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BREAKING NEWS

More Agencies Taking Advantage Of Technology Advances

By LAURA MAZZUCA TOOPS

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More independent agencies are taking advantage of advances in technology, including improved agency management systems, social media marketing methods and real-time capabilities, according to *American Agent & Brokers'* 2010 reader agency automation survey.

According to the second annual survey of more than 500 independent agency owners or principals, more respondents have agency management systems than last year—88 percent compared to 76 percent in 2009—and of that number, more users ranked as “excellent” their systems’ available tools and ease of use.

The use of real-time transactions was steadily on the rise as well, with 59.2 percent of respondents stating they were conducting real-time transactions for inquiries and/or comparative rating, compared to 55.1 percent last year.

Survey respondents also indicated an increase in their use of social media. Fifty-six percent said they currently use Internet-based methods in their marketing plans, including agency websites (87.6 percent), Facebook (33.7 percent), LinkedIn (28 percent) and Twitter (11.3 percent).

However, only 47.2 percent reported having a formal written policy for employee use of social media at work.

Other findings indicate that users in 2010 were both more loyal to their agency management brands and more involved in industry tech groups. When asked if they would consider switching agency management systems, only 15.9 percent said yes this year, compared to 23 percent last year.

And more agents said they were involved in agency management user groups or industry support groups such as AUGIE and ACT—26.1 percent, compared to 20.3 percent in 2009.

A majority of respondents, 40.3 percent, reported using an Applied Systems agency management system. Another 24.2 percent used Vertafore (formerly AMS), and 28.8 percent reported using “other,” with brands including Nexsure, Hawksoft, Agency Pro and proprietary systems developed by individual agencies. Last year, 32.6 percent of respondents used AMS systems and 34.7 percent used Applied Systems.

Respondents also reported staying current on agency management system updates. Almost 60 percent said they had installed the latest version of their primary agency management system within the last six months, followed by 18.3 percent within the last year and 7 percent more than a year ago. Last year, 53.5 percent said they had upgraded within the past year.

Policy view tops the list of uses for agency management systems at 84.3 percent, followed by billing (74.5 percent), claims status (57.8 percent) and single-company quote (28.1 percent). Other uses written in by agents include customer service, correspondence, imaging and “all phases of agency operations.”

Levels for real-time usage split between commercial and personal lines were level with last year, with 23.3 percent reporting they used it for commercial lines (compared to 23.4 percent in 2009) and 52.8 percent for personal lines (43.5 percent last year). Only 41.2 percent reported using real time for “neither,” compared with 48.2 percent last year.

The survey of AA&B readers was conducted online in May.

Laura Mazzuca Toops is Editor of *American Agent & Broker*, part of Summit Business Media’s P&C Magazine Group, which includes *National Underwriter*.

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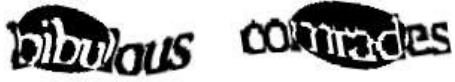
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