

# Boost Employee Wellness Participation

## How to meet employees' incentive expectations

**By Theresa McEndree**

*VP, Marketing, Hawk Incentives*

Employee wellness programs are now commonplace, yet only 20 to 40 percent of eligible employees participate in them, according to the Department of Labor<sup>1</sup>. So, to maintain a workforce's engagement and interest in wellness programs, a smart reward and incentive strategy is key. Depending on a company's employee demographics, employers must adjust to the changing expectations for wellness program participation rewards, including which types of rewards are most valuable and when and how employees like to receive them. The goal is to deliver the right reward to the right person at the right time.

As you design your wellness incentive programs, there are several important things to keep in mind:

### **More than anything else, people want choice in rewards**

According to a reward preference survey conducted by Hawk Incentives this year, people want choice more than any specific reward.<sup>2</sup> There was no clear reward "winner" for any demographic segment or dollar value. So, when selecting rewards for wellness program participation, be sure you offer a variety. One size doesn't fit all when you're trying to motivate and show appreciation toward your employees, who are likely a diverse group that spans various demographics. It's important to offer numerous choices such as gift cards, egifts, travel, merchandise and more to satisfy a varied group of recipients.

### **Incent employees regularly**

If a reward is purely aspirational and is too difficult or takes too long to obtain, employees might forget about it or lose interest in working toward it. Instead, employers should offer smaller, regularly delivered rewards to incent wellness program participation. Micro rewards enable organizations to create a steady stream of recognition and interaction while regularly engaging with employees. Additionally, frequent and quickly delivered rewards are meaningful to recipients because they provide regular reminders of the behavior(s) that led to the reward.

### Digital rewards should be in the mix

Digital rewards are a great option to satisfy employees who increasingly rely on smartphones and computers in their day-to-day lives—in and out of work. According to a 2016 Forrester report<sup>3</sup>, 244 million consumers browsed or bought online in 2015. The report also predicted that these numbers will rise. For that reason, virtual open-loop rewards could be a great fit for those who prefer an immediate reward and digital shopping experience. Employees appreciate the flexibility and rapid delivery of egifts and virtual rewards as they can be used soon after they have been earned. Additionally, the cost of providing digital rewards, especially at the micro level, is typically lower than providing physical rewards that require printing, shipping, etc.

### Do you really need wellness rewards? Yes

People have been trained to expect rewards for making a purchase, participating in an activity at work, taking a test drive, etc. So to maximize participation in your workplace wellness program (which can lead to healthier employees and lower healthcare and insurance costs for the business), offering smart incentives that motivate action is a worthwhile effort.

Plus, rewards can delight your employees, which can drive impact beyond wellness program participation and influence overall happiness in the workplace. A Hawk Incentives employee happiness study<sup>4</sup> found that only 42 percent of employees are satisfied with their workplace rewards and recognition programs, which is not surprising, given the fact that almost four in 10 employees reported their employers don't provide any reward programs at all.

Organizations are investing significant resources in wellness programs for their employees, so it is critical to motivate participation in these programs. Additionally, as incentives and rewards have become more commonplace in peoples' lives, expectations for rewards and incentive experiences are changing. In order to drive meaningful ROI, organizations must continually evolve their wellness program participation incentives to adapt to employees' demands for meaningful rewards.

---

1. "Workplace Wellness Programs; Services Offered, Participation, and Incentives" is a report sponsored by the Department of Labor in 2014.

2. Source: A Hawk Incentives Rewards Preference survey of 1,022 smartphone owning Americans was completed by Leger online between February 10 and 28, 2017. A probability sample of the same size would yield a margin of error of +/-3.07%, 19 times out of 20.

3. U.S. Cross-Channel Retail Forecast, 2015 to 2020" is a report published by Forrester Research in January 2016.

4. "The Happiness Study" was an Internet-based survey conducted in 2015 by Hawk Incentives. The sample size included 1,851 respondents in the United States.

---

## About Hawk Incentives

Hawk Incentives, a Blackhawk Network business, is a leading provider of rewards and incentives to organizations across the globe, including many of the Fortune 500. We power an inspiring brand experience with proven delivery of customized rewards for consumer, employee, sales and channel incentive programs. Our expansive rewards portfolio includes multiple patents and industry firsts, including digital and mobile rewards. To learn more, visit [www.hawkincentives.com](http://www.hawkincentives.com). Hawk Incentives, headquartered in Lewisville, Texas, is a division of Blackhawk Network.