

How to Get Started with Social Media



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CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE

Social media is not just about reconnecting with old friends and status updates—and it is not just a fad that is going to go away soon. Social media has fundamentally transformed the way we communicate. Social media tools are incredibly effective communication vehicles—helping you achieve your benefits goals, communicate more frequently and gather real-time feedback from employees and their families.

Many companies have had years of success with social media tools like blogs, videos and social networking sites—and have paved the way for you. Following the established best practices and learning from others' experiences can help you get in the game with fewer missteps. Use this guide to help you get started with social media.

FIRST: LAY A FOUNDATION

Social media is most effective when you have good online resources to which you can refer employees and their families. Make sure you have well-organized benefits information—ideally on the Internet (not behind a firewall)—or just on your Intranet or benefits enrollment site. Be sure employees and their families can access information quickly and easily and can link to key information. If your benefits information is not perfectly organized online already, don't hold off using social media. Just realize that you may need to include more detail in your posts or supplement them with additional resources. See the Tip Sheet, "Simple Ways to Make Open Enrollment More Effective," for more ideas.

NEXT: START WITH STRATEGY

It is easy to jump to tactics and get excited about the prospect of using videos or Twitter but, as with any communication plan, start with your objectives—what do you want to accomplish?

Here are Four Questions to Ask:

What are your objectives? It might just sound fun to start a series of podcasts or videos, but they should serve a strategic purpose. Don't roll out new communication or technology just

for the sake of doing so—make sure it is tied to your overall strategy or it will be money wasted. So, are you trying to save costs long-term by getting employees more engaged in their health care? Trying to help employees use their benefits throughout the year? Do you want to get more people using preventive care? Start with your core objectives and then decide if a social media tool will help you get there.

Who are you talking to? Who is your audience? How do they want to receive information? What's practical and what makes sense given the needs of your workforce (and their families)? Take employee demographic differences under consideration, but do not rely on assumptions. A retiree or older workforce could still use social media and some younger employees may still prefer more traditional methods of communication. Make sure that communication—no matter what form—is making it easier and faster for your audience to get and use the information they need, when and where they need it.

What is a wise use of development dollars? Think about investing in infrastructure first, as it will have the most benefit long-term. Creating a benefits communications website, on the Internet and outside of your firewall, may be one of the best investments you can make in benefits communication. While you're at it, add a blog. Investing in a series of one-off podcasts or videos will have a shorter lifespan, but may make sense if part of a high-value campaign. Keep in mind, what you produce must still be professional and high-quality, and you'll need to factor that into your budget.

What is going to have a long-term ROI? What is efficient to monitor and maintain? Social media is a conversation—that means you have to participate. All tools have an element of monitoring/maintenance that you should factor in when deciding what to use. Don't be overly concerned about employees posting negative comments or false information, but understand you still need to monitor, respond to feedback and ensure the accuracy of social media channels.

FINALLY: UNDERSTAND THE TOOLS

There are countless social media sites and tools. Listed below are the most relevant ones for benefits communication.

WHAT IT IS	HOW TO USE IT FOR BENEFITS	TIPS FOR SUCCESS
<p>BLOGS</p> <p>Blogs are a simple and easy way to create Web content and self-publish. They also give readers the opportunity to respond with comments and have a dialog with the author.</p>	<p>A benefits blog is one of the most effective ways to get started with social media. Add a blog to your benefits Website or intranet and use it to post reminders, new features and articles. Think of the blog as insider tips to help employees get the most from their benefits.</p> <p>Ask employees for comments and get real-time feedback whenever you post new content.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a realistic schedule and keep to it. Posting a couple times a month is plenty to start. Post more often during busy times like annual enrollment. • Make sure all posts have actionable information—tell employees not only what to do but how to do it. • Worried about negative or inaccurate comments? Set up your blog so that it is “moderated”—meaning, no comments are posted until you review them.
<p>MICRO-BLOG</p> <p>Twitter, Yammer and others are examples of “micro-blogs.”</p> <p>Micro-blogs like Twitter let you post only a short update at once, and provide you with more interactivity than a traditional blog.</p>	<p>Twitter and other similar platforms are great ways to get out short bits of information and reminders frequently. You’ll be surprised how much you can say in a short sentence or two and your employees will be delighted with the quick hits of helpful information.</p> <p>Pull the feed into your benefits Website or intranet for a cost-effective way to keep those sites fresh.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use Benz Communications’ @BenefitsTip to help you with content and ideas for your Twitter stream. Go to http://twitter.com/benefitstip. • Twitter lets your users decide how they want to receive the content—online, in an application, on their mobile phone. Educate your employees about how you’ll be streaming information and the various ways they can interact with you in person and online.
<p>PODCASTS AND VIDEOS</p> <p>These are online downloadable audio and video clips. Play them on a computer or drop them on an iPod to listen to any time.</p>	<p>Audio clips and videos are a great way to make your content more exciting and inviting. Use videos or podcasts to help explain changes, introduce a new program or uncover common misperceptions about benefits.</p> <p>High-profile case studies have shown the positive outcomes for organizations using employee video contests to boost participation in benefit plans and get their organizations to talk.¹</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with the benefits team or a quick explanation of a plan can be a simple way to get started with video. • Do keep things professional and high-quality. Messy videos might be OK for YouTube, but they are not a good representative of your benefits brand. • Use caution if you ask employees to submit videos—those campaigns often require more management than you might assume.
<p>SOCIAL NETWORKS</p> <p>Facebook, LinkedIn and many other social networks connect individuals around interests and activities. Whether personal or professional, they are incredibly powerful tools for distributing information and ideas.</p>	<p>Consider creating a Facebook wellness or benefits group and letting employees and their families get updates via Facebook (you can integrate it with your blog or Twitter too).</p> <p>Build an internal social network (or use your intranet) to connect employees interested in similar wellness topics.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for wellness and health carriers who are starting to build social networking into their tools—peer influence can be incredibly effective for meeting wellness goals. • Recognize that social networks will take on a life of their own, but you’ll need to participate.
<p>USER FORUMS</p> <p>User forums are moderated online discussions around a specific topic.</p>	<p>A benefits user forum lets employees (and your benefits team) swap ideas and answer each other’s questions about how to get the most out of your programs. Structure your forum by benefit plan so information is easy to find. You’ll certainly be surprised by how much your employees know about your programs and how much they’d like to share that knowledge.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User forums are likely to be most effective at organizations that use online discussions for other topics—whether customer support or training. Make sure it is a good fit for your organization. • Like social networks, user forums may take on a life of their own and do require more hands-on monitoring than some of the other channels.

TIPS FOR ALL SOCIAL MEDIA:

- Think of social media as a way to create an ongoing dialogue with your employees and their families.
- Use a conversational tone—corporate-speak is not effective in the social media space.
- Don’t be overly ambitious to start. Set realistic goals about creating content and what you can maintain and let things grow over time.
- Use social media to share personal stories—for example, profile employees who have made great health changes. Employee stories are incredibly powerful!
- Remember: Feedback is a good thing! You’ll get great insight into where employees and their families have questions. And you can respond in real time with social media tools.

FOR MORE DETAILS:

www.benzcommunications.com/socialmedia | www.benzcommunications.com | <http://twitter.com/benefitstip>

¹ <http://www.workforce.com/section/02/feature/25/82/06/index.html>



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