

Advantages of an Enterprise Web Portal for Professional Liability Insurance Companies

Insurance Companies and the Web – A Brief History

Almost every insurance company today has a website, many with a web presence going back ten years or more. Early websites functioned as simple informational portals aimed at improving the branding and awareness of the company, possibly allowing for forms downloading, such as an application, and with a “contact us” section as a method to send an email request to the company – usually for sales inquiries. These early websites provided a minimal return on investment – but gave insurers a starting point.

As the web became more omnipresent, and technology improved, some incremental enhancements were seen – a “rough quote” calculator, the ability to request a certificate of insurance or an ID card, the ability to search for a local agent, and so on. The most innovative insurance companies were direct writing personal lines carriers who had the most to gain from offering an alternative to the dreaded 800 number.

In the last few years, the vast potential for using the web has been realized – but in most cases, not by insurers. The travel industry, brokerages and banks have led the way in showing what could be done using the web to improve their service while at the same time, saving time and money in a meaningful way. As a result, insurers have seen what is possible in these applications and are now showing increased interest in using the web to achieve the same ends.

What is an Enterprise Web Portal?

In order for an insurance company’s enterprise web portal to be successful, it has to:

- Have useful functionality that is designed to match the role of the user – an insured will have a different set of functions than an agent or a risk manager. The services and the information to be offered must differ by the role of the user. Agents can generate quotes, whereas an insured might not. Risk Managers could access seminars or white paper offerings, and look at the records of those in their organization who attended events.
- Be attractive, intuitive and easy to use – no one is going to train the user in the software! The website is the public face of the company and should reflect corporate design standards. Navigation should be easy and insurance jargon or abbreviations should be avoided. Where possible, online help should be provided where a user may reasonably be expected to need an explanation; and drop down boxes, calendars, defaults, etc. should be used to make the data entry experience as simple and foolproof as possible.
- Provide specific and up-to-date information for users on their activities with the company – real-time data on coverage, collections, claims, and more. There is a fine line between providing enough information to be useful and providing too much information which might be hard to understand, hard to navigate, or be confusing in the context in which it’s being presented. Information available must be considered in light of the intended user. An Agent who might use the website daily, and who would be expected to have a need for more information, would have a different presentation than what would be offered an insured who may use the website just once or twice a year.
- Use the latest technology that will allow for the best in terms of security, flexibility, maintenance, and performance. Systems have historically been developed independently, with little or no integration in the software. Developing a web portal with standard integration protocols for SOA, such as SOAP, WSDL, WS-Security, ACORD, HTTP, XML, etc. facilitates easier integration with both internal and external services. An insurance company can quickly adapt to changes in customer and regulatory demands, utilizing 3rd party vendor solutions where appropriate.

The Advantages of a Well-Designed Web Portal

As noted above, the services and information offered via a web portal must be designed for the specific class of user. The most common class of users would be insureds and agents, but there might be others, for instance hospital administrators, risk managers, or users associated with an affinity group.

Regardless of the type of user, the web portal will:

- Reduce service costs. The web portal should allow certain transactions to be performed directly by the web user. For example: requesting a Certificate of Insurance to be emailed or faxed to a third party, making payments by credit card, obtaining a loss run or credentialing report, making changes to contact information. While these functions can be appealing to the insurance company because they are completed by the customer, there is a concern for control and auditability. These concerns can be addressed by a workflow manager that reviews the activities, and, by exception, intercepts the transaction in some way. For instance, a change to a client's PO BOX or telephone number could be processed through to the enterprise software, but a change of address might be pended for underwriting review. As well as transactions, the fact that details on invoicing, coverage, claims, and so on is easily available should reduce the number of information and status calls to the company. All in all the use of the web can reduce the handling of routine matters by the insurance carrier's staff, resulting in a significant savings in service costs.
- Increase service efficiency. As well as decreasing costs, the ability to perform activities and access information at any time and with immediate results will be welcomed by the portal user. Obtaining a quote quickly can be critical to capturing new business. Presenting information for review prior to renewal can be done in a convenient and timely way. Allowing payment by credit card or EFT payments can improve cash flow, and reduce late payments. Allowing the user to print out their policy from the website saves on printing and mailing. These and many other examples can make the company's use of a web portal a service differentiator from its competitors.
- Create a brand awareness and loyalty. Insurance is an intangible product. What allows one company to distinguish itself from another is efficient and responsive service. This extends to all aspects of the business, including the all-important business of handling claims in a fair and transparent fashion. The web portal is becoming the "shop window" for the company – the first place that a prospective customer may get to know it. The impression left can be a critical element in acquiring and retaining business. Think about this – is there someone that you deal with – perhaps an airline, a bank, or a brokerage – where, when you think of them, the web portal comes quickly to mind as a positive component of your relationship with that entity? Good web portals make for "sticky" customers.
- Offer a rapid return on investment. Compared to the investment in developing an enterprise system, the cost of deploying a web portal is insignificant. Web portals, in a sense, leverage the capabilities of, and the information in, the back-end software, and quickly pay for themselves in both tangible and intangible ways. The return on investment of installing a well-designed web portal can be realized within the first 4 months of operation.

Whether business-to-business (for agents) or business-to-customer (for insureds) the web portal is a must-have for any size of insurance company, and one of the most cost effective ways to gain a competitive advantage.

About Delphi Technology

For more than 15 years, Delphi Technology has been a leading provider of technology solutions to the insurance and risk management industries. By leveraging its extensive industry knowledge and experience, Delphi Technology delivers a comprehensive range of innovative technology solutions for property and casualty insurers, third party administrators (TPAs), self-insureds, and risk retention groups (RRGs).

Delphi Technology's OASIS suite provides proven software applications to run core insurance operations including underwriting, billing, policy administration, claims management, financial management, risk assessment, and reinsurance. OASIS enables companies to optimize their business processes and respond to changing business needs resulting in reduced costs, increased operational efficiency, and improved business intelligence.

Delphi Technology's professional services staff of 150+ technical and insurance experts utilize a proven implementation methodology ensuring the transfer of necessary market and business expertise throughout the deployment process resulting in successful implementations that come in on schedule and on budget.

Headquartered in Boston, MA, Delphi Technology has sales, support and development offices throughout North America as well as in Shanghai, China.

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