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## Get Ready... Open Enrollment is Fast Approaching

In a perfect world, the planning for this year's open enrollment started the day after last year's open enrollment ended. But, we know the reality. So let's bite the bullet and start planning now. Because now is still better than putting it off until tomorrow.

According to a recent MetLife study, on average, employees spend only 30 minutes each year reviewing their benefits. Communication can change that. Research shows that communicating early and often makes a real difference in employee benefit knowledge and satisfaction come open enrollment time. With some practical tips, a realistic timeline and some thoughtful planning, you can be on your way to a winning open enrollment strategy.

### Start with the Basics

- **Build on experience.** Look at what worked and what didn't work in prior years.
- **Set up a timeline and be realistic.** Plan for interruptions that will sidetrack you.
- **Communicate early and often and be consistent.** Change is stressful for employers and employees. Reduce everyone's stress by planning and implementing your strategy to help educate and prepare your employees for what's coming. Employees need time to understand and act on new information, and employers need to reinforce their messages on a regular basis. Use a combination of printed, Web and face-to-face communication at open enrollment to drive a consistent message.
- **Get Personal.** We understand information better when we can relate to specific examples. Incorporate real life testimonials. Consider offering employees online modeling tools to customize the "what if" scenarios. Don't forget to develop communications for the spouse and dependents. As members of your health plans, they are a key audience.
- **Cut through the noise.** Eliminate the jargon. Use plain language creatively to engage and educate employees.
- **Avoid information paralysis.** You know what it's like -- there is so much information to digest that it can be overwhelming. Of course, it's important to be thorough with your communications, just try to balance your materials. Don't overwhelm employees. Use "At a Glance" and "Highlights" to simplify communication materials. They actually have a greater likelihood of being read and kept for future reference.



**Next, build on the basics by producing materials that can be used as your building blocks for the following year.** Think about your enrollment kits and benefit summaries. Can you extend the shelf life of your communication materials by eliminating logistical information such as meeting sites, dates and deadlines? It's a simple fix and very cost effective. The logistical information is better handled in memos, posters and cover letters, not in the body of your documents.

**Increase your effectiveness by creating a brand for Open Enrollment.** You're spending a great deal of time, energy and significant portion of your overall organizational budget on your benefits. When you brand your communications, you automatically increase visibility, awareness and your organization's role as the plan sponsor. It's inexpensive to develop and design worksite materials to publicize your theme. Brainstorm around a creative theme to make it fun – be creative.

**Provide multiple ways for employees to get their questions answered.** Best practices include:

- o using a benefits hotline
- o planning group meetings and allowing time for individual meetings as needed
- o publishing frequently asked questions
- o referring employees to [www.quotit.net/resources/terms\\_health.htm](http://www.quotit.net/resources/terms_health.htm) for assistance with defining terms
- o providing a help desk or benefits email address
- o incorporating blogs into strategies for the younger generation of texters

**Use your health plan to help inform.** Ask your health plan for help in obtaining or developing – or even paying for -- communication materials, but make sure that any materials from your plan will match your goals, key messages and branding requirements.

**Follow up your Open Enrollment with an annual benefit statement.** What better way to emphasize the value your benefits plans provide to employees and their families? This is a great way to remind them and confirm their recent benefit elections as well.

**As for Tomorrow...** you can begin to lay the groundwork for next fall by incorporating your messages throughout the coming year. Make your benefit communications part of your ongoing discussions with employees. Keep your message out there and avoid any year-end surprises.

With over 17 years of experience, BeneCom Associates can offer you real insight into how to **develop a successful strategy to communicate to your employees.**

To learn more about us call **860.674.2626** or visit us [online](#).