



Northumbria Business Clinic students with Louise Weeks (far left), People & Culture Manager at OddBalls.

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Students help OddBalls in top employer mission

Savvy students from Northumbria University Business Clinic have been helping one of the UK's most vibrant and distinctive underwear brands to showcase itself as a brilliant place to work.

The students, who are all studying business and human resource management at the University, were tasked with developing a comprehensive employer branding strategy for OddBalls Apparel, which sells more than 300 sleek underwear designs, cutting-edge sportswear and accessories to

customers all over the globe.

The strategy was designed to highlight current perceptions of OddBalls as an employer from internal and external perspectives and identify perks that the company offers to employees. From this, the students were asked to create a plan for promoting OddBalls to current and potential employees.

Louise Weeks, People & Culture Manager at OddBalls, said: “The main challenge for the students was to define and develop a compelling employer brand strategy, one that would clearly communicate who we are as an employer, what we stand for, and why talented individuals should want to work with us. This was part of our People & Culture project, which I established to demonstrate what the company offers to its employees including its culture, benefits, career growth opportunities and overall work environment.

“As a growing business, attracting and retaining the right people is critical. I wanted the strategy to reflect our values, culture and ambitions and to help differentiate us in a really competitive recruitment landscape.”

To gauge current perception of OddBalls, the students conducted two surveys: one to get the views of Oddballs’ employees and another survey of the general adult public. They researched employee benefits currently offered, training and development opportunities, workplace culture and communication strategies.

The students’ recommendations included enhanced pension and sickness packages, additional flexible working times and hybrid working building on the current hybrid model OddBalls already operates (88% of Oddballs staff surveyed said hybrid working is important to them), enhanced holiday allowance and the offer of private healthcare for staff. The menu of options tabled also included training for managers and the recruitment of an external consultant who could support OddBalls with the growth of its team and organisational culture development.

On the communications side of the equation, the students suggested advanced social media and artificial intelligence training for staff, as well as a graduate scheme to attract and retain top talent, e-learning courses to build on existing knowledge and the use of external experts to deliver face-to-face training sessions and tailored, one-to-one support for employees.

Katie Simmonds, Student Project Leader, said: “Getting the employee offering right is critical for a business like OddBalls, which is operating in an ultra-competitive marketplace. It’s a dangerous threat to corporate reputation if you get your offering wrong and you lose talented people to a competitor who’s willing to offer more attractive terms and conditions. Our recommendations are designed to make it easier for OddBalls to attract and retain top talent, improve its reputation and cement its position as a great place to work.”

Katie, who has secured a graduate role at finance giant EY after completing an internship there, added: “The Oddballs project has been a great opportunity and the skills and experience I’ve gained will be of great use at EY. The guidance and support from the Business Clinic tutors have helped my learning and made me feel more comfortable and confident working with clients.”

Students work at the Business Clinic within their final year of study, offering clients a full consultancy experience that takes in activities as diverse as feasibility studies including finance, investment and growth; HR including recruitment, retention and diversity; marketing including branding and digital; business analytics; logistics and supply chain management. The aim of each project is to undertake research and make recommendations that will benefit organisations in the short and long term.

Ed Cottam, director of the Business Clinic, said: “The students got the opportunity to work with an internationally recognised brand in OddBalls to complement their academic studies. Their sterling work on this meaningful project freed up time for Louise to manage the wider aspects of the business.

“At the Business Clinic we aim to power an inclusive economy by placing more of our graduates in highly skilled professions. Katie’s experience here, and her work placement at EY, has enabled her to secure a high-quality job when she graduates and this is testament to her dedication, commercial nous and creativity – attributes that she showcased in abundance on this project.”

The Business Clinic has delivered 870 consultancy projects involving more than 3,500 students across all business subjects since it was founded in 2013. It offers pro-bono consultancy support to SMEs, multi-national organisations, charitable organisations, educational trusts and social enterprises that operate across a wide range of sectors, both in the North East of England as

well as further afield in the UK and overseas.

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