# Effective Insurance Marketing on a
# Limited Budget

**sIs**

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*Agency Management Systems*

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# INTRO

Did you know that your target customers must hear your marketing message at least seven times to influence a buying decision? The best marketing programs provide high volume exposure and repeat touches in the market. This poses slight problem for the big insurance giants who appear to have unlimited funds. For the independent insurance agent, however, it requires careful planning and creative thinking.

Unfortunately, many independent agencies, strapped for time and resources, focus on having prime office space, state–of–the–art computer equipment, and expensive office furnishings, but neglect to allocate the funds necessary to market their agency. In fact, when push comes to shove, the marketing budget is often the one that gets cut. **It is important to note, however, that you don't need to break the bank in order to effectively market your agency.** The fundamental secret to creating a high–impact marketing plan on a limited budget is to optimize what you have and focus on capturing the customers that will provide a return on your investment.

This eGuide will focus on **five key ways** independent insurance agents can generate positive exposure for their agency, gain a stronger digital presence and leverage the tools already at their disposal.

# Chapter 1: **Get People Talking**

There is no more cost effective way to market your agency than through word of mouth. The more visible and active you are in the neighborhood, the more exposure you will get. Get out in the community (the real one and the virtual one), participate in events, actively network, and never forget to ask for referrals.

## Attend Local Networking Events

Most Chambers of Commerce and other professional organizations host a wide variety of networking events. Attend these events, make as many contacts a possible, focus on how you can help everyone that you meet, and have fun! Don't forget to follow–up with a "Nice meeting you…" email or letter.

If you really want to gain exposure for your agency, consider a leadership position. While everyone involved in the group will not know every member, you can rest assured that they will all know the President and other members of the leadership committee.

*"Become an active participant in group discussions. Post links to blogs you've written. Comment on others' blogs. Don't comment just for the sake of commenting, however. Be sure you have something valuable to add to the conversation."*

### Take Advantage of LinkedIn Groups

LinkedIn is a great resource for building your network online. Unlike Facebook, LinkedIn is primarily a professional social networking site, and many groups and organizations that meet in traditional settings offer LinkedIn groups as well. Extend your traditional Rotary, Kiwanis or Chamber membership by joining the affiliated LinkedIn group. Become an active participant in group discussions. Post links to blogs you've written. Comment on others' blogs. Don't comment just for the sake of commenting, however. Be sure you have something valuable to add to the conversation.

### Actively Participate in Community Events

Volunteering is another excellent way to build your network and increase exposure for your agency. Not only will you gain additional avenues for meeting other local business owners and community members, you will also have the opportunity to educate people about their insurance options. If you are lucky (or PR savvy) you may even get some good press out. Volunteer to coach or sponsor a youth sports team, host seminars on insurance basics, sponsor police or fire events, and raise your hand when local organizations ask for speakers.

## Increase Referrals:

Ask and you shall receive. Don't ask and, well… your chances of receiving are often slim to none. When talking with clients, make it a point to ask them if they have a friend or family member who might benefit from your services. Don't leave it at that, however. Systemize a referral program and your chances of success should go up incrementally.

• **Institute a Referral Rewards Program:** Provide a reward to existing policyholders for sending new clients to your agency, such as movie passes or a gift card. Promote your referral program on billing statements and/or via your website page and make mention of the program during each interaction you have with your members.

• **Implement a Referral Marketing Exchange:** There are many successful agencies that offer incentives to car salesman, local real estate firms, and mortgage brokers who refer their agency to individuals they conduct business with. Some of these incentives include cash, shared expense in publications, or assistance with the distribution of marketing material. (Please check the laws in your area as this is not legal in all locations.)

# Chapter 2: **Make the Most of Social Media**

Not all that long ago, marketing your independent insurance agency meant putting an ad on TV or in the newspaper or paying extra money for a decent sized ad in the Yellow Pages. It was tough, if not impossible for independent agencies to compete with the large, direct writers with their seemingly unlimited budgets. Some consider digital marketing and social media as a way to level the playing field.

> *"Never has there been a time in history when it was so quick, easy and inexpensive to deliver our message to insurance consumers. Social media is a gift. It levels the playing field. With amplifiers like blogs, social media, email marketing and customer relationship management tools such as Infusionsoft, we can take back the airways."*
> —Ryan Hanley

As insurance marketing professional Ryan Hanley wrote in his ACT article, **Marketing to the Connected Generation** "Never has there been a time in history when it was so quick, easy and inexpensive to deliver our message to insurance consumers. Social media is a gift. It levels the playing field. With amplifiers like blogs, social media, email marketing and customer relationship management tools such as Infusionsoft, we can take back the airways." [i]

Hanley is quick to note, however, that mastering social media tactics is not difficult… understanding the need for strategy, specifically a strategy that will continually convey value to the consumer, is the bigger issue.

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[i] http://www.independentagent.com/Resources/AgencyManagement/ACT/Pages/marketing/Internet/Marketing–Connected–Generation.aspx

## Here are some quick strategy tips:

→ **Talk About More Than Yourself:** There's no better way to lose followers than blatant self promotion. In addition to sharing information on yourself and your product offerings, seek out other interesting and engaging information. A good rule of thumb is to post relevant content from other sources, such as business press, trade journals, and industry specialists. Twitter is a great way to begin curating information—find and follow others who have good things to say and then pass the news on to YOUR followers. Google Alerts are also an excellent way to get access to relevant content on topics your followers might be interested in.

→ **Talk About More Than Just Insurance:** As we mentioned earlier, it is important to get out in the community, network and get involved. Social media is an excellent way to promote the events and activities you are involved in, as well as those of clients and community partners. This could be anything from promoting a local blood drive, food bank collection or recycling effort to spreading the word about a financial seminar one of your fellow Chamber members is hosting.

→ **Follow Others:** Social media is a two way street. Follow the other members of your networking organizations. Follow other community businesses. Follow your clients, friends and neighbors. The more you follow, the more likely they will follow you back. Not only that, by reading what they are sharing with others, you will gain more insight into the types of content they care about—so you can meaningfully add to the conversation.

→ **Review Your Material Monthly:** Look at key performance indicators (KPI) each month to see what is working well and what is not. These include (but are not limited to) monitoring leads generated by your social media network, social media mentions, and views, shares, and comments on blog posts.

As for tactics, that is another issue altogether—and one which some independent agents find daunting. *The reality is, it shouldn't be.*

→ **Set up your social media pages** (Google+, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter are good starting points.)

→ **Promote your networks** on all printed material as well as on your website, in your email signature, etc.

→ **Set Google Alerts and follow others** to make it gather content to curate.

→ **Set a schedule and post regularly**, but don't get hung up on needing a certain number of posts.

→ **Most of all, make the process as simple and streamlined as possible**. Social media management tools such as HootSuite (https://hootsuite.com) allow you to manage all your social networks from one interface, which not only cuts back on time spent posting, but also makes it simple to monitor activity on without logging into each individual account.

# Chapter 3: **Jump on the "Local Search" Bandwagon**

Local search, defined by Wikipedia as "the use of specialized Internet search engines that allow users to submit geographically constrained searches against a structured database of local business listings" is an extremely effective, and often free, way to help people find your agency online.

At a minimum, be sure to register your agency with as many free local listings as possible. If you'd like to extend your reach, many of them offer more extensive paid options as well.

To help break through the clutter, use websites such as www.getlisted.org to create, find, claim, or edit your local listings and increase your online presence.

## Some local listings to consider include:

**Yelp:** http://www.yelp.com

**Kudzu:** http://www.kudzu.com

**Foursquare:** https://foursquare.com

**Hotfrog:** http://www.hotfrog.com

**YP.com:** http://www.yellowpages.com

**Google+ Local:** www.google.com/local/add/

**Yahoo! Local:** http://listings.local.yahoo.com/nonfl.php

**Yext:** http://www.yext.com

**eLocal:** http://www.elocal.com

**Citysearch:** http://www.citysearch.com/world

**Bing:** https://www.bingplaces.com

An important thing to keep in mind as you register your agency with these local search engines is to be consistent in your description of your agency, your services, and your benefits across all platforms.

# Chapter 4: **Put Your Website to Work for You**

Having a website used to be considered "cutting edge." Nowadays however, a good website is a necessity if you want to have any skin in the game.

**Just to clarify, by "good" we mean a website that:**

• Is a professional representation of your brand

• Includes effective calls to action

• Educates and informs the consumer

• Provides "self service" opportunities for clients and prospects

• Is optimized for inbound lead generation

Although websites are not inexpensive in and of themselves, the reason they fall into effective marketing on a limited budget is that, done correctly, they enable your agency to take advantage of things like the aforementioned Local Search and Social Media as well as SEO and other digital marketing tactics.

Your website should be built in a way that positively promotes your brand and helps you earn new business. To do this, in addition to being functionally sound, it should be well written, visually appealing, and easy to navigate.

**Here is a short checklist of things to consider as you review your website.** *If you are too close to it to be really honest with yourself, have a friend or family member do the reviewing for you. If you have a lot of checks in the "yes" column you are headed in the right direction. If you are heavy in the "no" column it might be wise to seek the advise of a website consultant. Most are not as expensive as you might think.*

| | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| Does your site accurately reflect the professionalism of your organization? | | |
| Does your site have a personal touch? | | |
| • Information about the agency | | |
| • Information about the agents | | |
| • Examples of community involvement | | |
| Does your site instill trust and confidence? | | |
| • Do you provide testimonials / social proof? | | |
| Does your site have visible & compelling calls to action? | | |
| • Request a Quote | | |
| • Schedule a Consultation | | |
| • Call now to learn how you can _____ | | |
| Does your site provide answers to commonly asked questions? | | |
| Is your site educational and informative? | | |
| Is your site easy to navigate? | | |
| Is your site optimized for mobile devices? | | |
| Does your site have a quote engine? | | |
| Can your clients file a claim through the site? | | |
| Does your site link to an online rater? | | |
| Does your site have a client portal? | | |
| Does your site link to your social media sites? | | |
| Does your site have tracking/analytics? | | |
| Is your site optimized for local search? | | |

# Chapter 5: **Mine Your Agency Management System**

Marketing isn't just about getting new customers. It is also about keeping, upselling and cross–selling the ones you have. Among other things, a good agency management system will serve as a central repository of past, present, and potential clients, making it a treasure trove of good marketing data. When, like with Partner XE by SIS, your system allows you to quickly pull lists based on certain search parameters (i.e. renewal date, auto, but not home; boat, but not auto, etc.) identifying potential upsell, cross sell and renewal opportunities gets easy.

Partner **XE**

**Here are some helpful suggestions for how to utilize the reporting capabilities of your agency management system to enhance your marketing efforts:**

• **Use your management system to identify what lines of business your current clients do not have.** Partner XE can easily create reports for any client with and/or without any line of business, giving you the ability to easily create cross sell marketing initiatives for CSRs or Producers.

• **Track the dates that quotes went out** and set a note to remind yourself to follow–up.

• **Track the dates of policy expirations** to evaluate the coverage of current clients and what additional coverage they might benefit from.

• **Keep track of important dates of your clients.** Sending a Happy Birthday or Anniversary message to a current client is a great way to build relationships and convey that you recognize the important dates in their life. Also, knowing that their son or daughter is quickly approaching driving age and policy adjustments may need to be made will help you proactively reach out to ensure they have the coverage necessary to protect those they care about most.

• **Utilize the calendar feature** to track the marketing efforts you have made throughout the year. This will help you as you plan next year's activities and analyze what efforts were successful and which were not.

Thanks for reading! We hope you've enjoyed this eGuide, and have a few new ideas to "chew on" that will be beneficial as you work to actively promote your agency.

The Team at SIS

## About SIS

Headquartered in Columbus, Ohio, Strategic Insurance Software (SIS) is the team behind Partner XE– an innovative web–based insurance agency management system that helps independent agencies streamline workflow and grow their business. Built on a foundation of strong technology and exceptional service, we're moving forward with a constant eye on innovation that will make independent agents' lives easier.

Because we aim to provide assistance to our agency partners in every way we can, we have taken the time to research and write about areas such as this that we feel would be of benefit to independent agents. In cases such as this we are able to draw from the knowledge of the marketing team at NuGrowth Solutions, our parent company, and Agency Marketing Partners, the insurance marketing arm of our business.

## About Partner XE

Supporting downloads from nearly 300 carriers, real time interaction, integrated agency accounting, and much more, Partner XE is a full–featured agency management system at an affordable cost for the independent insurance agency. For more information, please visit www.sisware.com