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# The Agency's Guide to Better Serving Employers in 2021

What businesses are looking for  
in their broker.

From managing a remote workforce, to furloughing and subsequently rehiring employees, to conducting a fully virtual open enrollment for the first time, businesses have found themselves faced with new obstacles over the last year.

While conducting the survey for this guide, we discovered that **65.53% of businesses have shifted their employee benefits strategy as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic**, and this number rises to 70.06% when we look at businesses with fewer than 50 employees. We understand the challenge today for insurance agencies is not simply the changes themselves, but the speed at which they are happening.

Throughout this guide, we've sought to help you better understand what employers are looking for and expect from their broker in 2021. **We surveyed nearly 650 businesses, and then used this data to build actionable recommendations.** We are excited to share the results with you and hope this guide will help you offer your clients the service they seek, attract new business, and return your agency's growth rate to pre-pandemic levels.

## Methodology

The recommendations in this guide are based on survey results from 644 businesses that offer health insurance benefits to their employees. Out of that sample size, 28.91% of businesses had fewer than 50 employees, 31.56% of them had between 51 and 100 employees, and businesses with more than 100 employees accounted for 39.53% of the respondents.

In addition, 74.80% of businesses surveyed work with a health insurance broker to offer employee benefits, while only 25.20% do not.

*The survey was conducted by Ease in February 2021.*

## The guide will cover the following:

1. Focusing on Retention
2. Becoming the Single Point of Entry
3. Making Your Small Groups Feel Like Big Companies
4. Creating the All-in-One Experience by Integrating Benefits with HR
5. Helping Shape Benefits Education and Communications
6. Boosting Your Marketing Efforts



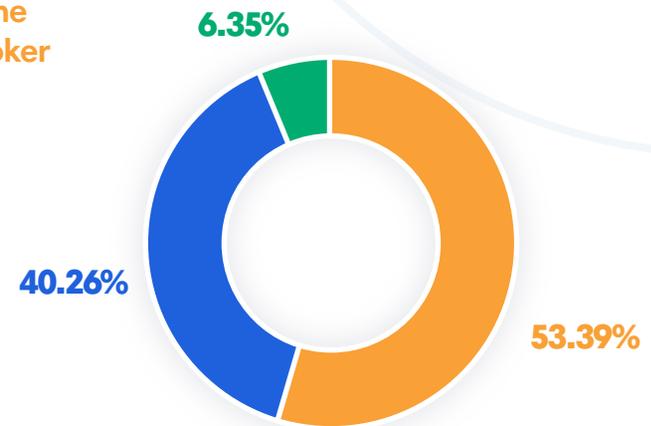
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## 1 Focusing on Retention

Of the businesses surveyed, **53.39% changed health insurance brokers in the past 12 months—meaning more than half made a switch in the last year.** Businesses with fewer than 50 employees were the most affected segment (60.74%), followed by businesses with 51–100 employees (59.48%), and businesses with 100+ employees coming last (49.01%). This indicates that the smallest businesses were the ones with the highest level of dissatisfaction with their health insurance broker.

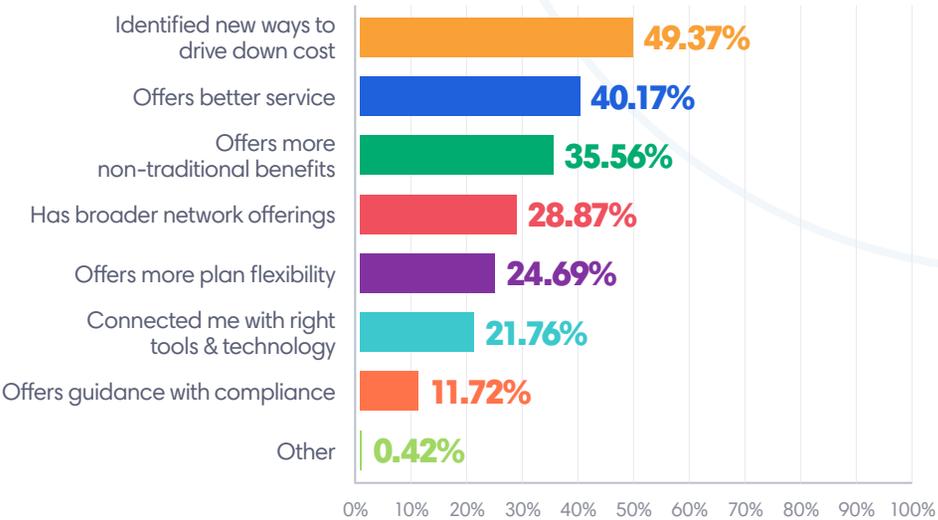
**Have you changed the health insurance broker you work with in the past 12 months?**

- Yes
- No
- Considering it



While maximizing benefits cost is not always everything, in this case, it is the main reason businesses changed brokers in the past 12 months. This is followed by “offers better service,” and “offers more non-traditional benefits like telehealth and wellness plans.”

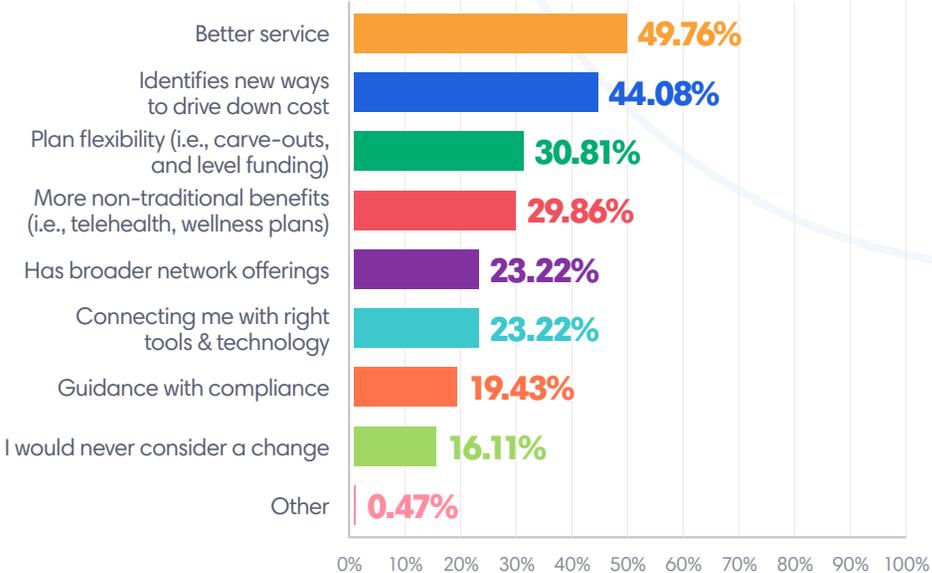
### Why did you change your health insurance broker? My new broker...



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Of those businesses that didn't change brokers in the past 12 months, 49.76% said that they would consider switching brokers if they offered "better service," followed by "identifies new ways to drive down cost," and "offers plan flexibility, for example carve-outs and level funding."

## What could another health insurance broker offer that would cause you to consider switching brokers in 2021?



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In today's competitive environment, retaining your clients is key to ensuring long-term profits—it costs [seven to nine times more](#) for an insurance agency to attract a new customer than to retain one. As the results above show, focusing on finding the ideal suite of preventive care and disease management benefits to maximize cost savings is the key to keep current clients in your book of business, but how can you balance high-quality care and low costs? Technology may be the answer:

- **Quickly add plans** (forms, rates, contributions, etc.) to a ben admin system and reduce the friction involved in offering your groups as many choices as possible. Employees can enroll in all of their benefits in one place, while you don't have to let the cost of managing more plans keep you from offering the best service.
- **Utilize a rate quoting solution** to present an accurate comparison of relevant quotes, build quick, informative, and personalized proposals for each of your clients, and ultimately present the best, most cost-efficient options.
- **Help employees take control of their own health** by offering a solution that allows them to view benefits information online, upload medical ID cards to the mobile app, see the price per pay period, and enroll in benefits at home while consulting dependents.
- **Consider offering alternatives** such as telemedicine and services such as [BetterHelp](#) or [Headspace](#) to target well-being at a reasonable price.



## Businesses selected these as their top 5 priorities in 2021:

- Employee health and well-being | **52.75%**
- Managing claims, developing strategies to cut costs while keeping employees satisfied | **39.81%**
- Improving employee satisfaction and engagement | **36.89%**
- Increasing employee productivity | **36.41%**
- Selected cost containment of healthcare prices | **34.79%**

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## 2 Becoming the Single Point of Entry

Employers have different options when getting their employees access to benefits and health insurance. On one hand, they can work with an insurance agency. On the other, they can:

- provide coverage through a Professional Employer Organization (PEO), such as TriNet or JustWorks;
- use direct-to-employer (DTE) software, such as Zenefits or Namely; or
- use their payroll provider, such as Gusto, ADP, or Paylocity.

In today's landscape, benefits are no longer enough. Small firms are handing over the reins to technology platforms and third-party administrators who can help them achieve greater efficiency and that offer better service with holistic HR and benefits solutions. Benefits, HR, and payroll are merging and broker control in the overall relationship is positioned to just one area.



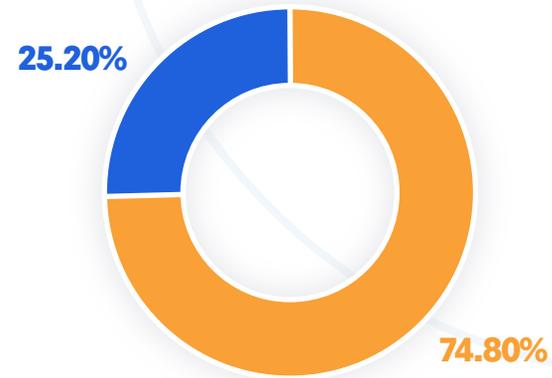
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Of the businesses surveyed, **74.80% work with a health insurance broker to offer employee benefits, while 25.20% do not.** However, of those who work with a broker, 45.41% said that they also work with an HR software provider, 37.34% with a payroll system, and 31.66% with a PEO. Only 10.48% selected that they don't work with any of those besides their broker. How long until the HR software or the payroll provider approaches your groups to offer benefits through their systems to increase efficiency?

Of those who said that they don't work with a health insurance broker, 48.08% said that they work with a payroll system and 32.69% said they work with HR software to offer benefits to their employees. Payroll is the most popular option with businesses under 50 employees. The popularity of HR software grows as businesses get bigger.

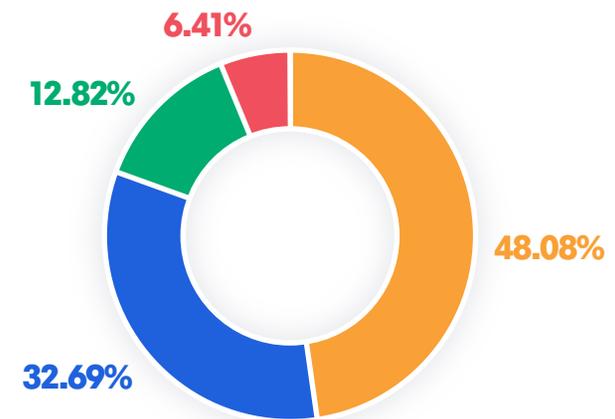
**Do you work with a health insurance broker to offer employee benefits?**

- Yes
- No



**Who does your company work with to offer benefits to employees?**

- Payroll system
- HR software
- PEO
- Other



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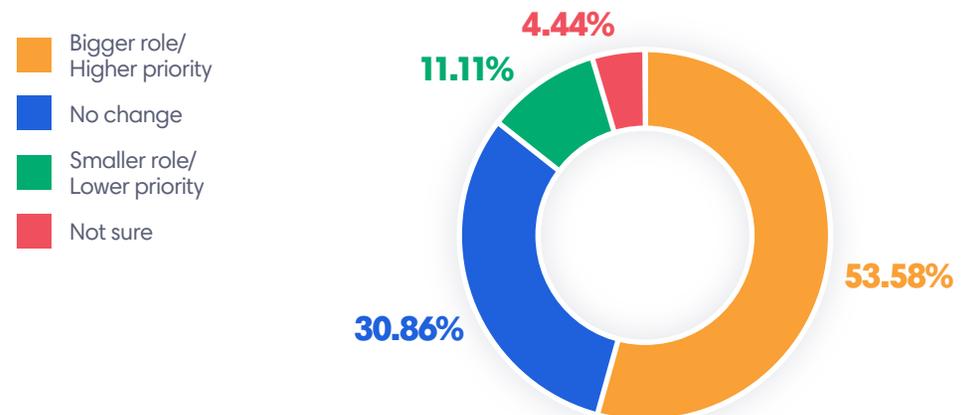
Today, in order to edge out the competition, you must offer an integrated, all-in-one solution to your groups. In the past, businesses had to purchase solutions separately, but no more. Brokers need to become the point of entry to holistic benefits and HR solutions. By incorporating a technology solution that can assist employers from hire to retire, insurance agencies can fill the holes in their service and compete more effectively against PEOs, DTEs, and payroll solutions. To stay relevant, pivot from just handling transactions to providing more value associated with benefits and HR.

Adopting a technology solution and rolling it out to your entire book of business will significantly reduce the time employers spend on administrative tasks, which means they can focus on strategy and employee needs. Companies will see in brokers the perfect partnership to achieve their goals.

## 3 Making Your Small Groups Feel Like Big Companies

**53.58% of the businesses surveyed think ben admin technology will have a bigger role and be a higher priority for them in 2021 compared to past years.** While small businesses—those with fewer than 50 employees—are usually slower when it comes to implementing technology, 51.15% agreed with the previous statement.

What role do you think ben admin technology will play for you in 2021 compared to past years?



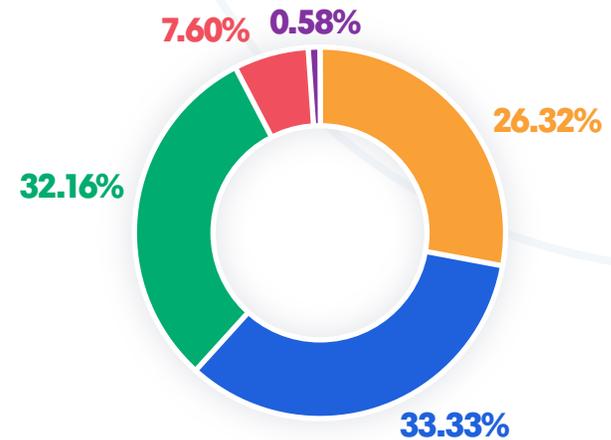
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According to the U.S. Small Business Administration, there are 30.2 Million small businesses in America, representing 99.9% of total businesses in the country. Small businesses represent the largest segment of the market for insurance agencies. However, it has historically been overlooked due to the overwhelmingly manual, paper-driven process, and lower returns. Knowing that **59.65% of businesses with fewer than 50 employees are extremely likely or somewhat likely to choose a health insurance broker that offers a free ben admin tech solution over one that doesn't**, your next step seems clear.

Replace paper forms with a system for employers and employees to fill in information digitally. Smaller groups don't have big onboarding and HR demands like larger companies do and they're likely to have very simple benefit plans. Consequently, the time allocated to these groups will diminish substantially, all the while, creating a benefits experience traditionally reserved for the bigger operations. Imagine the kind of loyalty that will help create, while shutting the door on competition.

## How likely are you to choose a health insurance broker that offers a free ben admin tech solution over one that doesn't?

- Extremely likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neutral
- Somewhat unlikely
- Extremely unlikely

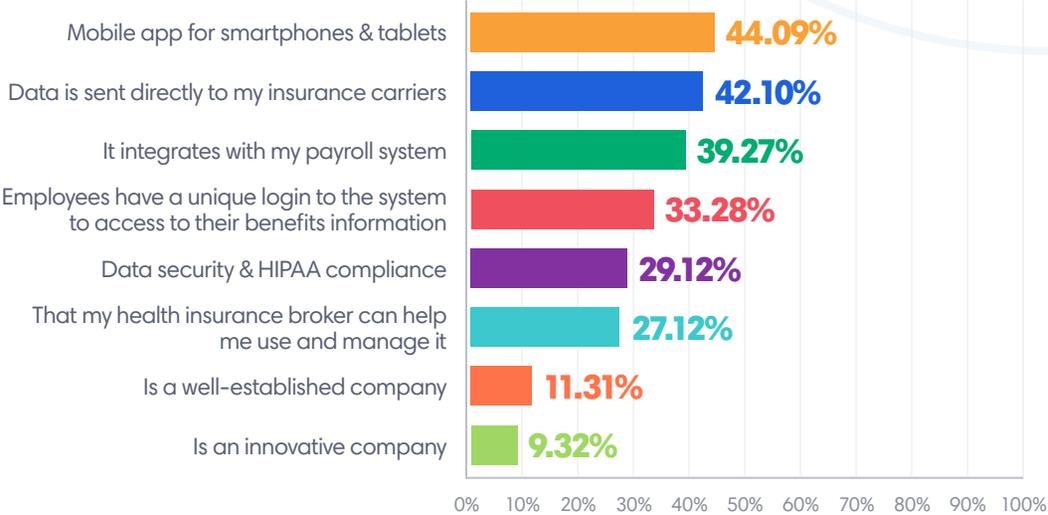


# 4 Creating the All-in-One Experience by Integrating Benefits with HR

Making it easier to share and exchange data is increasingly important for employers—including finding ways to enhance connectivity between different digital platforms through API-based integrations. **When selecting vendors to integrate with their current HR technology, the top three selected by the businesses surveyed were “mobile app for smartphones and tablets,” followed closely by “data is sent directly to my insurance carriers,” and “it integrates with my payroll system.”**

Integrations between the different systems will help create an all-in-one solution that will allow your clients to streamline enrollment, payroll, renewal, and benefits administration.

## What matters most when selecting vendors to integrate with your current HR technology?

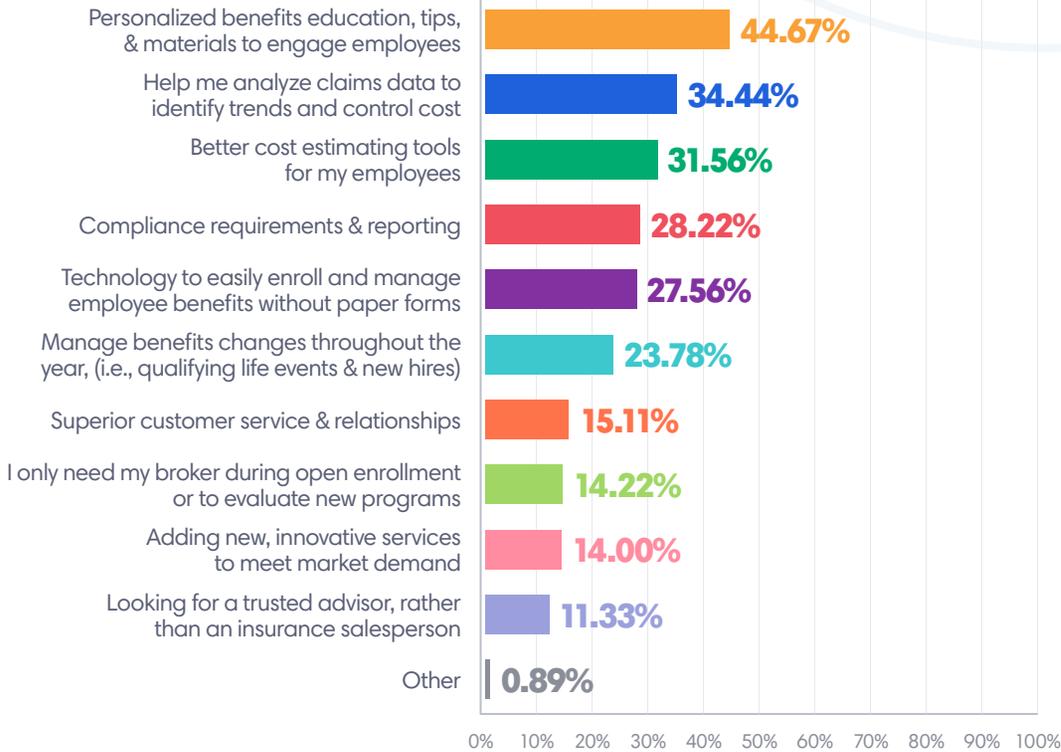


# 5 Helping Shape Benefits Education and Communications

When asked which areas they would like more help in from their health insurance broker, **employers' top answer was "personalized benefits education, tips, and materials to engage employees."**

It's not surprising that benefits communications are a significant concern to employers. Oftentimes, employees find benefits enrollment and management to be confusing. Consequently, they don't know how to engage with their benefits and are afraid to make changes, relying on their employer and broker to help them understand. If benefits become a frustrating experience for employees, engagement will drop and your client's financial risk will increase. How can you simplify benefits communications to empower employees and help your clients ensure their participation?

## Which areas would you like more help in from your health insurance broker?



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## Keep the messaging and directions simple

Exhaustive information in benefits communications might cause employees to disengage; keeping your materials as simple as possible is key to high participation and engagement. The prominent spot should be reserved for an easy-to-digest synopsis of the benefits plans offered and, when necessary, step-by-step directions to enroll.

## Explain the information in as many ways as you are able to

Multimedia messaging provides a different way for employees and their families to engage with their benefits. Expanding your delivery methods will help employees recognize the value of each benefit and make more informed benefits decisions. Consider combining elements like:

- Electronic communications, such as emails or instant messaging
- Videos or webinars
- Packages mailed to home addresses so as to involve families in the decision making
- Social media platforms
- Live hotline for questions and concerns
- Materials such as Q&As, infographics, “Did you know?” sheets, or case studies

## Explain the What and Why

Essentially, what are the benefits being offered and why? If there are changes in the benefits program from the previous year, be clear about it: what are the changes and why were those changes made? Focusing on what and why also allows you to highlight the important value of the benefits program. For example, promote wellness or encourage retirement savings. What is a 401(k) and why should employees enroll?



## 6 Boosting Your Marketing Efforts

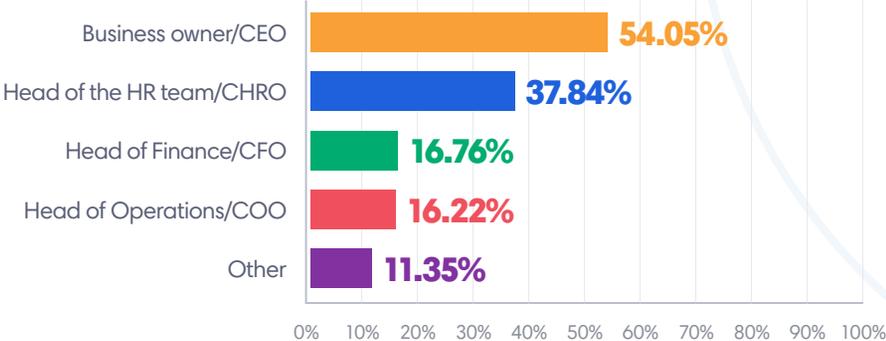
You can build an excellent benefits offering, but it doesn't help if you don't tell people about it. Marketing has a serious impact on the growth of your agency. You have to put yourself in front of your customers and your prospects, so they know who you are and what you can do for them. However, do you have different marketing materials and campaigns for different segments of the market (e.g. groups with fewer than 50 employees vs. groups with more than 50 employees?) Are you selling and marketing to 20-life groups the same way as 80-life groups? Utilizing the same marketing strategy with all prospective groups won't work.

First, keep in mind the stakeholders at different-sized companies vary. **When asked who at their company makes key decisions about employee benefits, such as deciding which plans to offer each open enrollment period, businesses with fewer than 50 employees primarily selected "business owners." On the other hand, businesses with more than 50 employees chose "head of the HR team."** When thinking about your marketing efforts, keep this difference in mind and adapt your message to the stakeholders.

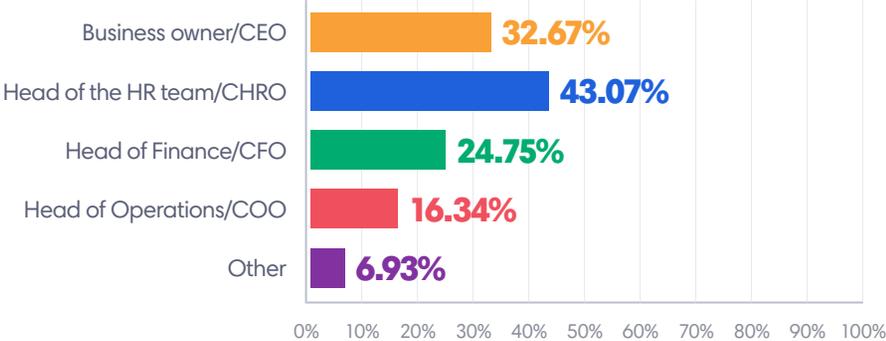


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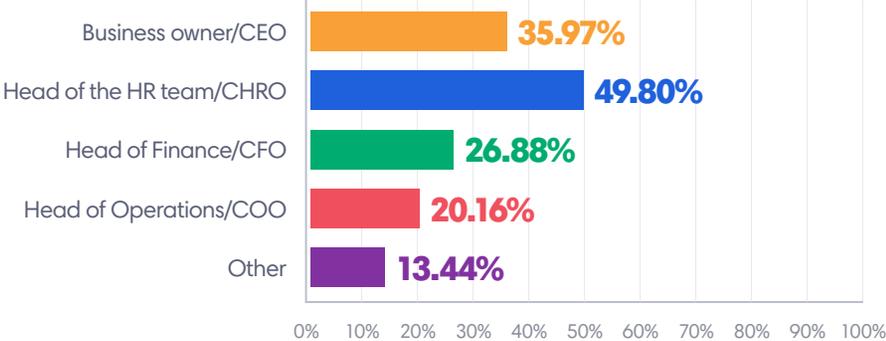
Who at your company makes key decisions about employee benefits, such as deciding which plans to offer each open enrollment period?



Business size:  
fewer than 50  
employees



Business size:  
51 to 100  
employees



Business size:  
100+ employees



Second, **the top five preferred ways to stay up to date on benefits and insurance information vary depending on business size.** We learned that as the business grows, the preferred way changes from social media to email. Therefore, your marketing strategy for businesses with fewer than 50 employees should focus on targeting business owners on social media platforms, while for businesses with more than 50 employees, you should concentrate on targeting HR teams through email campaigns.

### What are your preferred ways to stay up-to-date on benefits and insurance information for your employees?



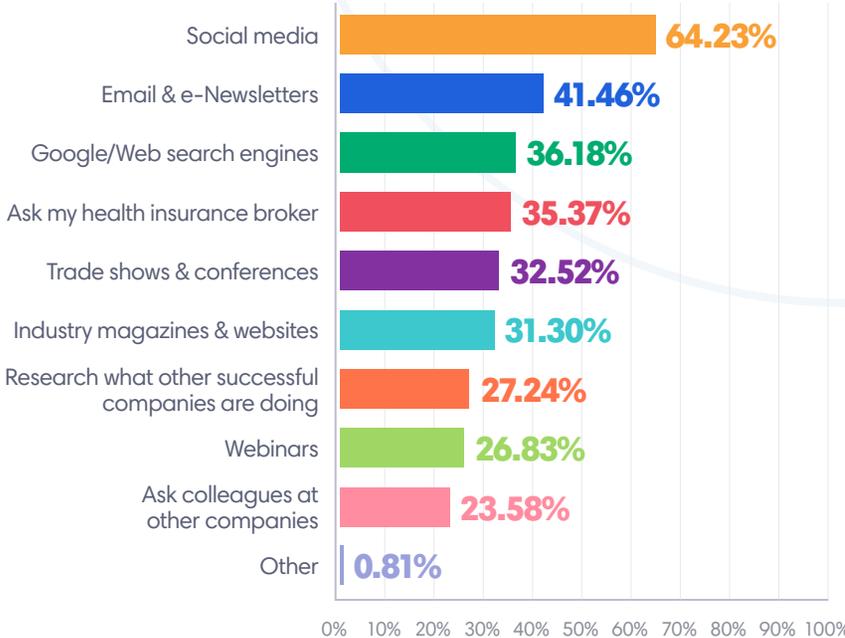
**Business size:  
fewer than 50  
employees**



## Business size: 51 to 100 employees



## Business size: 100+ employees





## Conclusion

2020 ushered in a number of unexpected challenges for health insurance agencies and employers. However, helping people when they need it most is at the core of your business. Handling the twists and turns wasn't the biggest challenge, it was how to continue providing high-quality service and achieving the same successful outcomes.

The experience of buying and working in insurance has historically been face-to-face and involved paper forms and manual processes. Post-pandemic, we've figured out how to do all things digitally. While permanent changes in the way we work seem likely, the Ease team has moved on from reacting, and instead we are focusing on adapting.

## Ease is the benefits administration and HR software for growing insurance agencies.

- With **6,000+ digitally-mapped forms**, you can streamline enrollment, reduce errors, cut the paperwork, and give your clients an easy-to-use tool to better manage changes throughout the year.
- **You don't need previous software knowledge to use Ease**—our team has helped 15,000+ agency staff bring their clients online. The Ease system is quick and easy to implement, allowing you to be up and running in hours, ready to serve your clients.
- Unlike other third-party companies, such as PEOs or direct-to-employer software, **Ease is a broker-powered solution**. What does that mean? Your agency subscribes to Ease, the system becomes an added value to your offering, and you decide when to onboard your clients to better serve them.
- Ease has partnered with the top insurance carriers in the industry so you can **submit enrollments directly from Ease and manage mid-year changes for businesses of all sizes**.

More than 2,000 agencies use Ease to bring their groups online. The system grows with you, offering tools like HRIS and payroll integrations when you and your clients are ready for them. With Ease, you'll go from dropping off, collecting, and sending out paper forms to a modernized enrollment and management process.

Reach out to us at  
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