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### **What to Look for If You Decide to Outsource**

While most of our clients haven't given us the impression they're ready to jump out a window (yet), this year they have seemed a tad harried. Between enactment of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), renewals, plan design changes, bid specifications/evaluations and just doing their best to keep up morale not much time is available to think about employee communication. But given the national mood, communication is something they realize shouldn't be put on a back burner. In fact, it's key.

Our clients understand the importance of communication during this time, but, and they admit, they don't have the time nor the resources to follow through with putting communication plans together. They decided the best option was to outsource. We asked them what they were looking for in a potential vendor and a common theme emerged. We thought some of the criteria they listed might be useful to you, too:

- 1. Benefits + Communications Expertise.** Creating effective communications takes knowledge, skills and experience. Your communications consultant should not only demonstrate the ability to create effective materials, but be conversant in benefits design, trends and the legal/regulatory environment, as well.
- 2. Ability to Identify Key Issues.** Your communications consultant should be prepared to analyze your benefits environment and the demographic composition of your employee population, including their "hot buttons." What's more, a good consultant will want to know how best to reach your employees – at all levels, media and locations. For instance, office workers may be comfortable using e-mail, while factory workers may not have access to a computer at work or at home.
- 3. Budget/Message Sensitivity.** Make sure your consultant is sensitive to budgets and the overall messages you're trying to convey. As an example, a message that tries to explain why the company is increasing the cost sharing burden will fall flat if delivered in a glossy, six-color brochure.
- 4. Been There, Done That.** Of course, one of the most important advantages of outside consultants is they've already tackled many of the same issues you're facing. They can take that experience and apply it to your situation, but with unique messages that resonate with your group.

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**5. Production Capacity.** Since most enrollment periods are in the fall, some benefit communications firms may be stretched too thin to devote sufficient attention to your needs. Make sure your firm has the capacity to handle your entire assignment; also ask whether all work is performed in-house or with a combination of outside and inside resources. (Engaging outside writers and designers is fine, as long as they have the right qualifications.)

**6. Ability to Meet Deadlines.** Ask for a preliminary schedule and, when you check references, find out how well the firm kept to the original schedule and whether its staff caused any production delays.

**7. Proven to Meet Expectations = Only Pleasant Surprises.** Some consultants like to point out their award-winning projects during the presentation. And although winning awards is great for staff morale and the firm's marketing efforts, quality should be measured according to criteria you establish in advance.

BeneCom has 18 years of experience with employee benefits communication. We can help you design a successful strategy that educates, increases satisfaction and engages employees. **BeneCom Associates offers effective benefit communication strategies for every budget.** To learn more about us call **860.674.2626** or visit us [online](#).