

Voluntary Benefits Insights

What many brokers overlook in the rush to adopt tech tools

Kirk Cooper

One of the biggest challenges we face is educating employees. Studies show employees struggle mightily to grasp the workings of their benefits, and how they can work to protect each family's bottom line.

Study upon study by insurers and HR organizations confirm what you've suspected all along:

Only a handful of employees "get it" when it comes time to comprehending their benefits plan. As for the rest, well, those untouched folders and blank expressions reveal everything you need to know. Whether they're intimidated, skeptical, confused, or a combination of the three, thinking about benefits is something most people would prefer not to do.

The truth is, understanding a full suite of benefits and how they work is complicated. Employees are taking in expert-level information, and the financial stakes are high. When you consider how much they take in and comprehend during a short time — especially when they're taking time out of a busy workday — it's a big ask. Tuning out is a natural defense.

While open enrollment is challenging, consider what employees face when they become benefits-eligible at any other time of the year. When human resource professionals are tasked with educating employees *ad hoc* about their choices, and what's best for their families, the gap widens.

That's where HR tech tools come in. While they do address enrollment challenges, they're not without their shortfalls. The human touch is still critical to winning sales and keeping clients happy. Here's what you need to know:

Tech tools to the rescue

An increasing number of insurers are aligning with online enrollment platforms, which are sometimes referred to as insuretech, HR tech, benefits administrative systems and HRIS systems. According to a study by [LIMRA](#), these tech tools are rapidly gaining adoption by employers:

- 47% for annual open enrollment
- 42% for insurance enrollment for new hires
- 36% for insurance benefit administration
- 30% for retirement benefits administration.

Decision-making tools can be a powerful aid for employees who are faced with understanding their benefits and making big decisions. Employees answer a series of questions, from family size to their current health concerns. Predictive analytics and medical claims data help the decision tool come up with a recommendation — one that would be the best fit for their situation.



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From the employee's perspective, this almost instant recommendation removes a sizable mental burden. That is, there's no need to comprehend and evaluate a long list of choices. The employee can quickly proceed to the decision-making stage with a still-fresh mind! In addition to more straightforward enrollment, employees also get access to tech tools like mobile phone apps, which simplify labor-intensive tasks like locating a description of the benefits, submitting claims and checking the status of these claims.

A human-centered approach is still good business

Despite these advances, technology doesn't fill all the gaps when it comes to making voluntary benefits easy and accessible to employees. As a broker, you can play an essential role in helping them overcome these challenges.

Intuitive online platforms and mobile apps are big checkmarks under the "win" column. They're great tools. But no one talks about the fact that tech tools, in their way, add at least some complexity back into the mix. Employers work with more than one insurance vendor; each vendor has a unique decision tool, platform, app, contact information and payment method. The task of managing these tools and passwords becomes another burden for employers and employees to manage.

The solution is to streamline where you can. Some employers may be offering voluntary benefits from two or even three providers. Make single benefit packages more attractive to employers, and you'll see some cascading benefits. When it's easier for employees to use these benefits, they'll be happier and more likely to sign up the following year — or even add more!

The other challenge is the human gap. HR tech tools are convenient and fast. However, when employees struggle to understand their benefits or figure out how to submit claims, they still want to reach a human being. If that's difficult, then technology is a hollow victory. The human touch is still critical to success. That's where skilled brokers such as yourself come in. Provide content via online newsletters that help employees understand one aspect of their benefits. Do occasional check-ins with employers so you can stay on top of any issues they're faced with. Above all, choose providers that make commitment to customer service a priority.

While technology makes life easier, it's meaningless when it's not backed with excellent service.



About the author

Kirk Cooper is Assistant Vice President, Producer Relations and Alliances for Reliance Standard Life Insurance Company.

Since his arrival in 2011, Kirk's work and influence have been a catalyst in spearheading innovative projects and research initiatives to help position Reliance Standard in a more competitive position across the group insurance marketplace. In his current role Kirk oversees and looks to expand Reliance Standard's relationship with a variety of national partners & third party specialty firms, including digital innovators, who

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