
PROFESSIONAL

Insurance Agents

Outsourcing e-mail gives brokers a competitive edge

By Joe Merces

A good broker knows that developing strong professional relationships is a crucial component in increasing business. One challenge many brokers are facing is how to reach out to prospective clients and develop lasting relationships while maintaining their existing client base. A few innovative insurance agents have found the solution in e-mail marketing.

Brokers can differentiate themselves via e-mail campaigns, by delivering their customers timely, highly targeted information such as rate changes, open enrollment announcements, plan updates, new legislation changes, etc. Combined face-to-face meetings, the phone and targeted direct mail, regular and timely value-added e-mails can have a huge impact in cementing productive client relationships and ensuring client loyalty. Time is money. Many agents cannot sit at a computer all day personalizing each e-mail message and distributing them to clients or potential customers. That's where an outsourced e-mail provider comes in.

Outsourced e-mail providers that possess an array of enhanced e-mail management solutions are increasingly enabling innovative brokers to stay ahead of their competitors at relatively low cost. By outsourcing the process of distributing and receiving high volumes of e-mail, companies have immediate access to efficient, secure and creative e-mail capabilities, without stretching their internal technological resources and employees' time.

Ahead of the competition

Through outsourcing, insurance agents can quickly and reliably distribute information to hundreds or thousands of targeted recipients by using easy to implement e-mail management solutions that operate on powerful and sophisticated delivery networks. E-mail management solutions allow an agent to customize each message with the recipient's name or other text, if so desired. In addition, costs also can be considerably reduced because no software

or hardware installations are required, and with some providers, you only pay on a per-usage basis for e-mails that are delivered to the recipient (i.e., the message distributor would not be charged for returned e-mails, wrong addresses, etc.). There are many reasons why you should consider outsourcing your e-mail communications.

Cost effective. the cost for sending out an e-message is significantly less when compared to the time and expense of using traditional mail to deliver time sensitive information. An outsourcer is able to offer customers low prices—literally pennies per message—because they distribute hundreds or thousands of e-messages each day.

Creative, dynamic messages. In today's technological world, it is not enough to merely send text messages to your targets. E-mails should be aesthetically pleasing, with graphics, Web links, logos, etc. Some outsourced providers have special downloadable software that allows users to develop dynamic HTML messages easily and effectively. If your recipients can't read HTML, the provider can send the message in parts, enabling the recipient only to see the portion his or her computer is configured to read.

Forms to the masses. Some e-mail management outsourcers are particularly savvy to insurance industry needs and have designed products specifically for businesses that send out numerous forms. Currently there are services available that allow a broker to create HTML forms that contain individualized pre-populated fields, such as the recipient's name, address, identifying code and agent name. This is a simple way for agents to keep their customer information updated, and since most of the information is already completed, an easy way to get your customer to return it.

Inbound response management. The provider manages the delivery and subsequent influx of responses for you and keeps your lists clean, sending you details of all bouncebacks and bad addresses, and requests to be removed from lists. valid responses from interested parties are forwarded to an e-mail address you supply.

This alleviates the strain on your internal e-mail system and allows you to handle regular incoming e-mails or customer requests during peak times.

Detailed reports. Some providers can embed individualized Web links into your messages so the sender can track who receives your messages and to what information they linked to. This knowledge gives you a direct advantage over your competition presently using in-house e-mail systems or direct mail. You already know who your best targets are before you follow up with anyone. This feature gives a broker a great way to gauge what customers and potential customers are interested in learning more about, so you know how to target them in the future.

Test messages. Some companies are sending out a series of e-mails as 'test messages' to target-specific audiences, and then distributing the on that generates the best responses to a larger list. Because it's all done via the Internet and e-mail, companies can send out their test e-mail, obtain the results, and then e-mail a targeted

marketing pitch to a larger audience all within 24 hours. Campaigns can be run very quickly, going from concept to test messages, to delivery to qualified responses in just a few days.

Using e-mail marketing to supplement existing marketing and customer relations efforts keeps you ahead of the competition. By opting to outsource the delivery of information to electronic messaging providers, brokers can enhance customer loyalty and satisfaction gain customers and increase efficiency without incurring extra costs.

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