

4 HR tips for open enrollment

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act has permanently altered the U.S. benefits landscape.

As a business leader, you need to stay on top of the rules, regulations and requirements that may impact your business.

But as an employer, it's crucial to communicate benefits-related changes to your employees so you can keep them informed, motivated and engaged.

Especially now, as benefits enrollment season approaches.

Change—particularly change that affects employees—could impact productivity, profitability and morale, so it should be proactively managed and communicated.

Here are four tips that can help you build a strategic communications campaign to inform employees of benefits-related changes.

1. Obtain buy-in from key stakeholders

Gain the support of senior management to ensure access to resources and budget. Communicate how the campaign will help to educate employees, drive behavior and improve employee engagement.

Emphasize the business connection between effective benefits communication and controlling tangible costs, such as onboarding and training new hires.

2. Build the plan

Develop the communications campaign with the help of organizational allies, including human resources, marketing, public relations and corporate communications. Identify key audiences (fulltime, part-time, and home-based employees, etc.); tie campaign goals and objectives to business outcomes; develop key messages for each audience.

Select the delivery vehicles to most effectively and efficiently convey campaign messaging across all target audiences. Use the entire arsenal — from traditional print mail, posters, email and videos to podcasts, smartphone apps, and social media.

If budget permits, reach out to external resources, such as a design or public relations firm, for their expertise.

3. Launch the plan

Your company's employee population varies by gender, age, marital status, worksite and more. Therefore, your campaign must reach all employees using the communications vehicles they use most often or are most comfortable using.

For instance, employees in an office environment might have instant access to electronic information, but those resources may not be available in a manufacturing plant or a warehouse setting.

Baby boomers may read bulletin boards and emails, while millennials may prefer information via smartphone. Social media connections are growing by leaps and bounds. Consider providing an app that allows employees to view their secure personal information, as well as your employee portal on their smartphone or tablet.

4. Quantify plan performance

Measure your campaign's performance using metrics that will provide clear insight into pertinent data. HR surveys are among the most effective tools to measure the performance of communication campaigns.

These surveys enable management to identify trends that can affect the business over the near-term and long-term, like employee satisfaction, retention trends and related costs.

A strategic benefits communications plan can engage your employees and help them to understand the full value of your company-sponsored benefits, as well as fuel job satisfaction and worker productivity.

By Gerry Leonard