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Insurance Firms Track Effectiveness of Wellness Programs

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Corporate wellness programs — including fitness, stress release and nutrition education — are giving employees the opportunity to enjoy the healthier side of life and likewise improve workplace productivity.

Insurance broker Intercare Insurance Solutions is part of the movement to modernize corporate wellness into implementable and measurable practices.

“We bring a very strategic consulting process,” says Mike Barone, president of Intercare.

Founded in 1994 and reporting \$10 million in revenue for 2008, Intercare has a staff of 45 and has had an average annual sales growth of 25 percent, according to Barone. Three new employees have been hired so far in 2009.

The brokerage, which has now expanded to the Bay Area and Houston, offers several services, including strategic planning, financial analysis, vendor management, funding analysis, benchmarking, open enrollment support, proprietary services and compliance.

“The way health care is purchased today is ... flawed,” says Barone. “We have ways to understand each employee and companies are able to improve their culture and employee productivity.”

Those measurements of concern include obesity, smoking habits, chronic illness, physical inactivity, job and life dissatisfaction, high blood pressure and poor personal physical health perception.

Local biotech company Illumina, which develops technology for genetic research, has been a client of Intercare for a year. Roy Burchill, director of human resource systems and services at Illumina, says Intercare is communicative, available and proactive in their approach to service.

“The Intercare team is talented, responsive, forward-thinking and completely dedicated to doing what is best for us,” Burchill said.

Analyzing Health Risks

Third-party companies such as Sonic Boom, a local corporate wellness firm, are brought in to analyze the health risks for prospective clients. Each employee is assessed as an individual, contributing to the overall assessment of a company population.

“All of our elements are designed to keep people engaged,” says Sonic Boom co-founder Danna Korn. “We have redefined wellness from one-time events to daily lifestyle and behavioral improvements.”

Korn, who has 18 years' experience in the wellness industry and is the author of four best-selling health books, and her husband Bryan Van Noy founded Sonic in 2007. They now have 25 clients and plan to increase client volume 100 percent every month for the next six months.

Sonic's current programs range in price from \$2.50 to \$10 monthly per employee. Korn says the programs have universal appeal as wellness is marketed to a female demographic.

The programs are software-based platforms that run in conjunction with daily interactive programs and a Sonicped, a wireless device attached to the shoe that tracks and monitors an employee's physical activity 24/7 and transmits the information to the individual's Sonic dashboard.

Programs include the "Challenge of the Day," consisting of a physical, nutritional or stress-reduction exercise, as well as weight-loss competitions and individual plans of action to lose and maintain weight.

"It's not a clinical approach, it's about having fun and getting healthy at the same time," Korn says. "Our programs appeal the same to healthy people and people trying to improve their health."

The unorthodox approach, which may include nutrition research or doing lunges every time you walk to the breakroom, is designed to boost morale while instilling accountability and competition in the workplace.

"The trash talking is fierce (during competition)," she says.

Prevention Is Best Medicine

Commercial insurance broker Cavnac & Associates has 700 clients in 42 states, 120 of which use all of their available insurance lines, including property and casualty, surety bonds, workers' compensation and employee benefits.

Clients range from construction and real estate to manufacturing and law.

Risk is a heavily assessed factor in determining a client's benefit and wellness profile.

"If we can manage the risk before it becomes a claim then we've been successful in lowering overall cost and driving dollars toward our clients' bottom line," says Patrick Casinelli, principal at Cavnac.

In 2007, Cavnac recorded \$8 million in revenue and sold \$70 million in premiums, and in 2008 revenues increased to \$8.8 million and premium sales to \$75 million. Projections for this year include a 15 percent increase in revenue.

"We take a lot of what we learn from ourselves and our own wellness programs and share them with our clients," Casinelli said.

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