

# Bolstering Agency Sales & Marketing with Technology

## ACT Sales & Marketing Work Group Phase Two Report<sup>1</sup>

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### I. Introduction

This report outlines how agents and brokers are using technology to enhance their marketing, sales, and sales management activities. The focus is on the functions being enhanced with technology, not on specific products or vendors.

We urge agents and brokers to take a three-pronged approach to establish a successful sales strategy for their agency:

1. Infuse the agency with a culture and related business processes that empower the entire staff to further the agency's overall sales effort. This crucial first step is the focus of the work group's Phase One report, *The Transition to an Agency Sales Organization—Culture and Process First, Then Technology* (at [www.independentagent.com/act](http://www.independentagent.com/act) under "Technology Reports.")
2. Formulate the major strategies the agency would like to pursue to improve the firm's sales, marketing, and sales management capabilities.
3. Determine the kinds of technologies that the agency would like to use to implement the chosen strategies and then decide upon the particular vendor(s) the agency would like to use to deliver the technology.

This report is designed to get you started with Step (3). When specific products or vendors are mentioned, we only do so to provide examples. Neither ACT nor the work group intends to confer any form of endorsement when a specific product is mentioned in this report. It is important for each agency to conduct its own assessment before deciding whether to use a particular product, and ACT recommends that you interview current agent and broker users of the product or service as part of this process.

This report is the product of 33 interviews of agents, brokers, and vendors conducted by ACT and is divided into four major sections: General Recommendations (Page 2), Marketing (Page 2), Sales (Page 4), and Sales Management (Page 7).

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<sup>1</sup> The Agents Council for Technology (ACT) is an association of agents, brokers, users groups, carriers, vendors, and industry associations dedicated to encouraging and facilitating the most effective use of technology and workflow within the Independent Agency System. ACT is affiliated with the Independent Insurance Agents & Brokers of America, Inc. (IIABA). See the ACT web site at [www.independentagent.com/act](http://www.independentagent.com/act) for more information about ACT and its initiatives.

## **II. General Recommendations**

1. There should be a “champion” in the agency that drives the learning for using technology to enhance the sales and marketing process. (This goes back to the need for strategy – as found in the ACT Sales & Marketing Work Group’s Phase One Report that led to this research.)
2. Agents believe technology should be used to increase the personal service the firm offers a client. These agents advocate high tech and high touch. There still is no replacement for picking up the phone. In addition, the technology enables more sales activity with prospects and clients.
3. Referrals from clients and “centers of influence” within the community, generated by the agency’s relationships and personal service, continue to be just as important in a high-tech world, maybe more so.
4. Regular sales meetings (typically weekly) are extremely important to assess the agency’s suspect-prospect-client pipeline inventory, to determine the priority risks to target, to upgrade coverages on renewal, to keep producers focused, and to facilitate the sales management process.
5. Use technology to record and share the “drivers” for a particular prospect or client.
6. Agencies should fully use the software tools they already have to enhance the sales and marketing process.
7. When it comes to technology, simple solutions are often the ones that get implemented.
8. Marketing and sales should not be handled as point-in-time projects but instead need to become ongoing and a core part of the agency culture. Keeping the business development pipeline full needs the constant attention of the agency’s sales management team. The process of suspect development, prospect target management and effective client acquisition need to become second nature to agency management.

## **III. Marketing**

### **Agency websites:**

Agency websites are helpful to attract prospects moving into the area or to get referrals from other agents. Specialized websites, as well as electronic newsletters, can showcase an agency’s specialty and help the agency create a presence in that field. Agents are increasingly setting up co-branded websites with organizations that can draw prospects from a particular field or with particular interests. Some agents are able to close sales online. Services exist to help agents develop and market their websites on the Internet (e.g., Afni Insurance Services, Gorilla Marketing). It is very important for the agency receptionist and staff to be aware of these online capabilities and to be organized to follow up on the leads and other activities generated from these capabilities.

**Using website information:**

By reviewing industry association and individual client websites, producers can become highly knowledgeable about the prospect's business and create the perception that they know more about the prospect's business than his or her current agent.

**Internet and search engines:**

These are helpful to get leads for a certain industry or to find out more about a "suspect", including contact information. Examples of helpful search engines include:

- Trade associations
- Companies that list their business partners
- State-run Workers Comp Councils
- Census information sites
- Department of Transportation sites
- State-run list of registered contractors
- Local/state tax assessors' sites (some include digital photos of homes)
- U.S. Post Office online
- Federal registry of benefit plans (e.g., [www.freeERISA.com](http://www.freeERISA.com))
- Online Yellow Pages
- Corporate websites.

Note that moving the information from these sites into other applications for managing "suspects" and "prospects" may require keying the individuals' information into those applications.

**Lead generation:**

Agents are looking for cost-effective lead generation web services. There are many services, including D&B, Bressers, eSemc.com, Dunn Marketing, InfoUSA, DCM, National Marketing Services, Tower Publishing, and individual carriers. Can the agency management system or third-party application the agency uses import the leads from the service into its prospecting system? Agents are also using call centers from carriers or other third-parties to generate leads (e.g., National Marketing).

**Online sources:**

Some agents use sources of workers compensation data (including experience modifications, class codes, and payrolls) to identify prospects. Examples include Datalister, Qmod.com.

**Agency management systems:**

These systems do search reports for cross-selling purposes. Query databases, such as Microsoft Sequel Server, have wide flexibility to search for risks having particular characteristics, provided the data exists in the database. Customized queries and reports can be generated by the agency and do not require programming by the vendor. Third-party software is sometimes used to enhance the generation of reports (e.g., Crystal Reports, R & R Reports). Some management systems provide the capability of automatically preparing and printing prospecting letters in Word. Some agents go through the commercial lines renewal lists at their sales meetings to identify opportunities to add coverages.

**Carrier market analysis:**

It would be very beneficial for carriers to provide an “appetite” guide for their agents on the website with the type of risks they are going after and are winning with, such as a “Hit List of the Month.” Agents would like to see more market analysis information from their carriers.

**Prospect & Customer contact software:**

1. Agency management systems, as well as third-party software such as ASP SaleSource and MarTech, can help agents run multiple, scheduled marketing campaigns. Automation can assist the agency greatly in keeping track of the myriad steps and contacts required for multiple campaigns.
2. Afni Insurance Services offers an electronic newsletter/survey tool that agents use to educate customers for a cross-sell.
3. CSR/24 from Afni offers customer self-service options for agents.
4. Agents are using software, such as Zywave and Compliance Check, that help an agency and/or its commercial accounts stay current on OSHA, employee handbooks and other risk-management issues. ForMyBenefits.com provides similar types of compliance information for benefits risks. The software provides customized e-mails and online material that the agent or client can tailor for their use and provide to prospects and clients. Sometimes the software is limited to certain early-adopter agents in a geographic area.

**IV. Sales****Agency management systems:**

1. Some have prospect handling modules, which can be customized, and these modules trigger activities to remind producers of contacts that must be made. Some producers, however, do not use the agency management system. This varies by agency.
2. Agency management systems should take their current sales capabilities and make them more producer friendly by creating sales “dashboards” that draw all of the capabilities together in an easy to use and “dynamic” format where the information is always available without the need to go through the procedures to run reports. Information should be available in a graphical format as well as in spreadsheets. There should be bells and whistles, and some “fun” features that will attract producers to use these systems.
3. Some agency management systems give the producer a high view of the client’s policies in-force whenever the producer opens up a client, which facilitates cross-selling conversations.
4. Some agency management systems are designed to take risks from the “suspect” to the “prospect” stage and then to the “client” stage. The information gathered at the prospect stage (unique customer info, underwriting info) can be pushed to marketing history and used in the future to generate an application to a new

carrier, even though this information is not part of the carrier's download info which is kept in the client portion of the database.

5. Agents would like their prospecting programs to be more free flowing and capable of retaining more personal information.
6. Agents would like their system to put the entire agency on the same "sales" page, where a centralized database provides meaningful pipeline analytics, there is a disciplined organization-wide sales methodology and approach, and sales information is always available dynamically and in graphical form.
7. Some agents use their agency management systems to manage and generate sales campaign letters and proposals. Agencies can set a number of preset marketing plans geared for different kinds of risks. Tools, such as the Dyno Labelmaker, can create a big convenience for the agency staff to generate the labels for a small number of letters. Some agency management systems can generate e-mail campaigns, or will in 2005.
8. Some agencies generate sample customized data reports for commercial lines prospects as a value-add to assist in the sales process. An example is where the client needs to manage a broad array of claims.
9. Agents want comparative rating tools that eliminate multiple data entry in order to place risks efficiently. These tools can be part of the agency management system or a third-party tool that integrates with the agency management system. Re-entry of data multiple times into individual carrier websites is very inefficient and takes away time that could be used for client contacts and sales.
10. Agency management systems have submission-tracking modules which also generate carrier specific hit ratios and risk appetites.
11. Some agency management systems can facilitate the use of telemarketing scripts to assist agency employees in cross selling, qualifying prospects and selling new risks.

**Other software and services:**

1. Some producers use third-party services to manage their contacts and sales campaigns, such as ACT, Goldmine, ASP SaleSource, Zywave, NovaStar, Esemc.com, and Gorilla Marketing. Producers can access the enterprise version of these tools from anywhere, and the agency staff or telemarketers can add appointments to many of these tools to prompt the producers in the field. Sometimes it is easier to import lists into these services, and some also provide leads. Agents sometimes use these products to manage benefits contacts that may not fit as well in the agency management system. ASP SaleSource can manage outbound sales for commercial, personal, benefits, bonds, life, and financial services.
2. Some agents are generating personal lines, benefits, and financial services prospects by setting up work-site marketing arrangements for employees. Software has been designed to manage these types of programs, including the calculation of the appropriate employee deductions as well as the generation of the necessary employee forms and notices, bills to the employer, and account currents to the carriers (e.g., Agency Revenue Tools).

3. Other agents use Outlook lists, calendars, and tasks to manage their sales activities because Outlook synchronizes with the smart phones and PDAs they are using in the field. Voice mails can also be integrated to Outlook. One agency has a customized piece of CRM software attached to Outlook that runs the agency's value-added services – a “mail-visit-phone call” program.
4. Web services can be a big help to agents in ascertaining the technical information needed for particular risks, such as fire classifications, flood maps, station distance, codes, loss control information, etc. Examples include Risk Meter, nuServe and ISO Online.
5. Some agents use commercial lines credit scores to identify a better caliber of risk.
6. Agents use services to provide underwriting and submission guidelines, SIC codes, and questions to ask for particular types of risks. This information can then be used to generate impressive proposals. Examples include nuServe, PS4, DataQuick, Sixth Sense, Rough Notes, Sage, ISO online, and Silver Plume. Larkspur data reporting may be used for benefits related information, such as the Form 5500s. ForMyBenefits.com also provides agents with benefits related information. Zywave can help agents provide their clients with online human resource department information.
7. Agents can use their agency management systems to generate proposals, but sometimes they want to use third-party proposal generators (e.g., PS4, AB Solutions, or Zywave (benefits)).
8. Some agents use company service centers for outbound calling. The companies can run credit scores on suspected leads and pass on warm prospects to the agency.

**Field options:**

1. Smart phones and PDAs are becoming very important to producers with their contact lists, calendar info (for prospect follow up), and e-mail capability. These tools should synchronize automatically with the Outlook portion of their agency management system and record the actions taken on the client record. Blackberries are a real trend, allowing producers to get e-mail, including attachments, and respond anywhere.
2. Phone photo capabilities that can be e-mailed are also increasingly being used in the field by producers. Cell phones are an absolutely indispensable part of business – for sales, but also for emergencies after hours.
3. Producers are using laptops to access the office when off site. Laptops are also very useful in making PowerPoint presentations to prospects. Some are also using laptops to fill out applications off site, but they are still struggling with the need to obtain “wet” signatures. Some agents have started using tablet PCs which feature improved handwriting and voice recognition. The use of smart phones and PDAs seems to be a stronger trend for producers, however.
4. Agency management system software can be taken on laptops – or, in some cases, PDAs.

## **V. Sales Management**

### **Agency management systems:**

1. Some agency principals monitor the agency management system's "open activities" to ascertain whether producers are following up with prospects. These managers have set up sales processes in their prospect handling modules which trigger the activities for their producers.
2. Managers would like a dynamic view of their overall sales pipeline (numbers of risks at each stage of the process, marketing analysis reports, cross sell reports, exception reports by producer (to indicate who is behind in their follow ups). Some agency management systems can do this, or will in 2005.
3. Agency management systems can be used to specify for producers the risk characteristics the agency is targeting. The agency can also establish the expected sales process for producers to follow for particular types of risks, so that activities are automatically generated at the appropriate intervals.

### **Other:**

1. Some agents currently ask producers to record prospect activity and new sales on an online Excel spreadsheet or on Lotus Notes on the agency's Intranet because it can be viewed immediately without the need to generate reports.
2. ASP SaleSource can generate exception reports for the sales manager if a producer isn't following up in a certain area.
3. Internet-based sales training programs are becoming available to agents. (e.g., Big "T" Virtual University (Richardson Quick Skills) and Apex)

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