

ajcBusiness

SUNDAY FOCUS ON LOCAL INDUSTRY & DEVELOPMENT



‘We design a plan to fit’ small businesses

Offering employees health care benefits gives firms an edge.

By **Bill Hendrick**
For The AJC

The goal of Atlanta-based Digital Insurance is to make life easier for small businesses that are struggling to offer health benefits for their employees in days of skyrocketing health costs. It is the nation’s fastest-growing employee benefits agency, according to Inc. 5000, managing 18,000 small-business groups representing 350,000 workers nationwide.

CEO and President Adam Bruckman sometimes even thinks about taking the word “digital” out of the company’s name, because small-business owners looking to buy insurance for employees typically aren’t all that computer savvy. Most need the insurance expert equivalent of a travel agent.

And that’s what Bruckman’s company provides. Business owners who call are hooked up with representatives who guide them through what often is a baffling array of choices.

Bruckman recently discussed small businesses and their efforts to provide health insurance options to their employees.

Q. Let’s start with the basics. What is an employee benefits agency?

A. An employee benefits agency is different from an insurance carrier that provides medical, dental, life and disability insurance. We advise business owners about the best available options for their employee-benefit package, based



Meet Adam Bruckman

Age: 42

Birthplace: Long Island, N.Y.

Hometown: Glen Cove, N.Y.

Education: Tufts University, 1990, bachelor’s in economics

Family: wife Adrienne; sons: Ryan 12, Eric 9

Favorite song: “Imagine,” John Lennon

Favorite pastime: Coaching my boys - any sport, but mainly lacrosse

Favorite movie: “Fletch” with Chevy Chase

Life philosophy: Attitude is everything.

on the employer’s financial and strategic goals.

Q. What do you do, exactly?

A. We do the research, the

legwork. Small businesses are in trouble. To be competitive with other companies, they need to offer some sort of health plan, and many can’t afford to. So we look at what major providers have and offer and design a plan for a business, whether it’s a couple of employees or 100. We offer options to the owners, such as copayment levels, deductible levels, dental insurance and so on. We try to make it easy for business owners, most of whom don’t have the time to understand insurance or to shop around for it.

Q. But all businesses have employees with different needs. For a small-business owner, can you design one plan that fits all?

A. Sometimes. That’s our goal. Business owners tell us about their employees, the demographics, what they need, and we design a plan to fit. We are like an HR department for small businesses that don’t have HR departments, or even people who know anything about HR. Sometimes not everyone in a small business has the same needs.

Q. How big is the company?

A. We have 200 employees, including 150 here in Atlanta at the Cobb Galleria and 50 benefits consultants spread around the country.

Q. What percentage of small businesses have either cut back on employee benefits or eliminated benefits since last 2008 when the economy hit the wall?

A. Each year since 2008, 25 to 30 percent of our clients make significant changes to benefit levels to reduce or maintain their overall health insurance expenditure for employees. In addition, each year 2 (percent) to 3 percent of

our clients completely drop their employer-sponsored benefits and ask us to help provide insurance options to their employees as individual consumers.

Q. The word “digital” makes me think that I’d have to go online, pick options and click a few buttons, like buying a plane ticket or ordering a book.

A. It doesn’t work that way. An owner calls and they are assigned a personal consultant who can hand-hold them through the whole process. We know many of our clients don’t know much about insurance, except that they are aware of the advantages of offering it to their employees.

Q. Benefits are a big problem for small businesses, right?

A. Offering health insurance is one of the biggest struggles for small businesses. Less than half of small businesses can provide insurance for employees. But it’s a huge tool to attract and retain people, and they know it.

Q. What’s your typical client?

A. The average-size client has about 15 employees. We have consultants because-ask any small-business owner-they don’t know the ins and outs of the insurance market. We help them make decisions on contribution levels, benefits, things like that.

Q. So small-business owners don’t need to become experts on health insurance?

A. No, that’s where we come in. That’s what we do. We tell them what’s available and what the costs are and they decide. We can just do the shopping much faster due to relationships and technology.