

case study

employer
brand research
2021.



employer
branding at
mercado
libre.

caring when it counts.

Employer brands reflect and project the culture of an organization. Already a magnet for talent as a result of its disruptive profile and culture of innovation, Mercado Libre's support for employee health and wellbeing during the upheaval of COVID-19 has reinforced its standout

employer brand. We asked Antonella Scola, Culture & Experience Senior Manager, to explain the importance of talent in navigating through the pandemic, and how Mercado Libre has risen to this ultimate test of its purpose, values, and culture.

Established in 1999, Mercado Libre (MELI) has grown to become Latin America's largest ecommerce group.

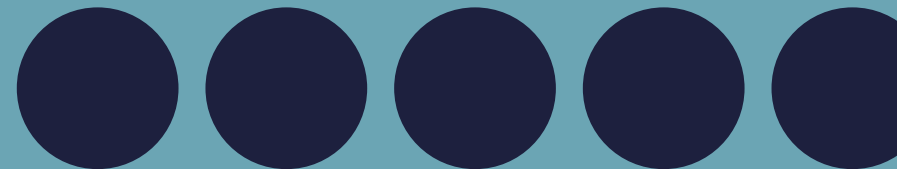
MELI's mission is to democratize commerce and payments by enabling people to buy and sell anything online. Every day, the company enables more than 130 million users in 18 countries to buy, sell, advertise, send, finance, and pay for goods and services with its trademark ease, efficiency, and speed.


The sense of a company that never stands still comes through strongly in our interview with Antonella. "What drives us and binds us as an organization is the adrenaline rush of entrepreneurship. Our entrepreneurial culture is about giving our best every day, executing with excellence to create value for our customers, taking risks and constantly learning," she says.

To illustrate what "giving our best" means in practice, Antonella cites the example of the people who pick, package, and prepare products for delivery. "Our people take exceptional pride in their work. Rather than just handling a product or package, we encourage them to see this as fulfilling a promise to the buyer," she says.

Describing what excellence means for her and her team, Antonella highlights their determination to manage people in a world-class way: "We want our company culture to reverberate around the organization. We want our people to be their true selves, and express themselves freely at work. We want them to fulfil their potential, while at the same time having fun."

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more than just a job

MELI's workforce spans a range of different talents from software, marketing, and business development teams to contact and distribution center personnel. Antonella explains that people are hired for their attitude as much as their skills and experience: "We're looking for people with the necessary adaptability and cultural fit to thrive in a fast-moving business like ours. We want people with an entrepreneurial spark. People who want to make a difference, and leave their mark."

The selection process reflects this focus on mindset and cultural fit. This includes placing candidates in everyday work situations, and gauging their reactions. "The people we want to attract view the place where they work as more than a job. It connects them with something bigger; a place where they feel they are making a difference. Our entrepreneurial culture vibrates in every corner, in every operation and in each of the people who make up and join our team".

Team members also gauge factors such as their ability to learn quickly and think on their feet. Feedback is entered into a mobile app straight after the interview so the hiring manager can make a fast and informed decision. They can then communicate this quickly to the candidate rather than making them wait around.

Once hired, Antonella describes how MELI seeks to instill its culture: "Culture is at the heart of our welcome for new recruits – 'Ownboarding' as we call it is an immersion and integration experience that runs for 90 days, led by ambassadors of our culture. In turn, adaptability is reinforced through the chance to participate in challenging projects, giving loads of opportunities to develop new skills and experience. Ultimately, we believe that the best way to instill culture is through the example of leaders. Their behavior speaks louder than words."

navigating the pandemic

As demand for home delivery rocketed up during lockdown, staff numbers at MELI more than doubled in 2020 to reach 15,000. The company now plans to take on a further 16,000 recruits, reaching 32,000 permanent employees at the end of 2021.

Commercially, MELI's success is reflected in the doubling of its market capitalization in 2020. However fast MELI grows, the company is determined not to lose sight of its responsibilities to employees, partner businesses and wider society. Antonella believes that "the upheaval of the pandemic has provided a great opportunity to test our culture, our entrepreneurial DNA. From the outset, we sought to respond with speed and agility. From a people management perspective, our three key priorities have been taking care of the physical and emotional health of our team, ensuring the continuity of operations, and supporting the community."

The immediate challenges included migrating more than 10,000 employees to remote working in less than 24 hours, while keeping the business running and sustaining productivity. Alongside the operational and technological hurdles, Antonella emphasizes "the vital importance of supporting the wellbeing of employees. Factors such as isolation or difficulties in organizing routines can all take their toll." To help address this, the company has implemented a range of initiatives including personalized psychological support, daily mindfulness sessions, and recommendations by specialists on sleep, resilience, parenting, stress, and anxiety management. The company also makes sure that remote staff don't miss out on the benefits of working onsite. For example, they can use their Mercado Pago virtual wallet to benefit from the same 70% discount in local restaurants and supermarkets they would receive at the onsite canteen.

For people working in distribution centers, the overriding priorities are safeguarding physical and mental health. This includes developing an interactive 'bot' to advise on safety measures, and a phone app that tracks close contacts, warns workers if they are coming too near and advises them if they need to preventatively isolate. The company also offers yoga and relaxation sessions, along with one-click access to a doctor through its virtual medical service.

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To further strengthen the health and wellbeing of employees, MELI has since 2020 been working with Ineco, a non-profit organization that specializes in neuroscience. All staff receive a regular confidential questionnaire to find out how they are feeling. They then receive follow-up guidance by professional counsellors. The Ineco data also helps the people team to determine ways to improve support. Recently this has included more initiatives to promote exercise and social connection.

The latest Randstad Employer Brand Research shows how such care for employees fosters allegiance. Over two-thirds of the 190,000 people taking part globally (68%) now feel more loyal to their employers as a result of the support they've received during the pandemic.

test of purpose

MELI has demonstrated its commitment to society by enabling small businesses affected by lockdown to continue selling their products. “By keeping our warehouses working and expanding capacity we have ensured that the thousands of entrepreneurs and small businesses that sell through our platforms can continue to have a source of income. We’ve backed this up by eliminating commissions on essential products and facilitating access to credit,” says Antonella.

Further support includes providing employment for people who had to be laid off by catering groups affected by loss of business during lockdown. This helped MELI to meet its recruitment targets and preserve hundreds of jobs. Interviewed for a profile on MELI for Randstad Argentina’s times of talent series, Camilo Rodríguez, one of the people recruited in this way, reported that: “We adapted very well to the working environment enabling us to work in such a big, high-quality company.” Sol Mascari shared this sentiment: “What surprised me was the development and learning opportunities.”

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Alongside MELI’s entrepreneurial DNA, this support for employees and the community is at the heart of the company’s employer brand. “We want to project our purpose and ability to make an impact. We also want to show that we’re with our people all the way. This includes helping them to fulfil their individual aspirations, while taking care of their physical, emotional, and mental health,” says Antonella. “If we get this right, our people will spread the word around and help us to attract more great talent. The best ambassadors for our employer brand are our people.”



projecting the employer brand

Key features of MELI's employer brand are common to all markets, though it can be adapted to local circumstances and the different types of talent it seeks to attract. "Our flexible value proposition allows us to reach out to different people in a targeted way, and align the message to their aspirations," explains Antonella. "Through our profiles on social networks, we convey who we are, how we work, what inspires us, and how our achievements make us feel."

In order to project MELI's employer brand in the most effective way, Antonella emphasizes the importance of people telling their own stories, in their own words: "The voices of our colleagues are the best way to convey our unique DNA in an authentic and credible way. We also use this personal approach to get our story across through forums, webinars and in events and initiatives that we carry out in alliance with different universities and NGOs in the region."

improving the candidate experience

The big challenges ahead include selecting 16,000 new permanent recruits from a projected 700,000 applications over the coming year.

In response, MELI redesigned its candidate experience in 2020. This includes a new job site to help simplify the application process. The company also deploys an artificial intelligence engine to analyze CVs, and match them to available opportunities.

In order to guarantee the quality of the candidate experience, MELI sends out a sign-off survey the day after contact. This allows it to capture invaluable insights about interviews, contact times or even the tools in use. Resulting developments include integrating the company's careers site and WhatsApp channel.

the human touch

So, what does the future hold? What's certain is that we're going to be hearing a lot more about what the London Financial Times has described as a "titan of ecommerce". "As we expand, we can be an engine of economic recovery, while helping partner businesses to digitize distribution and adapt to changing consumer preferences," says Antonella.

At the same time, this is a company that prizes the human touch, and is determined to operate on a human scale. Indeed, Antonella describes one of the big lessons of the last year as never underestimating the value of personal engagement: "Face-to-face contacts play a key role in instilling our culture. They promote bonding, social connection, motivation, and inspiration. In a company built around innovation, creativity, and collaboration, we believe that meeting in person is essential. The challenge will be how to preserve this within the new 'hybrid' ways of working."


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knowledge base

what we can learn about employer branding from Mercado Libre

- Employer brands and company culture are inseparable. Companies with a strong culture like MELI have strong employer brands.
- How people feel at work and how they're treated are critical elements of both a culture and an employer brand. MELI has applied its culture of innovation to strengthen support and protection for employees.
- Every member of staff has a crucial part to play in the success of a company, and projecting its employer brand. If they feel part of your purpose and pride in their work, they'll give their best, and want to tell their family and friends about what a great place this is to work.
- A good candidate experience can not only create a positive impression of the company among potential recruits, but also encourage people to brush up on their skills and apply again even if they aren't successful first time.

employees are the best employer brand ambassadors, communicating what it's really like to work for a company to family, friends and their social media network.

A man and a woman are smiling and looking at a smartphone together. The man is on the left, wearing a light blue shirt, and the woman is on the right, wearing a yellow top. They are both looking at the phone held by the woman. The background is a blurred office setting with a red wall on the right. A thin white horizontal line is at the top of the page.

it takes actions rather
than just words to give
people the confidence
to be their true selves
at work.



antonella scola
culture & experience senior
manager, mercado libre

Antonella Scola leads the Internal Communication & Employer Brand strategy in Mercado Libre in eight countries with an impact on more than 26,000 people.

Antonella previously worked at Accenture, Galicia, and The Hershey Company. During her career journey, she has managed talent attraction, learning, development, employer brand, culture, communication, change management, engagement, and recognition.

antonella is a firm believer that people are the most important driver for success in any organization.

Antonella has a degree in Labor Relations from the University of Buenos Aires. She did postgraduate studies at the University of Oxford (UK), the University of International Business and Economics (China) and the Tampere University of Applied Sciences (Finland).