

# NOW WE'RE TALKING!

Transform Your  
Wellness Program  
With an All-Out  
Communication  
Strategy



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# INTRODUCTION



Some well-being programs have high participation rates, foster a culture of health, and measurably improve employee wellness. Others — even if they offer high-quality, well run activities — struggle to fulfill their potential. The difference often lies in program communication.

**HOT  
TIP**



**A robust, consistent, well executed communication strategy can not only pull an underperforming program out of its doldrums, it can boost engagement and outcomes for any well-being program — even the best.**



## **BETTER PROGRAM RESULTS**

Early in my 20-year career as an employee wellness program manager, I, like others in similar positions, often wondered why my lunch and learns had mostly empty seats, HRAs had a mere 20% completion rate, and tobacco cessation classes didn't generate enough engagement to make a dent in the cluster of smokers that gathered outside the workplace entrance.

Once I realized I needed to tap into the skills I'd learned as a communication specialist and marketer in other industries, however, I never struggled again to recruit participants or to infuse well-being into organizational culture. More frequently, I was hard-pressed to meet employees' demand for programs.

Using the techniques in this book, you too can boost participation and achieve better program outcomes. Your communication will guide employees into the programs that will benefit them most. What's more, you can increase buzz and program visibility — essential ingredients for a culture of health.

In this book, I share communication tips and tricks that are tried-and-true, based on experience and research. But they are not stale or common. You'll deepen your understanding and skillset that — far from adding to the responsibilities that already keep you busy — put strategy and tactics to work for you.



# WHAT IS WELL-BEING PROGRAM COMMUNICATION?

This book is adapted from my communication column in HES's bimonthly publication, *Well-Being Practitioner*. Consider it your user guide, chock full of tips and tricks that can make your program soar.

This information views the concept of communication in the broadest sense, including...



- Program promotion
- Social media marketing
- Ongoing status updates and reporting
- Branding
- Inbound marketing
- Word-of-mouth
- Event marketing
- Champion mobilization
- Program "sales."





Implicit throughout this book is a fresh perspective on the 5 Ws, well known to anyone who's written a newspaper article, taken a journalism class, or simply learned how to tell a good story: the who, what, when, where, and why of program communication. Here's a preview:

**WHO**  
communicates?

Everyone in the organization.

**WHAT**  
should be communicated?

The right well-being solutions, for the right population, at the right time.

**WHEN**  
is the best time for  
program communication?

Before, during, and after wellness activities.

**WHERE**  
is program information and  
promotion communicated?

Anywhere, using whatever means possible, that captures even a sliver of employees' attention.

**WHY**  
is strategic communication  
necessary?

To deliver maximum value to the organization and its employees.



## HOW

The icing on the cake is *how*, which is explained — with simple tips you can start using today — for each strategy and tactic you’ll learn in the chapters that follow.

Before reading further, think of all the possible communication channels available to you. Consider opportunities ranging from the obvious to the far-fetched:

- Customizable sections of a wellness portal
- The recording employees hear while on hold with HR
- Company meetings
- New-hire onboarding
- Electronic display boards
- Employee cafeteria menus
- Training materials
- Paycheck stubs

- Banners
- Table tents
- Imprinted coffee cup sleeves in break rooms
- Screensavers.



**Don't get stuck on what you've done in the past. Changing how you communicate — just like behavioral changes you encourage in participants — requires an open mind about what's possible.**



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# The ABCs

## ALWAYS BE COMMUNICATING



Well-being pros often ask how far in advance they should communicate about a program. The better question is: “How *frequently* should I communicate?” The correct answer is as simple as ABC: Always Be Communicating.

Effective communication takes place before, during, and after activities.



# COMMUNICATE BEFORE IMPLEMENTATION

The importance of communicating before the launch of a program activity, like one of the team-based campaigns HES offers, is a no-brainer for most people. Try this approach, which I've used when implementing many campaigns:

- **Near the start of the year** — Communicate all upcoming programs you know about. In December, I might include in a newsletter article a statement like, “Next summer you’ll set sail in a new campaign unlike anything we’ve offered before.” I don’t have to explain that this refers to HES’s pirate-themed *Yo Ho Ho*. It’s just the right hint of mystery to keep readers wanting more.
- **As a campaign launch draws closer** — Communicate increasingly specific information. For a 6-week team-based campaign, for example, create buzz with the program name and slogan 2 weeks before registration, then blast the details (with a call to action, such as registering or finalizing a team by a specific date) on the day registration opens. You want everyone talking about the program and reinforcing key messages, like why employees will love participating. **Avoid communicating details so early that employees file away a mental note they may forget to revisit.**

HOT  
TIP



- **Throughout registration** — Communicate updates that feature registration rates. This is a social marketing technique: More people will register if they see that large numbers of their peers are doing so. Use messages like, “Nearly half of your coworkers already have signed up!” to create excitement and urgency.

Available channels influence the frequency of communications. After all, you can’t send an all-employee email every time the registration rate ticks up a notch. But you can:



**Have wellness champions distribute fliers for “coming soon” messages**



**Save precious email bandwidth only for the main call to action like “Click this link and register now for...”**



**Leverage social media posts with “time is running out” messages and persuasive tidbits to expand prospective participants’ understanding of the program.**



These are in addition to intranet banners, table tents, and every other channel imaginable.



You may not be able to leverage all these modalities, but don't make the mistake of issuing only 1 announcement and hoping employees find information on your intranet. **A well staged flow of messages can make the difference between a 5% and a 75% participation rate for an activity like a team-based campaign.**

## THE EXPONENTIAL POWER OF CROSS-PROMOTION

Use cross-promotion to recruit participants by embedding targeted messages within related activities and communications.

Say you're launching the HES [HealthTrails](#) program; customize the Web Resources page with links to details on the employee walking club.

Running a stress management program? Add a reminder about other resources, like your EAP, to the registration confirmation.

But don't confuse your audience. You may want to pitch your financial fitness program in a 401(k) enrollment letter, but the bulk of your message has to be about the 401(k). After the letter's closing signature, however, you can simply add: "PS: If you'd like to save more for current expenses, learn about financial fitness by..."

Let no communication opportunity go untapped.





# MOTIVATE PARTICIPANTS BY COMMUNICATING THROUGHOUT PROGRAMS

Once registration is closed and the program has launched, your work's not done. (Remember? Always Be Communicating.) This is your chance to:



Keep participants engaged with motivational tips



Recognize the accomplishments of individual participants and teams



Announce surprises like drawings for those actively engaged.

Inevitably, some people will be tempted to drop out of the program and may convince themselves that others are doing the same. Show it's not true with testimonials from active participants and data reflecting how well they're doing (like total number of steps, percentage of people tracking every day, or team accomplishments). To remind individuals where they are in the program, consider messages marking the halfway point or just a week to go.



**REMEMBER: AFTER  
COMMUNICATION  
FOR ONE PROGRAM  
BECOMES YOUR  
BEFORE  
COMMUNICATION  
FOR THE NEXT**

Communicating after a program is almost as important as communicating before. In fact, its success largely hinges on your messaging in the wake of previous campaigns.

In your end-of-program communication, congratulate participants. And thank internal team members — wellness committee members, champions, support partners, and leaders who helped make the program possible. Participants value the program more, and feel more valued by their employer, when they understand how much effort goes into providing them with wellness services.

You'll also want to acknowledge and share results from program evaluations and any insight about future program changes based on participant feedback. Use this opportunity to start generating excitement about your next big well-being offering. Your “after” communication for one program becomes your “before” communication for the next. Remember to note participants' accomplishments — including those who achieved health goals (and agree to share) — and results like building camaraderie, inspiring employees' family members to improve their health habits, and just having fun.



# USE ONGOING COMMUNICATION TO ENSURE GOOD OUTCOMES

There's no formula for communication frequency that fits every scenario. Annual health fairs, biweekly farmers' markets, financial wellness seminars, flu shots, and new healthy vending machine choices, to name a few, all lend themselves to different timing.

The important thing is to think of communication as ongoing. Don't worry about overdoing it; you can avoid that with a well executed plan based on the channels you have available.

As you hone your messaging and your schedule, communicating will get easier and more efficient. If you still feel you're too busy running programs to communicate enough, you may need to conduct fewer programs. **Better to do a few well communicated quality programs than several nobody knows or cares about.**

**HOT  
TIP**



A culture of health, high participation rates, program satisfaction, leadership buy-in, and positive outcomes all depend on strategic, ongoing well-being communication.



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# Social Media in Well-Being Programs

## *WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE?*



If you use a social media platform in your work, you may underestimate — and underuse — its power. This is true for public websites like Facebook®, Instagram®, or Twitter®; in-house collaboration platforms like Yammer® or Chatter®; or the social features of well-being products — including HES campaigns and several wellness portals.

Practitioners often think of social media platforms as being like bulletin boards, posting program announcements and never giving them another thought. But we're lucky if a post — used like this — draws the fleeting attention of a few people who happen upon it.

Most social platforms have at least 3 ways users can interact with a post.



*Like* a post — that is, endorse it by clicking on the word “like” or “favorite” or on a heart, star, or thumbs-up icon



Comment or reply in response to a post



Reshare a post, distributing it to their own connections on the platform.

Regardless of your social platform, try to get as many people as possible to engage in these activities.



# AN OPTIMIZED SOCIAL MEDIA POST

I managed the employee well-being program for a large organization whose in-house social platform functioned a lot like Facebook or LinkedIn®. Here’s an example of how I optimized a post to garner more *likes*, followed by a breakdown of why there’s more to social media engagement than may first meet the eye.

We had recently installed our first treadmill workstation and wanted employees to know about it. I could have just posted “New Treadmill Workstation” with a few details, which may have popped up in the newsfeeds of my online connections. But a dry informational post would soon be forgotten by the few employees who saw it. Instead, I used 5 simple social tactics:



1. Posted a few sentences with a header, “Get steps at your desk!” which personalized an action-oriented message and tied it to the step campaign we were launching.



2. Included a photo of an employee — my coworker, Judith — using the treadmill workstation. Social media experts have determined that using an image increases engagement on a post by 650%.



3. Tagged Judith — mentioning her with a link to her profile. This assured the post made it into the feeds of Judith’s connections; it sparked conversation online and off.



4. Noted that typing speed and accuracy tend to be normal after 3 15-minute sessions using the treadmill workstation. By answering an inevitable question, I delivered meaningful content — essential to social media strategy.



5. Asked my connections on the platform to click “like.”



This last tactic may be the most important. A marketing industry analysis showed that including the word “like” in a post more than doubles the odds of it being *liked*.

But I didn’t just say, “Like this post,” which may have been perceived as manipulative. Instead, I concluded the post with an almost irresistible call to action: “Click ‘like’ if you think you’d enjoy more physical activity during the workday.”

On our platform, most posts averaged 4-5 *likes*. My treadmill workstation post received 528, with each spreading the word and keeping the message fresh in employees’ newsfeeds on the platform. It also evoked a screen full of enthusiastic comments. I replied to (and/or *liked*) every one, to personalize the dialog, draw deeper engagement, and keep the topic prominent in users’ feeds in days following the initial post. In the final analysis, the post was viewed by more than 10 times the average.

(Some platforms discourage users from requesting *likes*. Learn whatever you can about the rules regulating use of your platform. When in doubt, contact a site administrator.)

Rudimentary as *likes* may be, a fuller understanding of how and why to elicit them can inspire you to customize a variety of increasingly sophisticated optimization tactics.

# WHY WE LIKE *LIKES*

HOT  
TIP



We've all heard stories of social media users staking their self-esteem to the number of *likes* their posts accrue. Well-being practitioners have a more noble motive. **Engagement with a program's social media posts is engagement in the program, and social sharing is a uniquely effective means to spread your message.**

If you examine your feed on almost any major platform, you'll notice a few different triggers that lead to specific posts being displayed. Depending on the system, you're likely to view content that:

- Your connections have personally posted
- A connection or you have been tagged or mentioned in
- Your connections have *liked, reshared, or commented on*.

Imagine, for example, wellness coordinator Susan has 15 connections — including her coworker, James — on a social media platform. James is a more active user and has 800 connections. When Susan posts an announcement, it may find its way into the newsfeed of only her 15 connections. But after James *likes* it, the post may be displayed to his 800 connections, who will read something like “James liked Susan’s post ‘New Walking Group,’” above Susan’s post about the group she’s starting.

If Susan's connections average 500 connections each, and 10 of them click *like*, Susan's post could be distributed to 5000 people plus those they share it with. Susan could spread the word even faster if she expanded her own pool of personal connections on the platform.



Earning *likes* to facilitate social sharing is the most basic example of optimizing these platforms. More can be done with special interest groups, comments, multimedia sharing, contests, live streaming, thoughtful timing, hashtags, and polls. **The value derived from social platforms can evolve even beyond program promotion to functions like participant support, education, and culture building.**

The essential first step to garnering results: Recognize that a social posting isn't comparable to a flier tacked on a crowded bulletin board. It's more similar to a current, spreading across a multidimensional network.



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# Timing Is Everything



There's an art and a science to scheduling social media posts that effectively promote employee wellness programs. The ideal cadence strengthens the message, turbocharges your communication plan, and adds to your peace of mind.



**Social media timing offers a model to understand strategic scheduling of *all* elements — emails, posters, announcements, home mailings, banners, intranet postings, and live events, to name a few — of your overall communication plan.**

In the previous chapter, I offered tips for posting on public websites like Facebook and Twitter or internal company sites like Chatter or Yammer. Most of those ideas — designed to evoke *likes*, comments, clicks, resharing, and ultimately higher wellness program engagement — can also be applied on the social Wall featured in many HES campaigns, like *Keep America Active* and *HealthTrails*.

Once you've crafted the perfect social media post — informative and catchy, with a compelling image — how do you know when to post it? A tempting answer is when you have a free moment. And it's easy to fall into the trap of posting only when you have something essential to say, like announcing a new program. These pitfalls, like those described in the previous chapter, amount to using the social platform like a bulletin board instead of making the most of everything technology offers.



## FIGURING OUT YOUR IDEAL TIME TO POST



For big companies selling national products and services, market researchers have identified the best days and times to post on social media. Their data shows it's important to think about timing, but it's not what you need to establish your own schedule. Promoting a wellness program to employees isn't the same as selling products to other businesses or to the public.

Ideal timing varies depending on circumstances. These insights based on my experience as a wellness manager for a large financial services firm should spark some ideas of how you can identify your best times to post:

- We promoted programs to office workers who predominantly had standard business hours in all US time zones. Our data showed activity on our platforms dipped to next-to-nothing on weeknights and weekends. Business hours were the best time to post.
- Our client service activity spiked on Mondays and Tuesdays. Promoting wellness programs on those days alienated potential participants by disregarding their workflow and risked distracting our service teams from our highest priority: the clients.



- We used a couple of major platforms that triggered an onscreen pop-up notification when something new was posted by someone you followed. This had more impact than someone just finding our message in their feed while browsing the site, so we timed our most important posts between 11:30 AM and 5 PM ET for the best chance of the notice catching the attention of employees at work in all US time zones.
- Though most team members worked Monday through Friday, an above-average number were out on Fridays, making it a bad day to promote programs.
- Here's another reason we preferred not to post on Fridays: Our primary social media platforms offered users an option to receive daily digests — an employee who didn't like the platform or didn't feel they had time to check it during the day could receive a daily email with truncated versions of the previous day's posts. If we posted on Friday, it would land in the digest on Saturday. That meant employees had no chance of seeing it until they arrived at the office Monday morning, when they were preoccupied with the work ahead for the week. Posts in digests often go unnoticed, but if that digest was received on a Saturday it was dead on arrival.

**HOT  
TIP**

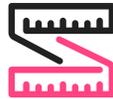


Even if you know the best times to post, you also need to consider ideal frequency to establish a *presence* on whatever platform you use. **Social media posts allow you or a team member to become the face of your program, which establishes a personal connection, and to build your program's brand.** What's more, you want people to look forward to and seek your posts, without overwhelming them. Some of this will depend on the users and the media. For example, on platforms that allow "following," a user who follows only you and 1 other person is more likely to see your posts than one whose feed is crowded with posts from 1000 other users they follow.



# 8 TIPS FOR YOUR COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

With these multiple considerations and absence of clear-cut rules, what's a well-being practitioner to do? Here are 8 tips to help you customize a social media strategy that works for you:



1. **Measure results.** This doesn't require sophisticated statistics or marketing savvy. For example, if you're promoting an HES campaign, see how registrations spike following a Tuesday post compared to a Friday post (remembering that successive messages deliver diminishing returns).



2. **Notice the levels of engagement your posts draw,** based on the number of *likes*, comments, clicks, and reshares. Measuring what works and what doesn't offers essential lessons in how to communicate for your population.



3. **Understand the ins and outs of the platform.** Know whether posts are displayed to users based on those they follow and what they've responded to, or a chronological feed where they see the most recent content, regardless of what it is or who posted it.



4. **Identify the most popular posts** from other users and look for patterns. Perhaps posts with mysterious headings or those that appeal to company pride get better responses.



5. **Establish a presence by maintaining a flow of “quiet” posts,** like “Today’s National Blackberry Day. Enjoy this cobbler recipe,” interspersed with high-impact posts, like announcing a new program or sharing results from a wellness survey. Use the quiet posts on low-engagement days and save the biggies for peak times.



6. **Avoid posting too much in a short time.** Your followers will tune you out, unfollow you, or flag you as a spammer.



7. **Stick to a social media schedule,** especially if using multiple platforms, with some flexibility to help assure a steady, well paced flow and reduce the stress of trying to craft your posts on the spur of the moment.



8. **Enlist the support** of your organization’s social media experts.

Most of these tips can be applied to other aspects of your communication strategy, even if social media platforms aren’t a big part of it.



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# 5 Tips to Spark Word-of-Mouth



You've probably heard that word-of-mouth is the best form of advertising. That's true, but it doesn't materialize out of thin air; you have to make it happen.

I've taken programs from "busted" to "booming" using 5 word-of-mouth techniques. No matter your current level of success, these techniques are like a fuse you can light to make your program pop:



**1. MOBILIZE WELL-BEING CHAMPIONS**



**2. CREATE MEETING KITS FOR LEADERS**



**3. GET PARTICIPANTS TO BRING  
A FRIEND**



**4. CAPITALIZE ON SPECIAL EVENTS**



**5. DELIGHT EMPLOYEES WITH  
PROGRAM SURPRISES**

# HELP WELL-BEING CHAMPIONS STIMULATE BUZZ

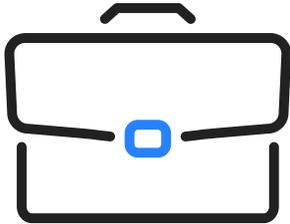


When I led a team of well-being champions for an employer with locations throughout the US, I emphasized that their primary role was to create buzz by talking positively about the program with their coworkers.

If you have champions, they may not feel fully prepared to spread the word in the course of their busy day. Here's how you can help:

- **Remind them periodically** that word-of-mouth depends on them
- **Provide a few memorable talking points**, like “Register for [\*Keep America Active\*](#), our most popular campaign” or “Attend next week’s stress management program to get an instant lift”
- **Encourage them to share the talking points**, in their own words, on any social media platforms your program uses
- **Suggest other ways for them to start conversations** even if they aren’t natural networkers, like making announcements at meetings or emailing team members to encourage them to participate and spread the word.

## BECOME A COMPANY HERO WITH MEETING KITS

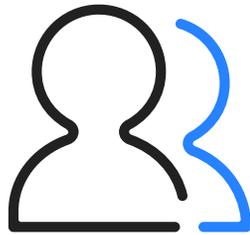


I led the roll-out of a major initiative that integrated a wellness program with employee benefits; it would affect every employee in the company. Our branch managers held regular all-hands meetings. I knew they often didn't have enough content for their meetings, and I was concerned that, left to their own devices, they'd have a hard time accurately explaining our extensive program. We packaged a meeting kit that contained:

- A DVD with upbeat videos introducing the program and narrated screencasts demonstrating how to get started on the health portal
- Handouts for employees
- Manager talking points and FAQs
- Giveaways — imprinted with the web address of the intranet resource that had more information — for managers to hand out to attendees
- A slick brochure that walked the manager through the process of how to use the kit.

The kits made me a hero to leaders throughout the company. Employees received the message with appreciation and excitement, rather than confusion and its twin brother... suspicion. By managing the message as well as the medium, we got everyone — including the all-important middle managers — talking positively about it and, not coincidentally, we made inroads toward our shift to a culture of health.

# EXPLODE REGISTRATION WITH BRING-A-FRIEND PROMOTIONS



Health clubs and other membership-based businesses use bring-a-friend tactics all the time, but we don't use them nearly enough in well-being programs.

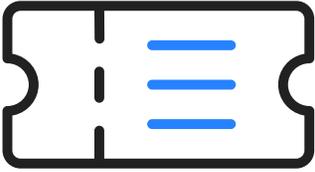
A few years ago, to infuse some fun into a program, I organized a Hula-Hoop® class. Signups for the oddball offering took off slowly at this buttoned-up worksite, as I knew they would. So, 2 weeks before the event, we announced that if a registrant recruited a coworker into the class, they would each be entered into a drawing for a free “professional-style” Hula-Hoop.

It worked. Registration exploded — we had to create 3 more sessions of the class — and years later employees still talked about it.



**Bring-a-friend promotions necessitate some logistical planning to track eligibility, but it's the ultimate embodiment of word-of-mouth, and it's sure to boost your numbers.**

# USE EVENTS TO CREATE BUZZ



Live events are perfect opportunities to get the buzz going. On the first morning of a team-based challenge that encouraged more fruits and vegetables — along the lines of HES’s popular [Colorful Choices](#) campaign — I stationed champions at the entrances of our largest sites handing out apples as employees arrived for work. We decorated each entrance with banners and balloons and had little signs with our program’s hashtag that people could display as they took selfies together, which many posted on our companywide social media platforms.

Employees were wowed. Champions didn’t even need to say anything about the program as they busily distributed the apples. Everyone at those worksites was talking about the program, and it generated enthusiasm on the social platforms, too. Registration spiked, and the program launched with a bang.

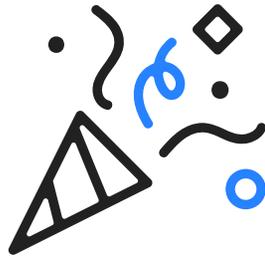
Once, when organizing a team for a charity bike tour, a top performer on my team recruited an executive to ride a stationary bike just outside the cafeteria during lunchtime. She promoted that he’d be there and solicited donation pledges based on how long he rode (he didn’t last as long as we hoped!). Champions wearing our team race jersey stood at the ready to register new members from the crowd gathering as word spread that an out-of-breath VP was sweating up a storm for a great cause.

**HOT  
TIP**



**Staying within your organization’s boundaries of what’s acceptable, the more outrageous the event, the more chatter there will be.**

# DELIGHT PARTICIPANTS WITH SURPRISES



Predictability is a word-of-mouth crusher. Why would anyone tell a colleague about something if they both knew what was going to happen? Embedding surprises is an effective variation of the outrageous event dynamic.

Surprises run the gamut, from a prize drawing announced in the middle of a campaign (“It’s Week 5, and all participants are entered into a drawing for an Apple Watch®!”) to a video message of encouragement from a popular personality (a celebrity, local hero, or your CEO).

Find out more about how surprises engage participants in the white paper, [The Science Behind HES Well-Being Campaigns](#).

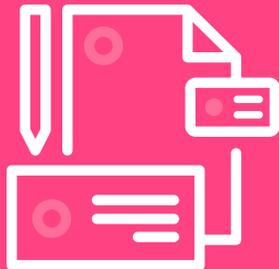
**HOT  
TIP**



**If you ever feel employees aren’t as engaged in your program as you’d like them to be, or you just want to be sure everyone — including those who aren’t tuned in to your usual communication channels — knows about the offerings, don’t overlook the best form of advertising: word-of-mouth.**



# Strengthen Your Program Brand



It's tempting to think of a wellness program's brand as comprised exclusively of name and logo. These are important, but to fulfill the potential of a meaningful, effective brand, it must go farther... even beyond words and images. A strategically executed brand reflects goals and values, permeating the program so that people recognize it — consciously or not — through the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions it triggers at every turn.

# BRAND EXAMPLES



To illustrate how brands can be fully integrated, consider 2 fictionalized well-being programs:

1. A venerable banking institution strives to reduce employees' cardiovascular risk factors and help manage their medical conditions. Biometric screenings and an HRA are at the program's core.



2. A start-up that sells organic dog treats on the web seeks to be a preferred employer. Its program has achieved notoriety for drumming circles, yoga classes, and onsite massage.

For these examples, note how the brand is expressed visually, verbally, emotionally:

- The bank's program name is Wealth of Health; the start-up's is Qioree (we'll say it's from an ancient word meaning *connection*).
- Wealth of Health's logo is made up of a W and an H, with abstract adornments that resemble a person running; Qioree's depicts people holding hands, with a paw print integrated into the program name.

Program names have no hard and fast rules. In these examples, both have advantages and disadvantages. Self-explanatory names like Health This or Wellness That (or Wealth of Health) have the advantage of conveying what the program is, yet run the risk of being generic (therefore, by definition, lacking a strong brand). An offbeat word, like Qioree, can work, especially if there's a meaningful narrative behind why the word was chosen.



- The bank's print and electronic communications repeat the employer's colors, yellow and blue; Qioree's colors are teal and fuchsia.
- Wealth of Health's website is designed for fast navigation and is laid out like a newspaper's front page; Qioree's uses a lot of images and animation to invite exploration.
- Qioree publishes a monthly flier of activities in the casual Comic Sans font, posted in the office's bathroom stalls; the bank communicates exclusively on its intranet and through email (bathroom postings are against policy) using the classic Verdana font.
- Wealth of Health offers a webinar featuring one of the nation's leading migraine specialists; Qioree has a dietitian lead a brown-bag workshop to discuss organic food facts and fiction.
- The bank's employee cafeteria designates Wealth of Health items, like salad, Greek yogurt, and grilled chicken; Qioree hosts a Friday afternoon smoothie bar.



- Wealth of Health’s promotional emails are formal, with messages that start like this: “Dear Employee, The Wealth of Health program encourages you to attend...”; Qioree’s emails start, “Hey guys!”
- Qioree’s staff have a choice of golf shirts or T-shirts they can wear to work, all featuring the Qioree logo; Wealth of Health’s are expected to wear business attire to reflect the program’s professionalism.

These examples — exaggerated here for purposes of illustration — demonstrate how brand is a thread that runs through the fabric of a well-being program. It’s an essential undercurrent of an effective communication strategy that allows participants to connect with the program’s vision and values on a sensory level.

When participants perceive the Qioree brand, they immediately identify it as innovative, holistic, and fun. When spotting the Wealth of Health brand, employees relate to it as well grounded, quality driven, and understated.

## WHAT IS A BRAND?



**A brand is not a thing, like a logo or a name. It's a familiar, recognizable feeling you want people to associate with your program.** As part of the brand, the name, logo, words, images, and offerings reinforce that feeling.

You'll find times when it makes sense to diverge from the brand, but do so strategically — for example, when a pilot program is intended to stand out from ongoing activities.

## 7 BRANDING TIPS

Whether you're developing a new brand or fine-tuning an existing one, here are some helpful tips:

1. Craft a brand that links your program to your employer's culture and purpose. The bank does this by using Wealth in its name; the start-up does it by slipping an image of a paw print into its logo. Both are well matched to culture.
2. Work with your employer's branding experts to get input on branding guidelines as well as processes for using trademarks and avoiding infringement.



- 3.** Assess in advance the different ways a logo may be used. Think twice, for example, before adopting a 4-color logo if you know it's going to be imprinted on T-shirts and water bottles.
- 4.** Consider the potential for multiple brands — the vendors' and yours — confusing participants if you outsource activities like HRAs, coaching, and biometric screenings.
- 5.** Learn vendors' opportunities for “white labeling,” where you rebrand their products to look like yours with techniques ranging from having your program's visual themes on their website to having their help desk answer the phone as if they worked for your program (for example, “This is Qioree Coaching, how can I help you?”).
- 6.** Ask if your vendors allow co-branding visual elements where websites or print materials share their logo and yours. But be cautious about having your brand used in ways you can't control.
- 7.** Don't integrate your brand into highly confidential vendor services, like HRAs or EAPs. You want employees to feel confident their personal information is processed exclusively by a third party.



**When developing a brand, start by defining what your program is, what values are important, and how you and your organization want employees to feel about it.** Working with a team of stakeholders, if possible, weave together the visual, verbal, sensory, and emotional elements.

Of course, creating the brand isn't enough. Being mindful to apply it consistently is what leads to the ultimate payoffs of improved engagement, satisfied participants, and better results.



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# Improve Participation and Outcomes

*WITH NEXT-GENERATION  
MARKETING*



Talking with colleagues, I've observed a pattern — namely, that program marketing hasn't evolved with the times. Many well-being practitioners can increase participation and improve outcomes by using modern models like inbound marketing, content repurposing, and, in some cases, automatic marketing.



# INBOUND MARKETING

The principle of inbound marketing is simple: Instead of going out to find potential participants, you *attract* them to your program.

To appreciate inbound marketing in action, consider your daily exposure to it. Those white papers, webinars, and subscription newsletters that well-being vendors offer? They usually feature information that helps you stay up-to-date and well informed as a professional. An enterprise offers these resources because they want to collect contact information from prospective purchasers interested in matters related to their products.

You can adapt this goal to your program, while also taking advantage of other reasons companies love inbound marketing:

- They want you to see them as the experts
- They're building name recognition
- They're creating or expanding the perception that their products are needed.



After a vendor has attracted you to their content, they may follow up with a more personalized email or phone call. This targeted approach provides better return on their marketing investment compared to cold-calling or blasting emails to a random mailing list.

**HOT TIP**



How can you leverage similar techniques to increase program participation in a way that fits your organization's culture?

**You may not have the resources or know-how to use inbound marketing with as much sophistication as large marketing departments, but any well-being program can benefit from attracting participants instead of just hunting for them with posters and email blasts.**

Apply principles of inbound marketing using:



**Intranet content**



**Lunch and learns**



**Webinars**



**White papers**



For starters, provide unique, valuable wellness content on whatever platform you use to communicate with employees. You may not have a stash of great articles, but you or another leader can start an internal well-being blog that offers perspectives your target population is hungry for. Check your company's policies — you may be able to blog on your intranet or a freely available platform like WordPress® or Facebook.

If a blog isn't in your future, write articles that can be posted on your intranet. As another alternative, you may be able to customize content provided by vendors.

Make the most of lunch and learns, webinars, and white papers. Most well-being practitioners think of these as stand-alone programs, but they also should be viewed as content and used as inbound marketing opportunities.

Here's an example. Last year, my colleague Kim told me about her initial disappointment with enrollment in an online sleep-health program — we'll call it *Snoozzz* — launched at her company, a large employer.



After the program languished for a few weeks, she led a 20-minute webinar about healthy sleep — it was convenient and required no big commitment from attendees. She used information collected from the CDC and Sleep Foundation.

The webinar attracted hundreds of participants. Near the beginning and again at the end, Kim announced: “To learn more about our new program, *Snoozzz*, visit our well-being home page.” The population of sleep-deprived employees responded; enrollment in *Snoozzz* skyrocketed over the next few weeks.

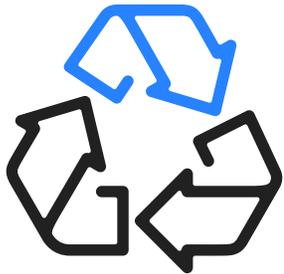
# CONTENT REPURPOSING

Creating content — whether it’s an article or a webinar — may seem like it would be a drain on your time. That’s where *repurposing* comes in. Kim converted the webinar to a podcast and posted it on the intranet. It continued to funnel large numbers of participants into *Snoozzz* over the next 6 months.

By default, Kim’s webinar platform and *Snoozzz* generated participant rosters. Next time she implements a similar program, Kim can contact employees on the rosters (past participation is the leading predictor of future participation) with a more personalized message.

She could publish a simple white paper (3 or 4 pages) based on information gathered for her webinar — again, repurposing it — with a sidebar promoting *Snoozzz*. With a little design assistance and refresh, Kim could post the white paper so it shows up in intranet searches and post it to the company’s internal social media. She also could share the white paper with *Snoozzz* participants and suggest they pass it along to coworkers.

In this scenario, Kim masterfully integrates inbound marketing with repurposing, personalized messaging, and word of mouth.



# AUTOMATIC MARKETING

Automatic marketing is exactly what its name implies: automation of recurring marketing tasks that would be too time-consuming to implement manually. This modern model streamlines your efforts and is the natural complement to inbound marketing. Individually or combined, these techniques do more than increase participation rates. They unobtrusively target participants who are most likely to engage in a program and achieve solid outcomes.

Targeted outreach — triggered by a specific date, event, or activity — is the most common automatic marketing practice.

If you shop on the web, you may experience automatic marketing when, for example, you receive an email from an e-commerce site that reminds you, “Product X is still in your shopping cart. Did you forget? You may also be interested in these similar products...” It’s an automated message, personalized to your circumstances, triggered by an incomplete purchase.

Large-scale marketing automation requires specialized software, but you can be creative with email rules and — if it’s okay with your organization — multiple email inboxes. Here’s an example:





- Have a generic email address: *help@xwell-being.com*. Set autoreplies so that employees seeking help get a simple message saying they'll be contacted within 24 hours and "Have you visited our FAQ page?"
- Create a specific email address: *snoozzz@xwell-being.com*. The autoreply, in addition to acknowledging receipt and thanking the sender, can link to other programs or resources likely to interest an employee drawn to a sleep-health program.

Create email addresses and autoreplies for other major programs and, for your convenience, have all incoming messages directed to 1 manageable inbox. This automation spares you from having to personalize marketing messages to individual employees based on their initial interest, and as a bonus can organize messages based on subject.

With autoreplies, you can get fancy and link, for example, to a mindfulness program if the original sender's message includes the word "stress." But don't go overboard. You'll sacrifice efficiency if you get too granular.



## BE AN EFFICIENT MARKETER

Dedicate 1 morning a month to work on content for inbound marketing/repurposing and to experiment with automatic marketing. It will save you time in the long run and improve your program.

Full-time marketers combine inbound marketing, repurposing, and automated marketing with a host of other techniques. But don't bite off more than you can chew. *Think* like a modern marketer, and soon you'll create your own methods to optimize the tools available to you.





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# Adopt a Sales Mindset



Once your well-being program promotion draws an employee's attention, how do you get them to engage? You need a plan to — as they say in sales — *close the deal*.

Recruiting participants has a lot in common with making a sale, as you:



**Aim to persuade them to *spend* their time and energy on your well-being *product***



**Discover their *need*, then present the product's *features* and *benefits* as a solution**



**Lead them through a process to *overcome barriers* and make a commitment.**

You don't have to adopt the sales terminology; it's more important to appreciate how your program and participants benefit when you identify and capitalize on opportunities to conduct a sales-like process.

# ENGAGEMENT INCREASES; OUTCOMES IMPROVE

A sales mindset brings you closer to achieving 3 of your most important objectives:



Program engagement increases



More participants reach their personal well-being goals



Health outcomes improve.

This approach is best suited for 1-on-1 interactions rather than mass communication, especially if you use it as an endpoint of the techniques described in the previous chapter. But you may find ways to incorporate some of the principles into promotional posters and fliers, too.



## PROGRAM SELLING IN ACTION

Larissa leads a well-being program for a software company with 6000 employees. To breathe fresh life into the program, she organized a 6-session line dancing class that she touted as an opportunity to “slide into fitness.” Demonstrating her inbound marketing savvy, Larissa led a 15-minute webinar on Fitness Fun — featuring tips on novel ways to enjoy physical activity — and encouraged attendees to register for the line dancing class as soon as possible. The class filled to capacity within minutes after the webinar.

Becky, one of the company’s quality assurance specialists, called Larissa to express disappointment at not being able to sign up for the class just 1 day after registration opened. She’d been excited to hear about it because she needed something fun to motivate her to be more active. Becky felt intimidated in fitness centers and had grown bored with home exercise equipment.

Larissa saw an opportunity. “If you’re looking to get started with fitness while having some fun,” she said, “I think you’ll like our *Keep America Active* campaign that starts in a couple of weeks.” She described the program’s exciting playfulness, social support, and suitability for participants at all levels of fitness. Larissa understood that these were the kinds of features that had attracted Becky to the line dancing class.



“Registration is open now, Becky. I’ll send you a link where you can learn more about the program and register, OK?” Larissa offered. She knew making registration effortless and presenting an immediate call to action were keys to helping Becky overcome perceived barriers that might prevent her from committing.

Becky registered for *Keep America Active* a few minutes after the call and went on to enjoy many of the company’s well-being activities. She successfully adopted regular exercise as a new healthy behavior: a result of participating in a program that met her needs.

A positive outcome would have been less likely if Larissa had suggested joining the company’s fitness center or, worse, just chalked up the original call as a complaint and neglected to present any alternative.

In this scenario, Larissa applied a fundamental characteristic of a good salesperson: She knew her product well and she believed in it. From there, she intuitively executed the process...



Recognize the sales opportunity



Learn the prospect's needs



Communicate how the product meets those needs



Close the deal with a call to action.

Larissa's and Becky's interaction illustrates how a sales approach can be a win-win for your program and your target population.

**HOT TIP**



**You can't personally pitch programs to all participants 1 at a time, but you can make a significant difference if you accept almost every encounter as an opportunity to "sell" an employee an activity they'll appreciate.**

# COACHING, GUIDING, COUNSELING

This approach isn't exclusively for phone conversations or in-person encounters; it can be used effectively through email and other modes of communication — like instant messaging — as well. As you get more comfortable, you may even find yourself marketing programs when casually interacting with work friends.

Anyone who responds to employee inquiries, registrations, or even complaints should be trained and prepared to sell, including your well-being team, HR help desk, administrative assistants, and benefit generalists. Your colleagues in these roles may wince at the first mention of selling: “I took this job to help people, not to be a salesperson.” But remind them that selling is just a term to describe this process. If you prefer, call it coaching, guiding, counseling, or whatever you think will be well received.



**No matter how you label it, you're ultimately providing a service: Proactively helping employees discover activities they'll enjoy that offer the best chance to achieve their well-being goals.**



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# DON'T NEGLECT THE FUNDAMENTALS

This book introduces effective communication techniques accessible to well-being program practitioners. They work — especially if you:

- Stay open to experimenting
- Reject the misconception that new approaches require too much time.



Though good communicators are taught to avoid clichés, I'll go out on a limb and say the techniques in this book are best described as low-hanging fruit.



I assume you already have these fundamentals in place:

- A communication plan, with goals, to-dos, task owners, and target dates
- An understanding of how to grab attention with language and design
- Effective use of conventional communication channels, like email and fliers
- Health messaging that's not program-specific, like motivational posters; branded giveaways like T-shirts and water bottles; reinforcement of your organization's commitment and culture through healthy food labeling, take-the-stairs reminders, and any other cues throughout the workplace
- Quality assurance, to make sure the information you're communicating is complete, correct, and clear
- Partnership with your organization's dedicated communication experts.



You may not have mastered *all* the fundamentals on the list, but if you can check off most of them, it's time to take the next step in the evolution of your well-being program communication.



This book may point you to the low-hanging fruit. But now it's up to you to harvest it and dig in.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For more than 20 years, Bob Merberg has led the way in workplace wellness. His success is built on broad experience developing and managing well-being programs, complemented by his strategic communication expertise. This work is recognized nationally:

- The National Business Group on Health honored Bob's program as sole recipient of its *Special Recognition Award for Program Communication*, citing his "innovative, technology-driven campaigns resulting in high employee engagement and continual support for a culture of health." NBGH also honored Bob's overall wellness program 7 times with its *Best Employer for Healthy Lifestyles* award.
- Bob's multiple accolades for health promotion, well-being, and communication include several National Health Information Awards that "honor the nation's best consumer health programs and materials."
- The Institute for HealthCare Consumerism named Bob an IHC *Superstar for Innovation and Employee Empowerment*, and in 2017 a panel of industry experts selected him as *Wellness Person of the Year*, commending his "creativity and ability to effect measurable improvements, sustainability, and program outcomes."





Bob developed and taught the Worksite Wellness course offered by University of California at Berkeley extension in addition to Program Administration classes in its Fitness and Intervention certificate program.

An in-demand speaker at national wellness and healthcare conferences, Bob has been featured in *Marketwatch*, *Human Resource Executive*, and *PC Magazine* as well as countless podcasts and webinars. He focuses on applying evidence-based models to achieve transformational health, well-being, and business outcomes for employees and employers.

Bob is currently principal at Jozito LLC, where he provides customized well-being and communication consulting. He also partners with HES on a variety of program design and communication projects.



**Bob Merberg**

Principal Consultant, Jozito LLC

[www.jozito.com](http://www.jozito.com)

## ABOUT HES

Our specialty is theme-based web and mobile well-being programs with engaging participant experiences and rich content — campaigns that are challenging, social, fun, and grounded in health behavior change science. It's all we do... for more than 25 years. Organizations look to HES when:



They're overwhelmed trying to build and support their own wellness challenges



It becomes clear that participants are bored with the same old same old — they want new and different campaigns each year



They're frustrated with other vendors' challenges that over time result in declining participation.

Contact HES — **800.326.2317** — to see how our best in class well-being campaigns and supporting communication tools and techniques can make your job easier.

*“The program provides the tools and motivation to keep me in the frame of mind to want to succeed. This is a huge benefit to myself and the organization I work for.”*

— Bob Roe, Participant

**HAPPY COMMUNICATING!**



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