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CONTACT:

Dave Willis

dave@Aartrijk.com

(603) 444-2225

Survey: Most Agents Using Real Time Functionality

Firms Save Hours Daily on Transactions Across Employee Base

PEARL RIVER, NY (February 9, 2009)—Increasing numbers of agents and brokers are leveraging real-time technology tools to handle policy rating and sales, manage customer inquiries, and deliver service, a broad coalition representing the Independent Agency System has found in a new survey.

According to a poll of some 3,200 agency staff members, more than half of agency management system users tap a real-time tool to start an inquiry or service transaction (54% for inquiries and 55% for personal lines endorsements). In addition, 43% of agents are rating personal lines in real time through the agency management system or comparative rater.

The survey was developed by the Real Time/Download Campaign and promoted by management system user groups, carriers, software vendors, state agent associations, ACORD-User Groups Information Exchange (AUGIE), and the Independent Insurance Agents & Brokers of America's Agents Council for Technology (ACT). Real Time is the ability to click on a button from a client file in the agency management system or comparative rater for immediate access to carrier information on that client. This approach provides a single workflow for servicing or quoting.

Survey responses came from every state in the country. Agency and brokerage staff were asked to complete the survey, regardless of how "automated" they believe their agency is. Slightly more than 90% of respondents said they use an agency management system in their office.

"As Real Time continues to gain momentum, it's important to understand what's been achieved," says campaign co-chair Cyndy Smith, vice president and director of technology at

Haylor, Freyer & Coon, Inc., Syracuse, N.Y., and Industry Affairs Committee chair of The AMS Users' Group. "By benchmarking where we are, we're better able to track future progress in implementation and adoption of this important workflow enhancement."

Benefits & Challenges

Use of real-time tools is saving agents and brokers a significant amount of time each day. Nearly half of those using Real Time (47%) find time savings of as much as 30 minutes per employee per day (45% in personal lines and 50% in commercial). An additional 28% (35% in personal lines and 19% in commercial) peg the savings at 31 minutes to an hour per employee each day.

Current non-users of Real Time gave these two main reasons for their lack of usage: 29% said they did not know the functionality existed within their system, and 14% said they don't have time for implementation and training.

"We've worked hard to educate people on the value of Real Time and Download," says Smith. "Agents need to understand that real-time functionality already exists in most management systems; it's a matter of turning it on and making sure employees understand its value. Workflows driven by Real Time and Download help agencies deliver better customer service and retain business without adding more staff."

Inquiries, Endorsements, Rating

The most frequently used real-time inquiry functions are personal lines billing inquiry (selected by 87% of inquiry users) and personal lines policy inquiry (82%), followed by commercial lines billing inquiry (75%), personal lines claims inquiry (70%), and commercial lines policy inquiry (69%).

Some 55% of those with management systems do personal lines endorsement processing, and 34% do commercial lines endorsement processing.

Forty-three percent of agents use a real-time tool to rate personal lines policies, and 18% use such a tool for commercial lines rating.

The difference in usage percentages between personal and commercial lines is driven, in part, by the number of carriers that have implemented the workflow.

Carrier Adoption

Agents have increasing numbers of carriers offering real-time functionality in their offices. About 60% of agencies doing personal lines real-time inquiries or service transactions say they have it available with four or more of their carriers (42% have four or more carriers providing this functionality in commercial lines). Six of 10 of agents doing personal lines real-time rating have it with four or more carriers. For commercial lines, just 32% of agents say four or more carriers provide real-time rating, but the number of carriers offering this functionality is expected to grow steadily in the coming year.

"Today, more than 90 insurance organizations—representing some 140 distinct carriers—offer independent agents and brokers the ability to complete some kind of transaction in Real

Time through their management system or rater,” says campaign co-chair Lisa Parry Becker, vice president of sales and marketing at William B. Parry Agency, Langhorne, Pa. “The number of carriers offering real-time service and inquiry capabilities is up about 17% since the campaign started. For real-time rating and quoting, it’s up 36%.

“But it’s not enough. More carriers need to implement real-time functionality and promote it to their agents, and agents need to use the transactions that are available from their carriers,” adds Parry Becker, who also is a national director of ASCnet, the Applied Systems user group. “Agents and brokers can help speed the process by getting carriers engaged in discussions and educating them on the benefits and ease of offering Real Time.”

Moving Forward

This survey will help campaign officials gauge how well agencies understand real-time tools, as well as the extent to which available tools are being used, Parry Becker noted. “Most important, though, it helps us see where knowledge and practice gaps exist.”

“The Campaign will continue a regular series of Real Time webinars and in-person sessions at agent association and user group meetings to drive increased agent and carrier usage,” Smith adds. “To get started, we encourage individual agents to download the Real Time Implementation Guide at www.getrealttime.org and to take advantage of the implementation seminars regularly being put on by their user groups and vendors.”

About the Real Time/Download Campaign

Launched in April 2007, the Real Time/Download Campaign (www.getrealttime.org) is dedicated to improving the competitiveness of the independent agency distribution channel. The campaign goal is to double the number of real-time transactions each year.

Real Time is the ability to click on a button from a client file in the 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 run, policy view, endorsement or a request for information.

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; ACT; AMS Services; AMS Users’ Group; Applied Systems; Applied Systems Client Network (ASCnet); Artizan Internet Services; AUGIE; EMC Insurance Companies; Grange Insurance; IIABA; IVANS; Liberty Mutual Agency Markets; MetLife Auto & Home; Nationwide/Allied; PIA of New York, New Jersey, Connecticut & New Hampshire; SilverPlume Rating Solutions; Strategic Insurance Software (SIS); The Hartford; and Westfield Insurance.

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