5 best practices for an open enrollment communications plan

As a member of the human resources team, open enrollment is one of the most crucial times of the year. The employees at your company are counting on you to provide them with the open enrollment information they need. That's why it's essential to have an open enrollment communications plan ready in advance.

Having a communications plan will keep the conversation open, so you don't find yourself with disgruntled employees who discover they've missed the open enrollment period or were confused about their options. Keep reading to learn a few best practices for developing your open enrollment communications plan.

Why open enrollment matters

Open enrollment gives employees a small window of time to enroll in, withdraw from, or make other changes to their medical, dental, vision, disability, and life insurance coverage.

The choices made during open enrollment can have a significant impact on one's take-home pay and insurance coverage; therefore, most employees need questions answered in detail, so they're knowledgeable about their options.

Consider your employees' background

When discussing open enrollment, consider your employees' background. If you work with a large percentage of women in their childbearing age, you might discuss the benefits of short term disability for maternity leave coverage more. However, if most of the employees are older and nearing retirement, you might discuss life insurance more.

If the employee demographics vary widely, consider how you can communicate different options throughout your overall messaging. You want to view yourself as a marketer when you are speaking to your employees about their options. This isn't a one size fits all process.

Keep it simple

Keep in mind that insurance is a confusing and sometimes overwhelming topic for people. So, to reduce the overwhelm and confusion, you want to keep the open enrollment process as simple as possible from beginning to end. Map out the entire open enrollment process from A to Z and walk through it as though you're someone who knows nothing about insurance.
If you go through it as an expert or someone highly skilled in insurance knowledge, you risk developing a system that's too complicated for some of your employees. It's better to be overly explanatory than to talk over the heads of your employees.

Ask for employee insight

When preparing for the open enrollment period, ask your employees what they've liked or disliked about open enrollment in previous years. Gauge their knowledge about insurance options and open enrollment so you can get an idea of who you're working with.

This is similar to developing a business idea. Instead of assuming what your potential customer aka company employees want or need, ask them directly. It will cut down on the time you spend theorizing and guessing.

You want to find out how they prefer to get information about open enrollment, what the most confusing and the most manageable parts of the process are, etc.

Vary your communication methods

When communicating about open enrollment, you don't want to use a one size fits all approach. Instead, speak to your staff in as many ways as your budget allows you to get the messaging across. You can try sending emails, posting flyers, creating videos, having in-person meetings, etc.

The purpose of varying your communication is to help your employees get the information they need by offering it in many forms. The key, no matter the communication method, is to have a clear message, break down the insurance information into the simplest form, and meet your employees where they are in terms of knowledge and understanding.

As you likely know, video communication is one of the most popular ways to communicate today, so consider how you can implement video into your open enrollment communications plan.

Set goals and analyze open enrollment data

Before you start the open enrollment period, you want to set S.M.A.R.T. goals. As I'm sure you know, S.M.A.R.T. stands for specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused, and time-bound.

The goals you set for open enrollment should be very specific and easy to track. One example might be to increase enrollment in the short term disability plan by 75% by December 5, 2019.

When you set these goals, you have a target in mind. You can review these targets throughout the open enrollment period as well as at the end to determine whether you achieved them.

When open enrollment is over, you want to review your data and analyze the process went. It's only when you consider your overall performance that you can gauge your success. What was the completion rate? How many eyes were tuned into your videos? How many people attended the meetings?

Review your data at the end of the open enrollment period so you can decide how to move forward in future years. Your employees will tell and/or show you, directly or indirectly, how successful your open enrollment communications plan ultimately was.

Developing an effective open enrollment communications plan requires strong communications skills. You can learn more about building better communication with our free Office Communication Toolkit.