

Reinvent for value:

# Open enrollment communication in a virtual world



## The world we once knew — the way we work, live and consume information — will never be the same.

The year 2020 brought a pandemic, global shutdown, and social unrest, all amid polarizing politics and natural disasters. And while the world adapted quickly to “virtually” everything, there remains disruption in the workforce and workplace, requiring U.S. employers to communicate in different ways. This year’s open enrollment season brings its own set of unique challenges.

We are all anxious to “get back to normal,” but what “normal” looks like will be different. In these times of remote working, increased flexibility and competing priorities, organizations have the opportunity to reinvent the overall employee experience and the way they reach and engage their workforce with benefits communication. Now is the time for a “do-over,” to reinvent for value — value for the organization, value for HR and, importantly, value for employees and their families.

Employees are madly juggling work and family life — the lines are blurred, and there is a struggle for balance. As we begin to rethink priorities at work and at home, consider creating a future state where employees are energized and benefits are valued. Lead with empathy, and consider new ways to reach people where they are.

Open enrollment is the one time of year when every organization has an audience ready to hear about benefits. Since open enrollment will be different again this year, it’s critical to deploy creative and thoughtful communication strategies that cut through the clutter and to ensure employees understand the value of your total rewards package as well as how their benefits can provide needed support, security and resources during these different times.

## What we know

Even before the pandemic struck and indelibly affected our people and our corporate way of life, companies were feeling the pressure to deliver a compelling value proposition to the workforce. Mercer’s 2020 Global Talent Trends study found that employee experience was the number one priority for senior HR leaders — and because of the far-reaching impacts recently experienced, we believe that priority is now even more critical.

“Anytime, anywhere” operations are becoming the norm as companies recognize the effectiveness of remote working and flexible hours. Employers need to rethink health plan designs and benefits programs to consider diversity, equity and inclusion, with an emphasis on virtual care, preventive care, mental health and employee support.



**Employee experience was the #1 priority for senior HR leaders in 2020.**

## How we respond

**Be creative — use effective methods to engage employees and communicate critical information in a virtual world.**

Companies that rely on doing things the same old way will find that their communication misses the mark and employees are not engaged. So what's a company to do?

**According to recent Mercer survey, the top 3 changes that companies plan to make to this year's open enrollment are:**

- › Use different media and communication channels
- › Create new messaging to help employees consider their benefit choices
- › Implementation of a virtual health fair

### Get personal.

Many employers are moving away from a “one size fits all” communication approach. Instead, messages, images and stories can be tailored and targeted to employees in a variety of ways — whether that's current plan elections, age range, gender or consumerism patterns.

Another way to get personal with employees is to deliver communications that are relatable and useful. Self-recorded testimonials, self-driven decision tools and branding that embodies the heart of the organization all create the opportunity for employees to feel a personal connection.



### Say less, show more.

Understanding benefits is not easy. Think about how you can tell the story with visuals. The use of icons, images and infographics can help simplify complex concepts around how plans — such as a Health Savings Account — work.

Digital presentations with recorded narration and engaging animation can do the trick. Consider providing a modern, self-paced e-learning experience through courses with videos, quizzes and gamification.

To keep benefits and other rewards top of mind year-round, total rewards websites help communicate the full range and value of an employee's pay and benefits. Use dashboards to summarize information and make key rewards information easy to identify.



### Engage in two-way communications.

Do you know what is on your employees' minds leading into this enrollment season? What about managers, the all-important link to the workforce? Or leaders — what keeps them up at night? Using pulse technology or some other sensing mechanism can be a great way of uncovering and dealing with those burning questions.

Consider hosting live sessions where leaders are available to answer questions. Implement virtual office hours through a platform such as the Mercer Virtual Benefits Fair, where employees and family members can learn about benefits and participate in live chats and webinars with HR and plan provider partners.



### Provide consumer-grade digital tools.

With people now working from home (or wherever they have a good Wi-Fi connection), employers need to be creative in getting enrollment information into their hands. Help employees experience your benefits, and focus on their health in the same ways that they engage in the consumer world — via smartphones, tablets and laptops. Open enrollment is a great time to rethink your media and communication channels, to consider the timing and the look and feel of your communication pieces.



## Next steps

If the goal is to provide timely, simple and targeted communications to deliver a consumer-grade employee experience, all while driving awareness and action through relevant, transparent and inclusive messaging, then below are three things to get you started.



### Develop a strategy.

It's important to be strategic about your communication efforts. Just putting "stuff" out there doesn't make it helpful. Having a strategic communication plan can give you the clarity and focus to engage your employees differently in their health and benefits. Employers are asking their workforce to take on more and more responsibility for making good decisions. Your strategy will help define what that looks like and how you'll get employees there.



### Craft the story.

Hone your messaging and visuals to stand out and motivate action. Personalize information through storytelling to help employees and their families see how a particular benefit or decision will lead to a better outcome. Make it simple. Make it actionable. Make it transparent.



### Activate your plan.

You'll want to consider timing carefully, based on enrollment deadlines, the current pulse of your employees, and the amount of change coming. Allow for ample time to provide meaningful resources that help employees choose the benefits best for them.

Be sure to cascade your messages, leveraging leaders and influencers to engage through modern media such as podcasts and video.

And remember to build two-way communication into your plan, so employees can ask questions, get answers and provide feedback on your efforts. This feedback informs communication going forward and will help you adjust your plan as you guide employees to evaluate and use their benefits effectively.



Visit us online for additional insights on open enrollment: [Mercer.us/OpenEnrollment](https://Mercer.us/OpenEnrollment).

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