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Success Stories From Buck Consultants

Using Communication to Implement a Successful Employee Benefit Program at Bell Aliant



Did you know that a well-planned communication initiative can make employees utilize their employee benefit programs more fully?

DID YOU KNOW THAT A WELL-PLANNED COMMUNICATION INITIATIVE CAN MAKE EMPLOYEES UTILIZE THEIR EMPLOYEE BENEFIT PROGRAMS MORE FULLY?

That's what happened when Bell Aliant, North America's second largest regional telecommunications provider, teamed up with ACS/Buck Consultants (ACS/Buck) to implement a new employee benefit plan.

In 1999, Aliant was created from the merger of four Atlantic Canada telephone companies, and quickly expanded to 10,000 employees in Telecommunications and IT consulting worldwide. In 2006, the Aliant wire line business, xwave, and knowledge solutions through Innovatia joined with Bell Canada's regional wire line business in Ontario and Quebec, and along with Bell's majority interest in Bell Nordiq, formed Bell Aliant Regional Communications LP – the largest business income trust in Canada.

Following the 1999 merger, they had a total of 9,500 employees in six provinces, with six existing benefit plans and 13 insurance carriers. They desperately wanted to achieve the efficiencies of one workable benefit plan, with flexible group benefits that all employees could utilize and understand.

"Merging all four companies together, dealing with the administration, review and harmonization of multiple HR programs and policies, kind of sucked the life of the HR department. We hadn't done a good job of communicating to our employees during the merger; it was important for us to bring in the experts. The new company didn't pay much attention to updating and communicating benefits information annually; that's where ACS/Buck came in and really added value for us," said Hugh Paton, Senior Benefits Consultant, Bell Aliant Human Resources.

How did Bell Aliant utilize communication to achieve its overall objectives? ACS/Buck developed a communication plan to implement a new employee benefit program, including the following tactics:

- Comprehensive executive coaching to review appropriate messaging, approach and delivery of messages
- Employee e-mail campaign, posters, guides, newsletters
- Online total rewards website and statements
- New branding and design for all materials
- Printing of all materials
- Employee information sessions
- Employee surveys, pre-launch and post-launch
- Ongoing follow-up on a quarterly basis to keep employees informed and updated about any plan changes

HOW DID BELL ALIANT BENEFIT FROM THE IMPLEMENTATION THAT WAS DONE BY ACS/BUCK?

- The company got rid of paper-based employee booklets and developed a fully online communications presence for the first time
- The benefits plan was designed to be simpler and easier to understand with much less administration
- Employee plan communications are now more comprehensive and targeted

WHEN DEVELOPING A NEW EMPLOYEE BENEFITS PLAN, WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF USING A STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PLAN?

- All employee communication is launched on a timely basis and works together to achieve desired goals
- Employees have better knowledge of the plan and understand the Total Rewards component of their compensation
- Employees participate more actively in the programs, ultimately maximizing the usefulness of the plan
- There will be fewer questions directed to HR allowing more time to focus on other important business
- Increased employee retention as employees realize that their benefit program is competitive in the marketplace.

KEY LEARNINGS - HUGH PATON, BELL ALIANT

The Value of a Comprehensive Employee Communication Plan

"We didn't fully realize the value of a comprehensive communication plan and program because we hadn't done one on a large scale in the past; we know that we wouldn't have been as successful without effective communication planning."

The Importance of Face-to-Face Communication

"As the largest rollout of a human resources program in the company's history, it was also the first time many employees had seen a flexible benefits program. So, we wanted to give everyone an opportunity to learn about the new plan face-to-face and to ask questions of the program designers. We could also educate employees about being a smarter consumer of health and dental plan services, which helped us control claims costs."

The Importance of Employee Engagement

"Employees were very pleased; we hadn't communicated to them like this in the past and we were so happy that employees got engaged in the implementation, learned something new and viewed the information as very important to them."

This plan has been up and running for all employees for just over a year and they have been pleased about how easy the new system is to use and the addition of a new online function. Moving forward, Bell Aliant continues to review their existing employee benefit communication for accuracy and usability and works with ACS/Buck to create and update new communication material.