



Wrapping Up The Loose Ends



I have been writing this column for more than three years. In it, I have shared concepts, ideas, and tips that I hope many readers have used. The Automated Agent is more than the name of this column. It is a better way of writing business, a better way of staying in touch, and a better way of servicing clients and prospects.

I look back in time and see the great strides our world has taken. I look forward to the years ahead and only can envision the advances yet to come. While some producers have embraced technology, a few have shunned it. But no matter the producer's opinion, in some way or another, advances in technology slowly creep into our daily lives. The Automated Agent is a way for the producer to leverage that technology to his or her benefit and be able to work from anywhere at anytime.

I travel extensively, and over the years I have shared with readers how being able to keep in touch with the office and my clients enables me to conduct business on the go. Recently I attended an annual compliance meeting with my broker-dealer. I attended that meeting online from halfway around the world. In using today's online meeting solutions and communications technologies, I have bridged the miles that otherwise would separate.

In this column I have shared how creating fillable forms and having them available online can make the producer's life simpler; how centralizing information enables everyone to know what he or she needs to; and how the right marketing plan can help retain and grow clients. I also have shared some great Web sites and software. Those interested may find the entire "Automated Agent" series of articles archived on my Web site: www.Aplusfg.com.

The Automated Agent of tomorrow will have advantages yet unforeseen in today's paper-based world. As information technology moves forward, completing paperwork will be the least of a producer's worries. Using tomorrow's technologies, the traditional bottlenecks in today's processing will be eliminated and the electronic policy will become a reality.

The electronic policy of tomorrow will be downloaded by the owner and then may be e-mailed to the beneficiaries. Or, it could be stored in a "virtual vault," an online safety deposit box, along with other important digital documents and virtual cash.

Medical Information Bureau data and attending physician statements all could be stored with the policy. The information also could be secured with digital signatures and electronically certified. Lag time for underwriting would be transformed from weeks to done.

This vision may not become the reality of the next year or even the next five, but think back; what computer was the reader using in 1993? The top-of-the-line IBM computer then was a 486DX2, Intel recently had announced the Pentium 1 processor, and Internet was not even in the vocabulary of many people, much less many producers. That was

only 10 years ago.

In Retrospect

The Automated Agent has been a vision of mine since 1991. In the October 1994 issue of LIFE INSURANCE SELLING I wrote an article entitled “Technology and Your Office.” I spoke then of many of the items we take for granted today. Networking, e-mail, and databases all were new to us those few years ago. Windows, as we know it today, did not exist. Some younger producers might not recall all of the changes that have occurred in the past 10 years.

Back then I wrote: “The computer world straddles the fence between two kinds of computer software, DOS and Windows-based software.” I was referring then to the ever popular Windows 3.1, the predecessor to Windows 95 and today’s newer versions. To see how far we have come, those with a curious mind might want to find an old copy just for fun.

Thinking back, I recall the day our office first installed a top-of-the-line one gigabyte hard drive and I thought to myself this would be more than we ever would need. I also recall how quickly Bill Gates proved that assumption wrong.

Looking back to those early days of office automation, it all seems so primitive, much as today’s technology may appear primitive to us 10 years from now. The challenge for producers today will be to make the transition from the old way of doing business to the new while continuing to keep and build relationships.

Futurescape

I occasionally have made reference to the paperless office. While I realize it will be some time before paper becomes an unnecessary luxury available to those willing to pay an extra fee for a policy they can hold in their hands, that day will come ... eventually.

The manner in which we sell may change as well. Readers of this column may recall the “video bibs” about which I fondly joked. We would need those to slip on when we are in our skivvies and have to answer that unexpected video call.

So much will change in the decade to come. What is new today will be old tomorrow. Recently I read an article on a company that successfully has produced “e-paper,” electronic paper that is flexible and thin where the information displayed can be changed at will. Maybe future versions of magazine subscriptions will be fulfilled on e-paper.

How we deliver our products will change over the next 10 years. What will not change is the need for our products and professional services. I have said it before; the face-to-face, belly-to-belly, firm honest handshake cannot be replaced; it may, however, be substituted. As they are today, insurance and annuities will be a vital part of proper life planning. The producer who can roll with the changes will have great success.

It is unfortunate, however, that, as the saying goes, all good things must come to an end. Next month’s “The Automated Agent” column will be the last in this series. It also is said, however, that from every ending comes a new beginning, and I hope to wrap up the loose ends and share some exciting news then.