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An Agent's Lifeline: Choosing Your Agency Management System

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In today's market, most independent insurance agents recognize their agency management system is the point of truth for their business. A central place to house an agency's customer and policy commission data that, if managed correctly, will provide accurate, up-to-date information that allows them to maintain and grow their businesses. Functionally, agents also know an effective management system will streamline servicing operations throughout an agency, from scheduling client appointments to marketing and book rolls. Those few agents still operating without an effective management system are lacking a crucial tool in running a successful agency.

Unfortunately, many independent agents find their agency management systems are not the North Star they expect. I often meet agents through SIAA who tell me about the capabilities they wish their management system had. What they don't know is that their current agency management system may already have the capabilities they are looking for, they just don't know where to find them.

Too many agents are willing to hop from one agency management system to another, without exploring how they can better use the tools already in their hands. The process of implementing an entirely new system can be costly and much more disruptive than improving how your agency is using its current management system. Still, the question is, how can agents be sure they are choosing the best system for their business?

Finding the Right Fit for Your Agency

The term agency management system is somewhat generic, and most of the options on the market have similar capabilities at varying levels and price points. Choosing the right tool for a particular agency will be an individual decision dependent on its size, workflow, employee needs, budgets and more. Utilize the following steps when considering agency management system options:

- **Understand your needs:** One agency's technology needs will be different than those of the agency right down the street. Agents

should evaluate what they require from their management system including implementation capabilities with other technology and functionality. While budgets will be a consideration, agents should think about value over costs. The cheapest options on the market might offer limited capabilities or resources that defeat the purpose of an agency's management system investment altogether. Taking some time to understand what your agency requires from its management system will help agents find the balance between value and cost, without sacrificing functionality.

- **Do your research:** Developing a list of realistic management system options will help agents sift through marketing jargon and gain an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the systems currently on the market. Research can unveil factors such as a tool's ability to integrate with an agency's existing technology or how much an agency will have to invest to meet their needs. As agents work to narrow

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down their management system options, they may also uncover functionalities they had not previously considered.

- **Consult your community:** An agent's community both in their local area and throughout the greater industry will be a crucial resource in finding the best fit for their operations. Feedback from such individuals might be the only opportunity an agent has to receive both the pros and cons of a tool without marketing speak. Peer networks, such as SIAA, and local working groups can be fantastic resources to ask questions and meet with other local agents.

Evaluating Your Agency Management System

Whether an agency has just implemented a new management system or is using the same one they have had for a few years, agents should always be evaluating the efficacy of the tool. Consider the following when evaluating your agency management system:

- **Developing a process:** Technol-

ogy is nothing without process. Agents implementing an agency management system must develop plans for how the tool will integrate into their workflow, how team members will be expected to input data, employee training and more. Many vendors of agency management systems offer resources to help implement their system, train agency teams and provide best practices that can aid process development and smooth transitions.

- **Measure:** On a regular basis, agents should ask themselves questions such as what typical requests they are receiving, how quickly can they service a client, can they answer questions about their client's policy, and can they clearly show the commissions and revenue coming into their agency? Such questions will help an agent evaluate if there is an issue with an agency's processes or if they should reconsider their agency management system altogether. It is important to remember, however, that implementing an entirely new system can be costly and time-

consuming. Agents should make certain their existing management system cannot provide a solution to the agency's challenges.

Beyond your team and the client and industry relationships an agency has, the agency management system can be a true lifeline for your business. Taking the time to ensure your agency's investment in a management system is worthwhile can help not only maintain and grow the agency but establish history and data that can bring even further value to your clients. ■



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