

Bringing an Employment Brand to Life

This ERE Recruiting Excellence Award finalist designed its website with its company's "start here, go anywhere" recruiting message in mind.

By Jane Davis, Head of Talent Management, The Warehouse

The Warehouse Group, a publicly-listed limited-liability company, is one of New Zealand's NZ's largest retailers with more than 8,500 employees. For the fiscal year ending July 30, 2007, it achieved sales revenue of \$1.8 billion (note: all amounts quoted are in NZ dollars) and a net profit of \$115.5 million. The Warehouse's 85 stores are located in 58 towns and cities and are within a 30-minute drive of 95% of the country's population, giving it unrivaled coverage in New Zealand retailing. We recently opened three Warehouse Extra stores offering fresh and frozen food, liquor, and a pharmacy, alongside general merchandise and apparel.

As part of a long-term strategy for attracting and retaining staff, The Warehouse launched a new careers website at www.thewarehousecareers.co.nz/ and implemented Snaphire, our successful e-recruitment system, on August 1, 2007. This allowed applicants to apply for jobs online for the first time. After six months, we received close to 15,000 applications to join our talent pool (see "Candidate Numbers in Database," on right, for trend information on size growth of The Warehouse's candidate pool). On average, we receive over 3,000 unique visits per month, and visitors view on average six to seven pages and spend between six and seven minutes exploring the website.

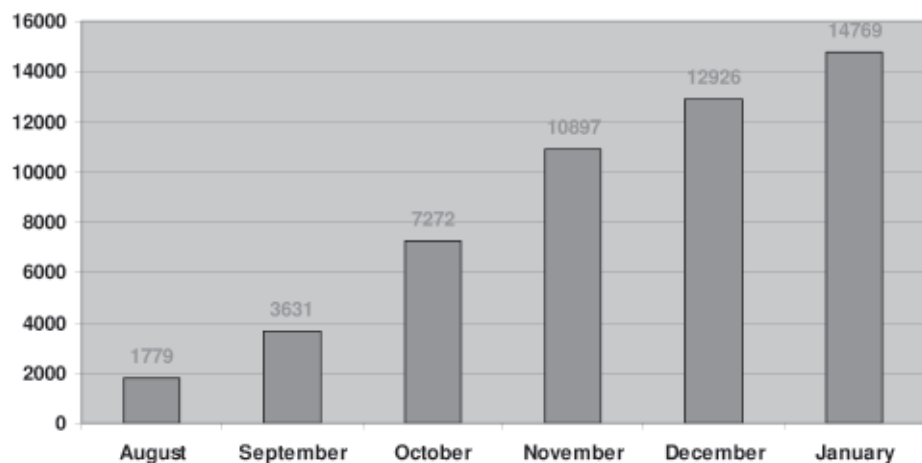
The website has a bounce rate—when you leave without visiting elsewhere—of 15% and, as Avinash Kaushik, Google's analytics evangelist

states, "It is really hard to get a bounce rate under 20%; anything over 35% is cause for concern, 50% (above) is worrying." The majority of visitors are from New Zealand, but there has been strong interest from Australia, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Snaphire has seen an increase in direct traffic volume to over 18% with around 80% of traffic coming from the main website, search engines (such as Google or Seek), and in-store advertising. Print advertising expenditure has decreased dramatically (by 68%) as we now focus on in-store advertising through posters and flyers directing people to our website (see the sample poster targeting return-to-work mothers, page 5).

With over 90% of the New Zealand population visiting a Warehouse store in any given three-month period, we are working on the premise that our customers are also our candidates. Internally, three people in our "Talent Team" are responsible for researching best practices, designing

Candidate Numbers in Database



website content, and monitoring and updating the site on a regular basis. Tribal DDB, an interactive agency owned by global advertising agency DDB, provides ongoing creative and technical support to develop and upgrade our website.

Tribal DDB was able to meet our time constraints and create and develop a new careers website within a six-week project timeframe, staying within a budget of \$45,000. Since launch, an additional \$20,000 has been spent on updates.

Innovative Site Features

The careers website is designed to fully support our employer brand of “Start here. Go anywhere.” We wanted to reinforce the tremendous range of career opportunities available in retail, particularly at The Warehouse.

Reinforcing this message is not only important for attracting external candidates to the business, but also helping our existing team members realize the opportunities available (i.e., to assist with staff retention). The website was designed to generate excitement and interest in a variety of ways, with many innovative features that appeal to our broad demographic groups: students and young people (Gen Y), return-to-work mothers, mature people, professionals, retail non-professionals, and temporary Christmas staff.

The most innovative site features, which have generated outstanding feedback, are the virtual tours of our business, including a store (see illustration, page 6), distribution center, and support office. Within these areas, information about virtual employees and their roles appears when you click on them. By double-clicking again for some of these people, you can go through to actual employee profiles.

The profiles provide photos and career biographies of some of our team members. The selected employees have had interesting or diverse career paths that clearly demonstrate our employer brand. Profiling team members and their career stories has been exceptionally well received, making people feel proud to work for us.

Our website also uses videos to engage job seekers and help capture what is unique about the organization.

Designed to attract people into roles that have traditionally been hard to fill, video interviews provide a first-hand perspective of what these roles entail and how the business works. There are links to employee blogs, which we aim to increase in the future. Each department is profiled with key achievements and types of roles available in each area. For select roles, there is a “week in the life” calendar (see illustration, page 7) to show more detailed job information. We have tabled 50 great reasons to work for The Warehouse with links to more detailed information when available. Examples and access to our innovative talent management system (including a case study) and samples of the psychometric tests used during the recruitment process are also accessible.

Our online application form uses screening questions to make sure we are recruiting people with the right level of experience, work permits, and qualifications. We also provide additional information on what makes our business special, such as its history (we’re an iconic New Zealand organization), core purpose (including video), commitment to being a sustainable business (we were recently nominated as a finalist at the World Retail Awards for the Responsible Retailer of the Year category), and details on the non-profit

organizations we support.

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Maintaining Cutting-Edge Features

Earlier this year, the Warehouse completed the first website update since the August 2007 launch. Our jobs are updated daily, and blogs are updated monthly. The Talent Team managing the website has a formal project plan in place to update the site on a quarterly basis, adding new features as the budget allows. Fortnightly team meetings are held to discuss feedback, innovative ideas, latest research, and best practices in features and design.

The latest update includes:

- **Updated Information on Profiled Employees.** Showing who has been promoted or changed departments and swapping out those who have left.

- **More Specific Department Information.** Information on what each department does, how it supports the business, what's special about it, the types of roles available, and key achievements and interesting facts about what makes the department unique (particularly in the NZ market). We have attached "week-in-the-life" calendars to some of the more difficult-to-fill roles. For each department, we have outlined the number of internal promotions within the team and the number of internal hires into the team for the past 12 months. This gives more validity to our employer brand.
- **Award Details.** We have recently made the finals of the 2008 World Retail Awards in two categories: Best Employer and Responsible Retailer of the Year. The finalist logo was placed on our website where appropriate.
- **Development Opportunities.** Some of our target demographic groups (e.g., Gen Y) are particularly interested in learning opportunities and advancement. More detailed information on the types of courses and leadership development programs are available for team members and managers at different levels.
- **More In-depth Career Path Information.** This is particularly targeted at our current employees. We wanted to show the types of opportunities available beyond operational roles in stores. In a graphical way, the types of traditional and non-traditional career paths are shown alongside video profiles of current incumbents.
- **Video Profiles.** We showcase hard-to-fill roles or those that are unusual in our market to give applicants a better understanding of exactly what these roles entail.
- **Employee Blogs.** These have been incorporated to appeal to Gen Y applicants and to promote our graduate program.
- **Specific Location Information.** For stores that find it very difficult to attract staff (e.g., the Queenstown location, which is a tourist location and has a transient

workforce), we have developed location-specific website pages. We meet regularly with Tribal DDB to develop new ideas and explore trends in the interactive area that could be applicable to our company. The next update, which should be done as you read this, includes further department-specific career path information, more employee blogs (including audio blogs), and executive and board member profiles, as well as possible interactive gaming options.

Reinforcing Employment Brand

Our corporate brand ("Where everyone gets a bargain") is one of New Zealand's most recognized slogans. However, what The Warehouse stood for as an employer was less obvious to potential and current employees. We recognized that taking a more proactive approach to sourcing high-quality candidates and increasing the focus on retaining good performers were critical for us to achieve our strategic objectives. A fully-integrated employer branding strategy was designed to support the increased focus on attraction and retention. This strategy strongly emphasizes internal employer branding to emotionally tie team members to the business and assist with retention.

Using internal and external research as a base, we developed a new direction for our employer brand that is



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Lots of parents work at The Warehouse and enjoy rewarding work and a variety of shifts. To make a fresh start, visit us at www.thewarehousecareers.co.nz or call 0800 THE WAREHOUSE (0800 843 9273)

thewarehouse //
start here. go anywhere.



People feel proud to know those featured, what we stand for, and our achievements. This emotional connection with the brand has helped to increase engagement. The website strongly emphasizes the learning and development focus in our business. Traditional career opportunities within departments and less conventional paths across functions are highlighted. Department-specific information is designed to alert people to some of the amazing work going on in the business and to inspire them to join our team (or move across departments).

The virtual tours are a huge success. They are the primary way to show people the range of roles available—not just in stores (which are the public face of our business). It is an invaluable

feature as it has given us the opportunity to feature the less obvious roles and show the scale of our business, which is not always obvious to those on the outside looking in.

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closely linked to our corporate brand, but flexible enough to appeal directly to specific target groups. The brand “Start here. Go anywhere” was chosen as it perfectly highlights key differentiating factors: the huge variety of career options available and the opportunity employees have for a traditional career path, or lateral and cross functional moves. It also reflects the experiences of many of our employees who have developed their careers with the company.

Bottom-Line Results

Our site has had considerable bottom-line impact on The Warehouse as significant cost reduction has been achieved. Key tangible benefits include:

Our careers website is the showcase of our employer brand. The website has the advantage of containing large volumes of information that can easily be updated with the flexibility of tailoring information to appeal to the demographic groups we want to attract. The brand “Start here. Go anywhere” is fully integrated into our website. We feature many of our own team members who help bring the brand to life and are “living proof” that the opportunities for development are endless for those who want them.

- **A 68% reduction in advertising spend.** This reduction in advertising spend converts to an annual saving of just over \$100,000 and this is expected to reduce further as more in-store advertising is implemented and other low-cost attraction strategies are put into place.
- **A 69% reduction in recruitment agency spend.** This represents an annual savings of approximately \$350,000 and this reduction is due to our ability to attract candidates directly through the website and tap into candidates in the talent pool as required.

- **A 78% reduction in the average cost per hire (for all hires).**
- **An 80% reduction in new-hire failure rate in stores (those who leave within a three-month period of joining).** In a six-month period measured, new-hire failure rate for store team members recruited through the online application process is five times less than the failure rate of those recruited directly by stores. The average cost of replacing a store team member is approximately \$3,500, and the higher retention rate contributed to a bottom-line savings of more than \$200,000 in six months.
- **Talent pool size.** Since August, our external talent pool has grown at an average rate of 2,500 people per month and, as of the end of February, nearly 17,000 registered their details in our database. The continuing growth of the talent pool has significantly reduced the need for external advertising and expenditure on recruitment agencies.
- **Increased shortlist sizes.** In recent cases in which we have recruited the same roles as a year ago, The Warehouse has had a significant increase in the quality and number of applicants per role. We have received four times the volume of applications for some senior roles and have had shortlists of six to eight candidates (as opposed to one to two candidates a year ago). For many roles, we now have a far greater choice of applicants, which means that managers can afford to be very selective about whom they hire. Over time, this will have a significant impact on our business as the quality and capability increases due to better hiring decisions. A key intangible benefit is that the careers website has had a very positive impact on The Warehouse's reputation as an employer, which is also likely to have a positive spin-off effect on the whole retail

Click here to view a week in the life of one of our Operations Managers.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8 am	Load Microstrategy reports and store rankings	Finish off loading Microstrategy reports if not done yesterday/check next 3 weeks price change reports	Send advertising info pack to stores	Send "People Newsletter" out to stores and DCs	Send Grocery COE minutes
9 am				Look at comms review – talk over with Roy	Start on FOTW – try and keep it short!
10 am	Morning tea on the deck overlooking the amazing city view over the harbour!	Store Operations meeting to agree 3 key points for FOTW communication to stores	Send any general communications to stores		
11 am	Daily communications analysis of previous days work	Finish off FOTW and send it!			
12 pm	Prepare draft Focus of the Week (FOTW)	Lunch with Isabelle in Café – she's paying!			
1 pm		Look at next quarter workload planning – Book quiet room for thinking space.			
2 pm					Send URGENT price changes on bikes!
3 pm					Deadline for Focus of the Week contributions

industry as it showcases all the benefits of retail as a career. However, focusing on building our employer brand is helping us to differentiate ourselves from the ever-increasing competition in the retail sector.

There are many indicators that the perception of The Warehouse as an employer has changed significantly. Our talent pool has grown exponentially, suggesting that many people now consider us a legitimate career choice. Our

website was designed with a particularly strong focus on our team members, and feedback from them has been exceptionally positive. We designed a competition to encourage team members to go online and explore our careers website, which was very well received and drew hundreds of entries. Many team members have mentioned that the website “makes them feel proud to work for” us, and that it accurately captures the true team spirit that exists across our business.

Making it easier for team members to access information about jobs and providing information about potential career opportunities in turn makes them more likely to stay with us rather than move to our competitors. They may also be more likely to refer jobs to others if they feel emotionally connected to our organization.

Feedback from candidates applying for roles has also been very positive. They like being able to easily access in-depth information about The Warehouse and the interactive elements, which encourages them to spend more time exploring our site. The ease of applying for a job impresses many applicants. Feedback from overseas candidates indicates that they are impressed by the information available, and this may mean that they are more likely to submit their applications directly to us.

Our company’s work on our employer brand and careers website has led to us being nominated as a finalist in the World Retail Awards in the Employer of the Year category (the winner will be announced in Barcelona in April 2008), and we gained a Distinction Award in the HRINZ HR Initiative of the Year category.

The external publicity generated since the website went live has been exceptional. We have been cited three times in “The Herald” (NZ’s largest metropolitan newspaper), have been mentioned in “NZ Marketing Magazine,” and have been the basis for articles in “Employment Today” and “NZ Retailer.” Two Australasian employment-branding experts (Peter Sheahan and Brett Minchington)

have both cited us as a good example of an organization that has clearly targeted its attraction strategies to different demographic groups.

The Talent Team responsible for this work has presented externally three times on the employer brand work: to a sell-out crowd at an HRINZ event, to a management group at a conference, and to an industry breakfast seminar. It is also

presenting a paper on the initiative at The Australasian Talent Conference in Sydney in April 2008.

Overall, many tangible and intangible benefits have been achieved. While there has been a significant cost reduction, our focus is on achieving long-term benefits for the organization and making sure it is well positioned to achieve our strategic goals.

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Jane Davis is head of talent management for one of New Zealand’s largest retailers, The Warehouse. She has been with The Warehouse for the past two and a half years and is responsible for everything to do with talent: attraction and employer branding, sourcing, recruitment, talent identification, talent development, engagement, and retention. She started her career as an industrial and organizational psychologist in the Royal New Zealand Air Force and then spent 15 years as a consulting psychologist to many of New Zealand’s largest corporate organizations.