

# Taking Real Time to the Next Level

By Jeff Yates, ACT Executive Director

In the six months since the Real Time/Download Campaign launched, Real Time has been a dominant subject of discussion at agency association and user group meetings across the country. Thousands of agencies are already saving significant time with Real Time – cutting in about half (or better) the time it would take to make the inquiry or get the comparative quotes using carrier Web sites. This article focuses on the progress the industry is making with Real Time and provides tips on how we can increase Real Time usage in our agencies and carriers. (See [www.getrealttime.org](http://www.getrealttime.org) for more information on Real Time and its implementation.)

## Industry Progress with Real Time

There is widespread consensus that the Campaign has been successful in raising agent interest in and requests for Real Time. One major agency management system vendor recently said that its transaction volume was running 30-40% over where it had been fourth quarter of last year and that this volume is trending up 5-7% per month. That vendor also said there had been a sharp jump in agent-carrier Real Time communicating pairs. A major national carrier said its engaged Real Time users had gone up 30% since January and its engaged agencies by 48%. That company still finds, however, that in many agencies, only pockets of employees are using Real Time. Another major national company has said that Real Time feels “like a train about to leave the station” – increased and growing agent interest, but the heightened interest has not yet been reflected in the numbers.

Three regional carriers recently reported they expect to double the number of their Real Time transactions this year. These companies have had people in the field working individually with their agencies on implementation, and some have included agency Real Time usage as part of their employees’ incentives. Others carriers have experienced a big increase in agency usage when they replaced their scripted Real Time Inquiry transactions with the ACORD XML Standard based Web services, because of the increase in their speed and reliability.

One Pennsylvania suburban agency with seven employees has been able to increase the number of its monthly Real Time transactions from January to August 2007 from 324 to 653 by demonstrating the value of Real Time to each employee and monitoring employee use. One larger regional agency in New York State is now doing 5100 Real Time transactions a month!

## Tips for More Successful Real Time Implementation

### *Agencies*

- Appoint a Real Time champion who will promote Real Time to other users.
- Demonstrate to non-believer employees the time savings of Real Time compared to going directly to carrier Web sites.
- Run monthly activity reports to monitor individual employee usage of Real Time and provide extra assistance where needed.
- Provide incentives, such as lunches, for those employees who use Real Time most often.
- Incorporate Real Time into the agency’s workflows and establish management’s expectation that these workflows be followed.
- Explain to employees that the more they use Real Time, the more carriers will be willing to invest in additional transactions, such as Endorsements and Quoting.
- Advocate for Real Time with your carriers of all sizes at every opportunity. Thank the CEOs of the companies which provide you with this improved workflow.
- Provide feedback to carriers and vendors when their particular Real Time implementation is slow or ineffective. Like any new technology, Real Time will continue to be refined, and agents can help shape these improvements.
- Speed implementation of Real Time Quoting applications by setting default settings to reduce data entry.
- Consider moving to centralized password administration, where individual users do not have to manage individual carrier passwords because they can access carrier Web sites through their agency system Real Time functionality.
- Implement Download wherever possible, including for Commercial Lines, and focus on maintaining complete and accurate data. Real Time Quoting depends on the agent’s sending complete and accurate data.

### Carriers

- Meet regularly with agent users and vendors to get feedback to help refine Real Time implementations. Consider an agency technology committee to provide agency input on priorities and workflows. Log all agency recommended improvements for follow up.
- Promote Real Time continuously with your agents on your Web site, in your publications, and during marketing rep visits. Consider an agency contest or incentive program for Real Time usage.
- Assist agencies needing help implementing Real Time.
- Move to the use of ACORD XML based Web services from Real Time scripting transactions for improved speed and reliability.
- Provide the full complement of inquiry transactions so that agents can count on more consistency across carriers, along with the various Real Time transactions.
- Review company uniques and decide whether they are absolutely necessary to the Real Time Quoting process. Use the ACORD applications wherever possible, including the new residential forms that incorporate several of the commonly found company “uniques.” Make assumptions where possible with the data the agent has submitted to avoid returning error messages and advise agents of the assumptions that you have made in your quote.
- Seek to reduce the number of error messages, but where they do occur, always provide an easy to understand description for the error and try to provide a link to the carrier Web site, so that the agent can complete the transaction.
- When providing the Real Time Endorsement Bridge, include the ability for the agent to drill down to make all types of changes (such as in vehicle schedules), to print out all needed customer documents to complete the transaction, and to provide an immediate confirmation that can be attached to the agency management system.

### Vendors

- Reduce the number of adjustments carriers have to make in their ACORD XML based messages for your system.
- Provide attractive plans for smaller carriers to implement Real Time.
- Regularly meet with agent users and carriers to continue to refine Real Time implementations.
- Continue to provide agencies with Real Time training, both Web based and in person.
- Promote Real Time continuously with your agents on your Web site and in your communications. Consider an agency contest or incentive program for Real Time usage.
- Promote use of ACORD XML based Web services over Real Time scripting transactions for improved speed and reliability.
- Ensure Download functionality is available (i.e., commercial lines, claims download).

For their parts, ACT and AUGIE, the national and state agents associations, and the user groups have a critical role to play in the ongoing promotion of Real Time and providing a forum to discuss its continued evolution and enhancement. ACORD has an important opportunity to strengthen its certification of ACORD XML standards implementations, so that the Real Time messages sent between carriers and vendors are fully compatible.

Real Time offers a unique opportunity for agents and carriers to work much more efficiently together, to improve the sales process, increase profitability and provide a higher level of service to our customers. The Real Time train has left the station, and it is up to each of us to make sure it generates the momentum necessary to reach every part of our distribution system.

