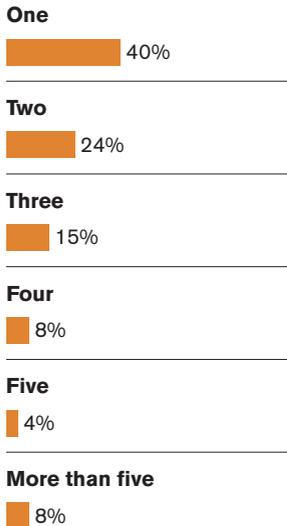


PLOT POINTS

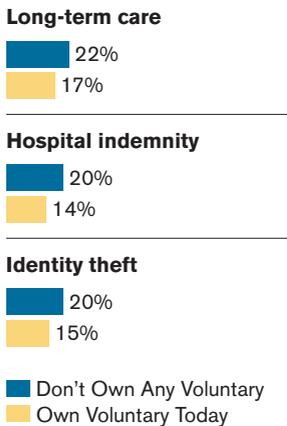
By Gil Lowerre and Bonnie Brazzell

Don't forget about the employee

Voluntary Product Ownership



Interest in Buying by Product



Preference for Learning About Voluntary Benefits by Age

Method	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-64	65+
On my own through information sent by my employer (emails, newsletters, etc.)	33%	30%	39%	50%	48%
Speaking with someone in person	34%	30%	31%	31%	36%
On my own via internet or intranet	31%	35%	22%	12%	9%

NEARLY EVERY benefits broker will tell you that they now sell voluntary. Understandably, many brokers are primarily tuned in to the employer's voice during the sales process. For some producers, this remains a default mode, born from their roots focusing on medical and other employer-paid group distribution.

Although this legacy centers on the employer conversation, it's good from time to time to check in on the sentiment among our final customer: the employee. After all, by neglecting this perspective, you may be leaving credibility and revenue potential on the table.

For some distributors, the first question is whether employees will even buy into worksite products. Many producers feel that one of the challenges in finding success in the voluntary market stems from a lack of employee interest. However, employee ownership data would challenge this belief. The recent *Market Vision Employee Viewpoint* study from Eastbridge found that over half of employees own at least one voluntary product, and 60 percent of employees who own voluntary products own more than one.

With the issue of employee interest settled, another common question concerns which products are the most popular. The same Eastbridge study looked at



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voluntary ownership by product and, interestingly, it's no longer just the usual suspects. Accident leads the market at 16 percent ownership, with the usual team of traditional products, such as life, dental and vision, close behind. However, non-traditional products are starting to gain significant ground as well. Identity-theft protection now has a voluntary ownership rate among employees of 10 percent, surpassing the rates of products such as voluntary long-term disability and voluntary AD&D.

For those employees who don't yet own any voluntary products, the interest in purchasing identity-theft protection, again, comes in second place (tied with hospital indemnity), while long-term care tops the list.

The right products are a good start, but communication is the next critical factor in reaching our end customer. The most common forms of communication to employees introducing them to voluntary benefits were either email or print material provided by the employer. When it comes to preference for learning about voluntary benefits, most employees prefer to learn on their own, but group demographics need to be considered. Employees over the age of 50 are more likely to prefer learning from printed material, while younger employees seem to want internet or intranet-based materials. The idea of speaking with someone in person about their benefits found the most even appeal across all age ranges.

Employees are interested in voluntary benefits and are buying them more and more often. But we must remember to listen to what this audience is telling us. Keeping up on *which* benefits employees want, and *how* they want to learn about them, will help us better serve employers.