Increasing Benefits Engagement:

Five Ways Technology Can Improve Employees' Benefits Connection and Satisfaction

EMPYREAN

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INTRODUCTION

Benefits are one of the most important and influential factors affecting employees' job satisfaction. 84% of employees that are highly satisfied with their benefits also say they are highly satisfied with their job.[1]

Given this encouraging correlation, fostering *year-round* engagement with your offering is a critical component of any successful benefits strategy. Employees that are not engaged with their benefits can lose sight of the complete value of their compensation, which can lead to dissatisfaction and a host of negative consequences.

Inspiring engagement can prove extremely challenging for employers to achieve alone. HR leaders must bring focus to their benefits during annual enrollment and *continue* to drive awareness to their offering throughout the plan year. And HR teams can find themselves unnecessarily struggling to keep their workforce and benefits properly connected unless they utilize a sound strategy, modern technology, and a capable partner.

Your employees' benefits success is *directly* dependent on the level of engagement enabled by your benefits administration outsourcing partner.

At-A-Glance Guide *from* Empyrean Benefit Solutions

This At-A-Glance takes a close look at the elements that can impact positive, lasting engagement across your entire workforce— regardless of company size or complexity—to improve employees' benefits interaction, increase overall satisfaction, and help you effectively meet your goals.

Introduction, *Cont'd.*

In an increasingly consumer-driven benefits environment, it is essential that you have the right technology, tools, and support readily accessible to encourage engagement and empower employees to confidently interact with their benefits.

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1 | Empower Employee Engagement Through Consumer-Centric Technology

Participants need to thoroughly engage with their benefits in order to reap the best results from their coverage options. However, it is crucial that employers facilitate the proper experiences in order to enable deeper levels of engagement and comprehension. Additionally, the rapid effects of consumerism have increased employee demands for a sophisticated and engaging approach to benefits.

To transition employees into a consumer mindset around engagement, it is extremely important that your workforce be *served* like modern consumers within this context. In today's market, 24/7 access to online stores, product education, and other informational resources has altered the way people consider, interact with, and purchase nearly any and all products and services.

You must be strategically agile enough to provide the online shopping and education tools that employees naturally expect: As coverage costs continue to shift between employers and employees, enabling smarter consumerism through heightened engagement will play an increasingly spotlighted role in successful benefit strategies.

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1 | Empower Employee Engagement Through Consumer-Centric Technology, *Cont'd.*

Your benefits administration partner's technology is *the* defining factor ensuring that employees receive the positive, engaging, and consumer-centric experiences needed to gain the most from your offering.

Your technology platform is the foundation on which employees build the comprehension and confidence to fully engage with their benefits. 80% of employees who report a highly positive enrollment also say they are highly confident in their benefits choices.[2]

A positive and engaging enrollment process, facilitated by a technology partner delivering focused and successful online shopping experiences, will help create a momentum of engagement as employees leverage their coverage throughout the plan year.

A robust online benefits portal serves as a *one-stop hub* for employees—making it easy and convenient for participants to interact with your offering all year long. Intuitive self-service that mimics the familiarity of your employees' favorite online shopping experience enables employees to positively interact with their benefits, and helps establish and encourage patterns of year-round engagement that continues after annual enrollment is over.

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2 | Leverage Your Platform to Effectively Communicate and Connect with Employees

A modern benefits administration technology partner will offer flexible solutions to support your workforce's varying needs *without* draining your team. Within your benefits portal, you should be capable of **tailoring messages** to drive relevant and targeted content to participants throughout the year.

During annual enrollment you may choose to direct benefits information to different populations—similar to the way product suggestions are displayed on online marketplaces such as Amazon.com. For example, younger employees may be greeted with information regarding a high deductible health plan (HDHP) or other cost-saving plan, while older workers and retirees may receive messaging focused on retirement savings options.

Once enrollment has passed, you can leverage this same channel to help employees keep in touch with all their benefits have to offer. Messages can include information regarding savings accounts, wellness programs, plans that feature anytime enrollment (such as pet insurance), or other applicable options and programs depending on your unique offering and communications strategy.

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2 | Leverage Your Platform to Effectively Communicate and Connect with Employees, *Cont'd.*

Similar to during annual enrollment, your *year-round messages* should also be targeted to specific employee groups as necessary to maintain audience relevancy and deliver optimal impact. As employees move into the plan year, your benefits administration platform will continue to serve as a key tool for keeping the advantages of your offerings front and center. Continuing the benefits conversation with employees *post-enrollment* will ensure they maintain focus on this daily aspect of their compensation and satisfaction.

Targeted messaging capabilities within your self-service portal enable you to fine-tune and personalize communications for your various employees. A strong communications strategy is key to ensuring your employees remain engaged beyond enrollment, and your benefits administration platform should make executing this strategy simpler to accomplish. Tailoring experiences to most effectively match your employees' needs will allow participants to easily identify with their coverage options and boost more immediate engagement.

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3 | Drive Engagement with Decision Support Tools

Encouraging employees to engage with and recognize the value of their benefits has huge impacts for employers. 65% of employees say their benefits influence their job satisfaction, 58% say their benefits impact their employer loyalty, and 43% say benefits are critical to their workplace engagement.[3]

Going further, 78% of employees that are highly satisfied with their benefits report high job satisfaction. In contrast, only 30% of employees that are dissatisfied with their benefits report similar job satisfaction.[4]

However, people are naturally reticent to interact with something they do not fully understand – especially in the case of interacting with their employee benefits. Unfortunately, nearly three-fourths of employees admit they do not fully grasp how their benefits work,[5] which can have a significantly negative effect on their level of engagement.

When considering decision support tools alongside your engagement goals, it is important that you acknowledge and accommodate the various ways employees will most effectively interact with their benefits. Your workforce may consist of up to *five*

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3 | Drive Engagement with Decision Support Tools, *Cont'd.*

different generations,[6] and within each generation are diverse style, learning, and shopping preferences that influence how employees choose to approach their benefits.

Some participants may be completely comfortable with entirely digital processes, some may prefer a helping hand to guide them when questions arise, while others may benefit most from a combination of these two approaches.

For successful interactions and *subsequent, year-round engagement,* employees should have the multi-channel option of engaging with your offering *on their own terms.*

However, facilitating this can prove to be a challenge. Meeting this demand requires constant resources and can easily overwhelm HR teams that attempt to take on this responsibility alone. Instead of solely struggling to cover all of your employees' different support needs and preferences, ask how your benefits administration technology provider can help. A capable partner will offer complete support solutions that ensure participants have access to the tools, guidance, and information they require to familiarize themselves with their benefits and intelligently choose from among your offering.

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3 | Drive Engagement with Decision Support Tools, *Cont'd.*

For those employees comfortable with a digital and individual process, your benefits portal should be designed to deliver an intuitive user experience, featuring complete self-service and administrative capabilities. A critical aspect of these capabilities includes your technology partner's **decision support tools**, which provide interactive ways for employees to determine the coverage options that most effectively meet their and their family's requirements.

A particularly powerful and helpful tool is your platform's *recommendation engine,* which considers a participant's needs alongside eligible coverage opportunities to match them with ideal plans or plan bundles, if applicable.

On the Empyrean Platform, for instance, employees are walked through a brief yet comprehensive questionnaire, answering clear, easy-to-understand questions to determine their individual financial standings, risk tolerance, healthcare requirements, and coverage utilization patterns. Upon completion of the questionnaire, the recommendation engine's proprietary algorithm compares the employee's results to eligible plans, and provides the ideal plan matches for their unique needs according to their responses.

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3 | Drive Engagement with Decision Support Tools, *Cont'd.*

Along with a recommendation engine, other decision support tools should be natively integrated and available for your participants to leverage directly within their benefits portal. Additional resources, such as a plan comparison tool, provide well-rounded guidance and help employees individually learn and ultimately choose the right plans for their unique situations.

Delivering *personalized recommendations* through self-service guidance tools lets employees gain a deeper understanding of how your offering applies to their needs, and simultaneously helps them to develop the familiarity and self-assurance to thoroughly engage with their benefits outside of annual enrollment and throughout the year.

Through your benefits administration technology platform, you should also provide one-on-one support for those employees that require or prefer more individualized benefits assistance beyond self-service tools. To most effectively align live employee support with your engagement and strategy goals, expect your outsourcing partner to dedicate a *single coordinated team* to address employees' questions and issues.

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3 | Drive Engagement with Decision Support Tools, *Cont'd.*

Simply filtering employees through an overseas or mass call center of representatives is likely to frustrate employees and only serve to further alienate them from engaging with their benefits.

Likewise, artificial intelligence (AI) service systems, or "chatbots," are novel support solutions. However, in dealing with proper names, industry acronyms, cost inquiries, or handling highly secure and HIPAA-protected information, today's chatbots currently are unable to adequately address employees' questions and concerns beyond offering one-size-fits-all or canned responses. If provided incorrect or incomplete information, chatbots are prone to respond inadequately, which can lead to participant frustration or confusion. Even the slightest name misspelling can cause service response or accuracy issues.

Instead, you should have a dedicated 100% U.S. based team of benefits service professionals available to assist your employees. A true technology and service partner will ensure your outsourced service team understands the core ins-and-outs of your company's unique offering, strategy, and culture in order to provide the highest quality assistance specific to *your* employees and *your* benefits.

To most effectively align live employee support with your engagement and strategy goals, you should expect your outsourcing partner to dedicate a ***single coordinated*** team to address employees' questions and issues.

3 | Drive Engagement with Decision Support Tools, *Cont'd.*

With the support of a dedicated service team, you can easily and comprehensively meet one of employees' most requested benefits concerns: 48% of employees say they want the opportunity to speak with an expert about their benefits during enrollment.[3]

Providing live, knowledgeable assistance for your participants can help fill generational and preferential gaps within your support strategy, and help employees get the answers, information, and confidence boost they need to both enroll *and* engage with their benefits.

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4 | Foster Confidence with Reliable Back-End Technology

At the core of every benefits administration solution is your system's back-end technology. **No matter how visually pleasing your platform may be, your solution will prove worthless if the technology powering it is unreliable, unable to adapt to current and future strategies, and unscalable to your expected and unexpected changes.**

Inaccurate, outdated, or inflexible benefits technology will not only lead to administrative headaches and potential hours of reconciliation work for your team, **but system errors can also erode employees' confidence in their benefits—** *which can severely impact their willingness to engage.*

Employees' benefits confidence and satisfaction (or conversely, their frustration and anxiety) are all dependent on the stability and reliability of the benefits administration partner and platform you choose.

Your technology should just work: If your system causes coverage or deduction errors, this can not only increase the potential for administrative risks, but will also damage employees' crucial connection to their benefits and employer. A partner and system that provides consistently reliable functionality, on the other hand, will bolster employees and encourage them in their benefits interactions on your platform.

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4 | Foster Confidence with Reliable Back-End Technology, *Cont'd.*

Key factors when considering the reliability of a potential benefits administration system are the scalability, flexibility, and integration capabilities of the platform's technology. It is important that the solution you choose is able to evolve along with your company, strategy, and offering. Though a potential provider may be able to meet your needs during the initial vetting process, long-term solution success is dependent on how well your benefits administration system is able to proactively manage your future requirements *as they shift.*

A modern platform will be architected to adapt along with your needs. *Strategy-agnostic* and *carrier-agnostic* capabilities will allow your solution to administer *any strategy* (be it traditional, a private exchange or marketplace, or a hybrid of these two approaches) and any plan or combination of plans from *any carrier.* Central to maintaining this functionality over time is the ability of the platform's back-end technology to appropriately scale and keep up with your company's organizational, strategic, and industry changes, whether they be small or large.

Selecting a highly adaptable and dependable technology partner will ensure that participants have consistently positive benefits experiences – thereby helping to maintain employees' level of confidence, trust, and willingness to engage with their benefits.

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5 | Consider Additional Steps to Encourage Engagement

To further drive the success of your engagement strategy, consider additional means by which your benefits administration technology can help increase employees' benefits acknowledgement and interaction throughout the year.

For example, your employees' compensation amounts to much more than just their salary when benefits are included, but the full value of their employment can easily be overshadowed by daily life in and out of the office. Guiding employees to regularly recognize this whole value, however, is an important part of maintaining a satisfied workforce.

Interactive **total compensation statements**, when made directly available through your employee benefits portal, can help employees adopt a holistic perspective towards their individual compensation package. When employees see *beyond* their salary, they are then able to see the full benefit value of their employment. A digital statement offers an engaging and readily accessible way for employees to gain visibility over a simple annual paper statement, and enables you to better communicate this value.

Interactive **total compensation statements,** when directly available through your employee benefits portal, offer an engaging way for employees to see the full benefit value of their employment.

5 | Consider Additional Steps to Encourage Engagement, *Cont'd.*

In addition to heightening visibility around their total benefits value, you can also streamline and simplify employees' benefits interactions.

With **single sign-on (SSO) capabilities**, employees can securely login once to their benefits portal and from there access carrier or other third-party vendor websites, eliminating the hassles of remembering multiple login credentials across multiple benefits-related websites.

With SSO functionality, employees can follow enabled links to automatically be signed into their individual account on that particular carrier or vendor's website. Accessing carrier-specific websites and tools, financial savings plans, and wellness programs becomes significantly easier, thus increasing the overall quality, satisfaction, and ease of engagement across the entire employee benefits experience.

Single sign-on (SSO) capabilities makes accessing carrier and third-party vendor websites significantly easier, increasing the overall quality, satisfaction, and ease of engagement of the employee benefits experience.

Conclusion

Driving consistent, year-round benefits engagement is an extremely important responsibility when it comes to maintaining a satisfied workforce—but it should not require your team to struggle alongside the management of your other business priorities.

By choosing a modern benefits administration platform built with engagement, reliability, and adaptability at its core, you can ensure your solution will remain viable as your offering evolves.

Through the support of a dedicated partner with the technology, tools, and experience to engage participants with their plans, you will help solidify employees' appreciation, drive satisfaction, and see your strategic goals met with success.

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About Empyrean

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Empyrean Benefit Solutions manages employee health and welfare benefits programs, combining the industry's most modern, client-adaptive, and configurable benefits technology platform with expert, responsive service to deliver Hi-Touch Benefits Administration. Empyrean provides market-leading enrollment, eligibility management, ACA reporting, and other plan administration services that empower employers, insurance brokers, and healthcare exchanges to meet ever-evolving benefit challenges. Founded in 2006, Empyrean's integrated platform serves over three million annual participants across a wide spectrum of sizes, industries, and complexities.

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