



## A Producer's Rapport

**RELATIONSHIP** building is a non-stop affair. Keeping oneself in front of clients and prospects should be a top priority for all producers.

A mentor years ago taught me some simple ways to do that. Over the years, I have followed his formula for success and added a few twists along the way. I now stay in contact with my 1,000-plus clients regularly. Technology has helped make the task a simple process.

It is impossible for me to visit personally the vast majority of my clients quarterly. There simply is not enough time. To make up for this deficit, my agency sends out a quarterly newsletter. This newsletter, named *The Quarterly Rapport*, contains articles from our producers, timely industry news, and other items of interest. In essence, *The Quarterly Rapport* helps me maintain my rapport with my clients and prospects.

Along with this, my agency also sends a personalized financial report to clients who have any kind of investment account. Every quarter we gather all of their account information and compile it into a report that combines fixed annuities, variable annuities, mutual funds, and variable life products into an easy-to-read statement. Also, we incorporate a future value calculator that automatically calculates the future value of their accounts based on the current information, including ongoing contributions.

Getting to this point has taken a lot of planning. Finding the correct format also has taken some trial and error. Over the years, our quarterly newsletter and financial reports have evolved into a streamlined process that one person can compile and produce in only a few days.

### Newsletters

Such software packages as Microsoft Publisher and Corel Draw greatly have simplified the process of delivering newsletters. The key to producing them quickly and easily is to develop a good basic template or layout that does not change. After the basic design is done, it is simple to add some headlines and staff-written content. Any extra free space can be filled with new or current product announcements that the agency or producer wants to highlight. The key to having a successful newsletter is to share the responsibilities with others and to present a professional image.

In the past an outside printing company printed our newsletters. In reviewing the costs, however, we found that purchasing a color laser printer would enable us to produce a full color newsletter for less than the printing company charged us for a basic black ink newsletter. To me, the benefits of color, along with a reduction in publishing costs, easily

offset the unit's \$2,000 price tag. For the producer or agency that believes an investment of that size is not justified, a basic black and white laser printer using well-chosen colored paper will work as well.

### **In Vivid Color**

Having a full color laser printer offers tremendous advantages. We recently changed our agency logo to a sophisticated full color design. With that change we needed new letterhead, envelopes, and business cards. In looking for someone to print these items, we found that many printers could not handle the job or their cost was prohibitively expensive. We almost scrapped the idea even though the new logo was outstanding. Then it occurred to us that we really did not require anyone's services. We could produce everything in house, business cards included. The most difficult task was locating a suitable stock of high quality papers. A few test prints later, and we were on our way to producing everything. We printed the business cards arranged 12 to a page and found a source to cut the heavy stock paper for \$12. Thank you, Kinko's.

### **Financial Reports**

There was a time when my staff scrambled everyday to obtain current information on client accounts. By manually calling each insurance and investment company, the staff slowly would update a spreadsheet of client specific data that I then could review. Thankfully, those days are long gone. Today, using the Internet and some hired programming expertise, most of this routine has been automated. Only a few companies still do not have data available via the Internet. Having to call on only these few is bearable. There will come a time, however, when we will drop those companies altogether and opt for the ones that enable us to automate our process completely.

We capture client information quarterly. Our plan is eventually to do this daily in a completely automated manner. By having all of our client data compiled in-house, we can generate numerous reports that help drive the agency. As an example, I quickly can find out which clients have fixed annuities that are past the surrender period, pull up their entire portfolio on my PC, and then see if better options are available for them. As they say, knowledge is power.

We include a postage-paid response card in each quarterly mailing. This makes it convenient for the recipient to arrange an appointment or send us a quick note while we still are fresh on his mind. In a recent follow-up call to a respondent who had indicated an interest in increasing his fixed annuity contribution, the respondent was so impressed with my financial review and The Quarterly Rapport that he decided to move his entire portfolio to me. What I thought was going to be a small sale ended up being a surprisingly large one. Maintaining contact with clients and prospects has proven itself once again.

### **On the Web**

The next step in my quest for better communication will be to allow clients to log onto our Web site and access most of this information securely. They also will be able to submit such information as address changes or questions. Future plans also include the ability to chat live online or schedule appointments at the click of the mouse. We also will add the option of receiving their newsletter and reports via e-mail. The mere prospect of these future enhancements gives me goosebumps! I cannot wait.

## Save a Tree

In this era of interconnectivity, e-mail plays a bigger role in our day-to-day lives, and with it comes the expectation that the producer can use it. There are several ways to make e-mail work to our advantage. By transmitting bulk information to clients and prospects who request it, a producer can send customized, personalized information to a list of prospects almost immediately without the hassle of printing pages of paper or stuffing envelopes. One of the better programs I have found is called Group Mail Free from [www.infacta.com](http://www.infacta.com), and yes, it is free for the basic version. (The producer probably will want to upgrade to the pro version for a nominal fee.) With a bulk e-mail program it is easy to send clients and prospects newsletters or sales materials, build subscription lists, and even process the unsubscribe information to remove prospects who no longer want to have information sent.

Another way to use e-mail is to implement an auto responder which can receive incoming e-mail, analyze it, and then reply to the sender with a prepared e-mail, all without any user intervention. This is a great tool to use along with a Web site to allow for the automated processing of informational requests. Promasoft Autoresponder ([www.autoreplying.com](http://www.autoreplying.com)), which incorporates both mailing lists and auto responses to e-mails, also is a great product. Much more sophisticated than the simple mailing list program, this product can handle almost any need a producer may have. Keep in mind that we all get more junk e-mail than we care for, so it is imperative for the producer to make sure he sends meaningful, worthwhile messages. Sending too many fluff-filled or boring e-mails can be a big turn off and actually may drive away prospects.

Building rapport with clients and prospects does not require the producer to overwhelm himself. By using newsletters, reports, and even something as simple as a birthday card, the producer will keep himself in front of his prospects on a regular basis.