

Health

Wellness on a budget

Employers adopt high-tech, high-touch solutions



BY SUE PRIDHAM

Even in these difficult economic times progressive organizations understand the value of wellness programs that help maintain employee health, energy and focus.

Lack of time, sedentary jobs, long commutes, stress, family responsibilities and inaccessible workout facilities are just a few of the reasons why many employees are struggling to stay active, eat well and keep their weight in check.

To help employees meet these challenges, there is growing interest in cost-effective, high-tech online wellness solutions, which are particularly effective for organizations with multiple locations. These programs can also be designed with high-touch features, such as “ask the expert” capabilities, healthy competition and interactive quizzes

Employees receive wellness information on a specific topic through

daily or weekly e-mails. Campaigns are time-defined, promote goal-setting and behavior change, and provide wellness information, follow-up and evaluation. Some of the campaigns incorporate healthy competition with optional draw prizes to reward participation.

Once the wellness campaign or challenge has ended, companies can keep the wellness message alive by profiling willing employees who have made positive lifestyle changes on the corporate wellness intranet site.

RBC’s “Feeling Good” campaign

Last fall, RBC launched Tri Fit’s “Feeling Good” e-mail campaign for its 57,000 employees across Canada, to promote work/life effectiveness

and resilience, and support a broader mental-health awareness initiative.

The 10-day campaign consisted of daily wellness tips relating to mental and emotional well-being, stress management and self-care. Each morning registered employees received a short health tip that was simple, practical and easy to incorporate into their daily life.

Employees said:

- “I found these daily tips helpful in thinking more positively and starting the day on a good note. I hope to see these again in the near future.”
- “I thought it was a terrific campaign and looked forward to opening the message each morning. The messages were perfect, and I wouldn’t change anything.”
- “It was short and to the point and

did not take too much time from work to read.”

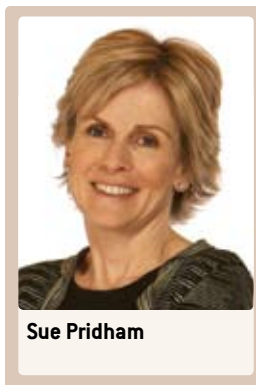
• “The tips were very helpful and applicable to everyone. I have forwarded them to family and friends.”

As a result of the campaign RBC is now providing a weekly wellness tip.

“Eating Well” at Staples Canada

Staples Canada is also enthusiastic about delivering the wellness message online. Like RBC, they are challenged to reach out to a decentralized workforce. Fifteen thousand associates across Canada were invited to participate in the “Eating Well” campaign last fall.

Associates tested their nutrition knowledge with this 4-week healthy eating campaign, covering topics such as snacking, dining out, eating breakfast and portion size. Registered associates received a weekly e-mail with a nutrition tip, an activity, recipes, trivia and a quiz. Associates who



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answered the weekly quiz were eligible to win prizes.

Staples associates also participated in the “Be Active” challenge last spring. Participants collected points for incorporating regular physical activity into their daily lives. Those who logged a minimum number of points online were entered into a prize-drawing.

Following these organized challenges, Staples Canada associates were inspired to develop their own wellness events. One Staples store created a challenge that involved walking or jogging laps around their building on breaks. Those who logged the most laps were eligible for prizes. Another store created a weight-loss challenge, and many stores have incorporated healthy snacks into Teacher Appreciation nights and meetings.

Microsoft learns to run

Microsoft conducted an e-mail “Learn to Run,” sponsored by the MicroFit Wellness Centre last April, with the goal for participating employees to be capable of running a 5-km race.

The program was designed to provide

increase commitment and mileage. Participants were able to “ask the expert” questions about their running challenges at any point in the eight-week training program.

Employee feedback was extremely positive:

- “Before I started running, I was not able to run for more than 10 minutes without giving up. Having participated in the Learn to Run program, I was able to confidently run a half-hour without being out of breath by the sixth week.”

- “The scheduled training and nutrition information enabled me to progressively increase my stamina, as well as eat properly to shock-up my energy.”

- “I had so much fun competing with my peers — we supported each other every week.”

- “I was amazed how the weekly fit-tips helped me stay motivated.”

The 12 Days of Fitmas

In December, employees at the Canada Life Toronto head office participated in “The 12 Days of Fitmas” e-mail campaign promoting the message “Tis



Participants had a lot of great things to say about the campaign:

- “It is always good to remind people to stay on track, and the idea of support throughout the ‘eating season’ is great.”

- “I enjoyed the e-mails. It kept me motivated to keep working out during the holidays. I enjoyed the recipes and also found some of the fitness tips to be very useful.”

- “I actually used a lot of info from the e-mails and recipes — tons of good tips!! They were very motivating!”

Putting eWellness in context

While high-tech wellness solutions can educate, motivate and connect employees with similar wellness goals, they should not be offered in isolation. In order for workplace wellness programs to have the greatest impact and ultimately influence behavior change, they need

to be integrated into a broader wellness strategy.

Your organization can develop a Wellness Advisory Committee to create a framework for wellness within your organization, and a program mission and goals that reflect your organization’s culture, resources and budget.

High-tech/high-touch wellness strategies can pay dividends to the employee and employer alike. Think big, start small and gradually build momentum one click at a time. — **E.B.N.C.**

Sue Pridham is the president of TriFit (www.trifit.com), which provides a broad range of workplace wellness services, including strategic planning, employee needs surveys, fitness and wellness programs, nutrition and weight management, and health fairs. She can be reached at sue@trifit.com. TriFit developed the programs discussed in this article and administered them for the companies profiled.

Online wellness solutions are particularly effective for organizations with multiple locations.

a safe and motivating online support group to gradually ease participants into running, build stamina and help ease the frustration that people often experience when they decide to try running on their own.

Weekly e-mails provided the motivation and information to help employees

the season to take time to take care of yourself.”

Participants received 12 days of wellness strategies to help get them through the season with energy and patience to spare. Strategies included exercise, holiday eating and entertaining tips, healthy recipes, getting rest and more.