

UNDERSTAND THE TOOLS.

■ ■ ■ Ready to get started with social media? There are many tools but these five are the most relevant and the most effective for benefits communication.

What it is	How to use it for benefits	Tips for success
<p>Blogs</p> <p>Blogs are a simple and easy way to create Web content and self-publish. They also give readers the opportunity to respond with comments and have a dialog with the author.</p>	<p>A benefits blog is one of the most effective ways to get started with social media. Add a blog to your benefits Web site or intranet and use it to post reminders, new features and articles. Think of the blog as insider tips to help employees get the most from their benefits.</p> <p>Ask employees for comments and get real-time feedback whenever you post new content.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set a realistic schedule and keep to it. Posting a couple times a month is plenty to start. Post more often during busy times like annual enrollment• Make sure all posts have actionable information—that you tell employees not only what to do but how to do it• Worried about negative or inaccurate comments? Set up your blog so that it is “moderated”—meaning no comments are posted until you review them
<p>Microblogs</p> <p>Twitter, Yammer and others are examples of “microblogs.” Microblogs like Twitter let you post only a short update at a time, and provide you with more interactivity than a traditional blog.</p>	<p>Twitter and other similar platforms are great ways to get out short bits of information and reminders frequently. You’ll be surprised how much you can say in a short sentence or two, and your employees will be delighted with the quick hits of helpful information.</p> <p>Pull the feed into your benefits Web site or intranet for a cost-effective way to keep those sites fresh.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use Benz Communications’ @BenefitsTip to help you with content and ideas for your Twitter stream. Go to http://twitter.com/benefitstip• Twitter lets your users decide how they want to receive the content—online, in an application, on their mobile phone. Educate your less-savvy employees about how you’ll be streaming information and the various ways they can interact with you in person and online
<p>Podcasts and videos</p> <p>These are online downloadable audio and video clips. Play them on a computer or drop them on an iPod to listen to any time.</p>	<p>Audio clips and videos are a great way to make your content more exciting and inviting. Use videos or podcasts to help explain changes, introduce a new program or uncover common misperceptions about benefits.</p> <p>High-profile case studies have shown the positive outcomes for organizations using employee video contests to boost participation in benefit plans and get their organizations to talk.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interviews with the benefits team or a quick explanation of a plan can be a simple way to get started with video• Do keep things professional and high quality. Messy videos might be OK for YouTube, but they are not a good representation of your benefits brand• Use caution if you ask employees to submit videos—those campaigns require more management than you might assume
<p>Social networks</p> <p>Facebook, LinkedIn and many other social networks connect individuals around interests and activities. Whether personal or professional, they are incredibly powerful tools for distributing information and ideas.</p>	<p>Consider creating a Facebook wellness or benefits group and letting employees and their families get updates via Facebook (you can integrate it with your blog or Twitter too).</p> <p>Build an internal social network (or use your intranet) to connect employees interested in similar wellness topics.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Look for wellness and health carriers who are starting to build social networking into their tools—peer influence and support can help individuals meet wellness goals and improve their health• Understand that social networks will take on a life of their own. This approach is not for the control freak
<p>User forums</p> <p>User forums are moderated online discussions focused around a certain topic.</p>	<p>A benefits user forum would let employees (and your benefits team) swap ideas and answer each other’s questions about how to get the most out of your programs. Structure your forum by benefit plan so information is easy to find. You’ll certainly be surprised by how much your employees know about your programs and how much they’d like to share that knowledge.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• User forums are likely to be most effective at organizations that use online discussions for other topics—whether customer support or training. Make sure it is a good fit for your organization• Like social networks, user forums may take on a life of their own and do require more hands-on monitoring than some of the other channels



SOCIAL MEDIA FOR BENEFITS COMMUNICATION

How to get started with social media

Change your perspective

Social media is not just about fun and gossip and swapping status updates—and it is not just a fad that is going to go away soon. Social media has fundamentally transformed the way we communicate. Social media tools are incredibly effective communication vehicles—helping you achieve your benefits goals, communicate more frequently and gather real-time feedback from employees and their families.

And the best news is this: Many companies have had years of success with social media tools like blogs, videos and social networking sites—and have paved the way for you. Following the established best practices and learning from others' experiences can help you get in the game without any missteps. Use this guide to help you get started with social media.

Don't jump in too fast: Start with strategy. As with any communication plan, start with your objectives—what do you want to accomplish? Before making a social media investment, ask yourself:

- What are your objectives?
- Who are you talking to?
- What is a wise use of development dollars?
- What is going to have a long-term ROI?
- What is efficient to monitor and maintain?

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Tips for all social media:

- Think of social media as a way to create an ongoing dialogue with your employees and their families.
- Don't be overly ambitious to start. Set realistic goals about creating content and what you can maintain and let things grow over time.
- Use social media to share personal stories—for example, profile employees who have made great health changes. Employee stories are very powerful!
- Remember: Feedback is a good thing! You'll get great insight into where employees and their families have questions. And you can respond in real time with social media tools.

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