



## SAM FLEMING

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# Technology can enhance customer engagement

**How does an agent become a reliable adviser with hundreds, if not thousands, of clients to manage? Having relied on tried-and-true methods of selling insurance to clients and small- to mid-sized businesses, professional insurance agents and their carriers are increasingly seeking ways to connect effectively with people in a digital way, establishing authentic relationships and earning the right to advise their clients.**

While some agents are beginning to take advantage of newly available insurance technology, many are still stuck in their old ways, struggling to keep up and grow their agencies. As a result, agents are losing market share to direct insurance marketers that are taking advantage of emerging technologies that combine new forms of digitally supplemented marketing communications; artificial intelligence technology; and marketing with valuable data insights.

Now independent agents are finding that the one-size-fits-all approach (i.e., follow-up phone calls) to communicating with clients in today's digital age is just no longer working. Consumers are demanding individualized communications that take into account their personal preferences. As millennials replace baby boomers, independent agents will have to step up to more well-organized and planned methods of communicating such as direct mail, texting, social media and other digital channels to create a true "omnichannel experience."

To be successful in the changing environment, agents must first use their communication strategies to earn the right to cross-sell or do business with clients in a cadence that is relevant and timely—still using, email, text, direct mail and phone calling, but in a way that suits each customer's preferred channel of communication.

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While human interaction by phone, email and text is essential to success in the insurance business, the communication must be performed in an authentic, non-contrived manner to generate a competitive advantage for agents. The task of communicating authentically with a large book of business in today's market is simply not possible using the old, often haphazard methods of phone calling and face-to-face meetings. The practice of making phone calls and sending emails and newsletters that often bear little relevance to the individual provides little benefit to the agent while increasing the noise and disruption perceived by the client.

The solution for independent agents is to adopt a practice of continuous engagement to earn the right—to not just sell, but service customers' business. This use of data to drive connection provides the agents the opportunity to be relevant and in touch with clients. It levels the playing field, allowing them competitive advantage in the marketplace.

Such technology should be specific to the insurance industry as opposed to broad-based customer-relationship management tools, which, while good for maintaining a customer record and setting up reminders, do little to expand the capacity for quality and frequency of meaningful interaction. At the velocity

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and volume of the insurance industry today, technology must be applied to empower agents with marketing tools that enable customer relationship management with hundreds of customers, creating agents who are continually earning the role of reliable adviser.

Traditional CRM applications alone do not satisfy the insurance industry's frequency and velocity of communication necessary to facilitate the reliable adviser relationship. It is the act of initiating communications that enables producers to build the role of reliable adviser, which is best accomplished by automating communications and marketing with their customers—setting up each customer on a sequential marketing plan that is relevant, timely and consistent.

## Foster the relationship

Particularly useful applications available in today's systems include lead filtering and AI activity scheduling, which automates conversation on issues of greatest importance to the agent and the customer.

As the number of leads increases, technology can help agents respond quickly to high quality leads, resulting in quoted and closed business. Technology can feed qualified leads to the producer's mobile phone within three seconds resulting in that agent becoming the first point of contact for a prospect providing valuable guidance and information. That is how reliable adviser relationships begin.

In addition, agents should profit from AI models that can alert activity-scheduling systems to enable marketing automation—sending email, direct mail or even schedule calls based on highest probability of success. Examples of such events can be the initiation of a claim, a policy price increase, achieving a birthday threshold or the sale of a home. Becoming a reliable adviser requires that you connect with your audience. AI could be your greatest ally in this endeavor.

## Better manage client relationships

To better manage their client relationships, professional insurance agents and their marketers should consider the following tips.

### **Think “relevancy” in your communications with customers and prospects.**

Take the time to identify what is important to your customer. For example, would your high-asset customers be interested in an umbrella policy? When you take the time to identify specific information about your customers, you can lead conversations they will find relevant. Ask yourself, if I were to receive this information, would I find it valuable.

**Look at your tool set and expect more of it.** Do your tools enable disciplined communications plans for every customer? Are all your customers hearing from you? Are no quotes left behind? If your tool set isn't enabling relevant, timely marketing can it be set up to do so?

**Buy technology that is specific to the insurance industry.** Generic CRMs don't address the volume and velocity of activity that occurs in the insurance space. Are your tools working for the processes and practices that are insurance specific? For instance, there are specific practices that can be built around the

“quote-not-taken” follow up. Is your tool maximizing your opportunity? What about cross-sell opportunities? If you can't leverage your existing technology tools to serve your insurance agency, what industry specific tools are available?

### **Seek out CRM at agency management systems and digital marketing people within your industry.**

Learn from your peers who have established best practices and best utilize this technology and these tools. What are others doing to market to their audiences successfully? The most successful agents have established themselves as reliable advisers for their customers. How have they marketed themselves to build those relationships?

### **When shopping for software, don't settle for just lead acquisition tools.**

Look for “automated processes” and “continuous engagement” software that cover the entire customer experience. It's not just the lead acquisition, but how you follow up on it. Your technology tools should guide and streamline your marketing communications, optimizing the entire sales process.

### **Automate your AMS or CRM and become more efficient in how you find and acquire new customers.**

Does your AMS/CRM give you the ability to use insurance specific integrated lead sources? Can your AMS or CRM partner assist with providing insurance specific leads—internet leads, third-party list providers, industry specific vertical lists, etc.? Does it provide a mechanism for list follow up? ■

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