

Re-thinking Communications: A Guide for Insurance Agencies



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At the heart of an insurance agency is customer service. But with 65% of those polled saying their agents provide “below average” customer service, it’s clear the insurance industry needs to look for every advantage when it comes to communications with customers. Many agents, recognizing that the telephone is the lifeline to their businesses, are improving their communications systems.

A modern telephone system takes an agency’s communications to a whole new level. It not only improves customer service, but agent productivity and mobility; and it reduces costs. Simply put, it helps you work smarter.

To do all this, a telephone system doesn’t have to cost a lot or demand lots of technical expertise. It does require agencies to carefully consider their options when it comes to technologies and service providers. But when properly envisioned, installed and employed, a modern phone system positions an insurance agency for increased productivity as well as business growth.



Challenges Facing Insurance Agencies

Increasing Productivity

For an insurance agency, business growth depends on agents staying productive. So, ensuring they are managing their time wisely is critical. A modern communications system lets agencies measure important metrics like call volumes, talk time, and missed calls. It gives agencies the data they need to make important business decisions about staffing and training. In the office or on the go, agents can keep track of their offices' productivity in real time. They can also generate reports to examine how their agents can be more productive.

Improving Customer Service

The most important way to retain a customer or to grow referral business is simple: excellent customer service. Agencies are constantly being rated based on their ability to quickly respond to customer policy questions, help with claims issues, and build relationships with customers.

An up-to-date communications systems means agencies:

- **Never miss a customer call**
- **Are better prepared with CRM integration**
- **Route customers to the right employee quickly**
- **Can monitor calls for quality assurance and training**

Challenges Facing Insurance Agencies

Improving Collaboration

The days of getting up to go talk to someone or waiting for return emails or voicemails are a thing of the past. Agencies can improve the way they communicate with everyone in the office through unified communications. With Unified Communications, agents can transfer calls, share screens, send email and instant messages, and access applications and data seamlessly, regardless of where they are located. Voice, data and conferencing all are managed from the agent's desktop, which is accessible through laptops and a range of mobile devices.



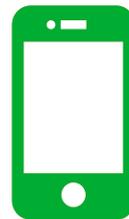
Challenges Facing Insurance Agencies

Leveraging Mobility

Work is definitely no longer a location; and modern communications systems reflect that reality. With them agents can easily manage their phone settings to stay connected with customers and prospects whether they're in the office or on the go. Set a phone number to ring a cell phone, an office phone, at home, or all of them at the same time. Now customers need just a single phone number or extension to stay in touch.

Agents also can monitor the productivity of an office even when they're away. The days of losing visibility to an agency when you're traveling are thankfully behind us. Remote workers, too, stay connected to the agents in the office and agency owners can monitor their productivity as well.

- **Customers can always reach agents**
- **Traveling agents stay connected to the office**
- **Agency can search for qualified employees outside local area, if necessary**



Challenges Facing Insurance Agencies

Systems Integration

Tracking every customer interaction is critical to an insurance agency. Understanding the policy history, call history, and personal notes and preferences of the insured is key to providing an optimal customer experience. Companies make large investments in software to manage and track every client-facing interaction, and a modern communications system integrates phones and other systems.

CRM software integration with the phone system helps keep agents prepared for every customer call. Customer interactions are more efficient, boosting the number of calls agents can make in a day.



- **Better customer management**
- **Greater efficiencies**
- **Improved visibility**
- **Personal touch**

Challenges Facing Insurance Agencies

Foresting Business Growth

A phone system shouldn't get in the way of a business' ability to grow. It should be flexible, easy to maintain, and easily adaptable to the needs of an expanding business. Agents should be able to add new employees to the system in minutes or open a new location and have the phone system up and running the same day. Employing the latest telecommunications technology keeps agencies ahead of the competition. Trying to compete in today's market with a regular telephone line is simply not good business.



Considering Options: Traditional phone service vs. VoIP

For many agencies looking to modernize their communications systems, the first decision is between a traditional phone service and one based on newer Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology.

Traditional Telephone Service

A traditional telephone solution uses the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN), which gives each call its own private bandwidth pipe from end to end. It's kind of like someone giving you a private two lane road whenever you and a friend want to drive somewhere. It's wonderful, but there's a lot of unused space in front and behind. And while this solution is the most reliable, it is also more expensive.



Considering Options: VoIP Features

Voice Over IP

VoIP wraps voice transmissions in data packets for transmission over the Internet, so calls share bandwidth with other data moving on the network. This makes VoIP a more efficient way of calling, and as a result, VoIP solutions are usually less expensive than traditional phone lines.

VoIP-based services are usually provided for a flat monthly fee that virtually eliminates long-distance charges. Saving money is the most popular reason most businesses give when they make the switch to a VoIP system, but plenty make the move to take advantage of its many advanced features. Some examples:

Unified Messaging(UM) - Merges voicemail, email, and fax into one simple solution. Voicemail is converted to email and can be “read” through the audio on a computer and the user can call back selected parties in any order. Users can also have the voicemail translated into text and sent as an email or even a text message to their smartphones.

Softphone applications - Allow users to treat their computer as a phone handset. With a softphone on their computers, users can “click to call” contacts and seamlessly transfer calls from a computer to a cell phone with one click.

Device/phone number mobility - Users can take their office number to another office or location using a softphone (voice application that runs on a computer) or VoIP handset. This allows them to not only take all of their preferences with them, it also helps the business save cell phone minutes.

Find me/Follow me - Extensions can be set to ring a desk phone two times then attempt to reach them on their cell phone, home phone, or ring all phones at once.

Considering Options: VoIP's Role in Unified Communications

VoIP technology has ushered in a new way of thinking about workplace efficiency through unified communications. Voice, data and conferencing are all managed on a single IT infrastructure that is accessible via in-office equipment, laptops, and a range of mobile devices.

In evaluating UC's potential impact on your agency, consider this: Your agency is only making money when your agents are staying productive, selling and servicing customers. Using unified communication applications like Fidelity's Heads Up Display (HUD) can save your agents two hours a week in lost time. That's two hours they can put back into selling and growing the business.



Considering Options: Success Stories

Improved Communications Credited in Agency Expansion

Among the insurance agencies embracing the contact center concept is ProVest Insurance Group, an Allstate Insurance Company affiliate based in North Carolina.

“The challenge insurance agencies face is communications with the staff and knowing what the staff is doing throughout the day,” says ProVest owner Jay Adkins, who installed a unified communications system from Fidelity. “It doesn’t matter how big you are or where you’re located. Being able to see what’s going on from your office, in real time, all the time, has just made a huge change in the way that I do business.”

“I believe technology is the lifeblood of this business. We do everything through the Internet and through the phone. The phone system can make or break you.”

-- Jay Adkins,
ProVest Insurance Group

Adkins said that without his improved phone system, he would not have been able to expand his business to Texas and Florida. “The system can scale seamlessly as the business expands,” he said, “and the features have allowed my staff and me to be completely mobile.”

Considering Options: Success Stories

Respected Agent Says Features Led Her to Switch to VoIP

Lisa Faina built one of her company's most recognized agencies relying on traditional telephone service from a local provider. But, she says, "Regular analog lines don't offer any of the features I rely on today." Also lacking was integration with her agency's CRM system.

"Integrating with our customer relationship system, eAgent, has been the greatest benefit of our Fonality phone system," Faina said. Now, she says, "When a call comes into our office, a screen pops up instantly displaying the customer's history, contact information, any special notes or issues about the customer."

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Faina Insurance Agency

"The ability to see a simple reminder note about how to pronounce a customer's last name can go a long way to getting a conversation off to the right start. Before, we may not have had that information in time and customers get frustrated when they have to repeat their name multiple times. First impressions go so far in our interactions with customers and being prepared with the smallest details is so important."

Considering Options: Success Stories

Hurricane Focuses Agent on Reliability and Features

Before switching to Fonality, Florida property and casualty agent Mike Burke relied on another VoIP provider who overpromised and under delivered. After three months, the true test came with the arrival of a hurricane. For a week his office had no power, phone service, and hundreds of customers were left trying to reach their trusted agents with no success. “We learned through this unfortunate situation, the service we were promised was not living up to the sell. If our phones are not working and we can’t talk to customers – we can’t do business.”

Looking for a replacement phone system, Burke was blown away with the additional communication and reporting features offered in addition to the reliable voice service.

“I travel extensively, and being out of the office makes it difficult to keep an eye on the productivity of my employees -- before I had Fonality,” says Burke. “The call reporting features allow me to review the number of inbound and outbound phone calls, length of calls, dropped or abandoned calls, how quickly calls were answered – all critical to understanding the productivity of my office.”



Our office went from a 6% average missed call rate in one month to below 1% average for over 6 months.



Considering Options: Hosted and On Premise

Which Deployment Model is Right for You?

Choosing a new communications system means making a decision between hosted and on-premise solutions. Here are some of details on each:

Hosted

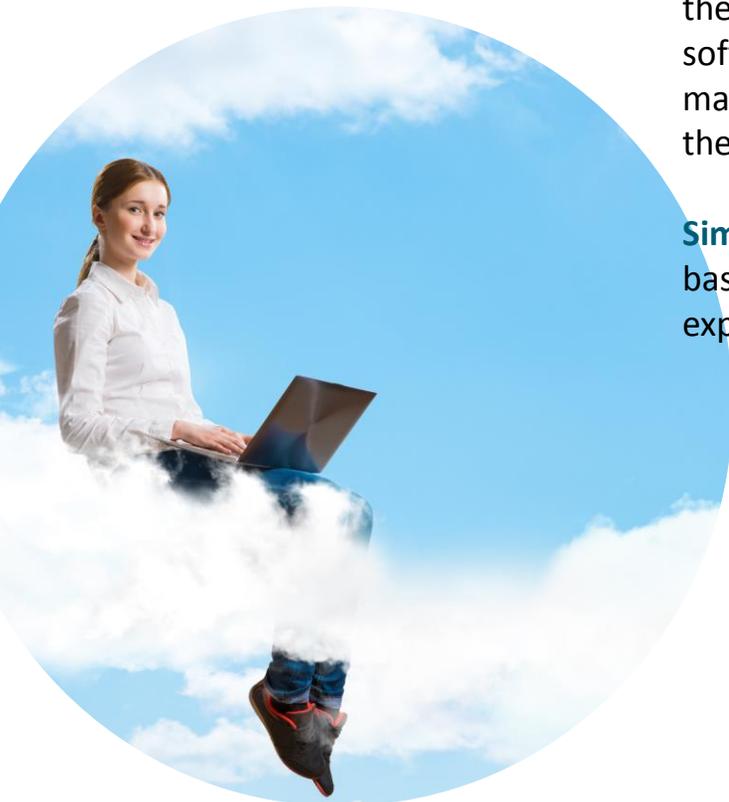
In a hosted or cloud-based service, the hardware and software are owned, managed, and operated by the provider. Service is accessed using the Internet.

Some benefits:

Quick set up - New users can be added in minutes, new locations in several hours.

Reduced cost - Hosted services eliminate the need to purchase equipment and software, and don't include the maintenance contracts that go along with them.

Simplicity - Because everything is web-based, no specialized training or operational expertise is required.



Considering Options: Hosted and On Premise

On-Premise

For larger agencies or those with multiple locations, an on-premise solution often is the better solution. Benefits of an on-premise solution include:

Voice technology options - The system can support both VoIP and analog voice services.

Ability to link multiple offices - The system can support multiple offices and the employees in them as well as telecommuters and remote workers.

Compatible with existing carrier contracts - There is no need to cancel and reorder service from your existing communications carrier.

Enhanced reliability - An on-premise solution can failover to analog services the instant that a VoIP link becomes unavailable.



Considering Options: Choosing a Provider

Make Certain Your Solution Fits Your Needs

When choosing a communications systems provider, consider this: Some companies that are quick to emphasize their low cost can offer only hosted solutions, while some larger providers tout their enterprise level solutions available only on-premise.

Rather than make that choice, why not look for a provider that can offer both? Fonality does, and is uniquely positioned to help agencies determine which approach is best for them. Fonality can take your agency's communications to a whole new level, improving customer service, agent productivity, mobility, and reducing costs. Fonality helps you work smarter not harder. If you're interested in increasing customer retention and referrals and saving time and money, Fonality has the tools to help. Learn more visiting www.fonality.com or calling 1-888-768-3770.

Fonality provides business phone systems and contact center solutions designed exclusively for small and midsize businesses. Fonality is the only provider that can deliver the same user experience in the cloud and on-premise, with innovative features that help small businesses save time, communicate more efficiently and reduce costs. For more information, visit www.Fonality.com or call 877-FONALITY.