Independent Agencies Prefer Real Time Over Carrier Portals

Recent Survey of Over 3,100 Independent Agents Confirms a Strategic Vision
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The Real Time/Download Campaign was founded to champion the adoption of Real Time[1] and Download for independent insurance agencies and companies. Real Time provides agencies with a consistent workflow through agency management systems or comparative raters when doing business with multiple carriers, rather than having to learn the workflow of each carrier portal and enter data multiple times into these portals.

Some 7,500 independent agents answered a survey on carrier communications in 2006, leading to the campaign's launch that fall. They said their primary challenge was dealing with "different proprietary company interfaces." That challenge was followed closely by "duplicate entry," "multiple IDs and passwords," and "training agency staff" on different carrier workflows.[2]

Real Time workflows were designed to ameliorate the challenges created by carrier portals. Today, carrier portals continue to play a role in enhancing some Real Time transactions and in providing additional information to agencies that is not otherwise available. But portals should not be seen by carriers as a substitute for implementing Real Time transactions for the many agencies which prefer to work through their agency management systems and comparative raters.

Our industry has an excellent opportunity in 2012 to increase implementation and enhance the benefits being delivered by Real Time to our distribution channel.

Vision Confirmed

Over the past five years, the adoption of Real Time has continued to expand and deliver outstanding benefits to agencies. This confirms our vision that Real Time offers these firms a more efficient and responsive workflow than navigating through various carrier portals. Consider what 3,110 agencies and brokerages told us in the campaign's latest agency survey, conducted a couple of months ago:

• Fully 63 percent of agency management system users employ real-time rating on comparative raters and management systems to access multiple carriers at once. This represents an increase of six percentage points over a similar 2010 survey.

• The use of real-time rating tools for personal lines saves agencies an estimated 68 minutes per employee per day.

• About three fifths (62 percent) of those using real-time rating also use real-time inquiry and service transactions through management systems, most often for billing, policy and claims inquiries, but also for endorsement processing (55 percent for personal lines, 29 percent for commercial).

• Real-time inquiry and servicing are saving 50 minutes daily for those employees using the functionality, because the real-time tool can enter IDs and passwords automatically. And it can either return the information directly to the management system or navigate precisely to the information on the carrier website.[3]

Moving Forward

Our industry has an excellent opportunity in 2012 to increase implementation and enhance the benefits being delivered by Real Time to our distribution channel. To encourage more agencies to implement Real Time, the campaign is planning a National Real Time Day on Feb. 29, 2012, during which the campaign, individual vendors, user groups and carriers will hold events to help agency owners and employees fully understand what real-time functionality can do for them. Details for the day will be announced soon.

Independent agency owners are busy people, to be sure. But as we enter a new year, the campaign calls on even more agency leaders to take a step back and examine—desktop to desktop—how employees write and service business. Real Time provides strategic benefits that enhance agency productivity. But there's more: If principals insist on Real Time as the required workflow for all employees, it promotes consistent workflows across the firm, which simplifies staff training, allows

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1 Real Time is the ability to click on a button from a client file in your agency management system or comparative rater for immediate access to carrier information on that client. The transaction may be a quote, billing inquiry, claim inquiry/loss runs, policy view, endorsements or a request for information. This approach provides a single workflow for servicing or quoting with multiple carriers. 2 ACORD User Groups Information Exchange (AUGIE) Agency Technology Survey Executive Summary, 2006, p. 14. 3 Fall, 2011 Survey of 3110 agencies by the Real Time/Download Campaign

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workflows across the firm, which simplifies staff training, allows managers to monitor employees' performance more effectively, increases the security of processing, and creates better transaction records for E&O protection.

Carrier & Vendor Role

More carriers need to offer Real Time and carriers and vendors should continue to enhance the functionality they provide. Agents clearly told us in our latest survey what further improvements in Real Time they want to see:

• Have additional carriers introduce Real Time.

• Have those carriers offering Real Time provide the full array of real-time functions across the major lines of business, so that agency employees can count on Real Time as a consistent[2] workflow across carriers.

• See vendors and carriers continue to improve the real-time functions they do provide so that the response times are faster.[4]

To give carriers and vendors a road map for implementing "best practice" real-time workflows—whether they are just starting to build out the functionality or seeking to improve and expand the transactions being provided— the campaign has just completed Agency Real-Time "Best Practice" Workflows & Implementation Strategies.

In addition, in 2012 ACORD will be developing specifications and implementation guidance to assist the industry in implementing ACORD standards and forms. The campaign also will encourage greater use of real-time transactions and download within the E&S market and for mid-commercial submissions.

About the Campaign

Launched in 2007, the Real Time/Download Campaign (www.getrealtime.org) is dedicated to improving the competitiveness of the independent agency distribution channel. The campaign isn't advocating a specific technology, but a workflow approach that frees up more time for agencies to sell, process and service business. Most agents can leverage tools already contained in their agency management systems or comparative raters.

Campaign participants include agents, brokers, carriers, technology providers, user groups, and agent and industry associations. The campaign is led by industry groups and sponsored financially by ACORD and the ACORD-User Groups Information Exchange (AUGIE); Allied Insurance; Applied Systems; Applied Systems Client Network (ASCnet); Artizan Internet Services; CNA; EMC Insurance Companies; Erie[3] Insurance; Grange Insurance; Harleysville; The Hartford; Independent Insurance Agents & Brokers of America (IIABA) and its Agents Council for Technology (ACT); IVANS; Liberty Mutual Agency Corporation; MetLife Auto & Home; Network of Vertafore Users (NetVU); PIA of New York, New Jersey, Connecticut & New Hampshire; Progressive; Travelers Insurance; Vertafore; and Westfield Insurance.

4 Ibid.