Workers' Comp

Is Your Workplace Safe2Work?

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12 MIN READ
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As employers are looking for efficient ways to keep work environments safe from COVID-19, Optis has developed Safe2Work, an app-enabled, web-based health screening program designed to help stop the spread of workplace illness.

Tom Kerr (TK): In today's Inside Workers' Comp, we talk with Bryan Stonecipher, president of Optis, and Jacob Sipko, vice president, at Genex Services, about how this program works.

Gentlemen, thanks for joining us. Let's jump in. Jacob, how did Ready2Work come about?

Jacob Sipko (JS): Hello, Tom. Optis is a company that Genex has owned since 1997, and its primary deliverables are in the absence management space. We had a lot of customers starting to reach out to us as many were looking for options, as they were reopening their worksites, for creating a safe workplace. It was a natural extension of what Optis delivers to create this product. They have the infrastructure, the security and the self?

service portal. So, we connected with Bryan and the team of developers and they were able to create the Safe2Work program.

TK: Bryan, what factors/guidelines did you consider when creating the program?

Bryan Stonecipher (BS): The Basis software is using the LeaveXpert platform, which is our main platform that we use at Optis to help with leave absent management. It actually helps HR stay compliant in the filing of FMLA and ADA claims. It helps them to ensure they have all the right documentations. It actually helps on the back end of it, after you approve or deny the claims, to where you have the ability to help the employee come back faster.

That is why we decided to build the Safe2Work app on top of that and add it into this very robust system for trackability and ability to actually follow through with claims just like Jacob said earlier. So, for instance, you can jump in FMLA, and follow an FMLA claim all the way through if that's the course that they want to go through.

And, with that, we were able to build a software program that can correlate mass amount of data, for most companies to check trends or even mitigate, as much as possible, outbreaks that could be happening within their organization. So, the guidelines we used and considered for most of the programs were the same ones that are used for the CDC guidelines, as well. We followed them to the tee for COVID.

TK: OK, so Bryan, this product was developed before COVID or as a response to it?

BS: It was made more as a response to it due to the fact that there was no precedence for software like this for tracking ability of this type of outbreak. As we know, we've never been this type of pandemic before. This is something new for the entire nation. So, we built as a response to it.

TK: So, how does it work?

BS: That's an easy question for a very long answer. It uses the LeaveXpert platform to self?test yourself at home by reading what the software prompts such as, "Do you have a temperature?" "Do you have any of these symptoms: coughing, runny nose?" What do you have within the symptoms the CDC says?

If you answer "no" to them, it actually tells you, "Have a good day, see you at work, you're good to go." If you answer "yes," it asks what kind of symptoms you have, your temperature, and next steps that you'll be taking for the process.

So therefore, if they said "yes," and the client wishes to have you call HR, or have you go directly to the doctor or just get a doctor visit, we have the system set up in that direction, or even, have the ability to link it to your HRIS system to request time off for this. Um, that is the front end of it.

The back end of it is more along the lines of what the software is really known for, which is ability to collate the data and put it together, and then have the ability to run reports. And have trackability, see trending reports, also know if someone did not check in and came into work, or someone did check in and came into work.

That way you now have ability to have accountability on the employee which allows you more to have faster results and find out if you have an outbreak or if you don't have an outbreak.

TK: OK, Jacob, it sounds like the program itself is highly involved, but is it difficult to use?

JS: When we designed it, we tried to make it very easy to use and very simplistic for the employee to have them use it and get a high level of engagement with the software. I think on average, it takes 13 to 15 seconds for an employee to go through the process of doing the self?assessment, excluding them taking their temperature. We wanted it to be very simplistic on the front end for the employee use but very robust on the back end.

TK: Bryan, one point I want to clarify — so when employees enter all of the information into the system, and receive a message of whether they're safe to go into work or not, do they need to contact HR, or does HR or the employees' manager get the results, too?

BS: It's a really good question. It could be done either way. We can give it the ability to send an email to the HR person saying, "This person has recorded a positive indicator for possible COVID exposure and needs to be contacted for further instructions." You could also have it set up to where the employee reaches out to HR, or we can have it set up, once again, to have it automated to say, "Please go to the doctor, get a review. When you're done, please upload the information from your doctor, what they said, what kind of report they said, if they gave you anything."

That way, the HR person can verify that they're OK. If they just have sniffles, they're good to go and we can move on. So, the system is highly customizable in that area, just as all the LXs. It's what sort of sets us apart in the whole software world, that is we're not a out?of?a?box system. We are very customizable and build to whatever workflow is needed within the client's perspective.

JS: Just to add to that, Tom, all the information is housed within the LX system. Optis meets all the security requirements for housing personal, employee data. And that email is sent out, not providing any specifics to the case but, providing the HR manager or whoever we set up the account to take action within the LX system.

TK: So, it's HIPAA complaint then?

BS: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. Our servers are military-grade servers. We've kept over 35 years of data for employees, HIPAA, so we are constantly being self?audited and also being audited to make sure our certifications are up?to?date. Those are some of the highest-class certifications in the nation to ensure that everything is very compliant. Everything is kept within the system.

TK: Does an employee need to download specific software to use it?

BS: No, it's web?based, so it's an SAS program with ability to use it in the cloud. So, you can log on with your phone. We are producing an app right now which will help you log into the system for faster access. You can also use your desktop to log into it.

Some companies using it have a couple of computers in their lobbies, and when you get there, you take the assessment there. And then you can either a.) go in or b.) go home depending on your symptoms and outcome. You can also, of course, do it from your phone, at home.

TK: Jacob, how is it different from similar COVID-screening programs?

JS: Obviously, this is new to the entire industry — COVID and this kind of self?assessment — checking as people are coming into work. And we haven't seen a lot of competitors in the space. But I think the immediate response people had was, "OK, we need a clinical person at the door checking temperatures, checking for symptoms and then, allowing people to come to work and doing it all on paper, or Excel, or things of that nature." Obviously, that's not sustainable for the long term.

It seems like COVID's going to be with us for a while, so that's why we came up again with Safe2Work. In the space, the things that we've seen, there's a lot of spreadsheets, paper forms, a lot of people trying to develop avenues to collect the data, report on the data, and do the self?service checks. And I think one of the critical things that we're bringing to the table with the Optis Safe2Work solution is the accountability of the employee. As Bryan said earlier, I've seen multiple programs where there's not really a high-level accountability from the employee to make sure that they're doing it.

Employees are demanding that all their employers are creating this super safe work space for them, but in this COVID?related issue, the employee is such a critical component of creating a safe workplace. So I really think that's what makes our product different, the level of accountability that we hold to the employees to do the symptom check, because we can show whether they did it or not.

Bryan: And I'd like to piggyback on that. Jacob was absolutely correct with his assessment of where we stand in the marketplace is the ability to automate this process versus a very manual operation. We're finding that majority of businesses out there doing this manually because they just don't know that this product is out there. They're trying to build it themselves by using a spreadsheet and manually doing this. And, as we all know, sometimes it does not go very well, or you lose data, or you don't have ability to track that data.

And so, this system allows the company and the employee the ability to track everything going in, and, once again, see the trends and where it's happening.

TK: In getting the temperature readings, are employees doing that on their own and providing that information or is it done at the workplace?

JS: That's a good question. It's been little bit of a learning process for us as well in understanding what can be expected of the employees at home versus when they're at the job site or at their place of employment.

I think our intention at first and our thought process was we were trying to eliminate people coming to their workplace, so it was a self?assessment at home where they were kind of expected to take their own temperature, input the information before they even leave their house, or whether they work in the field or at a factory, or an office building, whatever it may be.

Through this process and meeting with multiple perspective clients and we're probably going to most likely customize this for each one in some capacity. A lot of them are either doing the kiosk as well at the work station where they'll enter the information and take their temperature or still having that safeguard on the back?end where they're having their temperature taken as they enter the building, to kind of verify the information they put in the system.

BS: Yeah, he's right on that. Every state really has their own guidelines, and based on those guidelines is what the company or the client's going to have to do. Because one company in California might have to do one way and then one company in New York has to do the other way, and they might have to give them the employees thermometers to use for that. It also depends on the workflow of that client, too So there's a lot of options that can go into that.

TK: Let's talk about the employers. What has been the response from those who have implemented the program?

JS: We're in the final stages of rolling out multiple programs as we speak, but the feedback we've gotten from a lot of people — and most companies have developed their COVID task force — has been very positive. So, they're continuing to evaluate the situation and see how this program fits into their exact needs, how do we need

to customize the program for each one and go from there.

BS: Yeah. Jacob's right. All those clients are really excited about using it. We also did an alpha and beta test on the software tool with one of the largest corporations in the world who actually used it for a while to a low test for it and they loved it. Matter of fact, to the point where they're probably going to be using it here very soon too as well.

So, it's been received very well and has really eased a lot of companies' minds to not only have this software for their own accountability, but also to have, the ability to report it in the near future. If the government decides to use this as an OSHA format, or anything else, it has ability for them to report it on out and showing them that they are tracking this and they are keeping tabs on their own employees.

TK: Jacob, what types of workplaces might benefit from this program than others?

JS: You know, Tom, I think we tend to be all over the map with companies who are interested in it. I think our initial thoughts were maybe distribution type facilities would be the most likely to use it where they have a lot of employees in a facility like an Amazon or something of that nature. But it's really kind of changed. We really feel like this is a risk mitigation tool as well. not only for client-facing organizations in the hospitality space, obviously distribution centers, and even, just standard office settings.

We feel like employees are demanding that their employers provide a safe workplace and we want to help them be accountable, build and report the data. The schools are a big space that we've talked to. The state of Texas, for example, is making it mandatory for schools to do some type of self?assessment. A lot of municipalities and specific cities and/or states are doing that across the country. So how do we hold parents accountable for not sending their kids to school sick and teachers and so forth. So, I think it's really across the map. Bryan?

BS: We were very impressed and very excited to hear about the school districts looking at the software to use for the kids. To answer and have the parents fill out the form or use the software, before they send the kid to school, I mean, that was a great new area for us to even think about. It's always a blessing when that happens, where it can help everybody.

TK: Aside from screening for COVID, do you see Safe2Work becoming a regular part of ensuring employee and workplace safety?

BS: Absolutely. It doesn't matter if it's COVID. It could be the flu, or any symptoms that could be coming up. As we all know, that if one employee gets the flu and comes in, it could spread around and lower your workforce significantly.

And so, this software would be able to help mitigate that and help you keep that employee from coming in, or have ability to track it and see where it started not just for COVID, but for keeping the flu out, or any other type of illness**.**

TK: Thanks Bryan and Jacob, and we'll be back soon with another Inside Workers' Comp. Until then, stay safe and thanks for listening.

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