

METHODOLOGY

America's Best Startup Employers **2026**



America's Best Startup Employers honors organizations that build dynamic, engaging workplaces

Ranking's cornerstones



Methodology

Despite recent macro-economic trends that lead many organizations to cost-cutting measures, US-based startups are still performing exceedingly well, especially in global comparisons. Particularly in the US market, we invariably observe firms with innovative ideas and a relentless drive to disrupt established industries. The unbroken confidence in the strength of startups becomes visible as investors continue to place their trust in the US landscape.

For the seventh time, the study "Best Startup Employers 2026" examines best performing startups as an employer through defined KPI's to guide potential candidates in finding innovative and stable startups to work for.

Companies considered in the evaluation must be headquartered in the U.S., founded between the years 2016 and 2023, employing at least 50 employees and exhibit a startup structure. Spin-offs of large corporations without a significant amount of external funding are examples of companies not considered.

More than 7 million datapoints are analyzed. All data gathered in Q3 and Q4 2025 via a social listening campaign and extensive desk research. An initial longlist of more than 20,000 companies is narrowed down to 2,700 companies that qualify for the in-depth analysis. This analysis is based on three key criteria:

- Reputation as an employer (Social Listening)
- Employee satisfaction
- Growth



Executive Summary

- **Title of ranking:** America's Best Startup Employers 2026
- **Media partner:** Forbes
- **Edition:** 7th
- **Number of awardees:** 500
- **Methodology:** Social Listening, Desk Research
- **Criteria used for determining rank:** KPIs gathered through social listening and desk research. Companies were scored across multiple dimensions in the categories: reputation, employee satisfaction, and growth, with the highest aggregate scores determining the final rank.

America's Best Startup Employers draws from multiple sources to create one ranking

Ranking's cornerstones

Shortlist

The selection of startups to be shortlisted and evaluated is based on the age and size of the companies as well as the location and market focus in the US, high web traffic and independency from other companies.



1



2

Data Gathering

The Social Listening campaign is launched, constantly monitored and mentions are collected. Incoming **data is cleaned and prepared** for analysis.



3

Additional Research

Additional KPI data is collected through **publicly available company information** to effectively measure the reputation, growth and employee satisfaction of the selected startups.



4

Analysis

The prepared data is analyzed with a proven scoring model to create a ranking of the **highest rated startup employer brands**.



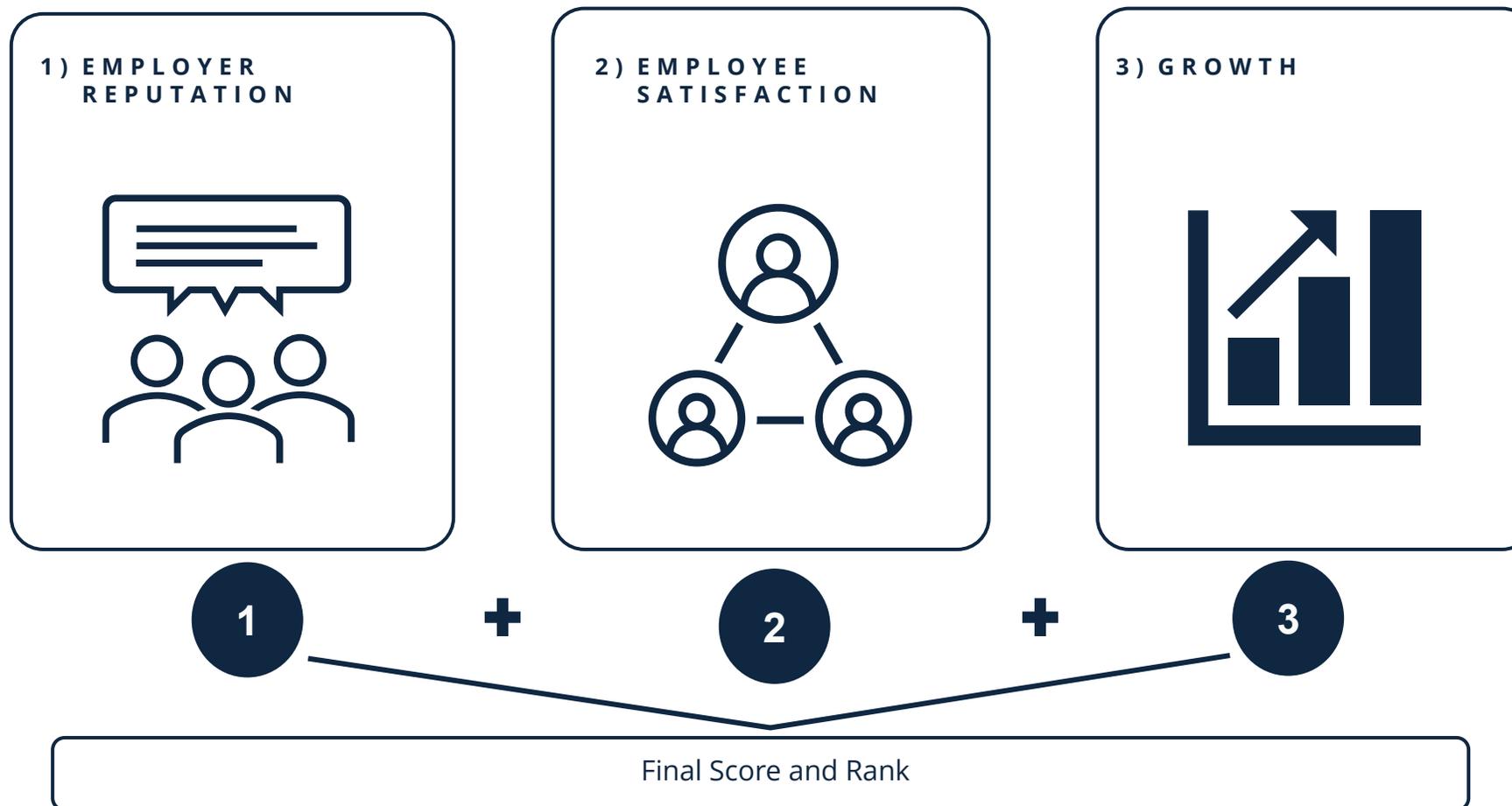
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Publication

The final ranking is published by Forbes which shows America's Best Startup Employers.

The final score is the result of KPIs gathered in three topical categories

Pillars overview



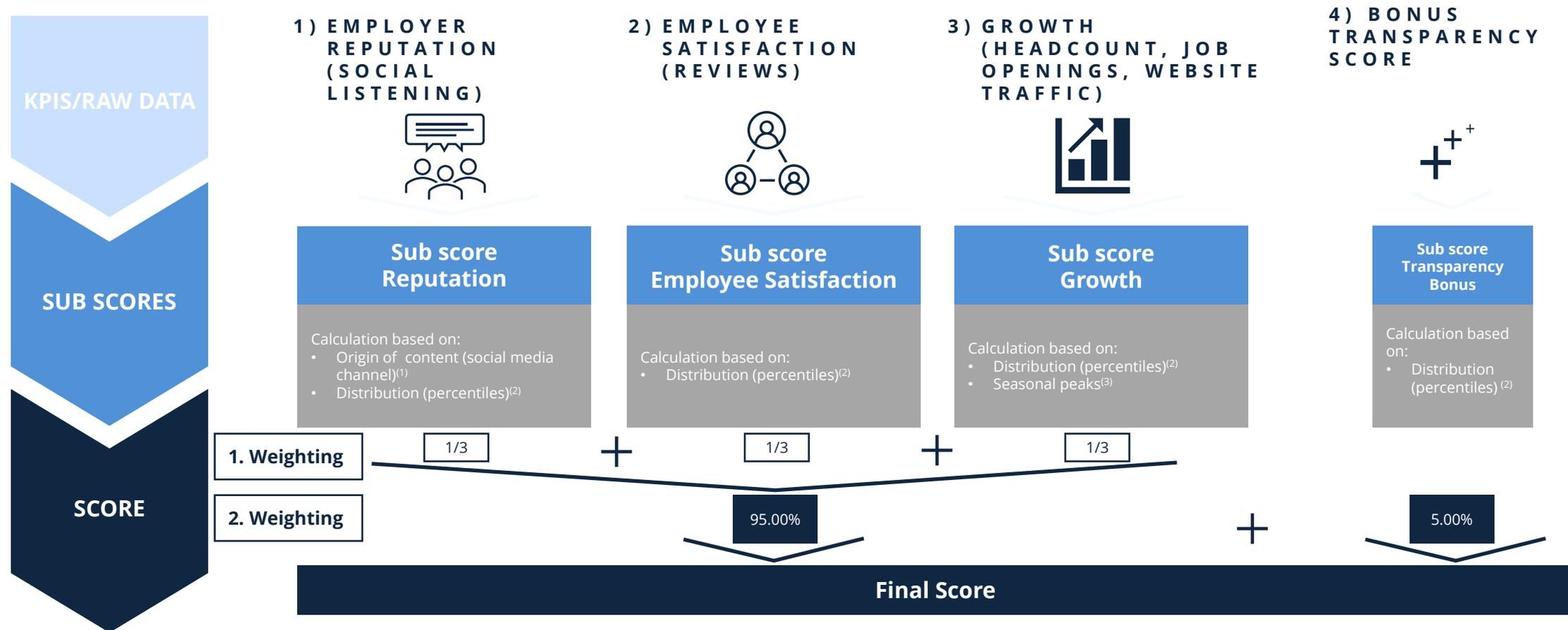
A broad bandwidth of KPIs are considered to create a complete picture of Startup Employers

Pillars overview in detail

- 1. Employer Reputation (Social Listening):** Comprehensive web and social media monitoring for a period of 3 months on employer attractiveness and employer branding. Relevant workplace aspects are defined, and search terms tested (e.g., employee engagement corporate culture,...). The results describe employer reputation based on direct information in terms of **reach, virality, volume** as well as **sentiment** of relevant posts.
- 2. Employee Satisfaction:** Employee Satisfaction is important especially for companies in the early stages of maturity. Not only are happy employees productive, but they also represent the first line of marketing and can act as brand ambassadors. KPIs such as "benefits" or "culture and values" are collected from online platforms and the company websites. We collect and evaluate employee reviews and an employers' general relevance. Presence and form of predefined criteria on topics such as **benefits, flexible working hours** or **workplace mobility**. Gathering information directly from the websites adds objectivity to what the company has to offer.
- 3. Growth:** The main objective for many startups is growth. This is important not only for founders and shareholders, but also for employees. We focus on the kind of growth that directly impacts employees, such as higher visibility, as well as opportunities to learn new skills and to take on new responsibilities. We research and evaluate various sources on **website traffic, headcount growth** and **job openings**.

The scoring model is founded on the same three KPI pillars as the data collected

Scoring model visualized



(1) Different weightings are assigned to different types of media. Logistic regression analysis was used to evaluate the impact each channel has on the sub score.
 (2) Scores reported on an ordinal basis and were attributed by the percentiles.
 (3) To control for seasonal peaks and valleys in the time series data, a 4-month rolling average was applied

Industries

Each employer grouped by industry

1. Advertising & Marketing
2. Biotechnology & Agriculture
3. Business Products & Software Services
4. Retail
5. Communication & Social
6. Robotics/Engineering
7. Professional Services
8. Education & EdTech
9. Energy & Resources
10. Manufacturing
11. Finance
12. Hardware & Electronics
13. Healthcare
14. Hospitality
15. Lifestyle & Health
16. Media & Entertainment
17. Real Estate
18. Security
19. Technology
20. Transportation & Logistics