



The Wallpaper Problem

Why most **careers websites**
look lovely, say nothing,
and quietly bore the very people
they are trying to attract...

There is a particular kind of sadness that only a careers website can produce.

You arrive full of hope. Perhaps you have clicked through from a job advert. Perhaps you have been told the company has “an amazing culture”. Perhaps you are killing ten minutes between meetings and wondering whether your current employer would notice if you quietly slipped out of the building disguised as someone with purpose.

And there it is.

The careers website.

A big hero image of three improbably happy employees pointing at a laptop. A headline that says something like:

“Join our journey.”

Underneath, inevitably:

“Our people are our greatest asset.”

Then come the usual suspects. About us. Why work here. Our people. Early careers. Diversity and inclusion. How to apply. Search jobs.

It is clean. It is responsive. It is on brand. It has passed accessibility checks. It probably has a video of someone called Sophie saying she “loves the people.”

And yet, somehow, it is dead.

Not technically dead. It loads. It scrolls. It functions. But emotionally, it is lying in a tasteful corporate coffin wearing smart-casual chinos.

This is the wallpaper problem.

Most careers websites are not built as experiences. They are built as polite extensions of the corporate website. A slightly warmer, slightly smilier, slightly more denim-clad version of the mothership.

They borrow the colours, the navigation, the visual system and the jargon, then add a few lifestyle photos and hope candidates will feel something.

They rarely do.

Because in the war for talent, nice is not enough. Usable is not enough. On brand is not enough. Beautiful is not enough.

The best careers websites are not merely designed.

They are conceived.

They begin with an **idea**.



The great careers website has become a very attractive brochure rack

There was a time when having a careers website at all felt progressive. It was a digital shop window. A place to list jobs, explain benefits and reassure candidates that the company had humans in it.

But candidates have changed. Attention has changed. Expectations have changed. The internet has changed.

Today, people can smell corporate filler from three tabs away.

They are not sitting patiently at home thinking, “I do hope this employer provides me with a comprehensive overview of its values framework.”

They are scrolling, comparing, judging, dipping in and out, half-distracted, fully sceptical. They have seen enough stock photography to identify “diverse group of colleagues in breakout space” at twenty paces. They have read “bring your whole self to work” so many times that their whole self would quite like a lie down.

And yet many careers websites still follow the same formula:

1. Big inspiring image
2. Vague purpose headline
3. Culture copy
4. Employee stories
5. Benefits
6. Recruitment process
7. Job search
8. Footer the size of Belgium



There is nothing inherently wrong with these ingredients. Candidates do need information. They do need to understand the company, the roles, the process and the offer.

The problem is not the content.

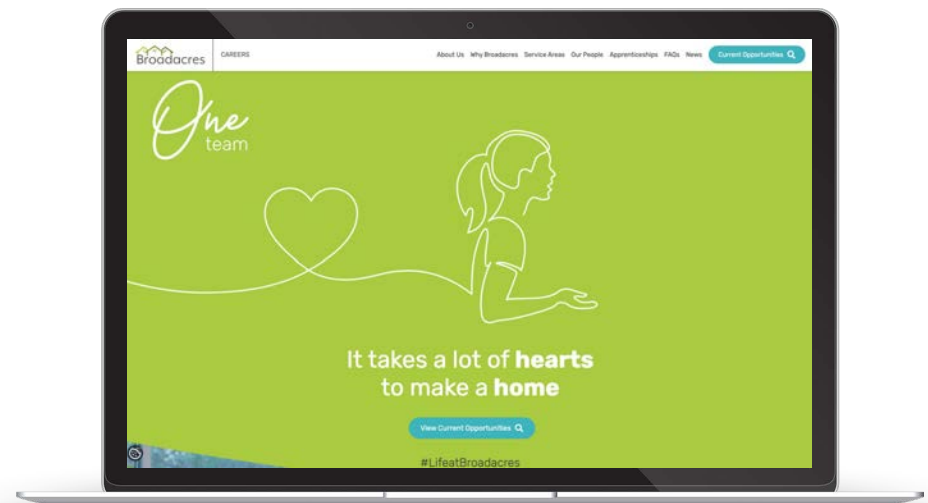
The problem is the absence of **concept**.

It is the difference between a menu and a meal. A set of ingredients and a dish. A suit on a hanger and someone wearing it with intent.

A careers website should not simply contain information. It should create a feeling. It should make a promise. It should dramatise what it means to belong there.

When it does not, it becomes wallpaper.

...And wallpaper, however expensive, **rarely changes anyone's life.**



Style over substance: the great seduction

The modern web design process often begins in entirely the wrong place.

Moodboards. Components. UI patterns. Page templates. Hero treatments. Navigation. Cards. Grids. Animations. Image crops. Buttons with satisfyingly rounded corners.

All useful. All necessary. All capable of making something look expensive.

But none of them are an **idea**.

A beautifully designed careers site without a concept is like a very well-dressed person with nothing to say. Charming for about eight seconds, then increasingly difficult to have dinner with.

This is where many organisations go wrong. They commission a site and ask: “What should it look like?”



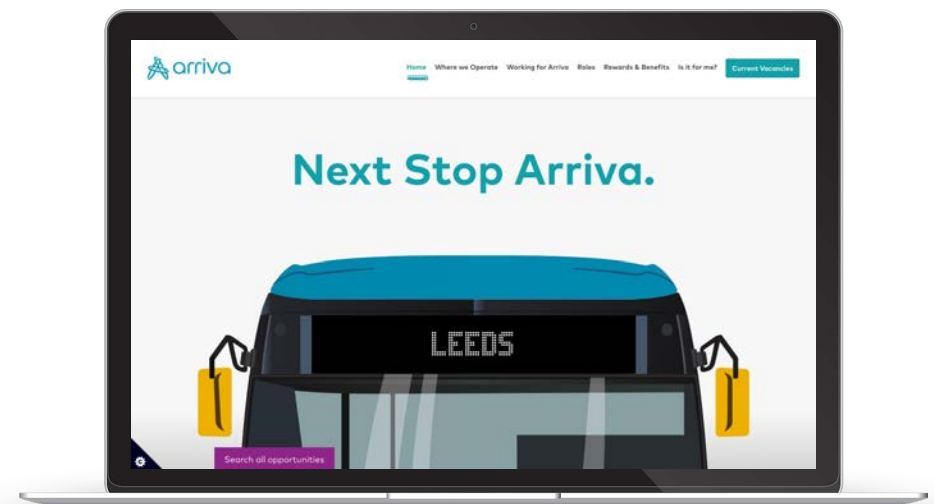
The better question is:

“What should it make people feel, do and remember?”

Design should not be the starting point. Design should be the delivery mechanism for the idea.

The concept is the engine. Design is the bodywork.

Without the engine, all you have is something shiny being pushed downhill by a tired project team.



Candidates do not fall in love with navigation

Nobody has ever accepted a job because the secondary menu was elegant.

Nobody has ever said, “I was unsure about applying, but then I saw the breadcrumb trail.”

Navigation matters, of course. So does UX. So does performance. So does accessibility. So does clear job search. A careers website that is clever but impossible to use is not a brand experience. It is a puzzle room with a pension scheme.

But once the fundamentals are in place, the question becomes bigger:

What is the hook?

What is the moment that makes someone lean in?

What is the interaction they remember?

What is the line they repeat to someone else?

What is the idea that belongs only to this employer?



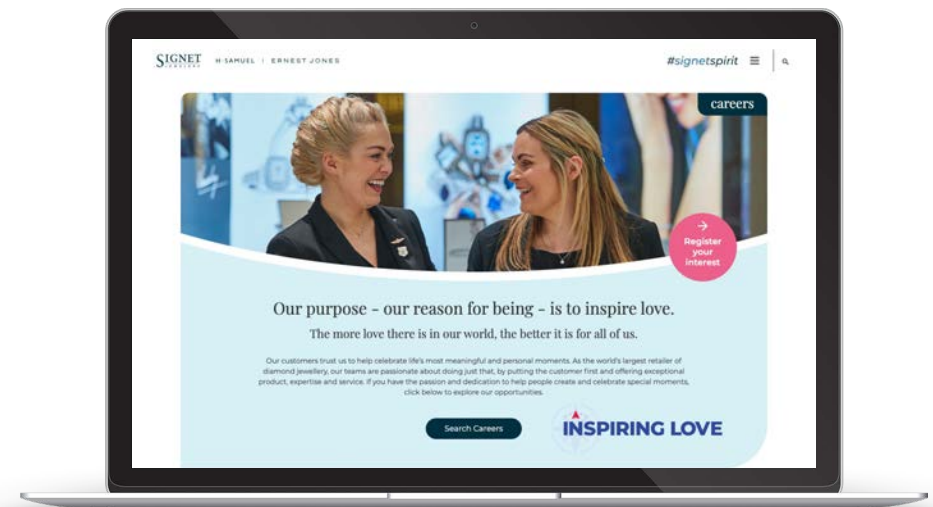
Because the best careers websites do not just explain the employer brand.

They embody it.

They turn the organisation's truth into an experience.

That is where the magic is.

Not in another carousel of smiling people holding reusable coffee cups.



The Starbucks example: making the site YOURS

Take the **Starbucks EMEA careers site**.

The concept starts with a simple human behaviour everyone recognises. You walk into Starbucks. You order a coffee. They ask your name. Your name goes on the cup...

That tiny ritual is part of the brand's everyday **theatre**.

So the careers website asks the same question:

What's your name?

Then it uses your name across the experience. On the cup. In the content. In the journey. The site becomes personalised, playful and immediately more human.

It does not simply tell you Starbucks is warm, welcoming and people-centred.

It behaves that way.

That is the crucial **distinction**.

A wallpaper careers site says, "We value individuality."

A concept-led careers site asks your name and puts it at the heart of the experience.

One is a claim. The other is **proof**.

And proof is far more persuasive than another paragraph beginning "At Starbucks, our partners..."





CAREERS.

Go Grande.

Working at Starbucks

Retail

Support Centres

Apprenticeships

Our Licensees

Login | EN

Search →

Hi there!
What's your name?

Go!

Hello Lucy



15:34

starbucksemeacareers.com



CAREERS. *Go Grande.*



Hi there!
What's your name?

Go!



Hello Sarah

By bringing people together over coffee, Starbucks has become one of the world's best-known and best loved companies. Working at Starbucks is a lot like working with your friends! When you work here, you're not an "employee" – we call ourselves "partners" because we believe in shared common goals and mutual success. Our partners are our greatest resource.

The Warburtons example: when the idea RISES

Warburtons offers another kind of lesson.

Bread rises. Careers rise. People rise. The working day begins with toast, warmth, smell, comfort, routine and a small but powerful act of domestic happiness.

So the idea becomes active. “**Rise and shine.**” A video concept around bread rising. An interactive toast game. A careers website that takes the product truth and turns it into candidate engagement.

This matters because the experience is not bolted on.

It comes from the **brand**.

It could not belong as naturally to a bank, a software company or an insurance provider. It is specific. It is ownable. It has texture. It makes the employer feel alive.

That is what concept does.

It finds the thing that is already **true** and gives it a **pulse**.

Family
Bakers
WarburtonS

Warburtons

Family
Values

PART OF THE

Family

PART OF THE STORY

Login/Register

Home

About

Family ▾

Rewards

Development

Values

Useful info

Locations

Search

Rise — AND — Shine

engineers

PART OF THE
Family
PART OF THE STORY

drivers

play catch the toast!



The deadly sameness of “why work here?”

One of the great tragedies of modern careers websites is the “Why work here?” page.

It should be the most seductive page on the site. The page where the employer makes its case. The page that says: “Here is why your future might be better with us in it.”

Instead, it often reads like it was assembled in a windowless room by a committee armed with Post-it notes and fear.

You know the structure:

- We’re innovative
- We’re inclusive
- We’re collaborative
- We’re passionate
- We offer development
- We care about wellbeing
- We have benefits
- Please clap

None of these things are bad.

The problem is that everyone says them.

When everyone says they are innovative, inclusive, collaborative and passionate, the words stop working. They become corporate air freshener. Pleasant at first, then suspicious.

A great careers website does not just state reasons to join. It dramatises them.

- If development is the promise, show me what growth feels like.
- If belonging is the promise, let me experience being welcomed.
- If pace is the promise, make the site move with energy.
- If craft is the promise, obsess over detail.
- If courage is the promise, say something brave.
- If humour is part of the culture, make me laugh before I reach the benefits page.

Candidates are not looking for a list of approved adjectives.

They are looking for **evidence**.



What concept-led actually means

“Concept-led” is not a posh way of saying “quirky”.

It does not mean adding a game because someone in a meeting said, “Could we make it more Gen Z?”

It does not mean forcing interactivity into places where it becomes annoying, like a chatbot that pops up every eleven seconds asking if you need help while you are clearly trying to read the pension information.

Concept-led means the site is built around a central creative thought. A thought that is:

True to the employer.

It comes from something real: the work, the culture, the product, the people, the customer experience, the heritage, the ambition.

Relevant to the candidate.

It connects with what people care about: belonging, growth, purpose, pride, flexibility, challenge, identity, progression, security, adventure.

Distinctive in the market.

It does not feel interchangeable. You could not swap the logo and pretend it belongs to anyone else.

Flexible enough to shape the experience.

It can influence headlines, navigation, interactions, page structure, content, motion, photography, film, job search and application journeys.

Simple enough to explain in one sentence.

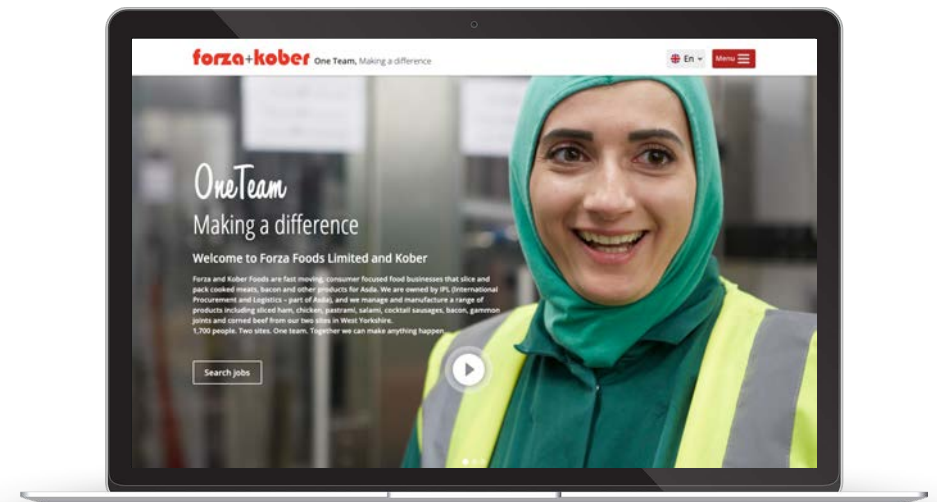
If the concept needs a thirty-slide deck and a supporting interpretive dance, it may not be the concept.

The best ideas are simple at the centre and rich at the edges.

“What’s your name?” is simple.

“Rise and shine” is simple.

But each opens a door to an entire **experience**.



Why careers websites need headlines again

Somewhere along the way, careers websites lost their appetite for great headlines.

They became obsessed with labels.

“Life at X.”
“Our culture.”
“Meet our people.”
“Rewards and benefits.”
“Application process.”



These are not headlines. They are filing cabinet tabs.

A headline should do something. It should provoke, charm, intrigue, reassure, challenge or invite. It should make the next click feel inevitable.

Careers websites need copywriting with a bit of blood in it. Not reckless. Not gimmicky. Not “Hey rockstar ninja unicorn, come disrupt the future with our squad!” That sort of thing should be locked in a cupboard with beanbags and the phrase “work hard, play hard”.



But candidates deserve language with personality.

Instead of:

“Our people are at the heart of everything we do.”

Try:

“You’ll meet the best people here. Some of them will even be in meetings.”

Instead of:

“We offer opportunities for growth and development.”

Try:

“Come in curious. Leave with stories, scars and a bigger job title.”

Instead of:

“We are committed to inclusion.”

Try:

“Different is not difficult here.”

Instead of:

“Search our latest vacancies.”

Try:

“Find the role that makes Monday less ridiculous.”

The point is not to be funny for the sake of it. The point is to sound like someone is awake.

A careers site is often the first meaningful conversation a candidate has with an employer. Too many begin that conversation like a legal disclaimer wearing perfume.

Interaction is not decoration

A good interaction should not be a party trick.

It should deepen understanding, increase emotional investment or help the candidate make a better decision.

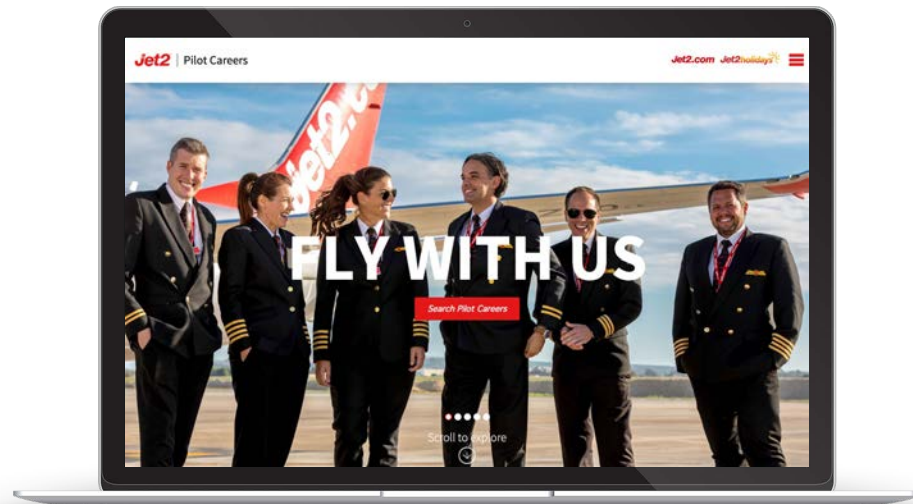
There is a difference between interaction and fiddling.

Fiddling is when candidates are made to click, drag, spin, swipe or decode something purely because the design team discovered a plugin.

Interaction is when the candidate participates in the story.

The Starbucks name mechanic works because participation is part of the **brand ritual**.

The Warburtons toast game works because it is connected to the product, the humour and the **warmth** of the brand.



A great careers website might invite candidates to:

- Build their ideal shift and see which role fits them.
- Choose what motivates them and receive a personalised career pathway.
- Explore a day in the life through decisions rather than passive video.
- Take a “culture weather report” to see how they like to work.
- Unlock employee stories based on what matters most to them.
- Navigate the business through real workplace dilemmas.
- See how their skills transfer into unexpected roles.
- Create a personalised “first week” preview.
- Play with the product in a way that reveals the work behind it.
- Vote on workplace myths and discover what is actually true.

The best interaction creates ownership.

The candidate stops being a visitor and becomes a participant.

That is when bounce rate starts to behave itself.

The enemy is not corporate brand. The enemy is obedience.

A careers website should respect the corporate brand. It should feel connected. It should not look like a rogue intern built it over a weekend after discovering gradients.

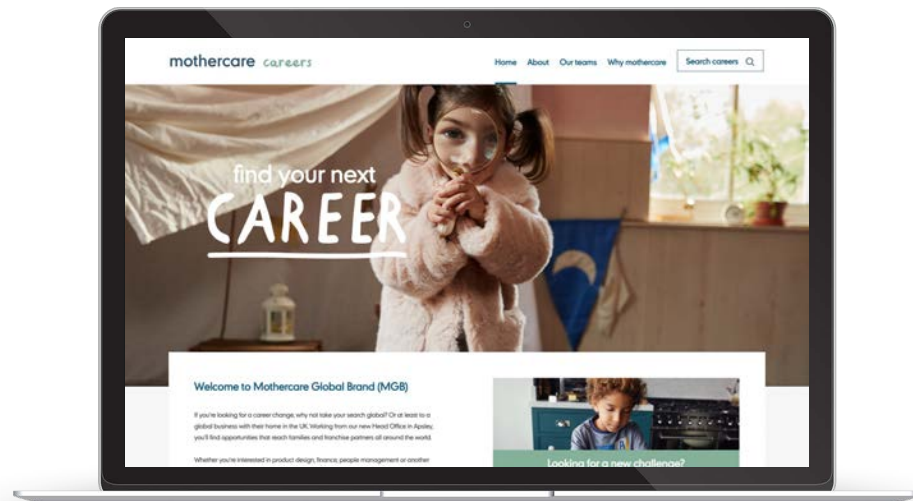
But respecting the corporate brand does not mean becoming its beige younger sibling.

Employer brand has a different job.

Corporate brand often speaks to customers, investors, partners and the market. Employer brand speaks to people making deeply personal decisions about their time, identity, income, ambition and future. That requires a different kind of intimacy.

A candidate is not buying a product. They are considering giving you their weekdays.

That is enormous.



They are asking:



- Will I belong here?
- Will I grow here?
- Will I be bored?
- Will I be respected?
- Will this make my life better or just add another branded lanyard to the drawer?
- Will I be proud to tell people I work here?
- Will I still recognise myself in six months?

A careers website must answer these questions emotionally as well as practically.

Corporate consistency matters. But emotional specificity matters more.

The most effective careers websites know when to inherit the brand and when to interpret it.

They do not rebel for the sake of rebellion.

They rebel against blandness.

The recruitment team deserves better than a template

Recruitment teams are often under huge pressure. Fill roles.
Reduce time to hire. Improve candidate quality. Increase diversity.
Lower agency spend. Make the ATS behave like it was built this century.
Smile through budget conversations. Smile harder through stakeholder conversations.

Then, when the careers website is commissioned, the brief often becomes strangely conservative.

“We need something clean.”

“We need something professional.”

“We need something easy to update.”

“We need to cover all the content.”



These are reasonable needs. But they are not ambitions.

No one wins talent by being merely comprehensive.

The careers site should be one of the recruitment team's most powerful assets:

A magnet.

A filter.

A storyteller.

A persuader.

A proof point.

A place where people begin to imagine themselves inside the organisation.



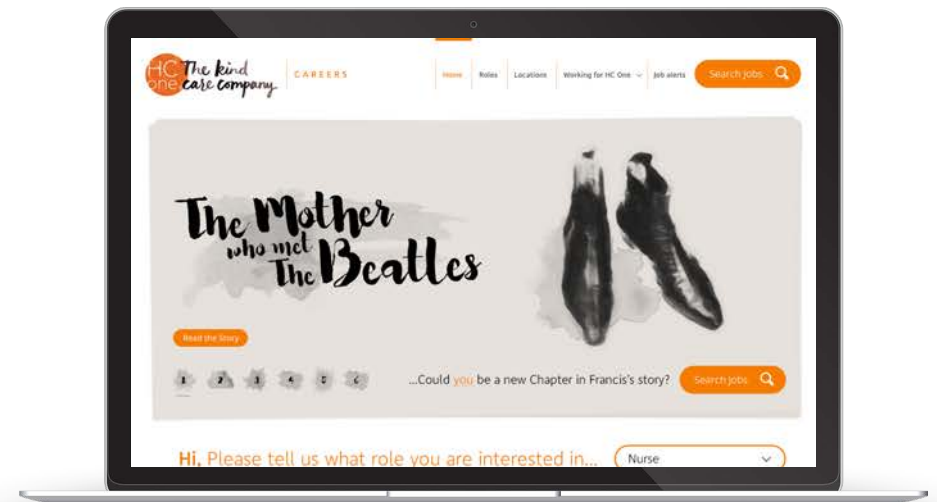
It should make recruiters' jobs easier by warming candidates before the first conversation.

It should help the right people opt in and the wrong people opt out.

It should express the employer brand so clearly that interviews begin halfway down the funnel, not at the foot of the mountain.

A concept-led careers website is not indulgence.

It is recruitment strategy with better clothes.



Fresh ideas for a new generation of careers websites

The next generation of careers websites should be braver, more useful and more memorable. Not louder. Not busier. Not “immersive” in the sense that your laptop fan begins to sound like a small aircraft.

Better.

Here are some territories worth exploring.

The candidate as main character

Most careers websites talk about the employer far too much.

“We are this.”

“We do that.”

“We believe these things.”

“We have won this award.”

“We have offices with plants.”

A more engaging site makes the candidate the protagonist.

Imagine a homepage that begins:

“What kind of workday are you looking for?”

The candidate chooses: fast, steady, social, technical, creative, practical, independent, customer-facing, physical, strategic.

The site responds with roles, stories and pathways shaped around them.

Not a generic employer broadcast. A guided personal journey.

The anti-job description

Job descriptions are often where enthusiasm goes to be stapled.

A careers website could reframe roles through truth, humour and clarity:

- **The brilliant bits.**
- **The difficult bits.**
- **The bits people never mention until week three.**
- **The kind of person who thrives here.**
- **The kind of person who probably won't.**

This honesty is magnetic. Candidates do not expect perfection.

They expect reality. When an employer is honest about challenge, the praise becomes more believable.

The “choose your first week” experience

Instead of passive onboarding copy, let candidates explore their first week.

Monday: meet the team.

Tuesday: shadow someone.

Wednesday: try a task.

Thursday: make a mistake safely.

Friday: feel like you might actually belong.

This could be interactive, role-specific and full of real employee voices.

It helps candidates picture the leap.

And picturing the leap is often what makes people **jump**.

The myth-busting careers site

Every employer has myths.

“It’s too corporate.”
“It’s only for graduates.”
“You need industry experience.”
“The hours are brutal.”
“There’s no progression.”
“It’s not creative.”
“It’s just a stepping stone.”

A brave careers site names the myths and answers them directly.
Not defensively. Humanly.

“Heard we’re all spreadsheets and sensible shoes? Fair. But not quite.”
Candidates already have assumptions. Ignoring them does not make them disappear. It just means the conversation happens without you.

The culture simulator

Culture is hard to explain because it is not what you say. It is what happens when things get busy, awkward, late, expensive or political.

A culture simulator could present real workplace moments:
A customer is unhappy.
A deadline moves.
A teammate needs help.
A manager gives feedback.
A meeting goes sideways.
A new idea challenges the old way.

The candidate chooses what they would do, then sees how the organisation tends to respond.

Suddenly culture is not a list of values. It **is** behaviour.

The “day in the life” that is not another video

Day-in-the-life videos can be lovely, but many follow the same pattern:

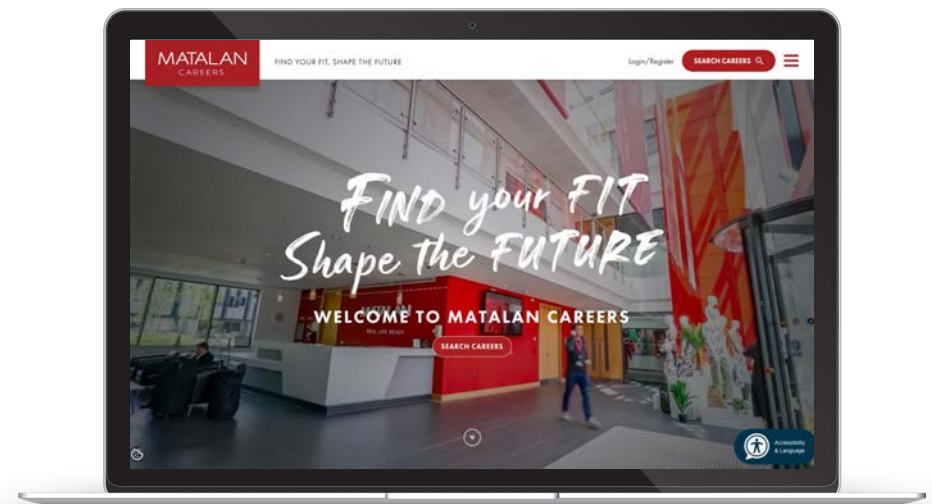
Person enters building.
Person smiles at coffee machine.
Person says no two days are the same.
Person points at laptop.
Person says the people are amazing.
Fade out.

Everyone involved feels safe.

Instead, make the day interactive.

Let candidates choose a role and move through real moments, decisions, sounds, messages, tasks and trade-offs. Show the rhythm of the work. The pace. The small wins. The chaos. The pride.

A real day is more interesting than a polished day.



The benefits translator

Benefits pages are often written as if candidates are procurement departments.

“25 days annual leave, salary sacrifice, employee assistance programme, cycle to work scheme, pension contribution...”

Useful, yes. Inspiring, rarely.

Translate benefits into **life**...

For when you need a proper break.

For future you.

For the days when life goes feral.

For your body, your brain and your bank account.

For getting here, getting home and getting on.

Same information. More humanity.



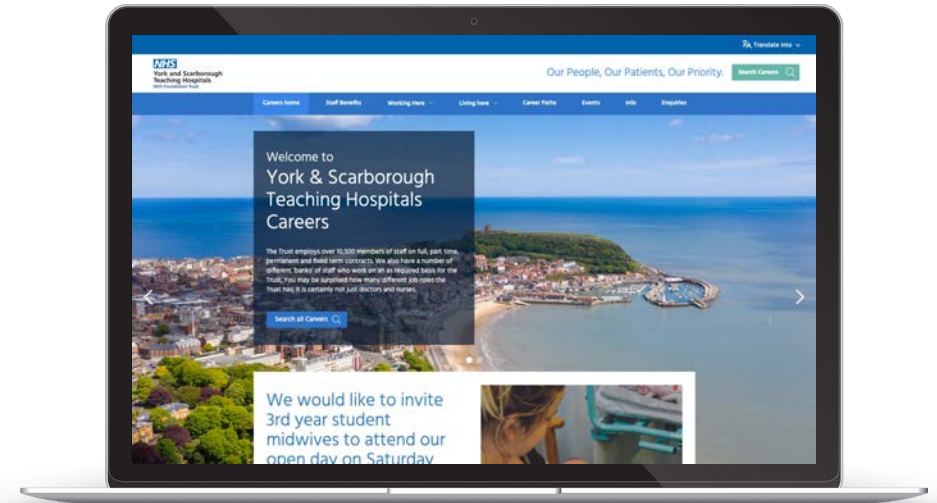
The rejection-respect promise

The candidate experience includes people who do not get the job. Most careers websites pretend this group does not exist, despite the fact they are often the majority.

A powerful concept could include a visible promise:

“However far you get, we’ll treat your time like it matters.”

Then explain response times, feedback principles, accessibility support, interview expectations and what candidates can expect at each stage. In a world of ghosting, respect is radical.



What a great careers website must do

A careers website has several jobs. Not one. Several.

- It must attract.
- It must inform.
- It must persuade.
- It must reassure.
- It must filter.
- It must differentiate.
- It must convert.
- It must support recruitment teams.
- It must reduce uncertainty.
- It must make the employer feel worth considering.

But above all, it must make people care.

That is the hardest part. And it is the part most often neglected.

A technically correct careers website can still fail emotionally.

A beautifully designed careers website can still be forgettable.

A content-rich careers website can still say nothing meaningful.

Greatness lives in the combination of usefulness and imagination.
The candidate should leave thinking:

- “I understand them.”
- “I remember them.”
- “I can see myself there.”
- “I want to know more.”

That is the holy quartet.



How to brief for concept, not wallpaper

If recruitment teams want better careers websites, they need to brief differently.

Do not start with pages. Start with belief.

Ask:

- What is the most compelling truth about working here?
- What do people love once they join?
- What surprises new starters?
- What do candidates misunderstand about us?
- What kind of people thrive here?
- What kind of people do not?
- What is the emotional reason to join?
- What is the rational reason to join?
- What could we say that competitors cannot?
- What could we do on the site that proves it?



Then ask the most important question:

What is the idea?

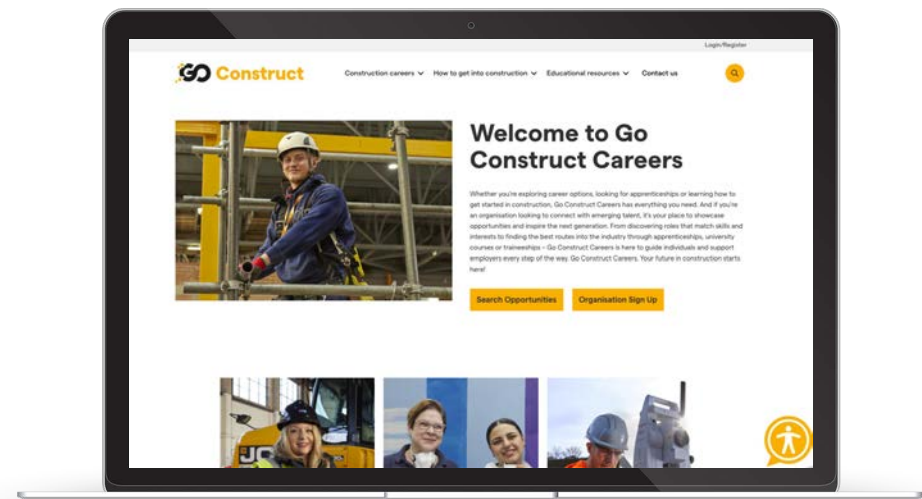
Not the sitemap. Not the design route. Not the CMS. Not the stock library. **The idea.**

A strong creative partner should be able to articulate the concept before showing a single layout.

Because once the idea is right, everything else has direction.

Headlines sharpen. Design decisions make sense. Interactions have purpose. Content earns its place. The site becomes more than a container.

It becomes a campaign, a conversation and a candidate experience.



A small plea for bravery

Blandness is usually not caused by a lack of talent.

It is caused by fear.

- **Fear of being too different.**
- **Fear of alienating someone.**
- **Fear of stakeholders.**
- **Fear of legal.**
- **Fear of humour.**
- **Fear of personality.**
- **Fear of being remembered for the wrong reasons.**



So everyone sands the edges down until the work is smooth, safe and entirely forgettable.

But in recruitment, forgettable is expensive.

If candidates cannot remember you, they cannot choose you.

If they cannot feel you, they cannot imagine joining you.

If your careers site looks and sounds like everyone else's, you are asking the job title, salary and location to do all the heavy lifting.

Sometimes that is enough.

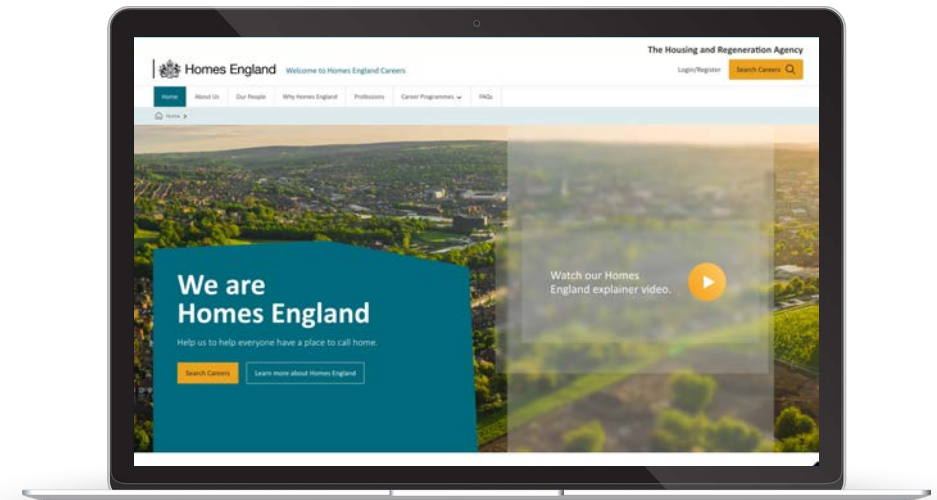
Often, it is not.

The organisations that win hearts and minds will be the ones brave enough to act like they actually want to be chosen.

They will commission careers websites that entertain without trivialising, inform without sedating, and persuade without shouting.

They will stop asking, "Can we have a careers site?"

And start asking, "What experience would make the right person want to belong here?"



The future belongs to the idea-led employer

The careers website is no longer a digital noticeboard.

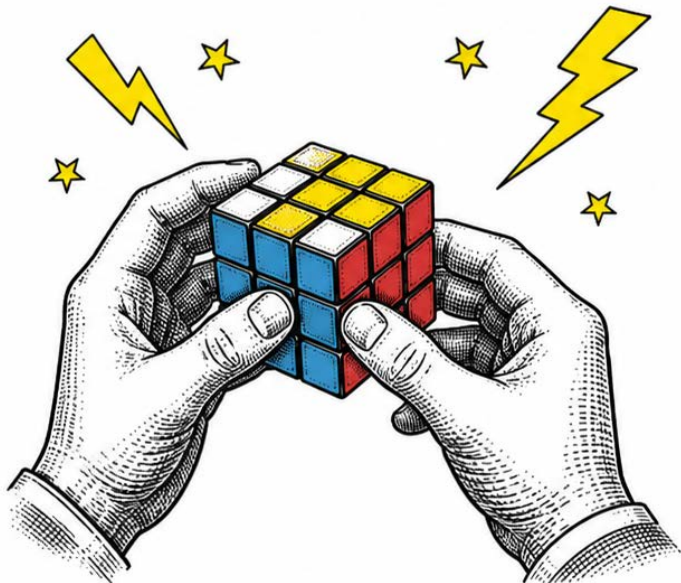
It is a front door. A handshake. A first date. A shop window. A backstage pass. A promise. A filter. A story. A test of whether the organisation understands people at all.

The old formula is not enough.

About us. Why work here. Our people. How to apply.

Fine. Necessary. Expected.

But not enough.

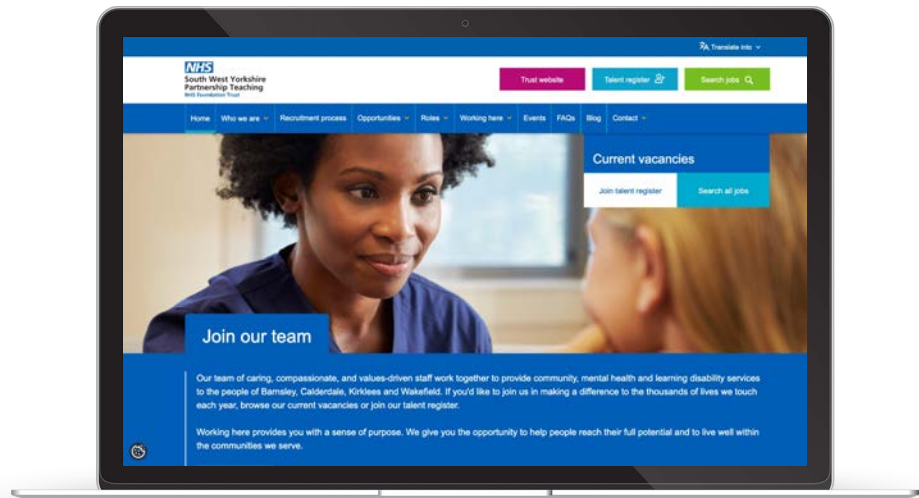


The future belongs to careers websites with an idea at the centre.

Websites that use concept to create meaning, interaction, memory and desire. Websites that make candidates feel something before asking them to do something.

Because the best talent has options.

- They do not need another wallpaper website.
- They need a reason to stop scrolling.
- They need a reason to believe.
- They need a reason to put their name on the cup.



About Genius

At Genius, we believe employer brands should have ideas big enough to move people.

We create careers websites, employer brand campaigns and candidate experiences that go beyond the expected. Work that does not simply look good, but thinks hard. Work with wit, warmth, intelligence and purpose. Work that helps organisations win hearts, minds and applications.

Because in the competition for talent, style matters.

But **substance** wins.

And **concept** is where the magic starts.



www.genius.online





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