



# Anna Näppä

*PhD student,*

*Department of Business Administration, Technology and Social Sciences*

*Industrial Marketing*

*Luleå University of Technology, (LTU) Luleå, Sweden*

*Anna.nappa(at)ltu.se*

My research interest is marketing and employer branding in particular. During the past 20 years or so, the area of employer branding has grown both among researchers and practitioners, but there is still much left to investigate. Employer branding was first coined by Ambler and Barrow in 1996, and they defined it as “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company” (p.187). Being able to not only attract, but also to retain, good employees has of course many positive implications for companies. With a competitive labour market and population decline (especially in the Nordics), it is no wonder employer branding is becoming so popular (and why I find it so fantastic and interesting!).



“What I am hoping to achieve in this project is a greater understanding of how companies in retail and hospitality sectors can build their employer brand, so that they appeal to and manage to keep the right type of employees.”



---

My doctoral research is part of the project "Attractive Employers", which explores how employers in retail and tourism & hospitality can work with employer branding. The Swedish Retail and Wholesale Council and the R&D Fund of the Swedish Tourism & Hospitality Industry are jointly funding the project. We study current and potential employees' perceptions, experiences and attitudes toward companies as employers. In order to achieve this, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods will be used: in-depth interviews, observations, experiments and surveys. Data is gathered mainly in Northern Sweden and Finland. To ensure relevance and usability of research results, we are conducting this project in collaboration with Visit Luleå and a reference group from the retail and tourism & hospitality sectors in Northern Sweden.

Before I started my doctoral research, I was a project manager at the Luleå University of Technology's career centre. I worked with different types of activities helping to facilitate students' way into work life, and I worked closely with companies looking to hire LTU students. It became evident that companies work hard to create a relationship with students already in their first year of university, so that they would choose their companies or businesses as a place to work after graduation. These types of employer branding activities are quite common when it comes to jobs that require higher education. The entry-level, customer service positions in the retail and service sectors on the other hand have relatively low barriers to enter (and exit!), require little or no experience or education, and often have low salary levels. Yet, they are major employers and attracting a talented workforce is also important: the frontline employees play a great role in delivering the brand message in the service encounters. The employees represent the brand and the service they give can highly influence how we as customers perceive the company.

What I am hoping to achieve in this project is a greater understanding of how companies in retail and hospitality sectors can build their employer brand, so that they appeal to and manage to keep the right type of employees. One aspect in this study is to look at how the place brand and the employer brand work together. We know that many northern cities are losing inhabitants to the larger cities, which of course has a major impact on the Barents region's economy. Owing to the challenges facing these sectors and our region, together with the important role of the frontline staff in representing a company brand, I am very excited to be working in this research project!

Ambler, T, and Barrow, S (1996), "The employer brand", *Journal of Brand Management*, 4(3), 185-206.