

The EBi logo is positioned in the top left corner of the image. It consists of the letters 'EBi' in a white, sans-serif font. The 'E' and 'B' are connected, and the 'i' has a dot. The background of the entire slide is a photograph of a modern building's interior with a large glass wall and a highly reflective floor. Three people are visible in the distance, looking out the window. A large yellow arrow graphic points from the left side towards the center of the image.

EBi

# Assured Automotive Consolidates Benefits and Controls Costs with EBI



# Auto body and collision repair company Assured Automotive Inc. reins in control over its employee group benefits for greater efficiency and cost savings.

When Grant Gerow joined the company as its vice-president of finance and CFO in 2013, he found an organization with a patchwork of employee benefit plans stitched together through numerous acquisitions. With approximately 550 employees, the corporately-owned Assured Automotive operates 43 auto body and collision shops throughout the Greater Toronto Area, Ontario's "Golden Horseshoe" and Ottawa region.

The company most recently saw growth by more than 50 per cent between 2012 and 2014 through these acquisitions and, according to Gerow, its group benefit plans followed this trend lockstep.

"Every time we grew and added a different region or company the benefits program grew too," he said. "If we doubled the business, we'd double the programs as well."

To make all acquisitions as non-intrusive as possible, Assured had to maintain employee salaries, income and benefits as they were—particularly important for the retention of scarce technical employees in some areas.

"In smaller communities holding onto people is critical. The last thing you want is a mass exodus after an acquisition, and we've prevented that by promising not to change things."

Still, to find efficiencies, some things needed to change.

## The Challenge: Doubling benefit plans

In 2013, Assured Automotive expanded into the Barrie, Ont. and the Ottawa region through the acquisition of six shops and three different automotive repair companies. This positive business move doubled the number of group benefit plans the company was dealing with.

It was time to look more closely at ways to create efficiencies, Gerow suggested. In the past, the company's incumbent insurance broker could only find discounts by removing elements, obviously not an option for a company keen on maintaining employee satisfaction.

Gerow and his team issued an open-ended RFP that incorporated the data from some of the company's existing insurance benefits providers, but allowed consultants to return with a broad range of recommendations. "We didn't want cookie cut proposals, so we left it open-ended as to where they could go."

EBi and People Corporation answered this call with open-mindedness and vision. "They brought up stuff I had never heard of before. They suggested how we could do things differently. And that showed their real benefit; the consulting expertise of specialists in group benefits."

Both consultancies pride themselves on this outside-the-box thinking that is lacking from much of the market. "a common misconception companies like Assured Automotive and business owners are sometimes led to believe is that the only way to achieve savings is through program cuts that affect the quality of their employees plans," noted Ted Polci, president of EBi.

Both EBi and People Corp agree there are more creative ways to find savings and deliver more value to companies and employees. "It's easy to reduce costs if you start carving away at the program, but I would argue you aren't reducing costs, you're just shifting them around," said John Shoniker, vice-president of Integrated Solutions at People Corp. "The real magic is in developing a plan that provides significant value to the plan members but in a way that's within budget and sustainable going forward."

"The real magic is in developing a plan that provides significant value... within budget"





## The Solution: All under one roof

Assured Automotive appointed EBi and People Corp. their brokers of record in September 2013 and the partners moved quickly to bring the company's existing plans under one provider. The brokers left nothing to chance and walked Gerow's team through every step, so that by the end of three short months Assured Automotive had rolled all six existing plans under a single comprehensive one.

Throughout the process, People Corp. met with employees across every shop location to assuage any possible fears. Fortunately, fears were few as the consolidation process created custom, individualized plans that mirrored existing ones benefit-by-benefit.

And the rate reduction has been significant.

Through consolidation and efficiencies derived from leveraging the company's more profitable plans, the project resulted in approximately 20 per cent savings, of which Assured Automotive intends to give back to employees as it enters the next phase of its group benefits consolidation.

## One package for all employees

With their expert counsel in place, Assured Automotive is now in the process of designing a single group benefits plan that it can roll out to all employees. Keeping up the company's principle of maintaining the benefits employees have come to expect, special care is being made to juggle benefits effectively to improve most employee plans.

As well as generally improving plans, EBi and People Corp. have been able to recommend more tax efficient structures for life insurance to provide even greater benefit to Assured Automotive's employees. The programs being developed rely heavily on the clout of People Corp. with the underwriting community, and EBi's high-touch model, consulting and high degree of client care.



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It doesn't end once People Corp. and EBi deliver a robust group benefits package. "Ongoing communications is a critical aspect," Shoniker said. "You can have the best structured program in the world, but you need to be able to deliver it in a way that employees understand."

It is a continual process, in which the consultants seek out ways companies like Assured Automotive can cost-effectively provide value to their employees, and good will that pays off in recruitment and retention.

And the future holds even more. Assured Automotive is already investigating unique benefits at the partner level, such as access to private healthcare, taking advantage of EBi's expertise in executive-level benefits. Gerow says he and his team are also considering unique employee benefits once the programs are in place, such as child and elder care programs—ideas brought to him during the RFP.

"These are things that are important to me, so it stands to reason they'd be important to many employees."