

**Build a Brand They'll Love:  
How to Create a Compelling, Consistent Experience  
with Your Employee Health and Wellness Strategy**

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### Overview

People are complex. And that makes changing behaviors a vexing problem. People are motivated by different things at different points in time and what motivates someone today may not motivate them tomorrow. What engages one person may not engage another. And low employee awareness of the programs you've put in place to help your workforce make healthy behavior changes only makes the problem more complex. If you want your employees to participate in your programs and change behaviors, they've got to know your programs exist.

At Virgin HealthMiles, we recently conducted a survey of employers and employees and found more than half of employers believe their employees have a good understanding of their range of health and wellness benefits and how they can participate. Yet, only 41% of employees felt they had a good awareness of available programs. And fewer than 50% said they understood how to participate. Chris Boyce, CEO of Virgin HealthMiles, says: "If employees aren't aware of their employers' programs and how to participate, health behaviors won't change. This is a traditional problem with how employee health and wellness has historically been done. If organizations don't get this right, they won't get the business impact they seek from their employee health investments."

Forward-thinking companies are looking across employee touch points to increase awareness and engagement with the different benefits they provide. One strategy companies are using to make employees aware of all the services they provide is to create and promote a distinct brand for their workplace health and wellness offerings. In fact, according to a 2010 study from Buck Consultants, more than 40% of employers have created a distinct wellness brand or identity in order to focus employees' attention on wellness initiatives and promote participation. Branding your programs can help you increase program awareness, drive engagement and in turn, positively impact your employees' health.

There are three options for creating a distinct brand for your workplace health and wellness programs. You can use your existing corporate brand, create a new and distinct sub-brand for your programs or use a third party's brand as the foundation of your health and wellness initiatives. Each of these branding options has its benefits and challenges, depending upon your goals. In this paper we'll discuss the merits of these branding options and help you understand how they can impact your health and wellness initiatives.



### Three Strategies for Creating a Distinct Workplace Health and Wellness Program

- **Use Your Corporate Brand**
- **Create a Health Sub-Brand**
- **Leverage Your Third-Party Program Provider's Brand**

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### Getting Started: Key Considerations for Choosing the Right Brand Option

Mark Thomson, a branding strategist, said “Brands are the stories that unite us all in a common purpose within an enterprise and connect us with the people we serve on the outside. These brand stories give meaning to who we are and what we do.”<sup>1</sup> Your health and wellness initiative is the perfect vehicle to build a brand around – the programs you offer can unite employees in a common cause and help them connect with your firm. Before deciding which branding option makes the most sense for your company, here are a few things to consider:

- **Make it Easy to Understand:** The brand and message should be clear and easy for your employees to understand. Think about some of the top brands like Apple, Coca-Cola or Nike. Consumers have a clear understanding about what they'll get from each of these brands. Your wellness brand should also present your “product” in a clear, concise way that eliminates any possibility for confusion about what it represents.
- **Make it Meaningful:** Your employees should have a connection with the brand – it should mean something to them. The brand should communicate what employees will get from your programs, not necessarily what you're offering. For example, your health and wellness brand could communicate that employees can build healthy habits by participating or get help quitting tobacco.
- **Make it Recognizable:** If you want to drive awareness of your health and wellness offerings, it's important for your brand to be easily recognizable. Make sure your brand and design elements are consistently represented in all your communications such as emails, posters, payroll stuffers, tabletop displays, social media and other media you use to promote your programs. Making sure your brand is recognizable enables you to maximize your employees' understanding of what your brand represents.
- **Deliver on the Promise:** To be more than a platitude, your actions must speak to the brand promise you've created. In fact, long-lasting brands are built through consistent delivery on the brand promise, in the eyes of your target, more than the current creative concepts. For instance, if your wellness brand is focused on choice, ensure your employees find a broad array of programs and a choice in participation. Alternately, if your brand is about engagement, focus your rewards on participation and acts that promote a supportive culture.

Whichever brand option you decide is right for your organization's goals, be sure to consider these elements as you begin promoting your programs. This will help you address the awareness gap many companies struggle with today.



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1. Source [www.blackcoffee.com/brand-related/branding-quotes/727](http://www.blackcoffee.com/brand-related/branding-quotes/727))

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### Promoting Your Programs: Which Brand Option Makes Sense for Your Company?

#### Strategy #1: Use Your Corporate Brand

Across your employee population, your corporate brand is highly recognizable. It already has a “personality” associated with it that connects people to it and tells a story. You can leverage the existing relationship your employees have with your brand to extend the connection into other benefit areas. There’s also less development work upfront as you’re likely to already have your brand’s guidelines and design assets in place, such as color schemes and logos. Using your corporate brand also makes sense if there’s a natural link between it and your workplace health and wellness strategies. For example, if your company’s core business promotes health and well-being (i.e., perhaps your company is a hospital, a gym, a provider of nutrition services, etc.), your corporate brand will likely resonate well if you extend it to your employee health programs.

There are also reasons to consider not using your corporate brand. While your corporate brand has a known personality, the perception of what this brand means is already set in the minds of your employees. There might be instances where your corporate brand might not portray the correct image or support your strategy as well as the other options. For example, a corporation that operates gyms or produces healthy foods would have a logical connection to healthy lifestyles. However, if you work for a firm that operates coal mines or produces cigarettes, the connection might actually be detrimental as the connection is tenuous. Given these considerations, it may be difficult to extend your corporate brand to your health benefits without transferring the wrong impression. This will make it difficult to drive engagement in the programs you’re seeking to promote.

#### Strategy #2: Create a Health Sub-Brand

A sub-brand can separate your wellness programs and strategy from other benefit offerings, eliminating any confusion employees might have between your different programs. By eliminating confusion, employees can focus on the benefits of your programs, not on trying to determine the differences between various offerings. A sub-brand can also change the perception of the vendors in your program. Employees might have a pre-conceived notion of a particular vendor or even how a service may work. A sub-brand shifts the focus to the overall program and away from analyzing the individual components of your plan. Lastly, by using a sub-brand, you can keep momentum in your program if you change providers or change the program mix in your strategy. The sub-brand stays the same but you now have more flexibility to make program changes without impacting all the work you have done to promote the sub-brand.



**“Our sub-brand helps make our wellness program more than just a buzzword. It’s a real, actionable program. Employees see it as fun and rewarding and I hear employees talking about the program all the time.”**

Mary Pitman,  
Health Promotions Manager,  
Norfolk Southern

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Norfolk Southern, one of the nation's premier transportation companies, created a specific brand for their wellness program called WellINS. Norfolk Southern felt that creating a sub-brand for their wellness program was critical to ensuring it was not confused with routine employment physicals, medical plan offerings or other health benefits. The sub-brand of WellINS helped distinguish the wellness program and ensure employees understood that these programs were for their benefit and to reward healthy behavior.

Mary Pitman, the Health Promotions Manager at Norfolk Southern, stated, "Our sub-brand helps make our wellness program more than just a buzzword. It's a real, actionable program. Employees see it as fun and rewarding and I hear employees talking about the program all the time." With its sub-brand, Norfolk Southern strove for simplicity. They wanted employees to know exactly what the goals of the program were and how they could achieve them. "We promote four things under our WellINS brand: 'I've got the power to know my health;' 'I've got the power to quit tobacco;' 'I've got the power to get active;' and, 'I've got the power to eat healthy.' The messages are simple and actionable." Pitman stated.

Pitman also conveyed a story that shows how a sub-brand can impact the perception of the vendors in your program. "One of our vendors is Weight Watchers, a brand that had been more popular with our female employees. However, we had a group of men get together and join Weight Watchers and collectively they lost over 1,000lbs. The WellINS brand was the motivator, not Weight Watchers," said Pitman.

A sub-brand will require some up front work and planning. You'll need to make sure your strategy and objectives are defined to help you create a brand that conveys these things clearly and simply. Also, unlike a corporate brand where all the work is done, creating a sub-brand takes effort around developing the name, choosing colors and promoting it to your employees. However, the impact of a sub-brand is more than just creating a fun or pretty logo. Rather, success lies in your ability to make sure your employees relate to the brand and take the actions you desire.

57%



**Employers who believe their employees have a good understanding of available programs and benefits**

41%



**Employees who felt they had a good awareness of available wellness programs**

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### Strategy #3: Leverage Your Third-Party Program Provider's Brand

Lastly, you have the option to use a third-party brand for your wellness programs. The challenge of engaging employees in their own health is at the core a 'consumer' challenge. Why? Because even though you provide wellness programs to your employees, the reality is that they are making an investment as well – be it their time, making demands on their self-discipline and even their sense of self-worth (who doesn't feel a bit down when we don't realize our weight loss aspirations?). Given this dynamic, many of our customers have chosen to leverage the fun and innovative Virgin brand as the foundation of their health and wellness initiatives. Drawing upon our deep consumer engagement roots, we understand the importance of gaining individual buy-in, the value of positive reinforcement and social support, and how long-term motivation is more about helping people meet short-term, attainable goals and then prescribing their next action.

Using a third-party brand like Virgin HealthMiles makes sense when your employees can easily identify that brand and when it has a personality that fits well with helping people make healthy behavior changes. We've heard from many employers who've shared that their employees perceive our brand as fun, exciting and hip, especially when compared to typical brands associated with corporate benefits. Clients have also shared that their employees are more likely to read emails from Virgin HealthMiles than from HR. Using a recognizable and relatable third-party brand helps you reduce the time and effort you have to dedicate toward simply raising awareness of your benefits. The key to using a third-party brand is to make sure that it's one that clearly unites your programs and makes it easy for your employees to understand the programs' goals, objectives and options to participate. One reason you may choose not to use a third-party brand for your programs is similar to why you might not want to use your corporate brand – a mismatch between the third-party's brand and your desired outcomes. If the third-party provider has a brand that does not convey the image you want, you should consider other options.



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Chris Boyce,  
CEO,  
Virgin HealthMiles

### Best Practices

When determining which branding approach is best for your company's goals, here are three best practices to consider that we've found helps increase success.

- ➔ **Keep it simple:** Think back to the Norfolk Southern example of simple branding and messaging around the 'I've got the power' campaign. The approach is simple and memorable and it also has a call to action that engages employees and lets them know what they need to do to participate. Too often with brands, it can be easy to overthink the details or create unnecessary complexity. But few can deny the difference it can make in attitudes and participation levels when something is simple to understand and clear about its rules and how it works.

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**➡ Consistent communications:** Once you've spent time and effort to select and implement the right branding approach for your organization, make sure you're consistent with communications. Coming up with a brand that includes a unique color scheme and symbol then sending out text emails or black and white posters doesn't make sense. You need to constantly make your chosen brand visible so your employees immediately recognize it. To ensure this happens, make sure you work with program vendors that can deliver that consistency across multiple channels. For example, with Virgin HealthMiles' Fall '12 release, you can leverage flexible branding options that help unite your various programs and create a consistent, branded experience for your employees; tailor your website with a unique logo and colors; and create communications, such as emails and posters, with the same branded look and feel, which you can use to drive employee awareness and excitement for your programs.

**➡ Unify your programs:** One way to help drive awareness of the various offerings you provide is to target employees with specific programs that are featured under a common, unified brand. Employees will have a harder time engaging with your programs if they have to navigate a maze of vendors and websites by themselves. You'll also have a harder time generating awareness and participation in your programs if you can't communicate what services you offer, the benefits of joining and a call to action under one unified brand umbrella. With Virgin HealthMiles Fall '12 release, you can easily promote all your programs and their providers in one centralized, branded location. Centralization makes it easier for your employees to learn about the services you offer and for them to quickly and easily find those services that are most beneficial and meaningful to them. This streamlined approach helps you increase employee awareness and engagement in your various health and wellness investments.

### Conclusion

Companies offer great programs to help employees, but how they fit together isn't always clear. To drive employee awareness and participation, it's critical to clearly link your health and wellness investments. And selecting the right branding approach for your organization is key to success. A brand that's simple, consistent and clear makes it easier for employees to better understand your programs' objectives, how they can participate and what they need to do to meet specific goals and earn rewards. Once the awareness gap is eliminated, you'll see engagement rise. Build a brand your employees will love, and you'll see the impact on employee awareness, appreciation and participation across all your programs, and in the results your programs deliver.