

Inspiring international employee engagement:

How a multinational financial services company boosted employee wellness programme participation in the Asia Pacific



A leading multinational company, with global assets in excess of \$2.4 trillion, faced a challenge in its goal to bring its strong culture of employee health and wellness to 40,000 employees in the Asia Pacific region. The answer was to develop a wellness programme that would deeply engage those employees, but the hurdle was to do so in a culturally sensitive way. The countries composing its Asia Pacific operations have very diverse populations, customs and needs. This financial services company had to determine how to create a wellness initiative that delivered consistent content and messaging across the entire region, yet at the same time conformed to each country's individual culture.

A strong global culture of corporate health

This financial services company has a long tradition of staying competitive in a fast-moving, dynamic industry, in no small part because of its strong commitment to providing a culture of health and wellness to its employees worldwide.

The company introduced a comprehensive wellness initiative for its employees spread across 30 offices in the Asia Pacific region. The company viewed the programme as an excellent opportunity to increase employee engagement and to attract and retain top talent in that part of the world.

This case study looks at the best practices enabling the company's Asia Pacific workforce to become more aware of their health status and engage in healthier behaviours that can lead to greater self-fulfillment and productivity.

The wellness programme has expanded to:

- Australia
 - India
 - Thailand
 - New Zealand
 - Hong Kong
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Partnering with Optum

The financial services company selected Optum® to develop and implement this major wellness initiative for several reasons: Optum is the leading global provider of workforce support programmes; Optum was already a trusted partner for the company’s worldwide employee assistance programme; and Optum offered a fully integrated suite of wellness services to support an end-to-end programme rollout.

Known for its global footprint and ability to deliver culturally attuned employee support programmes, Optum possessed the unique advantage of not only understanding the cultural nuances within the Asia Pacific region, but also having on-the-ground operational support capable of implementing this far-reaching wellness initiative.

Working closely with the financial services company to understand its key programme objectives, Optum designed a comprehensive 12-month integrated initiative targeting the company’s entire employee population in the Asia Pacific region.

The solution: an integrated and targeted behavioural change programme

Based on a broad assessment of the company’s corporate culture and the local cultures of the various geographies, Optum designed a multi-touch, multi-channel and culturally attuned wellness promotion programme to drive changes in personal health behaviours.

| Common challenges for global companies | Best practices |
|---|---|
| Low employee awareness regarding availability of health and wellness programmes | Securing strong senior leadership support |
| Lack of a strong brand and culture to create trust and consensus | Assessing employee population using industry-leading screening tools |
| Lack of services that are relevant and convenient to support employee health care needs | Designing comprehensive programme tailored to the customer’s local populations to drive specific health behaviour changes |
| Programme complexity and relevance | Implementing integrated, comprehensive communication plan |
| | Appointing regional champions |
| | Utilising multiple programme modalities (phone, mail, digital) |
| | Engaging employees through awareness-building activities |
| | Integrating programme across the customer’s health initiatives |
| | Measuring results to optimise programme effectiveness |

The strategy: Assess, design, engage, promote and measure

Start with a comprehensive health risk assessment

Wanting to improve the well-being of a global employee population is a laudable goal. The challenge, of course, is knowing where to start. Health and productivity concerns may differ widely at different locations. The ability to assess local culture, customs and nuances plays a major role in shaping wellness initiatives.

In order to pinpoint the specific health challenges for each Asia Pacific site, Optum designed and launched a comprehensive health risk assessment (HRA) in eight Asian languages. Delivered on a web-based platform, the HRA featured in-depth questions on an individual's medical history, weight, mental health, lifestyle habits and activities. For the majority of employees in these regions, this was their first experience with an HRA.

The results were somewhat surprising. Although the vast majority of the employees profiled (91 percent) were under 40 years of age, there was a high prevalence of health challenges often associated with older workers. Of the population profiled, the HRA demonstrated:

- 53 percent overweight or obese
- 46 percent completely sedentary; 26 percent exercise only occasionally
- Back pain (25 percent) and headache (15 percent) were the most common complaints
- A significant prevalence of mental health issues like stress (23 percent), sleep disorders (11 percent) and depression (7 percent)

Upon completion of the online HRA, employees received customised health information relating specifically to their HRA results, along with news and information on upcoming wellness events and promotions.

Programme design and execution

The HRA revealed wellness challenges that varied from site to site, prompting the company to realise that a one-size-fits-all approach wouldn't be effective. However, the company still wanted its strong culture of health and wellness to be consistently reflected in every communication, regardless of geography. In addition, all communications also had to strictly comply with the company's branding look, feel and messaging.

Data driven

Leveraging the results of the HRA data, Optum developed a wellness programme that included a comprehensive set of integrated services to drive improved health outcomes specific to each targeted population. The programme is also flexible enough to allow for customisation and cultural tweaks at the local level.

Core components

Core components of the Asia Pacific Wellness Program included:

- Online portal with integrated support service
 - Health risk assessment (HRA)
 - Telephonic coaching
 - Online Q&A services
 - Wellness fairs
 - Programme education and turnkey implementation tool kits
 - Employee discounts for local gym membership

Optum designed and launched a comprehensive web-based health risk assessment (HRA) that was integrated into the health portal. The assessment was available in eight major Asian languages to identify specific health challenges. Users could easily select their language using the flags at the top of screen.

Targeted components

Targeted components — directly linked to the HRA data — included:

- Monthly themed programmes, specifically:
 - Stress Less
 - Back Care
 - Heart Health
 - Exercise
 - Nutrition
 - Men's Health
 - Women's Health
 - Resilience
 - Addictive Behaviour
 - Brain Health
 - Headaches
- Lunch and learn sessions (with same topics as above)

Ensuring engagement

Leadership champions

Employees need to engage and participate in order to achieve the behavioural change necessary to address specific wellness challenges. The first step in the wellness programme engagement process is to secure senior and functional leadership commitment. Company leaders were encouraged to inspire all wellness initiatives and become wellness champions by “walking the walk and talking the talk.”

To facilitate this high level of leadership buy-in, Optum targeted human resource and business unit leaders with webinar orientation sessions. During these sessions, leaders received information on the expectations regarding their role as champions. Other information they received included:

- 12-month programme overviews and detailed information on promoting monthly themes
- Programme goals, expectations for participation and a communications schedule
- Communications plan and support tools
- Guidelines regarding how feedback and results were to be shared
- Suggestions on how to project a “walk the walk/talk the talk” philosophy

Additionally, these leaders participated in weekly calls with local Optum staff and on-site coordinators for three months.

Once regional leadership committed to the wellness programme, Optum facilitated a similar set of sessions with their employees. During these one-hour meetings, the wellness teams, including local health professionals, delivered:

- An overview of the 12-month programme and each monthly theme
- A wellness team tour
- Online personal wellness booklet
- A wellness email for health information access and promotion of EAP
- Promotion posters

Customisation at the local level increases participation

The Asia Pacific wellness programme needed to be flexible enough to inspire specific employee populations. In order to maximise programme participation, each region/site was encouraged to tailor the programme to the unique interests of their employees.



Local variations on the wellness programme theme “Nutrition”

- Australia preferred group presentations led by a nutrition expert.
 - India preferred 1:1 consultations with a dietitian to explore specific personal questions.
 - Thailand requested education on nutrition for improving memory and treating Alzheimer’s.
 - New Zealand wanted more education about healthy food groups.
 - Hong Kong recorded a very strong response to the topic of nutrition as it relates to mindfulness.
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What was learned

In order to implement a 15-country, multicultural, multi-activity programme, communications must be clear, concise and consistent. The best way to do this is to nurture relationships through regular phone calls, location visits, email updates and acute attention to feedback.

The critical element of success of this programme continues to be the strength of the relationships between the centralised corporate wellness team, the local coordinators and Optum.

In addition, collective societies like Japan and Thailand require a different decision-making process than more individualistic societies like Australia and New Zealand. These cultural nuances may be subtle to an outsider’s eye, but they are critical to the success of rolling out a wellness programme under a single corporate banner.

Highlights of health fair participation

Local health fairs inspire employees and promote engagement

Encompassing 12 countries, 36 different venues, eight languages and multiple disciplines of health and wellness professionals, on-site events were received with overwhelmingly positive feedback across the entire Asia Pacific region. Although health fairs are quite common in western nations, many of the Asia Pacific locations experienced a local health fair for the first time.

Health fair participation highlights



More than
30%

of the financial services company's employees attended across 12 countries

89%

survey respondents ranked their health fair as very professional and helpful in addressing their wellness concerns

Most participants said their health fair raised their health and wellness knowledge



High-level support given by senior managers with 21 regional champions participating

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