

Special Points of Interest:

- Drive wellness participation to a higher level
- Policy change in active coverage for dependents in college
- Benergy eases open enrollment administration
- Employee engagement issue top of mind for employers

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New AFG Web Site Launched

Austin Financial Group launched a new Web site this summer at austinfo.com.

With the execution of the redesign, the site maintains a fresh clean look and offers user-friendly navigation with each click bringing value to the reader. The site offers options for readers to further investigate more information.

You, as our client, as well as your employees, will find increased value in the depth of the content on our site. Serving as a valuable resource, the site shows how we offer solutions for employee benefit plans. We strongly believe

employees should become well-informed consumers of their benefit plans, therefore we provide resources for



Redesigned home page for austinfo.com.

educational assistance. The site is a mini-portal for up-to-date news and

information pertaining to employee benefits. We have designated a separate section just for employers & benefit managers and a separate section just for employees.

On our site you can now watch video demonstrations of our online benefits portal, Benergy. We have devoted a page to introduce Benergy 2G!, the upgrade and second generation of the portal.

The site will be updated regularly. Visit often! And, please provide feedback to us on our Contact Us page. We'd like to hear from you!

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) Can Help Employees Struggling with Clinical Depression

The high prevalence of mental health problems increases the incidence of disabilities among workers, hurting workplace productivity and increasing costs for employer-provided health care and disability insurance.

According to a four-year study recently completed by The Hartford Financial Services Group, Inc., employers who offer Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) can not only help workers get well but, in the process, can blunt the impact of mental health

issues on employee productivity. The study, which involved 11 companies with a combined 94,000 employees, indicated that EAPs are worth promoting and can provide meaningful results.

Employee Assistance Programs can help shorten the duration of short-term disability (STD) claims and help people return to work. Disabilities sustained by employees who had access to EAP services lasted 14.5 days less on average than disabilities sustained by employees who did not have

access to these services.

The study also showed that simply having an EAP in place reduced the duration of STD claims, regardless of whether employees made use of the programs. Further study must be done to know why simply making EAPs available to employees, whether the program was used or not, reduces disability durations. A theory is that employers offering EAPs may simply provide a more positive and supportive workplace culture overall.

HEALTH & WELLNESS



Communicate the connection between healthy behaviors with lower health care costs to your employees.

“44% said they were likely to be in an unpleasant or unfriendly mood—bad news for employers, employees and customers.”

Employee benefits pique younger workers’ interests when applying for jobs.



Incentive & Integration = Cure for Lack of Participation in Wellness Programs

Integrating wellness initiatives with a rewards-based incentive during open enrollment is likely to generate an even greater level of employee participation in wellness programs than by just offering an incentive alone.

Not only will it strike a chord with employees as they make their upcoming health care decisions, it also helps connect the relationship between healthy behaviors and lower health care costs.

Corporate wellness programs, when offered at the point of purchase, inspire a call to action by capitalizing on when people are making an emotional decision about their health care. People typically think about health care when ill and also when choosing benefits elections for the upcoming year.

Linking wellness to benefits open enrollment assists employees in understanding that

behavior modification and healthy living can potentially slim their waistlines, while also fattening their wallets. This may drive higher participation levels.

When employees are healthy, productivity at work is increased and medical expenses at home are decreased.

Employees feel good, morale improves, and there is less absenteeism. Everybody wins!

Poor Sleep Affecting Employee Accuracy & Attitude on the Job

Sleep deprivation is costing U.S. businesses nearly \$150 billion annually in absenteeism and lost productivity, studies estimate.

Respondents to a May 2007 survey administered by the Better Sleep Council reported an alarming decline in quality of work, poor judgment and trouble retaining

information as top work-related consequences from lack of sleep. In fact, 44% said they were likely to be in an unpleasant or unfriendly mood—bad news for employers, employees and customers.

Survey results uncovered that tired employees are turning to quick-fix performance enhancers to remedy their sleep

deficiency problem, including: drinking coffee/caffeinated drinks (33%); taking a nap (17%); and going outside for fresh air (18%).

Only 13% of Americans are willing to make the commitment to get more sleep in order to feel more awake and productive at work.

New Grads More Savvy than Employers Expect

Current college grads are far more savvy and interested in benefits, such as medical and retirement, partly because their baby boomer parents are at an age where benefits matter a great deal.

When targeting recent graduates, the promotion of a company’s benefits program is usually a big part of its recruitment strategy because the

young workforce is attuned to the importance of benefits. Most grads are looking for an employer that offers good benefits. The negotiating power rests with the candidate when they face multiple job offers. Benefits are considerably just as important as salary.

New graduates value additional benefits such as mentoring, training and career advancement

opportunities. Benefits that rank highly among grads include health care savings accounts, higher education reimbursement and 401(k) plans.

A report published by *Young Money* in April found that today’s 18-24 year olds are more interested in saving for their retirement (32%) than in saving for a house or car (7%) or paying off debts (1.4%).

BCBSM Family Continuation Coverage



Active coverage for college students

continuation coverage before Dec. 31st of the year that the dependent turns 19, starting this year in order for coverage to be continued.

requirements. The child must be between the ages of 19 and 25; unmarried; a member of the subscriber's household (unless he or she temporarily resides elsewhere, such as college students living away at school); the subscriber provides more than half of child's support and is related to the child by blood, marriage, legal adoption or legal guardianship; a full-time student for a minimum of five months of the year or has a gross income of less than four times the IRS personal exemption.

During the back-to-school season, employees may ask about keeping active coverage for a dependent child that is going off to college.

When BCBSM knows a dependent is attending college, a letter will be sent annually to verify his/her enrollment continues.

If your organization offers one of the family continuation or dependent continuation riders, employees must apply for

To keep coverage active for a dependent child, the child must meet all of the following

“Ready...Enroll Express is an online open enrollment system, and it also facilitates new hire enrollments and family status changes.”

Online Enrollment Assistance

Ready...Enroll Express is the Benergy System's online benefits enrollment and administration solution that can be installed quickly and easily for companies that have uncomplicated benefits plans.

Ready...Enroll Express is an online open enrollment system, and it also facilitates new hire enrollments and family status changes. Whenever an event requires

employees to elect benefits, Ready...Enroll Express delivers



Ready...Enroll Express Screenshot

an integrated approach to communications & enrollment.

Enrolling in benefit plans should be much more than filling out forms. Ready...Enroll Express is an online benefits management system built right into Benergy. It capitalizes on the portal's ability to teach employees about their plans, compare them & conveniently elect them. Perfect for companies with uncomplicated plans, Ready...Enroll Express can greatly simplify the headache of managing elections data.

Video Demo: www.onlinebenefits.com/demos/Ready_Enroll_Express_Demo.html

Alcohol Awareness: Casual drinking leads to lost productivity in the workplace

Remarkably, new research shows it is the social drinkers - not the hard-core alcoholics or problem drinkers - who are responsible for most of lost productivity, according to a Christian Science Monitor article, specifically tying the hangover issue to production in the workplace.

This study also found that it was managers, not hourly employees, who were most often drinking during the workday. Twenty-three percent of upper managers and 11 percent of first-line supervisors reported having a drink during the workday, compared with only eight percent of hourly

employees. The study also found that 21% of employees said their own productivity had been affected because of a co-worker's drinking.



Company loss in the US due to employee alcohol and drug-related abuse totals \$100 billion a year according to the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol & Drug Information.



**AUSTIN
FINANCIAL
GROUP LLC**

SMART BENEFIT SOLUTIONS

26999 Central Park Blvd.
Suite 225
Southfield, MI 48076

Phone: (248) 355-3600
Toll Free: (888) 277-0077
Fax: (248) 355-3131
austinfo.com

Austin Financial Group LLC is a leading employee benefits firm that provides smart benefit solutions to both private and publicly traded companies. We design and service customized benefit plan solutions for employer organizations in southeastern Michigan.

For more information, contact your AFG Account Manager at (248) 355-3600 or e-mail smartsolutions@austinfo.com.

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The Shifting Requirements of Benefits Enrollment

As employers make substantial changes to their benefit plans and seek to involve employees more fully in health decisions, Watson Wyatt's Survey on Annual Benefits Enrollment found employee engagement issues top of mind with employers during the 2006 enrollment cycle. Sixty-seven companies were surveyed; respondents were mostly senior-level HR managers at large companies.

The average company reported two-thirds of its enrollments took place over the Web, suggesting that online enrollment has become the norm. Employers report high levels of satisfaction with the transactional components of benefits enrollment, 75% are completely or somewhat satisfied with the completeness and accuracy of elections. But, they are far less

satisfied with the available health information delivery and decision support tools at hand to help their employees make the right enrollment decisions.



Employers are most concerned with the growing complexity of the enrollment process for their employees.

When asked to name the top three challenges during the enrollment cycle, 63% of respondents cited employee

communication issues. The need for effective employee communication is growing in importance as employees are asked to become more engaged as benefits consumers and employers seek to educate them on their health care buying decisions. The need for employee behavior change underlies the majority of employer concerns cited and is particularly relevant to those employers who rank employee engagement as a top issue.

As for employees, they are most concerned with the growing complexity of the enrollment process and the magnitude of plan changes. The survey also found that as the need for employee support increased, companies using a blend of internal and external resources during the enrollment process reported the highest satisfaction.

For the full survey report: www.watsonwyatt.com/research/resrender.asp?id=2007-US-0003&page=1