

# How Technology is Transforming the Voluntary Benefits Industry

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It is an age-old conundrum for benefits managers—managing escalating health care costs while maintaining value for their employees. More and more benefits managers rely on voluntary benefits to fill important insurance gaps and provide essential services due to cuts in traditional benefits programs.

While the benefits department can create an attractive, holistic benefits program, that is only one piece of the puzzle. Employees need to know the what, why and how. Enter advanced technology! Using technology is the key to measuring the efficacy of the benefits program— communicating effectively, ease of enrollment and worry-free administration.

## **Communications**

As the availability of communication technology grows, benefit managers can target focused benefit information to an individual, eliminating unnecessary information and providing valuable resources that are most beneficial to the individual. It goes without saying, but when it comes to benefits, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. What may

be appealing to an employee who recently graduated may not appeal to a senior-level employee who is nearing retirement. For example, employees with young children may be especially interested in accident insurance, while pet owners might look to pet insurance to help offset the costs of well visits and routine care.

Today's consumers use multiple platforms (social, email, blogs, etc.) and devices (from desktops, to tablets, to smartphones), so communicate with your employees on their terms. Are your communications in a format that employees can easily share the information with his or her significant other? Reducing the jargon that typically accompanies benefit communication, enhancing relevancy, and reaching the employee where and when they want to receive information allows him or her to focus on the significant value of these voluntary benefit programs. Communications are constantly morphing, so it will be interesting to see how the advances in artificial intelligence will play out over the next few years.

With today's technology, benefit managers can pull metrics on how employees are interacting with their communications and also help identify the natural path where employees are looking for information. By determining where employees expect to receive communications, employers can ensure that their workforce is seeing the information that is most pertinent to them.

## **Enrollment medium**

So, you have implemented an effective communications campaign, the next technology opportunity is the enrollment medium. For years, enrollment in voluntary benefits could be likened to the Jurassic age...slow and cumbersome. Much like the way core benefit plans were enrolled during the disco era: paper application, directly with an enroller, etc. Now, most benefits can be enrolled online and allow you as the benefit manager to track your employees' progress through enrollment.

Benefits managers can identify where employees may have abandoned the enrollment process. Utilizing this technology, benefits managers can retarget these employees with a personalized message, advising them what percent of the enrollment they've completed; how much time they have left to enroll; and provide support from customer service representatives.

Online enrollment technology also allows for a simplified enrollment experience by pre-populating certain required data fields and auto selecting the plan design they are most likely to select given their demographics.

## **Administration**

One road block of voluntary benefits is the additional payroll slots for each new voluntary benefit. Payroll managers cling to payroll slots like gold. Employers know how difficult, complicated and costly it is to get payroll slots from their payroll administration systems and as the number of voluntary benefits increases, managing these benefits become difficult and expensive. Modern technology allows voluntary benefit outsourcers to offer consolidated payroll slots, giving employers the flexibility to consider multiple voluntary benefit solutions without the anxiety building the infrastructure to support it.

With diverse offers, ease of administration and modern communication technology, voluntary benefits are worth considering and should be an integral part of total rewards package.

By Peter Marcia