

## How to Use Digital Technology to Effectively Manage Your Employee Benefit Plans

Digital technology touches almost everything we do today, including;

- 1) Information gathering on current events or various subject matters
- 2) Conducting transactions concerning purchasing goods and services, banking and a host of others
- 3) Communicating and interacting with others through social media
- 4) Entertaining ourselves through online movies and games
- 5) Planning a vacation and booking an airline, car and/or hotel reservation

Through technology, we have eliminated reams of unnecessary paperwork and forms. Thus, it makes sense that most HR executives are drawn to improved technology to effectively manage their Employee Benefit Plans. Most employers now utilize an online employee portal which will allow employees to initially enroll in the Employee benefits Plan, make changes to their information throughout the year and complete their Annual Open Enrollment process. At the same time, the portal can be used 24/7 as a depository for Plan information such as:

- 1) Plan documents, including booklets, summaries, etc.
- 2) Benefit newsletters, bulletins and updates
- 3) Administrative contacts and forms for all third-party vendors, including insurance companies, third party administrators, retirement plan investment managers, etc. This information should include websites and for health insurance companies, information on provider networks and personal claim transactions
- 4) Description of Wellness programs, including announcements to encourage employees to utilize the programs
- 5) Video presentations which can help to explain the nuances of the plan in a simple straight forward manner
- 6) FAQ's (Frequently Asked Questions) which can eliminate a number of employee calls to the HR Department

While the use of an employee portal helps to streamline the management of the Employee Benefit Plans, it is not enough. The portal needs to incorporate interactive features to assist employees in making benefit decisions. For example, during the enrollment process employees should be able to compare and contrast plan offerings by creating a side-by-side analysis. Similar to what an individual would get when they research travel options on Expedia. More importantly plan sponsors need to communicate often during the year so that employees are engaged. These communications can be in the form of text messages or broadcast e-mails. According to one survey, the biggest complaint from 41% of employees is that Employee Benefit Plan communications is too infrequent.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Health Advocate Solutions, *Striking a Healthy Balance: What Employees Really Want Out of Workplace Benefits Communication*, p.4

What we need to realize is that while technology has transformed our lives, it has not totally replaced human contact. There are a number of situations where human contact should complement technology. Some situations where personal interaction is warranted are:

1. Communication of Employee Benefit Plans to employees who are new to the work force. How many newcomers know the difference between a deductible and coinsurance? Or what is a network provider versus an out of network provider?
2. When making major changes to an Employee Benefit Program, the message is often better delivered by a person rather than through a website. An employer who communicates major changes through technology only can often be viewed as insensitive or out of touch.

Interestingly, employees still value the personal touch, especially as it pertains to healthcare cost information and the workings of the plan. When ranking preferred communication channels, talking directly with a person by phone was #1, followed by website/online portal (#2) and In person conversation (#3).<sup>2</sup>

Bankers Cooperative Group, Inc. (“BCG”) has extensive experience providing employee portals for our clients through the Employee Navigator platform. At the same time, we assist HR Departments with onsite employee meetings, when appropriate. On an ongoing basis, our Customer Service Representatives act as advocates for employees with regards to claim problems and provide explanations on the inner workings of all their employee benefit programs.

If you would like information on how BCG can assist you with your Employee Benefit Technology needs, please contact Jim DiOrio, 908-272-8500 ext. 606 or [jdiorio@bankerscoopgroup.com](mailto:jdiorio@bankerscoopgroup.com).

*Established in 1982, Bankers Cooperative Group, Inc. (BCG) is the self-contained brokerage facility for members and associate members of the New Jersey Bankers Association (NJBankers). Today, BCG is the leading provider of employee benefit programs for New Jersey’s banking industry. As administrator of the New Jersey Bankers Association sponsored Employee Benefits Trust EBT, BCG is able to leverage almost 8,000 industry employees and their dependents to negotiate group employee benefit programs and pricing not generally attainable on an individual employer basis. The “Cooperative” in our name is what sets BCG apart from the competition. Since 1998, BCG has returned \$3.1 million in patronage dividends to its shareholders and EBT participants.*

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<sup>2</sup> Health Advocate Solutions, *Striking a Healthy Balance: What Employees Really Want Out of Workplace Benefits Communication*, p.2