

Single enrollment platform helps raise the bar on plan participation, adds value to employee benefits

By Bruce Shutan

With another open-enrollment season for employee benefit plans just months away, producers realize that this annual rite of fall in the Information Age is only as good as the technology and partnerships that they're able to secure on behalf of employer clients.

And with most employers offering competing products and services from several carriers, why not choose a service provider that is well-equipped to consolidate these offerings into a single enrollment experience that's easy, convenient and affordable?

The answer: multi-carrier enrollment.

One-stop shopping

"As more decision-making shifts to employees, and new products and services evolve, employees have to be up to speed on their benefits plans, and employers need to find ways to reduce the administrative burden," says Elena Wu, group marketing officer for The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America. "At Guardian, we're working hard to make enrollment easier so employers can drive participation and add value."

Guardian recently introduced a multi-carrier online enrollment system to help employers meet their increasingly complex enrollment challenges. This complete benefits administration and state-of-the-art enrollment solution is available to brokers for their groups of 50 plus benefit enrolled employees at minimal or no cost per employee per month with some discounted fees. This solution will help employees enroll in all their benefit plans for all carriers at one time.

The scale of this easy-to-use technology platform enables small- and midsize businesses to offer benefit packages that are similar to larger employers for less

money and without the administrative headaches. Key features include online benefits enrollment and life-events changes through a self-service Web portal, employee decision support tools, electronic data feeds to carriers, consolidated bill presentment, preformatted spreadsheet for data import, and common file format for COBRA, FSA and payroll exports.

Automated employee transactions and a direct connection to insurance carriers not only increases accuracy and improves operational efficiency, but also eliminates paper forms, confusing rules and the use of multiple Web sites from various carriers. In addition, benefits eligibility is transferred electronically to all in-force carriers, while customers can view, edit and pay monthly bills. The new service also produces an up-to-date census and other useful reports.

Multi-phase enrollment

In addition to a single platform, Wu recommends a multi-channel approach to enrollment that blends quality educational and transactional tools with face-to-face meetings, personalized kits, and online Web access.

"We have to get away from the idea that enrollment is just an administrative process to sign people up for their benefits plans," explains Wu, "It's really a process for people to think about their needs, evaluate options and make the right decisions. The more we can help them, the more valuable we'll be to our customers."

The evolution of health care reform and yearly escalation in benefits costs should motivate brokers, carriers and employers to be more creative about the way they ensure employee benefit packages are being optimized and adding value to employees' lives. It's important to note that employee communications

and technology solutions were cited as the most important enrollment issues that employers will face this year, and 69% of employers blame their dissatisfaction with enrollment on inadequate technology.¹

The bottom line is brokers and advisers need to encourage their employer clients to devote more time, attention and resources to employee education. Adding a multi-carrier enrollment platform can drive up employee participation and heighten program value, which, in turn, can produce a competitive

advantage for employer clients.

To better understand how Guardian can help you develop an efficient enrollment process with your clients, visit www.aboutemployeebenefits.com. You'll gain new insights and ways of thinking that you can use to uncover needs and serve your customers more effectively.

1 Towers Watson Annual Benefits Enrollment Survey, 2011.

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