

5 Reasons for making workplace wellness social

It's where we spend our time.

The way to capture people's attention is to be where they are—and clearly, they're online and on social networks, in particular. Nielsen reported that our time spent on social networks has nearly tripled in the past year, and I'd suspect that's continued its rapid ascent since this data was captured in September 2009. Social can also be mobile. With smartphone ownership skyrocketing, reaching employees through that medium is going to be not only advantageous, but a necessity.

Our social networks influence our behavior.

The Framingham Study is one of the more famous studies of how social networks influence our behavior. From 1971 to 2003, researchers looked at the influence of social networks on tobacco and obesity and determined that your network has a powerful influence on what you do and provides necessary support for changing behavior. Since then, researchers continued to dig into how this works. Social networks provide companies a new channel for spurring and cementing positive change by making it the norm and widening the ripple of positive change that starts with a few committed individuals.

Engaged patients take charge.

Individuals who take an active role in their health—understanding their health risks and habits, researching their options and making informed decisions—have better outcomes. By creating social networks for interests and prevalent lifestyle risks and increasing their value with on-tap experts, companies provide the means for employees to take charge. Where privacy concerns exist, companies can point employees toward condition-related networks where they may feel more confident about sharing.

Social networks amp up trusted peer-to-peer communications.

Peers, neighbors and friends continue to be a major source for recommendations and advice. Granted, in a big organization employees aren't going to know everyone; they will, however, have shared circumstances and access to the same (or similar) benefits and programs. In this way, company-delivered social networks connect employees to peers with similar concerns who can speak from experience about what works for them.

Eavesdrop your way to better design and communications.

Online conversations—whether on Twitter, forums or blogs—help HR and corporate communication know where people are confused, where they have questions or where there's a lack of understanding. It's a nonstop, unbudgeted focus group with unvarnished information about how companies can improve their program design and communications.