

FLIPPING THE CONVERSATION

Toronto-based technology company actively seeks feedback from employees and job candidates on which benefits they want most as it works to win the war for talent

By *Helen Burnett-Nichols*

With incentives like a staff lunch on Fridays and free transportation to work, Toronto-based Flipp Corp. has tapped into some of the unique benefits and perks that can attract top talent in the competitive technology industry.

The company, whose app allows consumers to access digital flyers from more than 1,000 retailers to plan their weekly shopping and find deals, has more than 300 employees and has doubled in size since last year. As it grows, it has been putting a significant focus on its benefits plan as it seeks to tap into employees' individual wants and needs as a key selling point.

While Flipp's corporate culture has a lot to do with the way it has designed its

benefits plan, it also seeks the feedback of employees and prospective candidates, says David Au-Yeung, the company's co-founder and chief people officer. Flipp's directors and managers regularly take the pulse of the team to find out which benefits would make their lives easier and they aren't afraid to adjust accordingly.

"That is our competitive advantage, is to really be able to engage our employees and to give them something that they really need and that's attractive to them," says Au-Yeung.

A two-pronged focus

Flipp's benefits plan has a two-pronged focus. First, the company supports employees through more common offerings such as parental leave top-up benefits, a matching registered retirement savings plan and health coverage.

Freedom and responsibility are also integral to Flipp's corporate culture, so the company provides flexible hours, the ability to work from home when necessary and a minimum of three weeks' vacation per year.

Also included in its benefits plan are a number of perks, including free transit or

parking passes and a complimentary gym membership.

Figuring out what employees want from the plan begins with a performance evaluation cycle that runs every four months. The process, says Au-Yeung, gives team members the opportunity to suggest areas for improvement or benefits for the company to consider adding.

The regular review, according to Au-Yeung, has recently driven some specific changes.

"As our workforce is increasing and growing, one of the key things that our team members have been asking [for] is RRSP matching. So what we said is we'd investigate what would be the most competitive at our stage of company to provide the team and we rolled it out in a matter of a few months.

"The other thing, too, is having a good understanding of the demographics and our makeup of our workforce, so that's why we've included a very aggressive plan on maternity leave top-up," he adds.

Flipp also engages its staff through surveys and leverages its network of managers to seek input from employees on how they view the company.

Flipp Corp. employees gather with David Au-Yeung, fourth from left, at one of the company's Friday staff lunches recently.



Seeking feedback

It's unusual to see companies that are so willing to hear from their employees about what they want from their benefits plan, as it's an area where some organizations feel they can't be very creative, says Roger Thorpe, president of Toronto-based Thorpe Benefits.

But Thorpe says it can be important to open the lines of communication to ensure employees understand the plan and are able to provide feedback the company can consider for future design.

"I think the method of asking for input in itself is a pretty powerful part of the process, right? It says, 'Hey, you're listening to me. You want to know how I feel.'"

At the same time, Thorpe says he has encountered companies that try too hard to achieve consensus from employees.

"I would make an executive decision that you think is for the best of the majority or something that can appeal to both parties."

Because a competitive benefits offering is essential to attracting and retaining employees, Au-Yeung says Flipp's recruitment team also talks to candidates about what they want from a potential employer.

JAMIE HOGUE

"The freedom and responsibility to be able to work from home, to support people's lifestyles, is one of the key things that's made us competitive in this marketplace," he says.

As Thorpe notes, offering interesting perks is becoming more common in industries like the technology sector, where companies are finding it challenging to hire the right people.

Perks, according to Thorpe, are also generally more successful if they're authentic — acting as a way of life for the business — rather than just something that checks a box. And, he cautions, it's difficult to take a perk away once a company has introduced it.

Flipp's rapid growth means the company is constantly advertising job postings. As it grows, it has been deliberate in sharing the details of its benefits plan.

"We have millions of Canadians who love and use our app, but one of the key things we realize is they don't know we are a team of more than 300 people located in Toronto and we're also looking to hire more than 100 people this year," says Au-Yeung. "We want to showcase to the people that we have a unique culture

THE IT INDUSTRY IN CANADA

7.1% Percentage of Canada's gross domestic product contributed by the technology industry in 2015

864,000 Number of people employed in the technology sector


6.1% Percentage of all Canadian businesses belonging to the technology industry

\$67,000 Average earnings for employees in the technology sector, compared to the national average of about **\$48,000**

Source: Brookfield Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship report on the state of Canada's technology sector for 2016

and we're hiring right now and that we really care about the well-being of our employees."

Amid the reinvention and continuous improvement, the ultimate goal for the benefits plan, says Au-Yeung, is personal and professional fulfilment for employees.

"It is really about listening to the team and hearing their feedback on what's good and what's not good and then providing that for them," he says. 

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