

PES
viewpoint



What makes an
ideal employee
benefits partner?

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Happy people. Happy business

What makes an ideal employee benefits partner?

Online benefits can help to create a loyal, motivated workforce. But choosing the right employee benefits partner for your business is crucial. How do you make sure your provider will give you the very best return for your investment?

Distinguishing run-of-the-mill providers from the real employee benefits champions is something of an art. These key questions will help you to identify your priorities, and recognise which suppliers will be committed to delivering them.

1. How important is the employee experience to your organisation?

There are many reasons why you might want to invest in employee benefits (see our Viewpoint paper [What makes a good employee benefits scheme?](#)).

But there's one central question that will have a huge bearing on the type of provider you choose.

Are you offering benefits as part of a wider strategy to create a great employee experience, or do you simply want a service that will make you a competitive employer, at minimal cost?

If you're keen to make employee benefits a strategic part of your drive towards employee happiness, then you need to seek a partner who shares your vision. Make sure they work with you to provide an innovative, modern, technical solution that creates a positive employee experience.

Employee disengagement costs the UK economy £340 billion a year in lost productivity, according to Hay Group.

The right employee benefits partner will help you to create a more positive employee experience.

2. Are employee benefits part of your brand?

A company brand exists inside and out. It's what your customers see, but it's also what your employees see. Brand is the unifying factor between:

- the product or service you provide
- the things you say about yourself
- the way you behave as an organisation.

For example, if you believe in giving customers a great experience, this should be reflected in your sales literature and the behaviours of all your customer-facing staff.

But take it one step further. If you behave one way with customers and another way with employees, there's a fundamental disconnect that weakens your brand. 'The way you behave' includes the way you treat your staff.

If they feel happy working for you, they're much more likely to give their best – which can only be positive for you and your customers. This is where employee benefits can play a key role. By demonstrating that you value your people, they can help to create a strong employer brand that's consistent with your other values.

Seen from this perspective, you need to choose a provider who understands the importance of employer brand.

3. Does your supplier share your values?

If benefits are a key part of a wider strategy to create loyal, motivated employees, you'll want a supplier who shares your passion and can deliver more than just a benefits solution.

'Employee engagement is a measurable degree of an employee's positive or negative emotional attachment to their job, manager, colleagues and the organisation that profoundly influences their willingness to learn and perform at work.' (Scarlett Surveys)

For example, will they try to understand your employee demographic and advise on which benefits will really appeal? Are they committed to measuring just how much employee benefits are driving engagement? These and similar criteria will test whether you have a supplier willing to go the extra mile.

Shared values are also about working in partnership. It's rare that a client-supplier relationship proceeds without hiccups – normally there are bumps along the way. But if you're really working as a team, your mutual understanding will smooth the path for a good experience and a positive outcome.

“The way you treat your employees is the way they will treat your customers.”

Richard Branson

4. What level of support do you need?

The level of support you need depends on how much you already know. Consider the following scenarios.

- a) You may have in-house expertise in employee benefits, internal communications and broking skills. All you need is a technology platform to bring it all together. That will lead you towards a provider who can simply deliver a good technical solution that integrates well with your HR, payroll and other systems.
- b) Or you may have technical expertise but limited knowledge of the employee benefits market. Then you need a supplier who can advise you, and a broker who can get the best deals.
- c) On the other hand, you may want to deliver a great experience for your employees but have no clear idea of how to create a benefits scheme that will really make them happy. Your supplier needs to be a partner who can advise you as well as broker your benefits, provide the technology and deliver great employee communications.

5. Does your supplier offer everything you need for a full-service solution?

If you need the kind of partner described in 4 c) above, here are some of the requirements you should look for.

- A flexible, online platform that the provider has full control over – so they can develop it to meet your needs.
- Robust IT security, so your employee data is safely held, and the system is fully compliant with current data protection legislation.
- In-house brokerage to get you the very best deals from providers, including insured benefits and pensions.
- Back office administration of the whole system.
- A helpdesk available every working day, offering user support to employees.
- Exceptional internal communications, so your employees can take full advantage of the benefits on offer.

6. How much are you prepared to invest?

Your budget will be shaped by your answers to all the questions raised in this document. The value you place on an employee benefits scheme really depends on the kind of outcomes you want, and how much you're prepared to invest in achieving them.

So don't necessarily make budget your starting point. Once you're clear about why you're investing in employee benefits, you'll have a better idea of and the kind of provider you need.

7. Are you interested in buying locally?

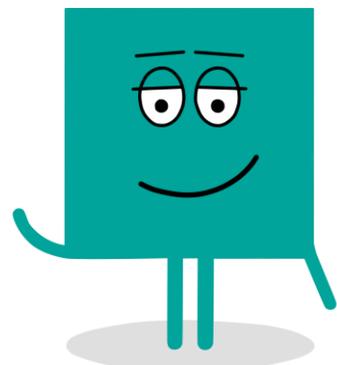
There are many good reasons to choose a supplier based nearby so you can meet face-to-face. Assuming all other things are equal (price, expertise, shared vision, values), choosing a local supplier:

- usually means a better service – if it's easy to get to a meeting with you, a local partner will be on hand to give you attention, and despite e-communications, face-to-face meetings are normally more productive
- could mean lower costs, since you're not dealing with a remote, possibly city-based supplier with expensive overheads to cover
- helps you re-invest in the local economy, by supporting a business that employs local people
- is better for the environment as less travel is involved.

Take a look at the checklists on the next two pages...

Pulling it all together

Take a look at the checklists on the next two pages. Your answers to these key questions should help you narrow down the list of employee benefits providers to those who are really going to deliver what you need.

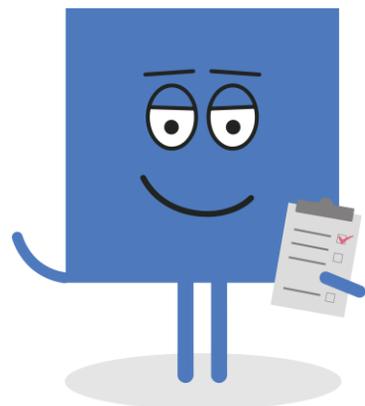


When do you choose an employee benefits partner rather than a supplier?

-  You have a desire to create something visionary for your employees.
-  You have a willingness to invest in something that will have meaning, longevity and an impact on your organisational culture.
-  You want to work with people who are committed to seeing a real return on your investment.
-  You recognise that you don't have the in-house expertise to deliver on all the different elements of an employee benefits scheme (technology, market knowledge, broking skills, employee communications).
-  Nor do you have the time to source all the different elements from different suppliers.

Employee benefits supplier checklist

- Do they share your vision and values?
- Are they committed to providing an outstanding employee experience?
- Do they have a proprietary technical platform that can be developed in-house to meet your needs?
- Is their technology secure enough to keep your sensitive data safe?
- Can they advise on which benefits will suit your employee demographic?
- Will they save you money by brokering outstanding deals with benefit providers?
- Can they act as a regulated broker for insured benefits, including pensions, health and risk benefits?
- Will they be able to communicate effectively with your employees?
- Do they offer a back office administration service to save you time?
- Can they provide you with detailed management information on a regular basis?
- Will there be helpdesk support for your employees?
- Can they demonstrate industry-wide recognition for their expertise?
- Are they based in a convenient location so you can meet regularly?



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