

Five Steps To Supercharge Open Enrollment

10/14/2008

By Jennifer Benz, Benz Communications

One of the key questions concerning benefits administrators as they prepare for annual open enrollment is, "Will our enrollment communications hit the mark?" Below are five easy-to-implement steps to ensure that companies hit their 2009 enrollment targets. With just a little extra effort, benefits administrators can integrate these five strategies into their campaigns and take their enrollment efforts to the next level.

- **Keep it simple.** Employees' top concerns during enrollment are: What's new and what will it cost? Spell out these answers (and why) in simple, easy-to-understand terms along with simple step-by-step instructions on how to enroll. If you haven't already done so, create a one-page enrollment "tip sheet" that lists what's changing in as simple a form as possible (perhaps just a bulleted list), gives brief enrollment instructions and tells employees and families where to go for all the details.
- **Make it personal.** If you talk about your overall health care costs, break it down into what the company spends *per employee*. That is, how much do your health benefits add to each employee's paycheck? When you talk about changes that could decrease costs, tell your employees what that will mean to their pocketbook. For example: "Using generic drugs instead of brand-name prescriptions could put an extra \$500 in your pocket each year," instead of "The cost of brand-name drugs is three times that of generic drugs and adds \$800,000 a year to our health care costs."
- **Promote missed or under-used benefits.** Put together a list of the five to 10 benefit plans employees aren't using enough—health savings accounts, fitness benefits, voluntary insurance, little-known features of the employee assistance plan (EAP), preventive care benefits, commuter benefits, etc.— as a one-page flyer. Title it "The Top 10 Employee Benefits You're Missing" or "10 Ways You're Not Getting the Most from Your Benefit Plans". Spell out why they're valuable and how to enroll/sign up/get reimbursed. Then, ask employees to send in their own tips and use those for a post-enrollment update.
- **Talk to your employees, and let your employees talk.** Debating whether to schedule enrollment meetings? In-person meetings are always worth the effort. Employees will appreciate being reached out to and given an opportunity to ask questions. Can't make it to all of your locations? Hold virtual meetings or conference calls. Post the recording online for employees who can't make it.

Or, start a benefits blog and ask employees to give feedback and ask questions via

the comments section. You don't have to be prolific; even one post a week during enrollment season will be of huge value to employees. Reminders and tips about enrollment are simple to post. Also, think about giving employees some "insider" tips about their benefits, the enrollment system, and/or the hidden features of their health plan. Chances are your benefits team can cite dozens of these that employees would be very interested in learning.

If you're still convinced that you can't write a blog post a week or you're worried about your writing skills, ask your internal communications group (or consultant) to write them for you.

- **Get managers in the game.** Chances are your employees are talking to their managers at least once a week, maybe several times a day. Get "the boss" in the game and give managers the tools and incentive to talk to their employees about benefits. Many retailers send out business updates to all store managers every week. Get a line on enrollment in that announcement, and let that turn into a bullet or two once a month about benefits.

Employee benefits are a key tool to attract and retain a top workforce. Make sure your managers know that benefits are an essential part of motivating their team. Often they just don't know what to say or how to say it, so give your managers talking points and a quick run-down on why it matters to them.

Jennifer Benz is founder and chief strategist of Benz Communications, an HR communications strategy boutique creating integrated employee benefits campaigns. Benz Communications' clients include Fortune 500 companies, Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For, and small- to mid-size companies.

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