



Why Companies Should Have Their Benefits on the Internet...

and Why the Excuses They Use Not To Aren't Relevant

By **Jennifer Benz**, **Benz Communications**

With all the value an employee benefits website provides – and the cost-effectiveness of one – it's surprising that all large employers don't already have one. Many companies have rationalized that having an enrollment system on the Internet (accessible outside the firewall) is sufficient. Or, that having information on the corporate Intranet is all that's needed for employees to access information and make good decisions. It's not. You need to get the information to the decision maker – who isn't always your employee – and make sure the information is easy to use and engaging to so that it can effectively compete with the social media vying for their attention.

And, while social media – blogs, user forums, Facebook groups, and Twitter – are powerful communications tools with tremendous potential to engage employees and families in their benefits selection process, their strength depends on a strong Internet presence. A branded and accessible website is the best foundation for using social media for employee benefits communication.

Following are the four key reasons companies should create a branded benefits website, and the three excuses companies use to avoid doing so and why these excuses are no longer relevant.

Why companies should have their employee benefits information online:

- **Access.** The most important reason to have employee benefits information online is access. Access for employees, their spouses, domestic partners, parents, and even, sometimes, children – any relation who helps make health care and retirement decisions. Companies keeping information hidden on an Intranet from these audiences are missing an opportunity to engage those using their programs and driving their costs.
- **Branding.** Even a fantastic benefits enrollment platform is limited, in terms of branding, and unlikely to provide information in a way that engages employees and their relations in company-relevant issues. Benefits information – and everything promised employees – must be communicated in a manner that is a direct reflection of the company brand. Typically, this is best accomplished with complete control over a user experience via a website.
- **Recruitment and new hires.** Having a benefits package available online for recruits to review and new hires to become familiar with helps attract key talent and eases new hire orientation. Unlike the "experience" garnered from reviewing written material, a website enables a prospective employee to get "inside" and see firsthand the commitment the company makes to its employees. Companies never fail to be surprised by the value this provides.
- **Social media.** Social media – from blogs to Facebook to Twitter – have tremendous potential to engage employees and families in health care and retirement decision-making. These new tools must be linked to an overall communications strategy and a comprehensive online resource to be effective. A branded company website is the best foundation from which to launch a social media campaign.

Companies' primary reasons for not having their benefits information online and why these reasons are no longer relevant:

- **It's confidential.** In fact, it isn't. Once written materials have been distributed to employees, a company's benefits information is in the public realm. This information is not proprietary, nor does it need to be confidential. If there's sensitivity regarding pricing, additional protection may be built in. Personal employee

data is not included. Companies can't let the perceived need for confidentiality prevent them from providing a resource that encourages employees and their families to have information and use it. Nor should these sites be password protected. In the time it takes to reset or find a password, an employee could well be lost to any number of social media distractions such as YouTube or Facebook. The best approach is to make access as simple and user-friendly as possible.

- **It's all provided in a printed book.** Unless a company has some portion of its employee population that absolutely does not use or have access to the Internet, it's time to ditch that big printed book and replace it with a benefits website and streamlined printed materials that drive employees to the site. A robust, user-friendly website engages and drives enrollment. It also eliminates the need to justify an annual print budget and companies gain kudos for being more environmentally conscious.
- **It's too expensive.** With all the efficient web development technologies available, it's no longer prohibitively expensive to build a company-customized benefits website – no matter the company size. It's likely that a year or two of print budgets – for those companies still printing a large benefits booklet annually -- would cover the cost of a fully developed website. The results prove it: a benefits website is the most valuable investment a company can make to its communications infrastructure.

Jennifer Benz is an award-winning communications consultant and writer based in San Francisco. Her firm, Benz Communications, provides full-service employee communication services to Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For and Fortune 500 leaders. She can be reached at jen@benzcommunications.com.

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