



## EMEX Benefit Systems Brings Voluntary Benefits to the Workplace

### Client

EMEX Benefits Systems

### Industry

Premier provider of employee and voluntary benefits.

### Location

Located in Minnesota and Wisconsin, the firm serves small and mid-sized employee groups, from sole proprietors to professional groups numbering over 6,000 employees.

### Challenge

To further build/expand employee relationships through worksite visits and increase sales of voluntary benefits.

### Solution

EMEX uses BASIC Guru to provide worksite consultation and expand sales of voluntary benefits.

As a fundamental principle, web-based technology provides a bridge between people based in different locations. Most—if not all—online benefits enrollment systems are designed to support employer groups remotely, offering (in theory at least), intuitive tools to promote employee self-service. Of course we all spend the majority of our time in the real world, and experience tells us that no self-service platform is entirely that—it invariably relies on considerable support, from initial log-in through navigation.

So when you hear of someone—in this case a benefits broker—using technology to facilitate face-to-face interactions, it sounds completely counterintuitive. But when Dave Wiest, CEO and founder of EMEX Benefit Systems describes how he uses an online benefits enrollment, management and communications platform—BASIC Guru—for just that purpose, it not only makes sense, it makes for a compelling business case.

“We’ve been doing worksite benefits for over eight years, and while we rely on technology to facilitate enrollment and communications, we use technology as a means to an end, not an end in itself,” said Wiest. EMEX is in the business of brokering and consulting in Group and Individual Health, Dental, Life and Disability Insurance, Travel and Short Term Medical Insurance, Qualified and Non-Qualified Retirement Plans and Voluntary Benefits. EMEX’s current accounts range from 2 employees to 6,000.

BASIC Guru’s suite of agency/agent management tools simplifies a broad range of otherwise labor-intensive processes: bulk records import, renewal management, the creation of customized Employee Benefit Statements, the ability to communicate with employer group clients and prospects via a monthly HTML newsletter, as well as robust support for assuring employer compliance.

When they first implemented BASIC Guru, Wiest and his team found that employees weren’t using it in the numbers they were expecting, and employers simply didn’t know how to use it to their maximum advantage. Using their onsite visits to give employees—

and employers—a better understanding of the system, it quickly moved well beyond the “tutorial” stage, becoming the focal point of their consultative process.

“Our approach is to schedule one-on-one meetings at the employer worksite, where we sit down with each employee and spend the bulk of our time on their core benefits. As we’re going through their core benefits we walk them through the BASIC Guru program, from logging in to navigating the system and finding links to all the resources that are available on the platform,” said Wiest. “As important as it is to take the opportunity to have each employee understand how to use and benefit from the platform, it’s as important as a discovery process—while we’re showing them the system and all it can do to help them manage their benefits, we’re building a rapport and finding out more about them, their family and their needs.”

As Wiest gathers information and an employee profile begins to coalesce, he then pivots to a conversation about voluntary benefits.

“Most brokers spend 20-25 minutes on voluntary benefits, and five on core,” said Wiest. “By focusing on the core, we get a better understanding of the voluntary benefits that will likely resonate and be a fit. Leading with and focusing on voluntary benefits can’t help but come across as more sales oriented, where ours is more consultative. By the time we get to a conversation around voluntary benefits, we have their attention and can engage them in a deeper, more meaningful discussion on benefits they are more likely to respond to.”

The approach has paid tangible dividends: each worksite visit results in an additional 1.2 new policies per employee.

Employers are only too happy to have Dave and EMEX agents onsite. First, HR is able to offload complex and time-consuming conversations around benefits to EMEX. Second, getting a better grasp of how the platform simplifies and assures compliance in today’s increasingly complex regulatory landscape is not only a huge relief, but also a guard against staggering penalties (failing to provide evidence of the transmission and receipt of Summary of Benefits Coverage documents can exact a steep \$1K per employee penalty). Third, their focus on core benefits underscores to employees the true value of their employer-sponsored benefits.

“Employees need to be communicated with, otherwise they won’t give employers credit for the benefits they’re receiving,” said Wiest. “Of course, this is reinforced by the newsletters we send out through BASIC Guru, but nothing makes more of an impression than a face-to-face meeting where we can drive that message home.”

Administering benefit programs, particularly with the uncertainty and confusion around the phased implementation of the Affordable Care Act, is a complex undertaking—particularly when considering all the hats the broker/agent must wear, providing guidance on strategy, design, mitigating risk, financing, delivery, ongoing management, communication...and compliance. Additionally, brokers and agents are under tremendous pressure to adapt as change sweeps the industry, and they are being

forced to hunker down and seriously re-evaluate their business models—from an operational and, even more fundamentally, a value proposition standpoint.

“This business is about the three C’s: cost, compliance, communications. Using BASIC Guru as we do enables us to deliver on all three, particularly on compliance and communications,” said Wiest. “It’s been an instrumental worksite tool, supporting a consultative model that continues to be a true differentiator, playing a central role in helping write a steady stream of new voluntary policies.”

Wiest and EMEX are showing a path forward for brokers and agents looking to establish and sustain dialog with employers and employees...using BASIC Guru to leverage their expertise, build relationships and grow their book of business. Using technology to facilitate face-to-face interactions may not be as counterintuitive as it seems. In fact, as Wiest and the EMEX team have compellingly demonstrated, it’s basic.