

Digital Strategies are Key to Winning in Today's Personal Lines Market

By: *Doug Coombs*

After 15 months of lockdowns and restricted access to retail stores and restaurants, the growth of online shopping has both expanded and accelerated. Now, as we enter the summer of 2021 — more dependent than ever on technology — whether they're video conferencing, visiting a doctor or buying groceries. While some will return to brick-and-mortar shopping, most experts believe this greater reliance on online sales will be permanent.

We can expect similar changes to apply to personal lines insurance. The auto market, which is more commoditized than ever, is a good example. Comparative rating systems offer a gateway to compare coverage and costs and buy insurance instantly from a website or mobile device. In addition, with short-term or shared auto ownership increasing, clients are looking for flexible options like usage-based auto insurance.

Independent insurance agents who align with and embrace these consumer

changes — adding digital technology to their agency and simplifying client interactions — will find they can also streamline their sales and marketing and improve their operational efficiency.

Many independent agents are well on their way already, integrating mobile and digital communication strategies, whether it's mobile apps, video conferencing or texting with clients. In doing so, they are engaging with clientele the way the clients like it best — at their convenience. As a result, these agencies are creating momentum in personal lines sales to strengthen their books of business.

Being Digital

Studies have shown that those who adopt digital strategies grow faster than those who don't. For example, Liberty Mutual's "Rise of the Digital Insurance Agency" report recently found that "agencies that are high digital adopters tend to grow faster than those that are low adopters. Year-over-year, low digital

adopters grew revenue 7.4% while high digital adopters grew 12% — equating to a more than 60% higher growth rate for highly digital agencies."

According to the report, "High digital adopters are reaching a broader client base, increasing the geographic area in which they acquire new clients." As a result, high digital adopters increase their client base by 47%, while low digital adopters increase their client base by 12%.

It's vital to start with a strong foundation. A quality agency management system and customer relationship management software are crucial to running an independent agency efficiently in conjunction with the many digital customer engagement tools. Together, these tools help the independent agency automate its workflow with more online channels and features that provide faster response time.

Enthusiastic adopters of technology will move beyond a simple website, email

and phone, and add new tools that allow clients to engage with the agency at their convenience:

- A self-service client portal lets consumers securely access policy information, pay bills, get insurance ID cards, request coverage changes and more.
- A mobile app provides agencies with a tool to broadcast messages to all clients or a select group, streamline business transactions, provide access to policy information 24/7 and more.
- Video call technology saves consumers a trip to your office and is a fast solution for busy clients. Liberty Mutual's report recommends video quotes and policy reviews as one of the seven "revenue-driving digital capabilities" for independent agents.
- Adding business text capability (SMS) saves time and adds convenience for clients and prospects who seek answers in real-time. In addition, adding text message marketing to a marketing strategy will enable agencies to communicate offers directly with clients and prospects.

- Providing customer service through web-chat software, a chatbot and live chat is helpful to answer clients' questions after hours. Plus, after collecting basic information, these tools can connect clients to a live agent.
- Having a mobile-ready website with informative content and ongoing assistance is integral to keeping clients and prospects engaged with your agency.

The Role of Analytics

A recent Travelers article stated, "simply having a website is not enough, you must regularly analyze, update and maintain it as your services, personnel and technology advance to provide a seamless experience to your site visitors, customers and prospects."

Regularly reviewing website analytics will help you understand what is working and what isn't. Google Analytics is a free program for real-time website analysis allowing businesses to look at their website traffic and measure whether the content is engaging readers.

Making a long-term content plan for both the agency website and its social media channels is key to keeping your audiences coming back.

Travelers also noted, "Google My Business empowers local businesses to develop online profiles that appear within web browser search results and via searches on Google Maps. By claiming your business and developing a profile, you can easily get your contact information in front of local searchers as well as use the system to develop an online review program."

Search engine optimization (SEO) strategies help independent agencies stay at the top of search engines when consumers search for insurance. To improve your search performance and position your agency for success, make sure you go beyond general industry terms to target relevant, local keyword searches.

Using the technology that suits simple transactions and transparency will help the independent agency and its clientele grow. Continuing to make it easy for clients and prospects to engage the agency at their convenience will strengthen the business and promote growth now and in the future. ■

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