



PERKS Convention showcases fun and unusual employee amenities to round out traditional benefits

All employer-provided health coverage, 401(k) plans, life insurance or blocks of paid time off are not created equal, but they have clearly become commoditized, or at the very least, expected.

Many HR departments increasingly realize the need to supplement these traditional offerings with a few fun or unusual, albeit also practical, employee benefits that will generate excitement and improve talent management.

Finding the right combination of soft perks can be a challenge. However, thanks to an annual day-long event, industry practitioners can assess the value of leading products or services up close and personal - an opportunity to kick the tires, so to speak.

They also can have fun and get pampered, as well as network, brainstorm and mingle with their peers at informal luncheon roundtable discussions on various topics. In addition, a DJ spins tunes and attendees can partake in happy hour.

Between 750 and 1,000 HR and benefit professionals are expected to attend the 5th Annual [PERKS Convention](#) on May 9 in Boston. The trade show, which will be held from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the Hynes Convention Center, will feature 75 to 100 best-of-breed vendors across several categories of onsite employee amenities and other nontraditional perks.

"Most organizations do not have dedicated resources whose sole job it is to find and stay on top of the latest and greatest employee amenities," says Alexa Baggio, co-creator of the event.

What separates [PERKS Convention](#) from other shows in the HR and benefits space is that it focuses on nontraditional benefits, many of which fly under the radar. It also features a lively exhibition hall without any accompanying educational workshops or keynote addresses, making for an experience that needs to be seen to be believed and appreciated.

"There is a very big difference between the idea of onsite car maintenance and actually seeing the mobile garage that they bring to your office and load your car onto," she enthuses. "We really try to make a fun and inspiring day for people to find what fits their culture."

In a similar vein, she says attendees see for themselves how beneficial it can be to receive a 15 minute massage service that can be made available onsite to their employees. They also can test out fitness and meditation classes throughout the day.

While providing thoughtful traditional benefits is critical, Baggio says employers are under mounting pressure to step beyond that realm. One reason is the labor market itself, with recruitment and retention strategies tailored to four different generations of employees. The strategic thinking behind her annual event is to nurture happier employees, who in turn, will be more productive and engaged, and less likely to leave for another job.

"A lot of the softer benefits that we highlight are very tangible for employees," she says. "I think in some ways it's refreshing for the HR audience to have a place to effectively shop to make their office better, and there is no requirement to commit to programming."

In a sign of the times, [PERKS Convention](#) is growing along with demand for nontraditional employee benefits. The event used to be just half a day at smaller venues in Boston that fit only about 30 exhibitors and nearly 450 attendees last year. The cost of admission is \$95 for the day, though readers of *Employee Benefit News* **qualify for a 50% discount when using code: EBNreader**. Tickets can be purchased online at: <http://perkscon.com/buy-tickets>.

Most attendees of the event are senior HR or benefits executives (28%), followed by general HR or benefits professionals (18%), facilities managers (13%), office management (12%), brokers (11%), C-level executives (7%), employees (6%) and other categories (5%).

"We have some really creative exhibitors," she says.

They include Circadian Corporate Sleep Programs, which offers education and training on the importance of sleep, Breather's on-demand meeting spaces for company off-sites and group meetings, Virtudent's onsite and in-office dental care, Vitals, whose employer-specific tools allow employees to compare healthcare cost and quality information, and Grind's cafe-quality "third wave" coffee for the office.

Baggio used to work for a digital lifestyle magazine called The Roger that was focused on the workplace. She also co-founded a company called 2020 Onsite, which offers onsite eye exams at offices and exhibits at her annual convention.

Other standouts include Uber for Business, which allows employers to create employee allowances and automatically approve to-office rides, AllyHealth's telemedicine solution for physical and mental health, wellness coaching and second opinions, and Phone Booths options that allow for quiet, personal spaces at a fraction of the cost of building conference rooms.

There also are zombie walking challenges at the [PERKS Convention](#) that not only generate buzz, but also drive return on investment for employee wellness dollars. "I'd say that discovering benefits you didn't even know existed is worth the price of admission," Baggio says.

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