

Benefits Communications: Trends to Watch



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With so much changing so quickly, it is not enough to keep up on benefits, you must keep up on overall trends and technology shifts to keep your benefits and benefits communication relevant. Here are four big trends you need to know about and know how to apply to benefits.

EMPLOYEE ATTITUDES

Employees care about their benefits more than ever before and their attitudes towards benefits are more closely linked to overall job satisfaction.¹ Benefits communication can be the difference between well understood and appreciated benefits and ones that fall flat.

Did you know?: 58% of employees who strongly feel their company's benefits communications effectively educate about benefits also feel that benefits are the foundation of their safety net vs. 20% of employees who feel communications are ineffective at educating about benefits.¹

What it means to benefits: You need to make effective benefits communication a priority just as much as the quality of your plans and programs.

How you can keep up: Use MetLife's Open Enrollment Toolkit for tips on making enrollment and ongoing communication a success.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has fundamentally changed the way people communicate, across all age groups and all demographics. It is setting a higher-than-ever-before bar for benefits communication.

Did you know?: Four out of five online adults in the US use social media and over 35% already use it for health-related information.²

What it means to benefits: Benefits communication is still mostly operating in a one-way, traditional manner and, without change, will soon seem irrelevant and out of touch. People expect a conversational approach, they expect to be able to interact, and they like receiving information that they can use immediately.

How you can keep up: Start to modernize your communication approaches. Communicate year-round, start using a blog or Twitter to get frequent, simple updates out to employees, and ask for feedback.

¹ 9th Annual Study of Employee Benefits

² Forrester Research (http://adage.com/digitalnext/post?article_id=138618) and <http://www.ihealthbeat.org/data-points/2009/what-percentage-of-us-adults-use-social-media-for-health-care-and-medical-purposes.aspx>

MOBILE ACCESS

Accessing the Internet via mobile phones is growing quickly and completely changing expectations for how, when and where people get information. People are starting to expect real-time, immediate access to information and a mobile-friendly experience. Mobile Internet is just in its infancy but is ramping up fast. The mobile user experience is already quite sophisticated for consumer products, although still in its early stages.

Did you know?: Use of social networks on mobile devices soared from January 2009 to January 2010. Women use mobile social networking applications about 10% more than men—and they also make more benefits decisions.³

What it means to benefits: Employees' expectations for how, when and where they receive information are rapidly changing. They expect real-time, immediate access to information.

How you can keep up: You have to get information to the decision-maker. Start by making sure your benefits information is easily accessible on the Internet (not just on your Intranet) and then consider optimizing the experience for mobile.

INTERACTIVE TOOLS

Gaming is no longer just for kids. The majority of adults play online games—from simple games like Scrabble to daily trading games on Facebook to more elaborate "traditional" video games. Wii counts! Gaming is now a broad category including most interactive tools.⁴

Did you know?: In a 2009 Department of Education study, online students out-performed those receiving face-to-face instruction.⁵

What it means to benefits: Interactive tools are highly effective for educating and engaging employees and their families. Using them for health, wellness and financial education will become an incredibly powerful tool in benefits communication.

How you can keep up: You may not have the budget to spend on developing games or online tools for your employees, but the health and insurance carriers do. Look to your vendors for cutting-edge interactive tools and games, like the MetLife Benefits Simplifier (metlife.com/employeebenefits).

³ http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/for-social-networking-women-use-mobile-more-than-men/

⁴ <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1048/video-games-adults-are-players-too>

⁵ <http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/tech/evidence-based-practices/finalreport.pdf>



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