

## *Step 5: Communication & Training*

Role of communications and training in incentive program design.

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### *What To Consider In Communications Planning*

Many incentive programs overlook the value of integrating communications with incentive program design. The incentives used in conjunction with the program help draw attention to company communications, and company communications help direct people toward the behaviors and training tools that can help them succeed.

If you think of incentive programs as a form of targeted marketing, then the rewards serve as a means of getting attention to the useful information you're trying to get across. Of course, the Internet and e-mail have greatly improved the simplicity of program communication. The following should be considered when planning your program communications strategy.

#### *Theme*

To provide the program with a marketing sound bite and "brand" so that people think of the program as a specific campaign, create a theme, which conveys the behavior or outcome you are targeting.

#### *Enrollment Kit*

To explain the program, collect necessary participant information and formal buy-in. The kit should collect all information needed for tax reporting, if appropriate, and explain the tax implications of the rewards.

#### *Imprinted Promotional Products*

Premiums delivered with training, announcement or standings materials create impact. Promotional products also increase the chances that people will open mailings.

Properly themed items provide an ongoing reminder of the program as well.

***Meetings***

Local, regional, national or international meetings are excellent venues for rollout. Satellite, online or in-person meetings, headed by top management, provide a powerful boost to a performance improvement effort.

***Newsletters (Print Or E-Mail), Personal Letters, Brochures, etc.***

These materials contain not only information about the program, but also tips to help people succeed and reports on general progress. These can include interviews with top performers sharing ideas about what makes them successful.

***Individual Progress Reports***

Participant statements show individuals how well they're doing against their personal goals and against the aggregate of other participants. (Be careful about how you compare sets of individuals to other individuals if you don't want to foster resentment in the group.) These reports should be sent even to those who have little chance of winning or who have effectively dropped out; as for those in this category, the goal is to encourage continued efforts to improve performance.

***Announcement Letters***

Announcement letters are a great way not only to announce the winners, but also to communicate in a positive way to those who did not achieve the goals. Thanking all for participating reminds everyone of the reasons for the program and the importance of reaching clear goals.

***Public Recognition***

Considerable anecdotal evidence supports the importance of making the award presentation as personal and meaningful as possible. The way we bestow gifts upon people who have succeeded can have a large impact on recipients and their colleagues. Some organizations go all out, making top performers feel like heroes or stars, so that everyone understands what's important to the organization and why.

***The Essential Need:  
Training***

Probably no element is more essential and yet more often overlooked than training. People have to be capable of reaching goals, even if they are motivated. Training needs come out of the assessment process, which should yield information about any training deficits that can stand in the way of achieving goals.

Online incentive programs provide direct links to training programs that are needed by participants to be successful. Many incentive program practitioners also integrate the completion of training into incentive program earnings as a way to “kick start” the program. These are especially important in direct sales and channel partner programs. In channel partner programs, training up-front helps to increase mind-share of the products or services – so important due to the fact that channel partners may stock or sell competitive products as well.