

UNO Employee Savings Program CACUBO Nomination

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Abstract

Every college/University struggles to manage an employee discount program which offers perceived value, avoids conflict of interest rules, and can be easily managed by limited HR staff. The University of Nebraska at Omaha has been able to create a new employee discount program that has met and exceeded our expectations.

The new program utilizes an outside vendor called PerkSpot. At no cost to the University, this firm finds national and local businesses that are interested in offering product and service discounts to UNO staff and faculty. PerkSpot manages vendor contacts and maintains a UNO customers only, customized web site where employees can access information about discounted offers from approximately 500 national and local companies, and also find information about various insurance products available to them. The program is maintained at no cost to UNO, and without UNO endorsement, or implied endorsement of any of the companies, their products or their services.

Employees can access the customized web site directly, or through UNO HR's web page. Participation in the program is voluntary, and employees and students are free to ignore the site or to choose how much information they receive based on what types of products and services they are interested in. PerkSpot generates its revenue from the participating vendors, service providers and voluntary benefit carriers, using commissions and a rate scale that sets prices for size and length of exposure on the site. In short, PerkSpot re-directs the commission it receives to support the costs to manage and customize the service. There are no participation requirements and no risk to UNO.

Introduction of the Organization

The University of Nebraska at Omaha is a comprehensive, public university located in the heart of Nebraska's largest city. It is the second-largest higher education campus in the state. UNO is part of the University of Nebraska system, which also includes the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the University of Nebraska at Kearney and the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

UNO, with approximately 500 full-time faculty members, offers more than 120 baccalaureate degree programs and over 50 masters and doctoral degree programs. Undergraduate degree programs are offered in the colleges of Arts and Sciences, Business Administration, Education, Communication, Fine Arts & Media, Information Science and Technology, Public Affairs and Community Service, and the Division of Continuing Studies. Programs and courses also are offered in the College of Human Resources and Family Sciences, the College of Engineering and Technology, the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and the College of Architecture, which are administered by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The College of Public Affairs and Community Service is administered by the University of Nebraska at Omaha on both the Omaha and Lincoln campuses.

With a student body of 15,000 undergraduate and graduate students, the University's focus on students is the top strategic goal. The UNO student population is

a diverse mix of full and part-time students, and traditional and non-traditional age enrollees. Students come from all walks of life, from business professionals to international students. Such broad backgrounds and experiences enrich the classroom atmosphere. Ample opportunity is provided for specialized study in terms of interest, talent and ultimate vocational objective. The University works to ensure that its graduates be good citizens, who earn a better living and live a richer, fuller life.

In addition to placing students at the center of all that the university does, the core values of the institution call for the campus to strive for academic excellence and to promote community engagement that transforms and improves urban, regional, national and global life.

The University designs training courses for thousands of business and industrial employees; provides in-service training for elementary and secondary school teachers; conducts distance education classes for college credit and sponsors a wide variety of conferences, workshops, lectures, and fine art events to enrich the college credit offerings.

Opportunities for teaching and research abroad, coordinated by the Office of International Studies and Programs, exist through the University's network of sibling institutions in Afghanistan, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Canada, China, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Greece, India, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Moldova, Nicaragua, Norway, Philippines, Romania, Russia, Republic of South

Korea, Tajikistan, the Ukraine, United Kingdom and other countries.

The University of Nebraska at Omaha, inaugurated in 1968, emerged from the Municipal University of Omaha, established in 1931, which grew out of the University of Omaha founded in 1908. Now in its second century, UNO continues to chart a course for an even brighter future.

Statement of the Problem

Managing incoming requests from companies to offer employee discounts is daunting, and in this period of austere manning is nearly impossible. The idea of recruiting national and local companies to join a discount program for the employee and student groups is out of the question. Still, requests do come in and they must somehow be addressed –

- to present discounts in an effective and easily accessible way to employees and students,
- while avoiding conflict of interest or implied endorsement,
- avoiding any cost to the University (since we are publicly funded), and
- achieving the added value that a meaningful discount program generates.

Such a program, when able to achieve the above objectives, is a WIN-WIN-WIN.

- Staff, faculty and students get the value of discounts and special offers that are based on their affiliation with UNO.

- Local and national businesses are able to reach a key target demographic audience for their goods and services.
- The University can provide a no-cost service to its employees and students that “extends the reach” of their pay and benefits packages.

PerkSpot offers a way to achieve these goals, enabling the WIN-WIN-WIN scenario.

It even adds a fourth WIN to the equation, an even more robust array of discount offerings. Additional benefits are great customer service, contact with both the University and the participating vendors reducing companies’ cost of reaching this target audience, and making a respectable profit for a growing niche company.

WIN + WIN + WIN + WIN = SUCCESS

Design

This initiative required no capital expenditures, equipment purchases, or additional personnel. The only investment for UNO was the time involved in the implementation of the program. Any capital investment and the majority of the time invested were on the part of PerkSpot.

Implementation

Steps to bring about the turn-key discount program at UNO involved:

- Establishing goals for the employee discount program
- Searching for private companies that specialized in providing management of discount programs

- Selecting a few firms for further examination
- Reviewing contract offers and performing legal review of same
- Checking references of potential firms
- Reviewing and approving an exclusive agreement
- Signing the agreement
- Marketing the new program to internal audiences (marketing materials provided by PerkSpot)
- Creating the web pages (The site was created and is maintained by PerkSpot)
- Launching the program and web site
- Monitoring volume of activity, relationships among the firm, vendors, University and UNO customers
- Reviewing pertinent data provided by PerkSpot
- Conducting a customer satisfaction survey
- Referring potential vendors/entities wishing to offer discounts to PerkSpot
- Continuing to market the program to UNO audiences/customers (PerkSpot provides materials to support ongoing marketing)

The timeframe to implement was about three months. (According to PerkSpot, a complete program can be created and launched in 30 days.) Our web site was launched on May 1, 2009.

Issues of Concern to Implementing

Some concern was expressed at using an out-of-state firm. This was answered by explaining that no Nebraska firm provided the service, and that since no cost to UNO was involved, no tax dollars were diverted outside Nebraska.

Also of concern was the possibility that staff and faculty would spend too much time monitoring the site while at the workplace. Initial launch marketing materials made clear to employees that they must register for their account using only their personal email addresses. It was also made clear that the site, while available through the UNO web site, was the same as any “outside” site in terms of University policy with regard to access at work.

The fact that there were not as many local vendors as we would like to see caused some concern. However, the number of local vendors has increased as PerkSpot has continued to recruit new local businesses, and many local businesses, wishing to reach UNO audiences to generate business or offer discounts, have already established PerkSpot as their preferred channel for doing so.

Some expressed concern that vendors would be overcharged or would mistakenly believe UNO was somehow gaining from the arrangement. In this case, both vendors and PerkSpot are more familiar with advertising industry norms than we are, and PerkSpot’s niche model is commonly understood by potential advertisers.

There was also concern that the site would advertise products or services that we did not want to facilitate marketing to staff, faculty or students. Before implementation of the program we set guidelines for PerkSpot to follow regarding bringing new vendors onto the site. When a potential vendor does not meet these guidelines they are not added to the site. If there is any question regarding the appropriateness of a vendor PerkSpot contacts us for approval.

Benefits

I'm delighted to report the following data that indicates customer support for this initiative. Since the launch of the site:

- Approximately 749 employees and have registered for the site, nearly 30% of our employee base.
- UNO employees have saved nearly \$2500.
- There have been zero complaints to PerkSpot about the program.

The site is generally viewed as an added benefit at a time of limited or no salary increases, allowing greater conservation of personal funds.

The site was provided to the University at no cost, helping conserve our limited budget.

The site is easy to manage. The HR staff is delighted by the time savings the program has afforded them. The web site is managed by PerkSpot, vendor contact falls to them, and favoritism and conflict of interest are avoided.

Before launching the program, we had the ability to choose which offers were visible to our employees. This allowed us to make available only those offers which coincided with our UNO values.

Retrospect

We have no regrets about taking this step to bring a vibrant employee discount program to our hard-working, dedicated staff, faculty and students. We are delighted with the experience. PerkSpot has met or exceed all our expectations. If we regret anything, it's not having done this much sooner. I would highly encourage the judges to review this site. To do so, go to <http://uno.perkspot.com> and enter the email address: uno@perkspot.com and password: perkspot to view UNO's site, and imagine the possibilities for every employer!