

Benefits Pulse Survey Results

Online Benefits Education

July 2010



Fresh Ideas in HR Communication

Introduction – Fresh Ideas in Benefits Communication

The Benefits Pulse Surveys offer a quick way to track trends and learn what works in HR and benefits communication. They are free for those who are looking for fresh ideas in benefits and HR communication. You don't even have to join the Knowledge Network unless you want to be a regular survey participant.

About the Online Benefits Education Survey

Most people use the internet to learn something of personal interest. Yet, studies show that employers are underutilizing the internet in educating employees on benefits and HR programs.

The survey was conducted during June-July 2010 through benefits managers who have agreed to be part of the Benefits Pulse Survey Knowledge Network and members of benefits discussion groups on the internet.

The survey received 38 responses, making the reliability of the data +/- five percent, adequate for tracking trends on a rapid response basis. Of the respondents, 23% represent manufacturing with the others from the following:

- University/education
- Technology
- Energy Services
- Telecommunications
- Transportation
- Real Estate Management/Development
- Retail
- Financial Services
- Health Services
- Beverage
- Government
- Professional Services (Consulting, Accounting, Insurance)

The number of employees participating in the health plans of the respondents ranges between 60 and 100,000. The average respondent has 9,045 health plan participants and the median number is 2,404. The number of employees who participate in respondents' health plans falls into three groups of roughly one-third each:

- 32% with fewer than 1,000 health plan participants
- 32% with between 1,000 and 5,000 health plan participants
- 36% with 5,000 or more participants

Respondents have both salaried and hourly employees, with the average composition at 48% hourly and 52% salaried.

Join the Knowledge Network

Become a member of the Benefits Pulse Surveys Knowledge Network by providing your email address. You will receive emails with pulse surveys that you choose to complete. You'll be alerted each time survey findings are available. You can request a pulse survey topic if you are looking for fast and easy information on what others are doing in HR communication.

That's it. No obligation. No marketing to you. No hassle. No sharing your email. Just be responsible for managing, designing and/or communicating benefits (go to the Download page at www.GrohComm.com).

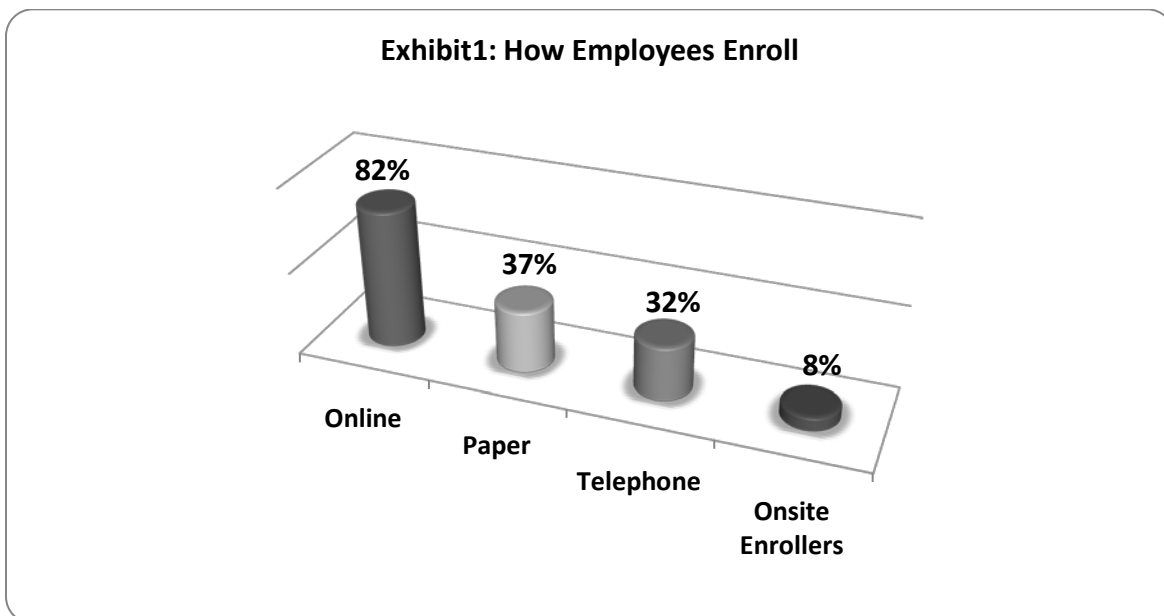
Find us at <http://twitter.com/kengroh>, and <http://freshideas.posterous.com> for our blog.

Online Benefits Education *Part 1: Annual Benefits Enrollment*

Part 1 examines how employees elect benefits during annual enrollment, as newly hired or following life events.

How Employees Enroll in Benefits

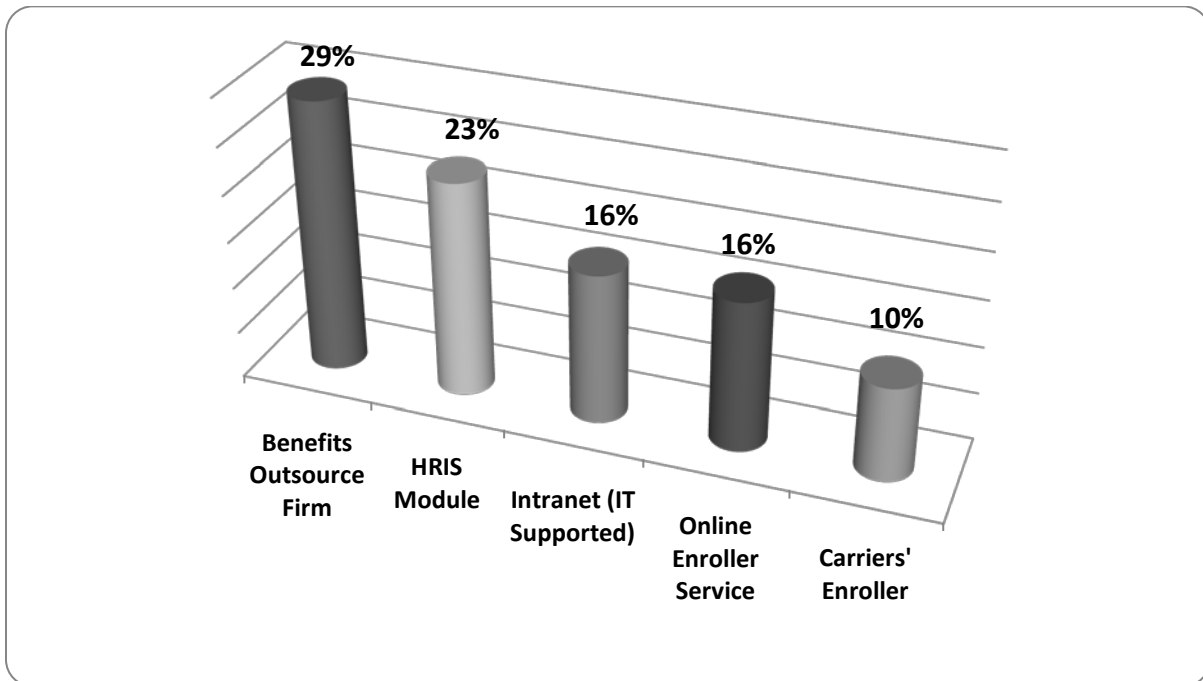
Eight in 10 employees enroll online, although 37% of the responding employers use paper and telephone either as a resource in support of online enrollment or as the single source (see Exhibit 1). Only 8% use onsite enrollers, a service often provided by voluntary benefits brokers.



Types of Online Enrollers

Exhibit 2 (next page) shows that the responding employers use several types of online enroller. The most common type, used by 29% of the respondents, is through the Human Resources or Benefits outsourcing firms, such as Hewitt, Aon (soon to be Aon Hewitt), Towers Watson, Mercer and others. Of the remaining respondents, 23% use their HRIS enrollment module, an internally developed system or they retain a specialized online enrollment service, such as Information Products, Inc., Employee Benefits Solutions (EBS), ADP Employeease and many others. Only 10% use a carriers' online enroller (i.e., Aetna, CIGNA, etc.).

Exhibit 2: Types of Online Enrollers Used by Respondents

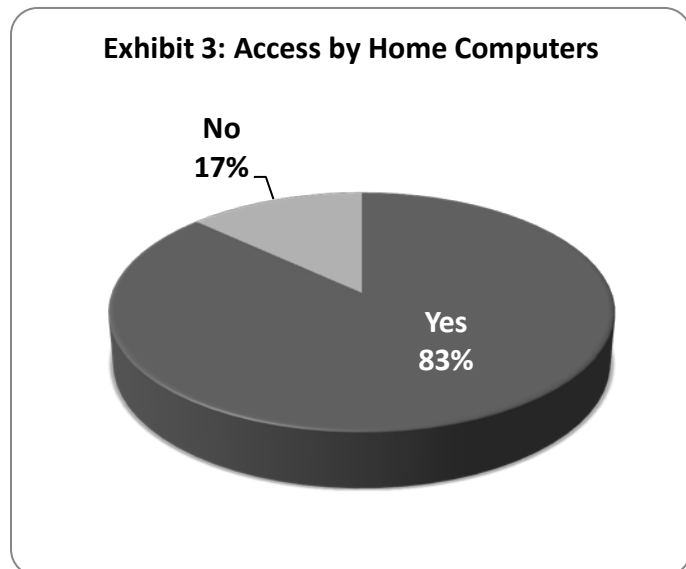


Home Computer Access to Online Enrollers

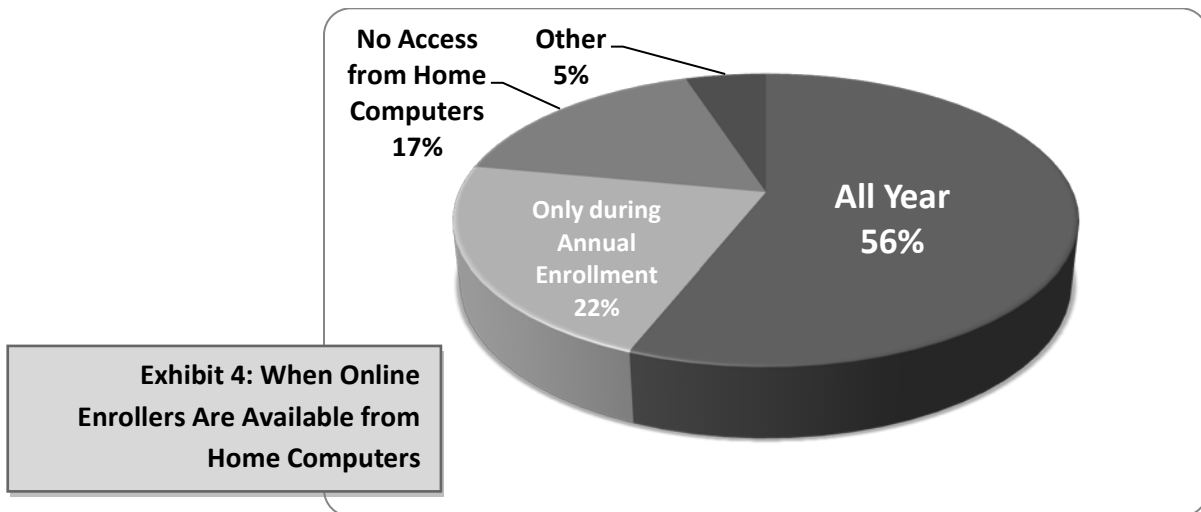
Most employers (83%) allow employees access to online enrollers through home computers (or public computers like library computers). This enables spouses and employees to enroll through the internet.

One issue for HRIS enrollers and those internally built by IT is that the enroller may be inside the intranet firewall, where security requirements restrict online access from home computers. This will clearly limit the ability of the enrollment site to function as a benefits learning center for all employees and their spouses.

Exhibit 3: Access by Home Computers



In Exhibit 4, 56% of respondents keep the enroller open all year to enable ongoing status changes from home computers. About one-quarter, 22%, keep their enrollers open only during annual benefits enrollment for home computer access; and 17% do not allow access from home computers.



How Employees Receive Annual Benefits Enrollment Information

Current Employees

Exhibit 5 (next page) shows that about two-thirds of respondents (68%) mail enrollment kits to the homes of employees and 65% post enrollment information on an Intranet. About half distribute information at worksites (49%) and slightly fewer (46%) distribute enrollment materials at meetings.

The findings suggest a continued reliance on enrollment kit mailings for at least part of the workforce. Posting enrollment materials on Web sites is limited if the Web site is not available through the internet from home computers or HR assumes that some employers will not go to the Web site if they do not use computers at work. As one respondent noted, “Salaried employees get a postcard directing them to enrollment materials posted on our benefits Web site. We mail enrollment kits to hourly employees who can enroll online or on paper.” An external Web site that enables access from home computers can totally avoid or limit printing and mailing enrollment kits.

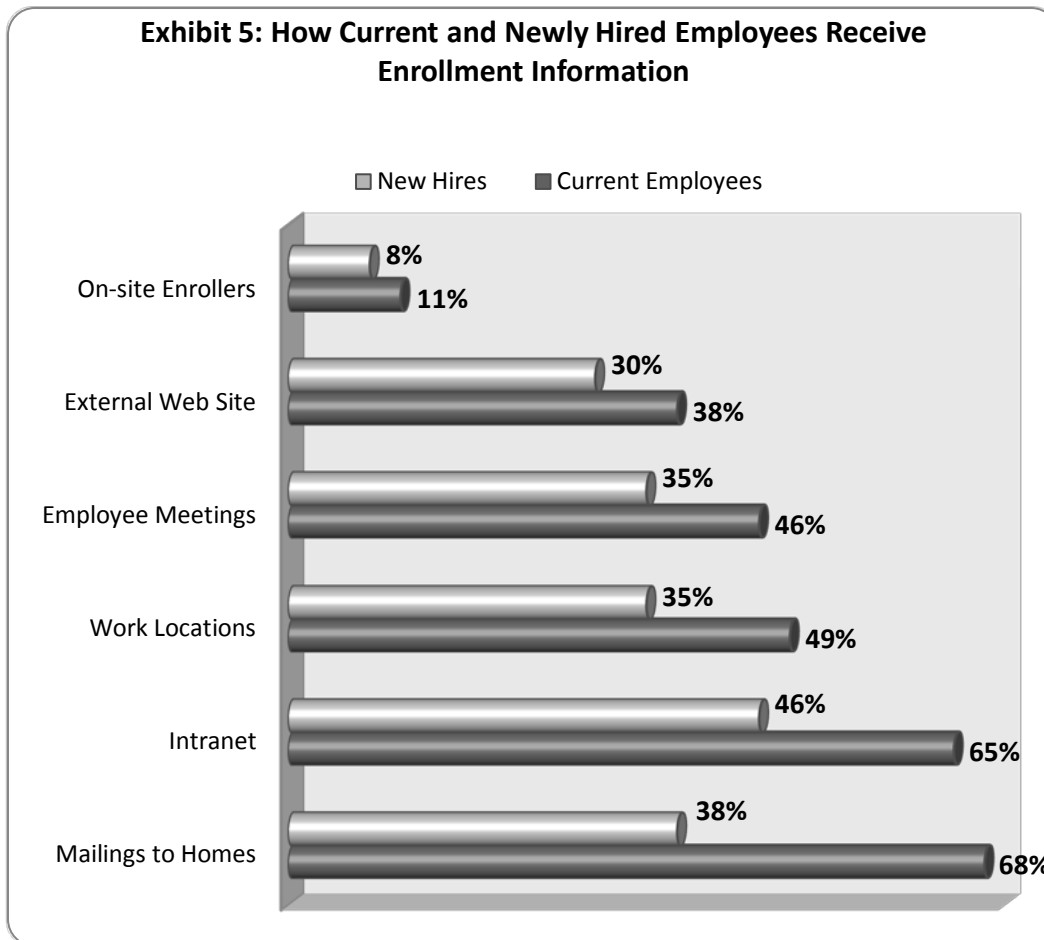
“Salaried employees get a postcard directing them to enrollment materials posted on our benefits Web site.”

Only 38% of the respondents use an external Web site to post enrollment materials, as one of these respondents noted: “Our employees can access our benefits portal and enroll via the internet.”

New Hires

Exhibit 5 also compares how new hires and current employees enroll. Results show that 38% of the respondents mail enrollment materials to new hires, fewer than half of the respondents who mail this information to current employees. Just over one-third distributes materials at orientation meetings or work locations. Only 46% open their intranet to new hires for benefits enrollment and even fewer, 30%, use external Web sites. One respondent noted that “new hires get an automated email telling them to take an e-learning course that explains benefits.”

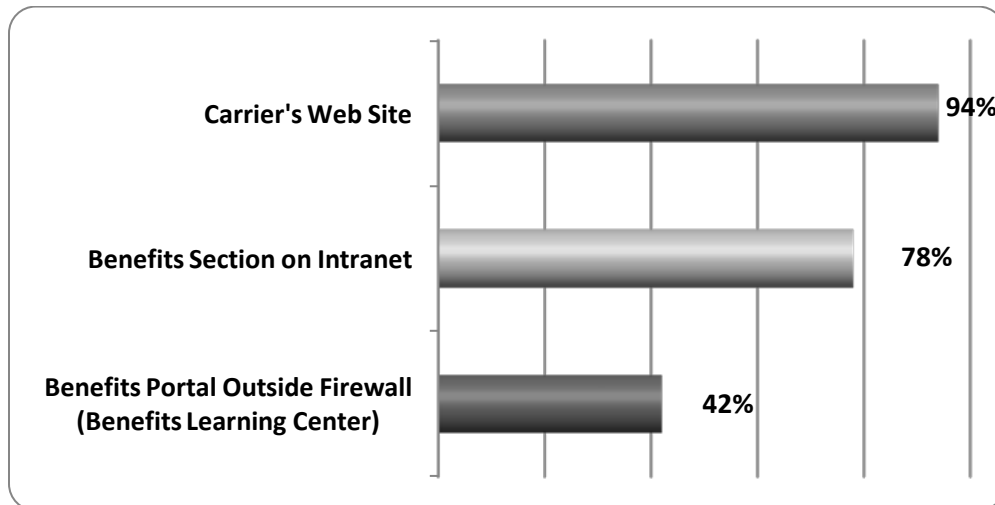
“Our new hires get an automated email telling them to take an e-learning course that explains benefits.”



Online Benefits Education *Part 2: Health Plan Benefits Online Learning*

Part 2 evaluates how employers are using online resources for benefits education. In Exhibit 6, nearly all, 94%, provide access to their health plan carriers'/administrators' Web site (i.e., myCIGNA, myUHC, etc.). Over three-quarters (78%) have a benefits section on their intranet. Only four in 10 (42%) have a dedicated employee benefits Web site (benefits learning center) set up outside their firewalls.

Exhibit 6: Online Benefits Education – Learning Sites



Access to Online Benefits Education through Home Computers

Of the employers that have online benefits education Web sites, 71% provide direct access to the site from home computers but require a log in to access (Exhibit 7). Another 6% allow direct access without a password or user ID. Some respondents (14%) allow access to employees who can log in from home computers through their intranet.

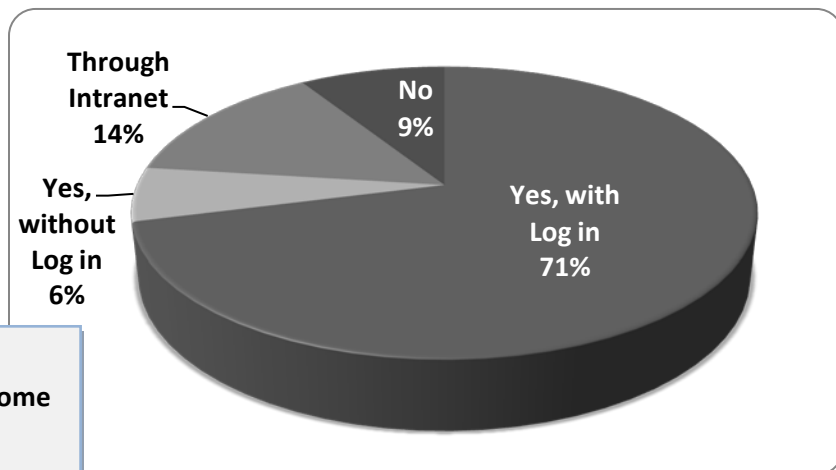


Exhibit 7: Access to Online Benefits Education from Home Computers

Exhibit 8 separates the findings by the types of benefits Web site. Most respondents password protect their benefits Web site (benefits learning centers) set up outside their firewalls.

Exhibit 8: Access to Online Benefits Information from Home Computers			
Type of Benefits Learning Center	Home Computer Access with log-in	Home Computer Access without log-in	No Home Access
Carrier's Web Site (MyCigna, My UHC, etc.)	68%	6%	26%
Benefits Section on Intranet	68%	3%	29%
Benefits Portal Outside of Firewall (Benefits Learning Center)	60%	13%	27%

One of the challenges of an online benefits learning center is getting employees and spouses to use it on a regular basis – making it the main resource for benefits information. Respondents indicate about half their health plan participants are accessing their learning sites (Exhibit 9). To be truly successful as a benefits learning center, a higher percentage would obviously be preferred.

Exhibit 9: Percentage of Health Plan Participants Accessing Online Benefits Education Web Sites			
Type of Benefits Learning Center	Range	Average	Median
Carrier's Web Site (MyCigna, My UHC, etc.)	10%-100%	47.3%	50.0%
Benefits Section on Intranet	10%-100%	53.2%	50.0%
Benefits Portal Outside of Firewall (Benefits Learning Center)	15%-100%	55.5%	60.0%

Key Point

Only about half of employees are accessing online learning centers and frequency of use is suspect without additional data. The two key things employers need to create a successful benefits learning center are:

- 1. A dedicated resource for managing the learning center content and*
- 2. A strategy for pulling employees and spouses to the site on a regular basis.*

With regular access to their benefits learning centers, employers can better monitor and measure results. Measurement should be in terms of employee behaviors that support wellness and health plan consumer-driven goals.

Online Benefits Education

Part 3: Wellness Benefits Online Learning

Benefits communicators are separating wellness benefits from health plan benefits. This enables a more focused message and helps promote the difference between preventive or “proactive” health care and the reactive benefits provided through the health plan. If a health plan is designed to provide benefits as a safety net for treating illness, the wellness plan should be positioned as providing benefits for sustaining health or managing conditions to avoid further health complications. This accelerates awareness, focuses education on proactive care and facilitates success in reaching business goals for creating a healthier workforce (to impact health plan costs over the long term).

Part 3 focuses on online learning centers for wellness education and resources. Although the content of these sites is not the focus of this Benefits Pulse Survey, it’s important to note from a benefits education perspective that wellness starts with preventive care. Preventive care benefits have traditionally been part of health plans and are often overlooked when setting up wellness communication strategies, where the campaign often starts with health risk assessments. The need to clearly promote and explain preventive care benefits will become more critical with “free” preventive care under Health Care Reform.

Key Point

When creating a communication campaign for wellness, clearly distinguish wellness benefits from the health plan. That way participants can see a difference between preventive or “proactive” health care and the reactive benefits provided through the health plan.

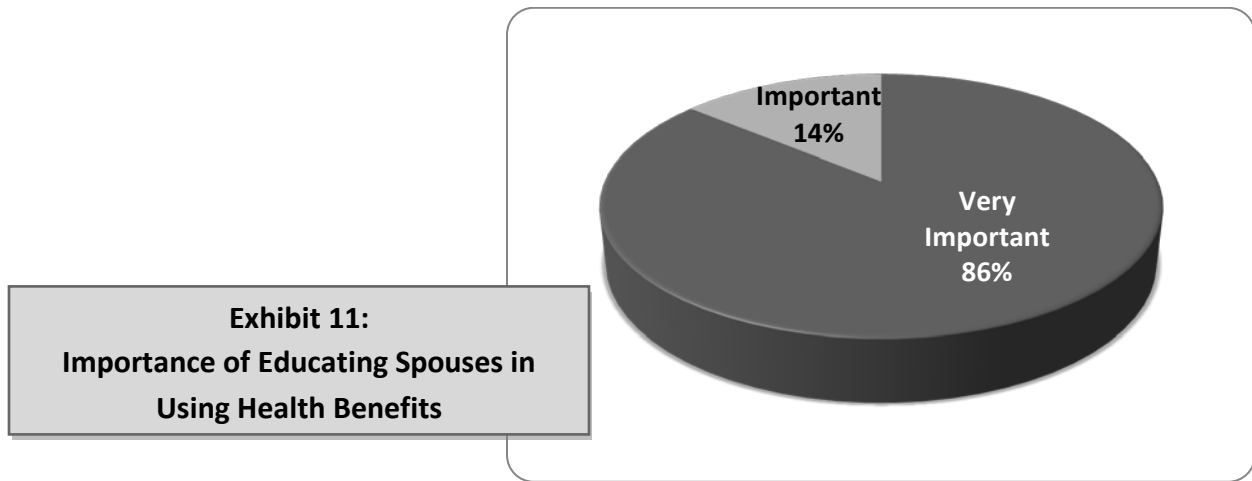
By combining preventive care benefits with wellness resources, such as health risk assessments and health coaches, you make it easier for participants to see the value in what you’re doing. That’s also why it makes sense to create a separate wellness education campaign apart from annual benefits enrollment.

As noted in Exhibit 10, 39% of respondents have a separate wellness Web site, either through their carrier or a health management firm. Most (86%) require a login to access the site. About two thirds of the health plan participants are accessing the sites.

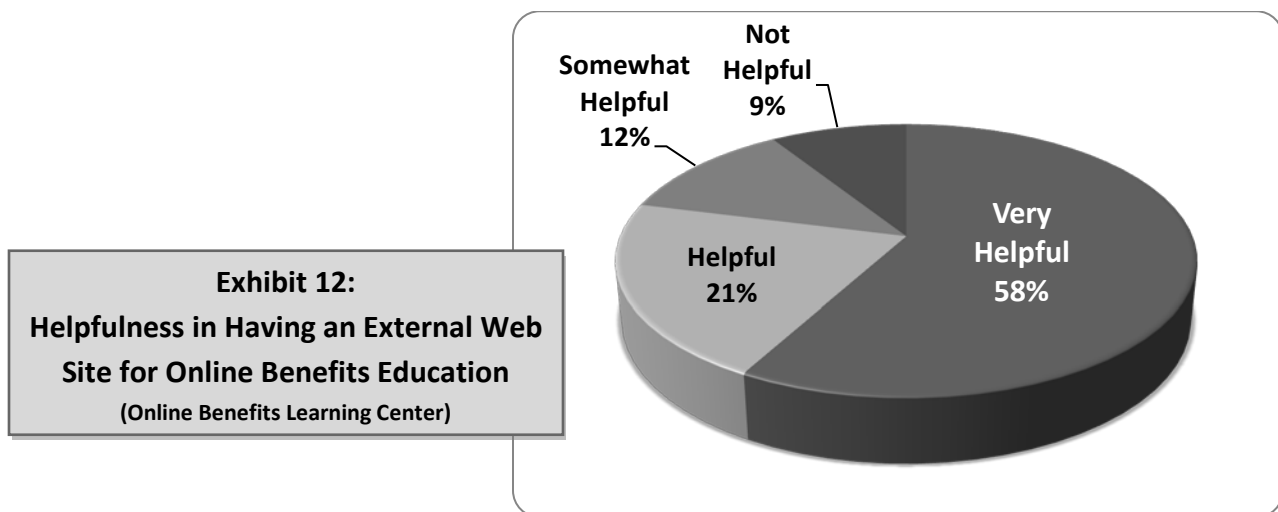
Exhibit 10: Wellness Benefits Online Education	
Percent of Respondents with Separate Wellness Web Sites	39%
Access to Wellness Web Sites by Home Computers	86%, Yes, login required 7%, No login required 7%, No access granted
Percent of Employees Accessing the Wellness Web Site	Range: 20% - 100% Average: 63% Median: 65%

Online Benefits Education Part 4: Engaging Spouses

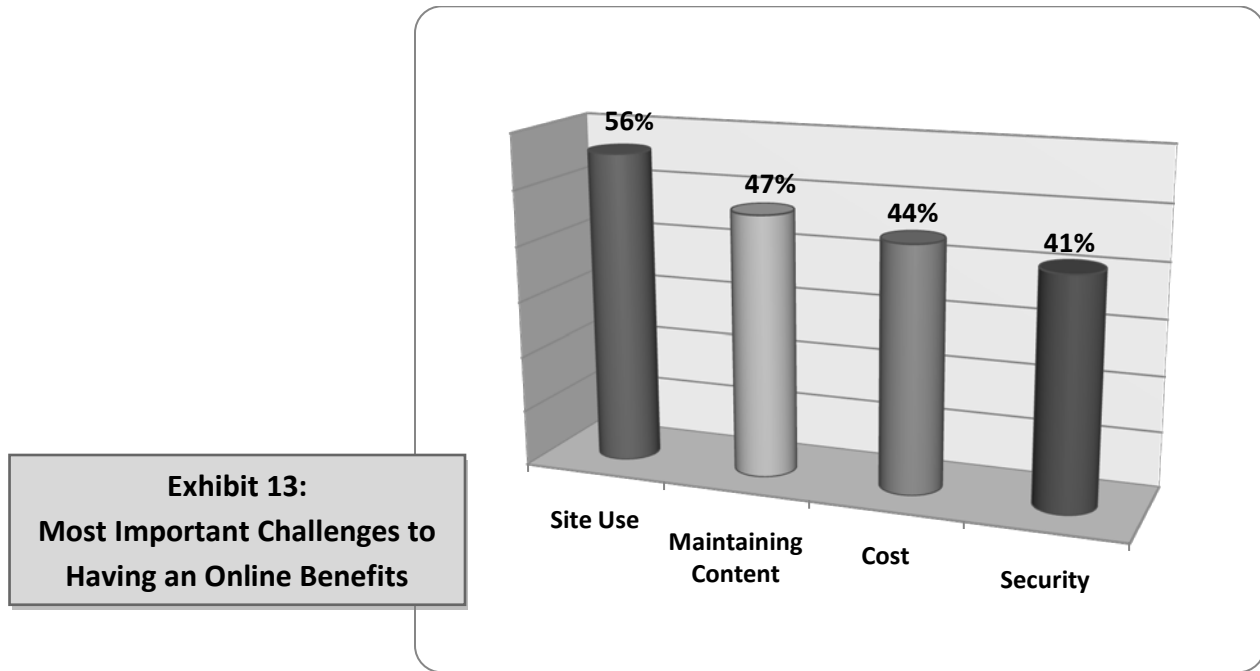
The role that the spouse plays in managing benefits and health care is critical to the success of any employer's goal to create a healthier workforce and to reap the return on investment in a consumer-driven health plan. Family members as well as employees need to know and use the health and benefits management tools that are available to them, and most of those tools are available on Web sites. In Exhibit 11, it's clear that the survey respondents agree in consensus that spousal education is critical.



In Exhibit 12, 58% of the respondents tell us that it would be *very helpful* to them to have an external Web site to use in benefits education. Another 21% said it would be *helpful*. Having an external benefits learning center makes it easier for spouses to be involved in wellness and health plan initiatives.



Setting up an external Web site as a benefits learning center has its challenges as noted in Exhibit 13. Here, 56% of the respondents listed “getting employees/spouses to use an online benefits learning center” as the most important challenge. The second most important challenge is maintaining the online learning center to keep it up to date and relevant (47%) followed by cost (44%) and security (41%).



In Conclusion...

Survey results show employers are using Web sites for online benefits education. Some are building them separately while others are trying to use or combine resources from their administrator partners. The value of online benefits learning centers surfaces in several ways.

1. In the savings from the cost to produce and mail benefits materials.
2. In tapping into the internet as a learning resource. This is critical, because the generation entering the workforce is accustomed to learning online.
3. In the ability to reach spouses and remote employees who are excluded from benefits educational events.
4. In creating a resource that centralizes your benefits materials and learning activities for new hires, new HR staff and others can access or be referred to when needed.

The challenge is in getting employees and spouses to regularly access and use online learning centers. That’s why it’s important to have a content manager refreshing the site and managing a promotion and communication plan.

About Groh & Associates

Groh & Associates works with employers and benefits providers to create and implement strategies for engaging employees in benefits and compensation programs. We are expert in benefits communication, including annual enrollments, pension freeze, summary plan descriptions and wellness campaigns.

Depth of Resources: Our team includes graphic designers, production coordinators, low-cost printers, web designers, personalized print technicians, meeting coordinators and project managers. We have more than 20 years of experience as benefits and HR change management communicators with the major HR consulting firms, working with hundreds of employers from large and small publicly traded and privately owned companies, to government and not-for-profit employers.

Innovators in Benefits Communication: G&A has developed the eBenefits Information Center (eBIC), a benefits portal accessible from home computers to function as a central resource for benefits enrollment, life event changes and new hire orientation. The site is fully customizable built on a template and secured on an external server. We also write and produce narrated, online benefit meeting materials and podcasts for annual enrollments and wellness campaigns.

Checklist for Creating Online Benefits Learning Centers

- Place online benefits learning centers in front of an online enroller for annual enrollment, new hire orientation and life event changes.
- Link to carrier Web sites, materials and resources.
- Include topical benefit podcasts or narrated e-learning presentations. Each should be no longer than 5 minutes and focus on specific “how to” benefits topics, such as how to succeed with a consumer-driven health plan, how a Health Savings Account works, why annual health assessments make sense, etc.
- Create a benefits education annual plan – calendar of events and communication campaigns.
- Make part of the site accessible only to HR staff where it can be used for online compliance training and as a dashboard for monitoring enrollment and benefits progress goals.
- Identify a dedicated resource (internal or external) to manage the annual communication plan, send promotional reminders to pull employees/spouses to online learning events.
- Build in incentives and contests to attract attention.

If you have more to add or would like to discuss online benefits centers, contact kgroh@grohcomm.com

For more information, contact Ken Groh at 847-334-0955, kgroh@grohcomm.com. Additional information is also available at the Fresh Ideas blog, <http://freshideas.posterous.com> and more fresh ideas in benefits communication can be followed through twitter, [KenGroh@twitter.com](https://twitter.com/KenGroh).