operate on Polish market. There are Carrefour, Metro, Tesco, Schwarz (Kaufland and Lidl) and Aldi. European enterprises from Germany, Great Britain and France are found among the most powerful retail sellers.

Changes that have occurred over the recent years on labour market contributed for the first time to the emergence of the situation in which we can speak about the employee market. As reported by Główny Urząd Statystyczny [*Central Statistical Office*], in January 2018 the unemployment rate in Poland was 6.9% (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, Liczba bezrobotnych, 2018). Even though this value has grown by 0.3%, it has still been at its lowest level for over the last 25 years. As stated by experts of Polish Confederation Lewiatan, the factors showing that there is the employee market in Poland also include the growing number of workplaces and increase in the average wage with the perspective of even higher pay rises this year(www2).

However, it must be noticed that even though the average unemployment rate in Poland has been at its low level, its value is different depending on the region. In voivodeships located to the east of the country and in small towns the level of unemployment is still relatively high. Additionally, it must be remembered that due to progressing scientific and technological development there is not enough of experienced specialists on the market on the one hand, and on the other hand there is a lack of manual or production workers and people doing simple work that do not require specific education.

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It is obvious that various sectors operating on Polish market will differ towards each other both with respect to the offered number of jobs, as well as candidates applying for work in a given position. Considering these differences, the paper aims to describe the situation typical of the labour market in retailing in Poland.

As report of Główny Urząd Statystyczny [*Central Statistical Office*] shows, increase in employment in trade in 2017 reached 4.7% which puts it into 6<sup>th</sup> place among other economy sectors. As shown by GUS [*Central Statistical Office*], there was an increase in average wages in all sectors in comparison with the first three quarters of the previous year, whereas the greatest increase occurred in trade and repair of vehicles (by 6.9%) (*Central Statistical Office, 2017, s., 15*).

**1.2 Needs of Y and Z Generation Representatives as The Basis for Employer Branding  
Strategies of Retail Chains Operating In Poland****1.2.1 Characteristics of Y and Z generations**

The profile of representatives of gen Y and Z as employees is definitely different from employees "of the past" therefore also retail chains need to adapt themselves to new challenges related to the characteristics of young employees. Characteristics of young employees bring observation about the necessity to gather knowledge about them by commercial chains. This knowledge is acquired for the need of construction of specific employer branding strategy.

"Y" generation is a generation of people born in Poland between 1986 and 2010, and in other countries, like for example in the USA, they are the generation of population boom of the 80s and 90s of the twentieth century. They are also called "Millennium generation", "next generation", "digital generation" and the "generation of flip-flops and iPods". Unlike the previous generation, referred to as Generation "X", they have "tamed" technological innovations and actively apply digital media and digital technologies; they are considered to be audacious generation that is open to new challenges.

On the other hand, the "Z" generation are people born after 1990, or - according to some experts - even after 1995. In general view they are most distinguished by the fact that new technologies are something ordinary and of daily use for them as they have been present in their life since their birth. They are also often referred to as "C" Generation - from the English word "Connected", meaning connected to the network. Experts place the word change at the basis of the definition of the generation; change as the situation they like most because continuous experimenting lets them develop themselves and offers a lot of experiences. (www3). Representatives of the "Z" generation approach life in a realistic and materialistic way, but at the same time they tend to be creative and ambitious. They want to have and achieve everything immediately. They are also distinguished by their attitude to knowledge - they acquire it from the Internet, and therefore for them it is not a fundamental attribute of an employee in the labour market. The speed of finding information and creative approach to ways of reaching the information is more important. They

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are aware of how quickly the world is changing, and therefore they treat knowledge as something that loses its value very fast. They are characterized by the mobility, they know foreign languages and have friends all over the world, but they usually live longer with their parents (www3).

**1.2.2 Employer branding in retail chains**

A particular enterprise's image as an employer can be identified with its brand; in the literature on this subject, it is referred to as *employer brand*, while *employer branding* is a process, a sequence of planned activities aimed at ensuring that the enterprise will be regarded as an attractive employer (Wilson, 2008).

Shaping a strong and positive brand of a retail chain as an employer should constitute an important element in a chain's development strategy. Such development cannot take place without the participation of employees with particular competencies and a properly conducted employer branding process is a means of acquiring and retaining such employees by retail chains. A negative perception of employment in the retail sector leads to a negative section of employees in this sector; therefore, in the case of retail chains, employer branding activities are so important (Grzesiuk, 2010).

There are many tools used to create a desired employer brand. In the literature on this subject, they are referred to as Employee Value Propositions (EVPs). For employer branding, an EVP is the same as a Brand Value Proposition is for each brand. In literal translation into Polish, an EVP may be rendered as "a proposal concerning the value of the employee" (Bilińska-Reformat, Dewalska-Opitek, 2016).

If an employer declares a particular set of benefits for an employee (e.g. the fulfilment of vocational ambitions, opportunities for promotion, etc.) and at the same does not ensure the possibility of planning and following career paths, if the rules of promotion are unclear, what occurs is a particular cognitive dissonance. An employee will not trust their employer; furthermore, feeling low satisfaction from work, they will be looking for new employment opportunities. Dissatisfied, they will share their negative opinion with other interested parties.

A set of benefits proposed by an employer should be adjusted to an employee's individual conditions and take into consideration their current and future (not yet realised) vocational and personal needs.

**2. Research Methodology**

The methods applied to achieve the goals of the paper include the critical analysis of the literature on the subject, and profound case study indicating developing of the employer branding activities used by discount chains functioning in Poland. The application of case study method is justified in management sciences because it allows studying quantitative phenomena, however, to obtain a full image of reality the method was complemented with results of investigating www

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pages of two discount retail chains operating in Poland. The author used both desk research methods and method of analyzing www sides of chosen discount chains.

The research objectives included the study of what kind of employer branding activities focused on Y and Z generation are used by discount chains, and for what purpose.

### **3. Results and Findings**

#### **Identification of Activities Related to Employer Branding Based On the Example of Bierdonka and Lidl Chains – Comparative Analysis**

Jeronimo Martins Poland is now the largest private employer in Poland, giving work to over 65 thousand workers. On its website it presents a list of benefits it offers, including: attractive pay, a bonus system and one of the most comprehensive social packages on the market. Apart from this, the company focuses on workers' development – according to data presented by the company, only in 2017, over 2.74 million training hours were organised (www4).

Biedronka offers its workers development opportunities through implementation of internal promotion policy. As the company states, around 90% of present managers have been promoted from lower organisational levels, and many general managers took their post thanks to participation in managerial programs for graduates from universities, and organised by the company (www4).

According to the research entitled “Pracodawca roku 2017” [“Employer of 2017”] conducted by AISEC organisation among students, Jeronimo Martens was in the 4<sup>th</sup> place among the most wanted employer, while moving up 9 places in comparison with 2016 (www5). Such a high position may prove great commitment in building brand as an employer.

In the same ranking Lidl was only in the 9<sup>th</sup> place, while climbing by three places in comparison with the previous year. However, the chain can boast several rewards in the sphere of employer branding. In February 2017, Lidl won a reward in the contest organised by EB Kreator for the best employer branding campaign(www6). In October 2017 it was distinguished in the competition Employer Branding Stars in the category of “the best employer branding campaign (budget of over PLN 100000)” (www6). Campaigns conducted by Lidl are very wide-ranging and occur simultaneously in many marketing channels which enhances the company image as an active, committed employer who cares about its workers.

Internal promotions are frequently applied by Lidl. The chain emphasises that they firstly fill the vacancies with employees from within the company. The focus is also on new workers who are provided with appropriate training. The company also pays attention to support for workers in their personal development and enabling them to maintain the work-life, as well as family-leisure time balance (www7).

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The webpage devoted to career is one of common external tools of employer branding. Both Lidl and Biedronka have webpages dedicated to work in a given chain.

The webpage belonging to stores managed by Jeronimo Martins Poland can be found at [www.karierswjm.pl](http://www.karierswjm.pl). The homepage is divided into 4 tabs: work, about us, news and contact. The first is sub-divided into individual sections concerning work in Biedronka stores, in the office or storehouse<sup>1</sup>. While clicking a selected section, the webpage user can find a short description and characteristics of the work in a given area and use the search engine to find present offers.

The website is easy and clear to move around. From the point of view of the potential candidate for work, it includes all necessary information that is needed in the recruitment process. A clear advantage of the webpage is its division into separate areas of employment in which there are thorough descriptions of such issues as the position, benefits for workers and their children, together with the presentation of non-salary benefits offered by the company, requirements regarding the candidate and current job offers. Infographics which presents the process of recruitment step by step, as well as the question of “What in your opinion is the most important for you at work?” together with presented workers’ responses and their brief descriptions is interesting. The elements can be helpful while building potential candidate’s interest in the offer.

Apart from the description, each position has a short, around 30-second-long film that shows a specific character of a given work. Biedronka store workers occurring in the films, present the activities they are responsible for during their working day. The climate of the films is in positive and friendly atmosphere, which aims to encourage the potential candidate to start working in a given position and to build a special bond already before the recruitment process.

The webpage devoted to the career in Lidl - [www.kariera.lidl.pl](http://www.kariera.lidl.pl) is slightly more expanded than this provided by Jeronimo Martins. The main webpage presents photos of workers together with their short opinion concerning a selected aspect of work in Lidl, like for example: “This is my first job and I already have an employment contract and private health care”, or “I wanted to work with the best, thus I have chosen Lidl”. These opinions aim to encourage a potential candidate to find out about the job offers already during their first visit on the website. They are also consistent with the main motto of the campaign conducted by the Lidl chain which says: “Lidl starts with the people”.

In the upper right-hand corner, the user can notice two graphics showing awards won by Lidl. They are Top Employer Poland and Europe 2018. The fact that the chain shows the awards on its home page is the element of building the image of a professional employer awarded in contests who is worth being employed by (www9). The page is divided into 6 tabs corresponding to the area that the candidate for work could be interested in. Apart from this, the webpage also presents the news and events directly related to company activities. Each tab is well-developed and contains detailed set of information about the selected section, structure of positions as well

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<sup>1</sup> Apart from the three tabs, the webpage also presents job offers in chemists’ and pharmacies that belong to Jeronimo Martins Poland company (author’s note)

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as a short film or photo gallery. The webpage also enables direct search for job offers, whereas “Apply now” buttons enable the candidate to apply for the selected position through online forms.

Lidl company website is clear even though it contains a lot of content. Thanks to this, the user can find comprehensive information about work in the retailing chain.

Employer branding campaign is another tool of building image as an employer. In 2014, Biedronka conducted a “1000 absolwentów” [*“1000 graduates”*] campaign within which it planned to employ 1000 graduates in managerial positions in stores belonging to the chain(www10).

The following main goals of the campaign can be indicated (www10):

- building image of work in Biedronka stores among people with university education from all around Poland
- change of negative perception of development opportunities in the chain of discount stores
- enhancing awareness about job offers in stores, targeted at graduates of university study programs.

The campaign was launched on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2014 on the Internet – on information and recruitment portals and a week later also in the press. The recruitment process was conducted in June and August 2014. The first group of managers employed within the campaign started work in September and October 2014, and further workers at the beginning of 2015. The candidates could apply through the dedicated service [www.1000absolwentow.pl](http://www.1000absolwentow.pl), the official recruitment page [www.karierawjm.pl](http://www.karierawjm.pl) and through [pracuj.pl](http://pracuj.pl) service (www11). The page devoted to the campaign - [www.1000absolwentow.pl](http://www.1000absolwentow.pl) was equipped with the application revealing the key elements of the offer on the basis of recipient’s preferences and also interactive form for sending a CV.

Employer Branding Institute agency was responsible for implementation of the project and preparation of its graphic form. The agency reported that as a result of the campaign, 15 000 CVs were submitted within 8-weeks’ campaign and the webpage dedicated to the project was visited by 250 thousand unique users (www10). Therefore, it can be stated that the action proved to be a great success for Biedronka chain (www11).

Employer branding campaign conducted by Lidl was widely commented online and was distinguished in several sector contests. The German discount store rose to the challenge of general opinions about work in retail chains, while showing its values, terms and conditions of employment, as well as development opportunities. The campaign was launched in September 2016 and its main motto was “Lidl starts with the people”. The characters in the campaign were the workers of Lidl company, who were willingly involved in employer branding campaign. It was important that they were people employed in various positions – including store and storehouse workers, young graduates starting their career in trade and even experienced specialists. As added by Aleksandra Robaszkiewicz, the PR Manager Lidl Poland: “We are giving floor to our workers as in this campaign we are prioritising reliability and authenticity. We are proud that 1300 of our workers – our colleagues – notified the wish to take part in the campaign (www12). The campaign was presented in various forms including TV, cinema and

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radio commercials, press and outdoor advertisements, as well as advertisements in social media. 45-second-long film promoting the project became very popular. It had almost 150 thousand views on YouTube service<sup>2</sup>.

The promotional campaign was prepared by GDP Agency and Havas Media with whom Lidl has also been cooperating in other advertising projects. Zbigniew Żurek, an expert on labour market BBC, gave the following comment on the goals of the campaign: “Lidl campaign can have two goals. One is that Lidl organised the action because they did not have enough workers. However, the other goal could be conducting an ordinary image campaign that is a result of increasing product competition between the largest retail grocery chains” (Szymański 2016; www9).

The owners of Biedronka chain, i.e. Jeronimo Martins, as well as of Lidl chain actively manage profiles in social networking sites devoted to professional activity, for example Goldenline. Apart from the news and information about job offers, there are also workers’ opinions and evaluation on these websites. Some of them come from registered users which can prove reliability of the opinions.

In the case of Biedronka chain, young workers list several positive aspects of the work in the chain. They include, among others, such comments as “work close to the place of residence”, “regular working time”, “flexible work schedule” and “good social conditions”. The disadvantages include the following comments among others: “not enough staff in stores”, “bad attitude of store and regional managers to workers”, “unequal number of staff in stores”, “poor security in the store” or “stress”. There are also recommendations for employers which include suggestions of employing a bigger number of workers, regularisation of the problem of ordering products or increasing the number of trainings introducing to the work (www13). The category of “social/benefits” was valued the highest on Goldenline profile of Jeronimo Martins Poland. This can prove an attractive package of non-salary benefits that the store chain offers to its workers. On the other hand, “development opportunities” and “atmosphere” were ranked the lowest (www13).

Lidl chain profile in Goldenline service was evaluated slightly lower than Jeronimo Martins Poland, however, this could be related to over twice smaller number of website viewers (fig. 7). In the case of this chain, the category of “remuneration” was ranked the highest, which suggests that the workers are quite pleased with their pays in Lidl stores. On the other hand, atmosphere was evaluated the worst, so it is the issue the company should focus on in the process of building image as an employer.

Among positive opinions about the work in Lidl chain the most frequent comments include trainings, development opportunities, salary or extra benefits. However, there are also disadvantages indicated by the workers that include such issues as the work under time pressure, stress, high pace of work and working overtime. The analysis of comments shows that working in Lidl is well-paid, but stressful and demanding. This is confirmed in suggestions for the

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<sup>2</sup> Number of views as of 21.05.2018

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employer that are posted on the profile – a lot of people indicate too high demands and too big number of tasks set for the employees (www14).

### **4. Conclusions**

Non-salary benefits increasingly more often constitute a vital element of human resource policy in companies. To attract the best workers, the employer has to offer not only an attractive salary but also other benefits. They are an important element of activities in the sphere of internal employer branding and they have impact on motivation and commitment of workers. Thus they become better company ambassadors.

Retailing chains offer a broad range of non-wage benefits that most often include private medical care, sport membership cards, life insurance, vouchers or party/holiday packages.

To adjust the offer of benefits to the workers' needs in the best way, Biedronka studies their expectations through surveys, gathering opinions about already implemented programs and organising surveys concerning workers' satisfaction from non-wage offer every year. They have around 20 diverse programs of support in their offer for people employed in the chain stores. They are based on 3 pillars: health, family and education (www15).

Lidl also seeks its workers' satisfaction while offering them interesting benefits apart from wage. They include among others a wide social package, vouchers and holiday packages, school starter kits or "Mentor program" for new workers. This is related to employee market that is existing now. It forces companies to start struggling for new candidates. Competitive benefits have a great impact on building a positive image of an employer (www16; www17; www18).

Summing up we can state, that retail chains have to spend more time and money in order to build their brands in the labour market. Their problems with acquiring proper candidates for employment are aggravated by the lack of concrete strategies aimed at making them perceived as trustworthy employers. Thus there are a few areas which should be developed and communicated in the external labour market with a view to increasing the reliability of the particular representatives of retail chains.

From academic point of view, the research examines some relevant questions in field of knowledge considered. Among them it is important to point out the role of activities of retailers in developing employer brand. From managerial perspective, presented study brings several contributions to marketing professionals. Findings of this study indicate that investment in increasing employer satisfaction can develop competitive advantage of retail chains.

We should remember that this research has some limitations, which can be opportunities for future research. Key limitation of this study is choice of retail sector in which probably the changes take place very rapidly. Secondly, it was only considered limited number of retail chains using as example only discount format. It is believing that future focus on role of employer branding strategies of retail chains will promote better understanding on its importance in retail.

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