

Share Plans for the Digital Age



It is estimated that digital technology could reduce global carbon emissions by 20% by 2030 through solutions in energy, manufacturing, agriculture, services, transportation and traffic management.

As we start the new decade, the world of work has changed through innovations in technology. The year 2020 always seemed so far away - and futuristic even – we might have imagined that by now we would be commuting via flying cars or that robots might have fulfilled many of the jobs we do today. In reality, technology has altered the ways in which most of us work today and created whole new career opportunities. It has allowed remote connections enabling flexible working, video calling so we can interact better with our global colleagues and clients and has created a real expectation of almost instant responses to communications.

The Share Plan Industry is no exception. Yesterday I was explaining to a share plan newbie how just ten years ago, online awards acceptance or vesting instructions were still under development; paper forms were used to capture this information relying heavily on humans to interpret dodgy handwriting or make individual contact with the person that ticked all of the boxes instead of just the one for their chosen option!

Five years ago, online elections were the norm, but today, with many firms having introduced mobile apps, these have become a new base level expectation.

What does this mean? Well for one, the level of interaction with participants has increased dramatically, it's not just a letter at the launch of the plan and then another one three years later at maturity. In the banking world, it is estimated that those who use mobile apps log in around twenty-eight times per month, compared to an average of three times on-line or

one branch visit. Already, and almost without even trying, we are seeing employee's engagement in their share plans going through the roof.

Although utilising this tech for share plans enables participants to track the share price, see the level of their holding, get permission to deal if needed and give exercise instructions from the palm of their hand, we need to think how to make this increased engagement not just more efficient but also more valuable for the company and the employee. Whilst engagement is more frequent in the app space, it is also much shorter – snippets of useful information need to be delivered quickly as your plan information is competing against multiple other media inputs to your participants. Only those companies at the front of the queue in terms of quick and engaging content will get their message across.

This is all very exciting from a delivery perspective, but as an industry the same question is increasingly being asked – why are the plans we are offering pretty much the same as they were in that paper based world? As technological innovation continues to change our world it is surely time to look at what is being delivered as well as how we deliver it.

At ProShare, with the support of our members, we have been trying to do just that. Towards the end of 2019 ProShare formed a 'super focus group' to discuss how share plans might evolve to better suit the needs of today's employees. Nothing was off limits, and as a group we came up with many different ideas. ProShare used this to write our 'Super Charging Employee Ownership' Policy Paper which in turn was used to create our budget submission which was sent to HM Treasury and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy this month.

If you would like to see our Policy Paper, [click here](#). Together we can shape share plans to suit the needs of today's employees.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'Z' followed by a series of loops and a wavy line extending to the right.

Zoe Denny-Thomas
Head of Member Services – ProShare