

Is your agency a strong advocate when your client has a loss?

By Craig Most

Why is it valuable to the industry that the agent is involved in their client's claim? If the agency has a better understanding of what's going on with their policy holder's claim, they're able to be a much stronger advocate. A stronger advocate is beneficial for not only the policy holder but also for the carrier themselves. Why is this? Who knows the customer better in theory than the agent? The agent is in the best position to identify when something seems off or seems out of place.

The most important time that an agent can show value is at the time of loss. Agents deal with all types of clients and losses. By having all the parties talking together - insured, carrier and agent - it will make it much easier for that policy holder to have a stronger claims experience.

Agents need information about the loss

Claims download will help eliminate data rekeying errors and make the workflow much more efficient! It allows the agent to be a true advocate for the policy holder at the time of claim.

The electronic passing of the data cuts out the opportunity for the agency to make a mistake in rekeying information. When the carrier pushes the data electronically in the download, they have eliminated the agent having to do the work.

Agents work with many clients and many carriers. It's not unusual for the agency to be advocating for a number of clients at one time, or the same customer at a different location, and it's all happening at the same time. There could also be multiple claims per customer and it would be very easy to get some of the data confused if it's handled manually. Agents have to keep the data clean: who's the claimant in the first situation, what was the claims exposure in the second one, where are the payments going on the third one, et cetera. In a manual process there is the potential of missing researching a carrier's claims information because you're having to reach out to so many different systems. If the system handles the download, you're removing the ability for the agency to make mistakes in transposing the data for the client's claim status.

Why should agents want claims data?

Well, many times the policy holder will pick up their cell phone, look at the back of the ID card in their car, or pull their paperwork from their house and they'll call the carrier directly. When this happens, the most efficient way for the agency to learn about the claim is through the first notice of loss. Without some type of information downloaded to the system, the agency may not be aware that the claim has been filed and is already behind the eight ball.

Which agency model do you follow?

Are you the agency who uses the claims data to keep tabs on the claim and follow the whole lifecycle of the claim itself? These agencies feel that it's important to work with the customer throughout the process. Or are you the agency that says "Here's the 1-800 number" and hope they don't call your agency if they need anything? You just let them talk to the claims rep.

Well, that's not the case in our agency. We feel that to truly provide that experience for the policy holder, we need to work throughout the claims process itself.

Do you know if your clients are profitable to the agency?

Very vital for the policy holder, the agency, and the carrier, is the entire claims history. How can you identify whether a client is profitable or not without knowing all their claims history? How about if you have to remarket the account? If you don't know their claims history, you cannot see if they're profitable for the carrier or for the agency.

People time can be replaced with technology

Claims download is an enabling technology. It frees up people hours; the rekeying and researching of data can be replaced with technology. With claims download, agents can truly leverage the data throughout the claims process, valuation of the profitability of the client and when advocating for the client with the underwriting carrier.

Does your agency system provide you with the ability to download claims data?

Agents select their agency system for a number of business reasons. In our agency, we've worked with two different management systems. One management system did a tremendous job presenting the data that was downloaded from a claims standpoint. They embraced that workflow and gave you everything that the carrier provided.

The other management system is still behind the power curve and is not displaying the claims data. There are other strong features in this system that are important to our agency. We understand that the claims download module is weak, and that the agency doesn't have the data we need in the system to be a claims advocate. We spend the manual hours researching and inputting the claims data into the system. We are also encouraging this agency system provider to add this claims download feature to our system.

Carriers need to start someplace!

If the agency system does have the functionality to capture a claims download, then the agency needs to encourage the carriers to provide it. Based on the carrier's internal systems, they have different levels of ability to download the data. Our agency continuously communicates that the carriers need to provide claims download!

One of our large auto carriers that we work with will download the first notice of loss but that's it, nothing else. Well, while that's a good start, at a minimum we know about the claim! Our agency's next step is to dig into their system and find out the claims rep, and the situation, et cetera. That's time-consuming for the agency!

We work with other carriers who push you all the data. It's a tremendous amount of data and the value is that we know the claims rep's name, what happened, the drivers involved, the vehicle involved, who did what, and have the claims notes. We can leverage the information to service

the policy holder.

Become an AUGIE Ambassador!

If you're only getting the first notice of loss, then you need to communicate the business reasons why you need more claims data. Ask the carrier representatives if they would rather have your agency manually digging for the claims data. Or would they want your agency to work harder just to take care of your mutual customer?

We know that the carrier has the data. Agents need them to push it downstream. Ultimately the agent wants to help the carrier to make a better claims experience for their insured!

Agents need the data!

We've had a number of conversations recently concerning a minimum amount of data, minimum standards across the board. If agents are getting something similar from all of the carriers that will participate in claims download, then that will make workflows and best practices in the agency that much more efficient.

Really for any kind of claims activity, you should have

1. A notification pushed down when a claim is opened,
2. Information about claim disbursements,
3. When there are notes about the claims added, and
4. When it closes.

Those four main activities in the claims process are important in any claims event.

Information needs to be linked to the insured, not the policy!

The information also needs to be linked to the insured, not just the policy. If a carrier or a management system assigns a claim directly to a specific policy, then based on whether it's their archiving or their history methods, they may lose that claims data when the policy renews. So the policy claims download, or the claims download, should exist independently of the policy itself so you don't lose it.

Claims data needs to be reportable!

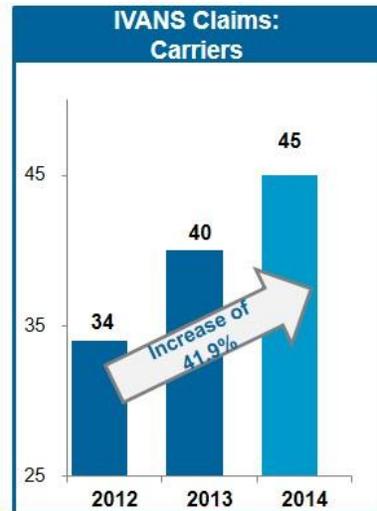
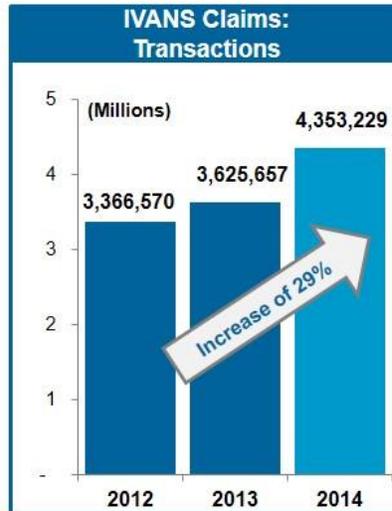
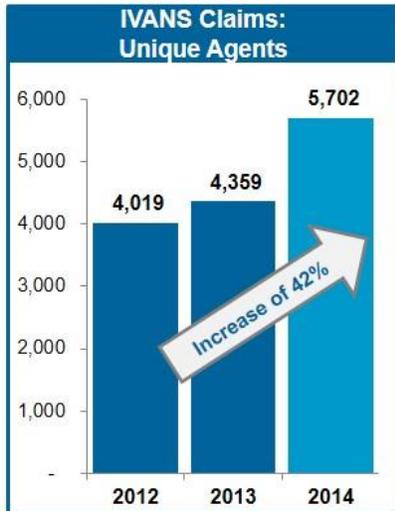
Another value to the agency is the ability to secure reports on their claims data. If you don't have an ability to pull a report on

- a new open claim,
- a first notice of loss, or
- a claim closed status,

then you have to hunt through the management system to find the data. The agency needs to find at minimum the date of loss, date reported, type of claim, some description of the loss, the driver involved, the vehicle involved, the type of loss, policy number, claim number, claims notes, and the adjuster's point of contact information. With this bit of information, an agency can be much more proactive and streamline that experience for the insurer and be an advocate for the policy holder and the carrier.

So how are we doing?

Claims Download Growth



As of March of this year, we're now up to 45 carriers that download claims data. About 230 carriers download homeowner's policies. All of these carriers handle homeowner's claims. All of them should share that data from a claims standpoint for each of their policy holders.

Carriers, you know the coverage limits, the drivers, the liability limits, you've got the data in one of your systems, and I'd bet you have it from a claims standpoint. You need to find a way to create that bridge and push that data down to the agency. I haven't spoken with an agency that receives downloads that would not want more claims downloads. To make it happen the agency needs to work with the carrier, their management system and determine the best way to push this claims data down to the agency.

Call to action!

It really boils down to "get involved"!

- If you're a management system provider, offer claims download in your system. Provide the data that comes from the carriers.

- Carriers you need to push at least a minimum amount of data out that will enable your agents to help the policy holder, and ultimately help you as the carrier with the claims experience.
- And then from an agency standpoint, if you're not using the claims download within your agency system, shame on you! You need to get on board, become more efficient, and ultimately provide a better claims experience for your insured.