

# Employer Marketing 4.0: Digital Candidate Journey in the maritime industry

## Management Summary

Study commissioned by  
Deutsches Maritimes Zentrum e.V.

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**nexum.**

# 1. Commissioning, scope and objectives of the study

**T**his study “Employer Marketing 4.0: Digital Candidate Journey in the Maritime Industry” was commissioned by the German Maritime Center (DMZ) in August 2023.

Founded in 2017, the DMZ is an independent, publicly funded, cross-industry institution based in Hamburg. The purpose of the association is to increase the competitiveness and innovative strength of the entire German maritime location and to strengthen the expertise and career prospects in the maritime industry.

The digital agency nexum AG was commissioned with the practical study. The study comprises the following work packages:


- Definition and prioritization of relevant professions for the development of candidate personas<sup>1</sup>
- Development of data-based candidate persona profiles<sup>2</sup>
- Development of candidate journey and recommendations for action
- Implementation of an event with presentation of the results



## Overall objective of the study

The study is intended to support decision-makers, especially those in small, medium-sized and family-run maritime companies, in adapting to changes in applicant behavior and to raise awareness of changes in online recruiting and employer branding measures.

The study provides maritime players with specific recommendations for action along the candidate journey in order to successfully design their online communication for recruiting young talent. The study also presents best-practice examples - which can also be implemented with a small budget.

This is intended to promote the retention of young talent in the maritime industry and, in the long term, contribute to the crisis-resistant creation and preservation of jobs. 

<sup>1</sup> All personas are school students with the aim of recruiting them for an apprenticeship, dual study program or traditional studies in the maritime industry. For this reason, the topic of university marketing is not included in this study.

<sup>2</sup> The personas and associated candidate journeys are to be developed in an ideal way for the maritime industry and have neither the claim nor the mandate to offer company-specific solutions.

## 2. Initial situation and methodology

**D**ue to demographic change, there are fewer and fewer potential employees in Germany. Four out of five companies have problems filling vacancies<sup>3</sup>. The shortage of personnel leads to obstacles to growth that can threaten the competitiveness of many companies. The maritime industry, like most other industries, is affected by staff shortages.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit suitable junior staff. Competition is high. Potential candidates can choose from a wide range of apprenticeships and professional career paths. In addition, vocational training is increasingly losing out to university studies among high school graduates<sup>4</sup>.

### Changing demands of the current training generation

The worsening shortage of skilled workers and the demands of Generation Z on the working world of tomorrow present companies with new challenges in their recruiting efforts in times of increasing digitalization.

Aspects that play a major role for today's generation of students include climate change, sustainability and digitalization. The maritime industry offers a lot of potential and prospects for making a contribution to sustainable change. These opportunities need to be made even more visible.

### Candidate personas

In order to better understand the needs of potential junior staff, eight profiles of ideal candidates were created. These so-called candidate personas<sup>5</sup> provide helpful points of reference on information

behavior as well as expectations and motives of the target groups. Personas are fictitious people who represent typical users of a target group, in this case the ideal candidate for the maritime industry. ➤



3 Ernst & Young, SME Barometer 2018

4 Bund-Länder Demography Portal (ed. Federal Institute for Population Research)

5 The target group consists of school pupils. In order to better differentiate between these pupils for the individual training occupations, the personas were characterized as if they had already gained initial experience in training or studying.

## Candidate Journey

Personas make it possible to identify suitable communication channels and messages along the so-called candidate journey. The candidate journey describes the path that applicants take from the first point of contact with a company to the conclusion of the application process.

With an optimized and targeted candidate journey, the candidate experience can be optimized and made as positive as possible. The candidate experience is the sum of the experiences and perceptions that an applicant gathers during the entire recruitment process.

## Design of contact points increases recruiting opportunities

With the help of an optimized journey, employers in the maritime industry are becoming (more) visible online for young talent and can address them more specifically for vocational training or a (dual) course of study.

An advantageous and convenient design of the relevant contact points along the candidate journey can contribute to a successful recruiting process through to the successful hiring of an apprentice or (dual) student. [🚢](#)

In this way, sufficiently qualified employees will also be recruited in the future in order to remain competitive in a tight applicant and personnel market. In other words:





### 3. Procedure

Only those who know their target group know how to address them on the right communication channels with relevant content and the right tone of voice and is perceived as an attractive employer.

In three phases, the study approaches the answer to the Question which interests, touchpoints and information are relevant for the target group.

#### Phase 1: Prioritization and selection of occupational fields

In a workshop with maritime industry representatives from port & terminal operations, shipping, shipbuilding, marine technology & offshore **eight occupational fields** were selected whose future (replacement) staffing is considered to be particularly challenging:

- Electronics technician (specializing in automation & systems technology)
- IT specialist
- Construction mechanic (specializing in metal and shipbuilding)
- Maritime industrial engineer (offshore)
- Mechatronics technician
- Shipbuilding engineer
- Shipping clerk
- Ship mechanic

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#### Phase 2: Development of the candidate persona profiles

An ideal-typical candidate persona was created for each of these eight professions, whose profile was then defined and sharpened in further steps:

- Research and analysis of motives, drivers, expectations and preferences as well as information and media usage behavior.
- Validation and enrichment of the findings by conducting qualitative interviews with people from the identified target groups.
- Further validation and finalization in the workshop with association and company representatives from each sector. ➤

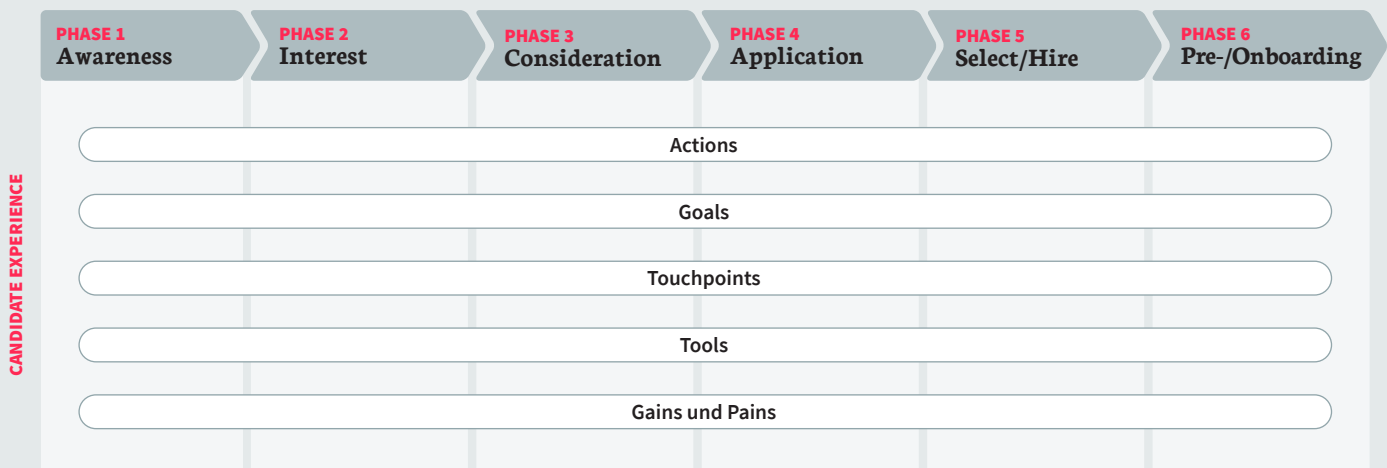


## Phase 3: Development of candidate journey and recommendations for action

Elaboration of the entire candidate journey from the awareness phase to onboarding based on the activities, needs, gains & gains, touch-points and emotions of the applicants.

### The six stages of the Candidate Journey

The Candidate Journey covers a total of **six stages**.



- 1. Awareness phase:** First awareness of the training occupation, (dual) study program or employer.
- 2. Interest phase:** Initial interest and discussion about the apprenticeship / (dual) study program and the employer.
- 3. Consideration phase:** More intensive research to find out whether the employer or degree program really suits you.

- 4. Application phase:** Preparation and submission of the application.
- 5. Select/Hire phase:** Interview(s), aptitude test if applicable and recruitment/contract.
- 6. Pre-/onboarding phase:** Getting to know each other, involvement and integration. ⚓



## 4. Recommendations for action and result

**T**he personas and the various stages of the candidate journey can be used to derive recommendations for action that companies can use to target the right candidates and win them over. Especially those who have not yet had any contact with the maritime industry.

The study's recommendations for action relate on the one hand to the relevant touchpoints, but also include the communication of relevant content and messages as well as the application process.

### 4.1 Consider the most important touchpoints



#### 4.1.1 Online touchpoints

As digital natives, GenZ prefer online touchpoints and -platforms in the search for an apprenticeship or a (dual) course of study. Mobile recruiting is becoming increasingly important in student marketing in particular. Responsive career websites and a targeted approach to applicants via smartphone and tablet have great potential to convert initial contacts into actual applications.

— **Career website:** It is a must-have in digital HR marketing and much more than a business card for the company, which can present itself as an employer and convince young talent of its merits. Job advertisements, job exchanges or recommendations from acquaintances – no matter where the young applicants come from: The next click goes to the careers page to find out more about the potential employer. And then, ideally, to the application form.



— **Social media:** Platforms such as TikTok, YouTube and Instagram dominate the lives of many young people. That's why it's important to have a presence there. If you don't have the resources in the HR department, you can turn the maintenance and support of social channels into a trainee project, for example, and involve the current trainees.

— **Videos and moving images:** The young target group makes intensive use of moving images. It is therefore important to include this on the company's websites and social media. This is the best way to convey the diversity, fascination and attractiveness of the maritime industry in a target group-oriented and authentic way.

— **Training and learning platforms:** What applies to social media also applies to digital student and trainee platforms, such as e.g. Azubiyo and Ausbildung.de or learning platforms such as Studysmarter and Studyflix. Candidates spend a lot of time here studying and preparing for exams, but they also use the platforms specifically to research potential employers.

— **Job exchanges and job advertisements:** In addition to the specific training and learning platforms, companies should also be findable on the general job exchanges and job search engines. In particular, the two market leaders in Germany, Stepstone and Indeed, are often the first starting point in the actual job search.

— **SEO & SEA:** The company's online presence should be optimized for search engines (SEO) in order to increase visibility in relevant search results. Targeted search engine advertising (SEA) appeals even more directly to potential trainees. ➤

#### 4.1.2 School marketing

The school is full of potential new recruits. They all want to start their professional career after graduation. It is the place where maritime stakeholders should and can provide career information, e.g. with notices, brochures and participation in teaching formats (working groups, project weeks) and trade fairs.

#### 4.1.3 Personal environment

Parents, relatives, friends, neighbors or acquaintances - many students find their way into the maritime industry because people from their personal environment work there. For example, parents should be considered as a second target group, addressed separately and convinced. Similar to the candidates, this can be done online (e.g. via Facebook), but also analogously via posters.

#### 4.1.4 Fairs

Young talents often visit career and trainee fairs to get an idea of the training on offer and potential employers. A perfect place to present yourself as a company with a booth.

#### 4.1.5 Hobbies, leisure and sport

The profiles developed show that the personas often pursue leisure activities that have a maritime connection. Places such as sailing clubs, rowing clubs etc. are therefore suitable places for a targeted approach to potential training candidates and students, e.g. via sponsorship.

#### 4.1.6 Ferry terminals, locks and ports

These places arouse longings and emotions and are an ideal touchpoint for the first encounter in the candidate journey. Private interest can lead to professional interest.

## 4.2 Communicate relevant content



#### 4.2.1 Social significance

The maritime industry is systemically relevant. Without the maritime companies in shipbuilding, shipping, ports, terminal operations, offshore and marine technology, nothing would work in Germany as an export country. Maritime professions are safe and have a high level of social acceptance. Companies can use these messages to score points with prospective candidates.

#### 4.2.2. Attractive added value in the industry

Internationality, the fascination of the maritime world and technological innovations – the maritime world of work has a lot to offer that can inspire young people. The industry is also characterized by a special cohesion and team spirit. These added values need to be emphasized in communication with talent and shared in exciting content formats.

#### 4.2.3 A career with potential and a future

What are the chances of being taken on? What further training measures will I receive? What possible career paths and accompanying measures can I expect after successfully completing my training or studies? And what are the salary prospects? These are questions that are very important for young people when deciding on their training or a (dual) degree course and should be answered on the careers website and in image and job advertisements.

#### 4.2.4 Sustainability communication

The integration of sustainability aspects of the company into employer communication is essential, as many young people are environmentally conscious and some are ecologically committed. They will include the sustainable orientation of training companies in their career choices.

#### 4.2.5 Job-specific tasks and requirements

The young target group wants to know exactly what to expect during their training and studies and afterwards in their everyday working life. What requirements they need to fulfill, what interests they should ideally have and how they can apply and expand these. Ideally, there should be a section on the careers page where all job-specific tasks and requirements of the respective apprenticeships and dual study courses are described in detail. ➤



### 4.3. Optimizing the application process



The application process, in particular the preparation and submission of the application, should be kept as attractive, transparent and simple as possible in order to reduce inhibitions among talented individuals. They want to know what the process looks like, what they need and what they need to prepare. Tips and tricks on how to create application documents or prepare for the interview are very useful for the still inexperienced target group.

The integration of digital tools is also helpful for a smooth and efficient process - especially applicant management systems such as ATS (Applicant Tracking System). These can be seamlessly integrated into the career website via an interface so that the candidate journey remains user-friendly and uncomplicated.

Good and uncomplicated alternatives to conventional procedures are quick applications, for example via an online application form on the career page or the integration of links that refer to a standardized e-mail template.

Application landing pages, which are available directly via advertisements on popular social media platforms, should also be used (e.g. with the help of tools such as Perspective). Similar to quick applications, candidates only provide the most necessary information without having to leave the respective platform. [!\[\]\(d66ff64371a51729ac8c1cdaa685ba6f\_img.jpg\)](#)

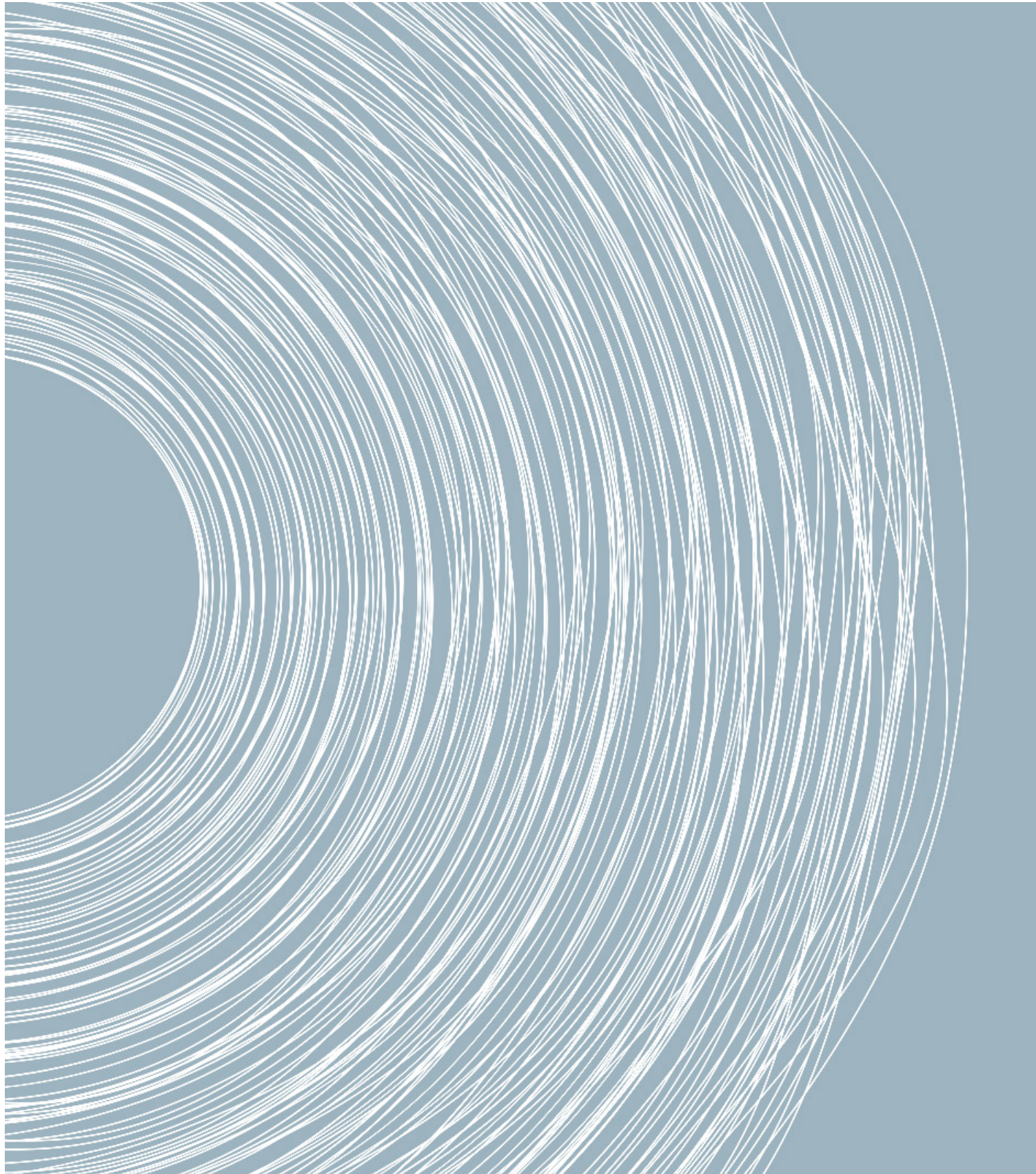
## 5. Conclusion

The following four guidelines should be taken into consideration for the successful recruitment of young talent:

1. Get to know and understand the target groups.
2. Identify relevant touchpoints.
3. Send relevant messages.
4. Create optimal application processes.







**Client of the study:**

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