

Fall for Fitness

An innovative Social Wellness platform achieves unprecedented engagement, biometric outcomes and return on investment (ROI) in UnitedHealth Group's Fall for Fitness challenge.



Social Wellness Boosts Health and Wellness Performance

Health and wellness programs have become invaluable tools for organizations seeking to address a wide range of common workplace health challenges, from the obesity epidemic to rapidly rising health care costs to the impacts of illness on productivity. To succeed, however, these programs must efficiently engage at-risk consumers in number, offering highly appealing content and services while maximizing the employer's health care investment.

Highlights

- A social wellness platform drives fitness challenge engagement and participation.
- The motivational power of team work and peer pressure
- Engaging high-risk members at high enrollment rates
- Life-changing weight loss results

OptumHealth™ Explores Social Wellness

OptumHealth has closely followed the emergence of social wellness — the application of social media technologies and techniques to wellness program design — as an innovative way to engage consumers. An industry-wide evaluation identified ShapeUp as a best-in-class partner with a unique and complementary technology platform and a proven ability to drive viral engagement at the population health level.

UnitedHealth Group's Experience with Social Wellness

UnitedHealth Group is a leading health care company that serves 75 million people worldwide, with a corporate mission to help people live healthier lives. Like many large employers, it has identified obesity-linked conditions as major cost drivers that impact both productivity and medical expenses. UnitedHealth Group also has a highly distributed workforce with a large telecommuter population. To mitigate obesity related costs and develop a connected and vibrant workforce that fully lives its mission, the firm has embraced innovative health and wellness program solutions.

UnitedHealth Group decided to test the ShapeUp social wellness platform in a full-scale, enterprise-wide pilot program executed in the fourth quarter of 2010. Key criteria for program success were the ability to connect the firm's large, diverse, and distributed population; drive engagement of at-risk target segments; and lower quantifiable health risks.

Fall for Fitness: Program Design and Execution

Fall for Fitness was UnitedHealth Group's first ever enterprise-wide health challenge. This 12-week program was designed as an activation-based challenge with three measured activity categories — weight loss, pedometer steps, and exercise minutes. No incentives were used to drive participation, and program communications had to compete with other HR messaging in the peak fall/holiday season.

The ShapeUp platform's grass roots marketing tactics and viral recruiting tools provided the secret sauce to stimulate engagement. Three simple top-down e-card communications were used to solicit initial enrollment, resulting in five percent engagement on the first day. The majority of these early adopters self-selected as team captains, then leveraged ShapeUp's recruitment toolkit to enlist friends and colleagues. With team captains recruiting eight members on average, their efforts drove total engagement to 30 percent of the overall employee population by close of registration.

While the platform's marketing tools were highly effective in driving initial enrollment, it was the social tools that made the platform sticky and generated participant retention. Once users became active on the platform, their social networks kept them returning, with features that appealed to competitors and collaborators alike.

Individuals could track and compare their personal progress against their own goals, their team's progress, or an average user's results. Participants could share workout plans, schedule healthy activities at their worksite, comment on a teammate's progress, encourage lagging participants or celebrate healthy achievements with a high-five.

"Although we had implemented fitness challenges before on a smaller scale, we needed a solution that we could deploy to more than 75,000 employees across our various locations and business segments. The ShapeUp social wellness platform was a turnkey solution that enabled us to quickly roll out a fitness challenge to our entire population with great success."

— Director, Health and Welfare Benefits, UnitedHealth Group

"Originally I was not going to sign up for the challenge, because I regularly go to the gym already, and thought that there wouldn't be much of a difference with my level of activity. Was I wrong! Having to be accountable to others by entering my workout activity onto the website kept me honest—something I never thought I needed. More than I'd like to admit, there were times when I would not have gone to the gym because I was too busy, but I went because I didn't want to be that person on the team who didn't pull his weight and let the others down."

— Vice President, National Accounts Sales Effectiveness and Social Responsibility, UnitedHealthcare

The Team Standings feature encouraged rivalries across competition categories as teams compared their collective progress within and across worksites. The fact that aggregate team participation, ranking and results were displayed provided accountability, proving the power of team work and social pressure.

Outstanding Engagement, Remarkable Outcomes

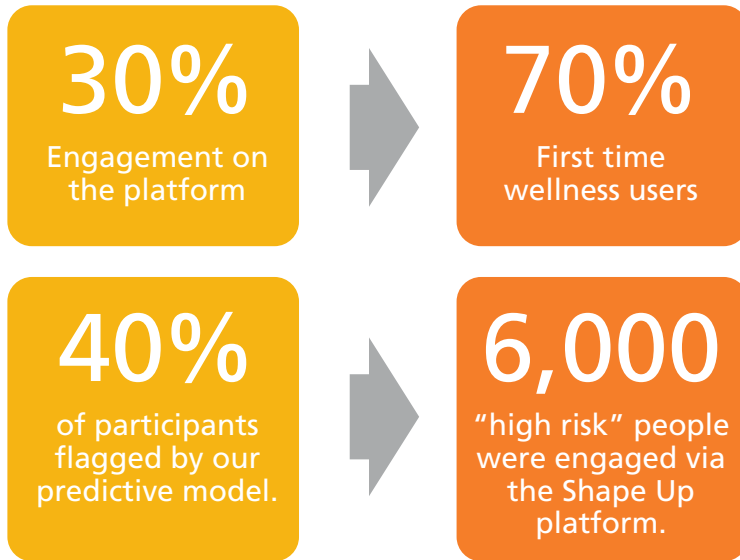


Figure 1: Fall for Fitness successfully engaged the target population in unprecedented numbers.

"I joined the Fall for Fitness program as a way to challenge myself to work in more exercise and to have the support of a team working towards the same goal. My team used the Fall for Fitness site to invite others to 5K walk / run events in the area, exercise classes, and sent high-fives to each other. It was helpful to set a goal for exercise minutes per week and then try to beat my goal. I really enjoyed that I could program text messages for my phone, reminding me of the exercise appointments I had scheduled. Over the 12 weeks of the Fall for Fitness program I lost eight percent body weight, which has contributed to my overall loss of nearly 60 pounds since April 2010."

— Senior Actuarial Consultant

By any measure, the Fall for Fitness challenge was successful. It engaged 30 percent of all UnitedHealth Group employees, a sample that almost perfectly mirrored the overall population demographics. Remarkably, 70 percent of registrants were first-time participants in a health and wellness program. Even more importantly, 40 percent of these — 6,000 individuals — were identified as high-risk, having been flagged by OptumHealth's predictive models as having at least one clinical risk factor. In short, the program engaged the target population in unprecedented numbers.

In aggregate, Fall for Fitness participants shed a staggering 25 tons of excess weight — the equivalent of eight Chevrolet® Suburban® SUVs. They recorded more than four billion steps taken, a greater distance than 60 trips around the earth at the equator. Individually, participants, exercised an average of almost 30 minutes daily, lost an average of 3.9 pounds and reduced their body mass index (BMI) by 0.6 points.

Many of the biometric outcomes achieved were clinically relevant. Some were life-changing. 1,511 participants lost at least 10 lbs. Of this group, 270 individuals lost at least 20 pounds, and 73 lost at least 30 pounds. Those who recorded more than 10,000 steps had BMI reductions of one point or greater.

Shifting the Weight Curve

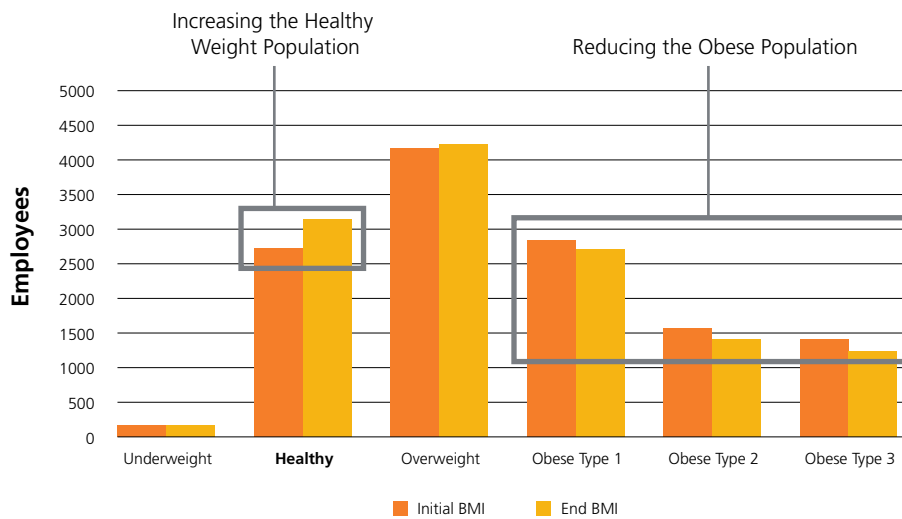


Figure 2: A decrease in all obesity categories shifted employees into healthier weight ranges.

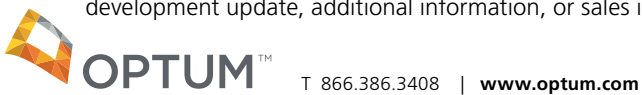
With more than 8,000 program participants achieving a one BMI point reduction, Fall for Fitness delivered significant value. According to OptumHealth’s analytics research validated by Emory University, a one-to-five percent body weight reduction is associated with approximately \$140 per participant in annual medical expense savings. By that measure, we estimate that Fall for Fitness will generate a savings of over \$1.2 million in cost avoidance.

Falling Hard for Social Wellness

The Fall for Fitness pilot program decisively demonstrated the effectiveness of the ShapeUp social wellness platform. It reached an unprecedented proportion of the at-risk target population, maintained their participation over a 12-week program, achieved life-changing health and behavioral outcomes and delivered significant value.

In post-program surveys administered to challenge completers, more than 90 percent of participants expressed satisfaction with the program. 80 percent said they would participate again or recommend the program to a friend. Program administrators were pleased with the platform’s ease of use, and appreciated the dashboard tools it made available. Most importantly, the Fall for Fitness pilot proved that social wellness solutions are a viable and relevant component of the health and wellness tool set. UnitedHealth Group looks forward to applying their learnings and social wellness tactics in future initiatives.

Based on this success, OptumHealth and ShapeUp are already exploring integration opportunities around online coaching, targeted messaging capabilities and value-based reporting. For more information, contact your OptumHealth sales representative for a development update, additional information, or sales inquires.



9900 Bren Road East, Minnetonka, MN 55343

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About the Author

Kari Severson, Product Consultant, Innovative Health Solutions, Optum

Kari has a strong background in health care innovation and product development, with a specialty in social media and worksite wellness. At Optum, she partners with top Fortune 100 employers to design and pilot innovative health management solutions that change the way health care is delivered. Kari brings a personal passion for health and wellness to the table, and is currently pursuing her MBA with a concentration in health sector management at Duke University.