

No stress open enrollments

Simple steps every employer can take to reduce the pressure of your next enrollment

Open enrollment; these two words have been known to cause anxiety for even the most seasoned HR professionals. Selecting a plan design, negotiating rates, sifting through stacks of benefit directories even figuring out where to hold the enrollment all fall under your responsibilities.

"It's no wonder why employers and human resources professionals everywhere dread that time of the year and are now looking for ways to take the sting off of their company's open enrollment process," says Gracy Weberman, an agent with Sapoznik Insurance. "Employers everywhere are looking for answers on how to counter increases in health insurance costs and at the same time stimulate plan participation. It's a balancing act that requires a bit of help from an experienced insurance broker."

Smart Business spoke with Weberman about the role of a qualified insurance broker before, during and after a company's open enrollment period.

As a company nears its open enrollment, what are some things to consider?

Build on experience, start by using what you learned from last year's enrollment to create this year's plan and be sure to start early. Make note of what worked and what your employees responded to the most. Working with an experienced employee benefits broker can also help greatly. A good broker can guide you through the delicate negotiation process that can often take place months in advance. Experienced brokers can guide you and help reduce a lot of the pressure that comes from electing the proper plan designs and funding strategies.

With so much going on, how should a company approach open enrollment?

Set up a timeline. Developing a realistic



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time line will help you manage what to do and when to get started. Depending on the size of your group, some full service brokers begin preparing for your open enrollment up to seven months in advance. This allows for the timely negotiation of rates and evaluation of plan designs to ensure that they fit your company's needs. It also ensures the accurate assembly of materials, kits and supplies all of which can be handled by a strong broker externally, and then delivered right to the company as they are required. Be selective and know what to ask for from your broker. Full service insurance agents should be able to "think outside the box" when it comes to creative ways of reaching your workforce.

How do the venue, location and hours of the open enrollment contribute to its success?

The space where a company holds its open enrollment is crucial to a successful meeting. An area with adequate room for insurance carriers and enrollers to effectively communicate and engage your employees allows for greater interaction

and typically results in better participation from your employees. Make sure you schedule your enrollment period during hours where all of your employees can attend and make sure you accommodate those employees who may work late shifts or have alternate schedules. Sometimes, more than one date is required for a given workplace. Be prepared to plan for follow-up meetings when necessary.

How do you get your employees involved?

When it comes to involvement, communication is the key. Now that you have set the location and time, be sure to get the word out. Communicate your open enrollment through flyers, payroll stuffers and email announcements to help generate a buzz about the enrollment period. Remind employees to bring in their spouses' or dependents' social security numbers, dates of birth, the names of your primary care physicians and other general information that will facilitate signing up for benefits.

Other ways to raise involvement is to be sure to make your employees aware of voluntary insurance benefits your company may be offering. These voluntary plans include life insurance, disability plans and other ancillary benefits. Oftentimes, these voluntary benefits are exclusively offered as part of a group insurance plan and not always available as an individual policy. These plans will sometimes be available as guaranteed issue, meaning that an employee would be able to purchase a policy without the need to undergo any medical underwriting, physical exams or filling out any lengthy questionnaires.

Following these steps and working with a qualified insurance broker are the best ways to break free from open enrollment anxieties while strengthening your company's benefits plan.

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