

WHITE PAPER

SUPPORT VS. “SUPPORT”: HOW AN EMPOWERED CUSTOMER SERVICE TEAM CAN MAKE YOUR AGENCY MORE PROFITABLE



In an age when consumers are becoming increasingly used to high levels of technology-enabled service, traditional insurance agencies are at a disadvantage. Many account-servicing processes, such as policy checking, issuing certificates, and responding to customer support queries, require manual intervention, and even insurtechs need human-based support services to compete effectively. Between service level agreements (SLAs) set by insurance carriers and rising customer expectations, the pressure to deliver an exceptional customer experience is on. Up to 32% of customers are prepared to walk away from a brand in the event of a poor experience, according to PwC.¹

Yet agencies large and small face a host of challenges in delivering high levels of service, particularly when it comes to finding, training, and retaining top talent. As a result, they can easily get bogged down with low-value tasks that put a drag on profitability. In many cases, these are time-consuming processes that require insurance expertise but don't have a meaningful impact on revenue, such as servicing small accounts. This leaves less time and resources for more productive and revenue-generating tasks. The solution to this problem is not to provide less service to small accounts, but rather better and more tailored service for all your accounts. This white paper will discuss strategies for aligning service levels to insured accounts with an empowered service team of experienced, licensed professionals who can solve problems quickly, efficiently, and cost-effectively.

THE CHALLENGES: TALENT AND FOCUS

Account servicing, especially for small accounts, is a cost center that with some ingenuity can transform into a differentiating revenue generator. However, agencies who want to make their account servicing both efficient and effective face significant headwinds. These include:

UNPROFITABLE SMALL ACCOUNTS. It is difficult for agents and brokers to achieve adequate profitability in small commercial P&C accounts. Handling small accounts can be just as complex as handling large ones because buyers are likely to be less sophisticated, requiring more advice and time. These accounts tend to persist because producer compensation plans typically reward even small sales, so producers can't resist them. And there's always the chance that a small account with high growth potential could become highly profitable. However, these small accounts can put an agency between a rock and a hard place: The agency can either overserve them, consequently suffering severe profitability challenges; or they can neglect them, which may reduce direct losses but also increase reputational and E&O risk.

¹ <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/services/consulting/library/consumer-intelligence-series/future-of-customer-experience.html>

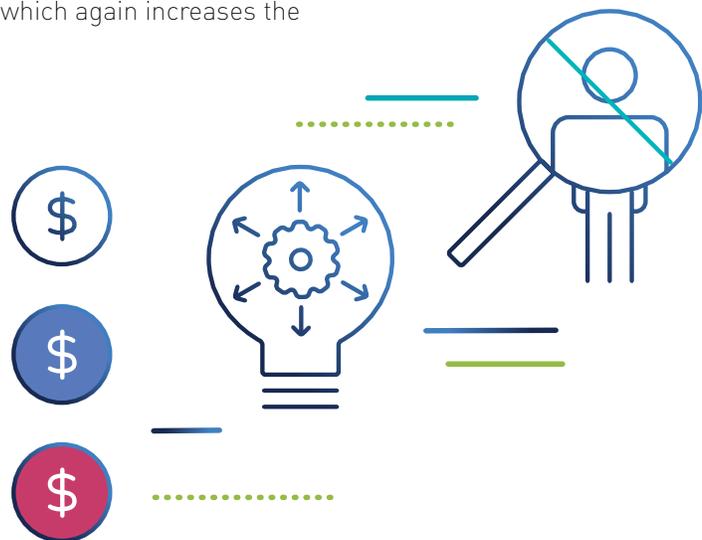
TALENT SHORTAGE. The current talent shortage in the insurance industry has multiple ripple effects on account servicing, which in turn affect profitability. A large cohort of senior professionals are reaching retirement age and taking institutional knowledge with them as they go. Recruitment has become a challenge, and retention suffers when account managers get saddled with unsatisfying "busywork," such as premium audits and quality assurance. When this results in increased turnover in the account manager role, the problem is compounded by a further reduction in efficiency.

LACK OF FOCUS. A direct result of the talent shortage is the strain that routine account management tasks can put on an account servicing team when resources can be better directed toward strategic imperatives, such as boosting cross-selling and upselling, integrating recent acquisitions, or entering new markets. Not only do agencies struggle to fill these roles, but those who perform them must turn their attention to tasks that are critically important but do not directly generate revenue.

INSUFFICIENT TECHNOLOGY. Many agencies rely on technology that lacks agility and scale, increasing the burden on account managers as the agency grows. While some processes can be automated, this requires additional investment in technology and training. More complex process orchestration, such as robotic process automation (RPA), holds promise but requires ongoing skilled human intervention to remain effective.

REPUTATIONAL DAMAGE. When processes break down or your agency becomes less responsive to customer needs, your reputation is sure to suffer. Dissatisfied customers are all too quick to turn to online review sites to voice their complaints, which can put downward pressure on growth. The problem is compounded with smaller accounts, which may be led by unsophisticated buyers less likely to understand coverage needs.

E&O EXPOSURE. Taking shortcuts with small accounts or detail-sensitive processes can lead to error that increases E&O risk. Many agencies use these accounts and processes as training grounds for inexperienced staff, which again increases the likelihood of error that could result in litigation.



THE SOLUTION: GETTING THE RIGHT WORK TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE

The solution is deceptively simple but challenging to implement: sending the right work to the right people—those who have the qualifications and skills to perform it at the most reasonable cost. This solution also requires ongoing training and process optimization to succeed.

Your most valuable producers and account managers should focus their efforts on revenue-generating work. This typically includes activities that customers can immediately appreciate. An example might be an agent identifying a risk the client wasn't aware of, saving the client money, or even being pleasant to work with. These activities can greatly increase the value of a client relationship when performed well. They can result in increased sales, greater customer lifetime value, and strong word of mouth.

Many other tasks are critically important but have less effect on revenue. In fact, activities such as compliance, premium audits, and certificates of insurance succeed when they go largely unnoticed by clients—when they are dispatched quickly, efficiently, and accurately. On the other hand, when done poorly, these activities can result in loss of business, reputational damage, and E&O claims.

These low-value (but important) tasks should be optimized and reassigned to less senior staff. This liberates producers and account managers to focus on higher-value, more interesting work. It also frees up time and resources for the kind of mentoring and training that will develop engaged service staff and high-earning producers. Your team will be able to acquire more clients, better serve policyholders, and generate more agency revenue.

REASSIGNMENT

The first step is to examine the tasks that comprise a business process: which ones must happen in real time onshore? Which ones can happen overnight in batch processes offshore? Which ones can take place offshore but must happen in real time? Which require licensed professionals? What are the language requirements for customer-facing personnel?

You can apportion tasks by account or by type. Assigning **by account size** lets a dedicated team of experienced, licensed, and trained small-account specialists focus on delivering exceptional service separately from large accounts. This team would handle end-to-end servicing for these accounts. Assigning **by type of task** can be done either dependent or independent of account size. Some tasks that can be reapportioned to less senior staff include:

WHEN OFFSHORING ISN'T AN OPTION

Assigning certain tasks to highly trained offshore workers can be an excellent strategy to lower costs without reducing quality and accuracy. But certain activities, like those that require licensed insurance professionals, must take place onshore.

A better approach is to incorporate offshore teams into a global strategy of integrated services that entrusts tasks to those best capable of handling them cost-effectively while meeting customer preferences and maintaining the highest levels of quality and accuracy. For example, ReSource Pro's Express^{IX} offering combines international operations teams with a U.S.-based call center to maximize efficiency, accuracy, and service.

- **Account manager support:** Agency account managers can play a key role in generating incremental revenue growth but are often overburdened with the details of ongoing account servicing, such as billing inquiries, endorsement requests, cancellations, terminations, and reinstatements, as well as the entire renewal process.
- **Carrier marketing support:** Taking a risk to market is a critical component of agency sales and renewals, but the process itself consists of lower-level tasks, such as submitting applications to multiple carriers to quote a single policy. This type of task reduces the resources and bandwidth that producers and account managers have to evaluate and communicate the risks that their customers face.
- **Premium audit:** Performing an audit of the exposure basis for a policy to calculate the final premium and premium taxes is a crucial process but not one that generates great value for your agency. Your team's time and effort can be better spent servicing customers and increasing sales. But if your organization requires U.S.-based licensed professionals and/or native English-speaking customer service providers, you can't offshore this task.
- **Certificates of insurance:** Certificates and evidences of insurance (COI, EOI) are a big pain point for agencies. When executed poorly, COIs can leave customers frustrated and create E&O exposures. This often occurs when less experienced personnel are assigned to complete them on the misconception that they are straightforward. In fact, COIs can be an E&O minefield, and require experienced professionals to compare them against the insured's requirements and their policies.

ONGOING PROCESS OPTIMIZATION

To reduce friction and increase efficiency, you should centralize and standardize your processes as much as possible while embracing a philosophy of continuous operational improvement through methodologies like Lean and Six Sigma. Continuously review your processes and look for efficiency gains at every point along the way. An excellent approach to process optimization is Lean process mapping, which enables you to visualize your workflows to identify and eliminate costly waste. This allows you to optimize your operations, giving your people the capacity to focus on value creation:

Here's how to take a strategic, comprehensive approach to provide maximum impact:

1. **Set priorities** by identifying and quantifying your most pressing issues. What are the outcomes your agency is looking to achieve?
2. **Map and quantify the current state** of the identified processes by conducting internal research to better understand your operations.

3. **Prioritize improvements** and map out a plan for implementation with a detailed roadmap to comprehensively address your people, process, technology, and data needs.
4. **Define the future state.** What does "better" look like? Quantify the bottom-line benefit you expect to achieve.
5. **Implement and document.** For example, ReSource Pro has created a library of 15,000 optimized procedures developed to drive efficiency across the insurance value chain.

NEW TECHNOLOGY AND AUTOMATION

Technology is advancing at a dizzying pace, and any new advancement is an opportunity for you to surpass your competitors or vice-versa. But new technology is also a double-edged sword. While it might represent an exciting opportunity to increase efficiency, it is also an unproven risk, not to mention a significant investment in purchasing, maintenance, and training.

EVALUATE AND COMPARE. Is your current technology stack performing as well as it could? Are you aware of the alternatives available in the market? Do you have a disciplined process for evaluating your options on an ongoing basis?

BUILD WHAT'S MISSING. Increasingly, low- and no-code development platforms are lowering the barrier to creating custom applications. At ReSource Pro, for example, we've developed our own technology called "Renewal Wizard" that automates and streamlines the renewal process of a given policy. Renewal Wizard helps us coordinate and communicate among our onshore and offshore teams and clients without emailing PDFs back and forth. The result is a nearly touchless process to assemble a renewal submission package.

AUTOMATE AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE. Robotic process automation is a familiar buzzword these days. At ReSource Pro, we take advantage of RPA, which takes processes that might have required multiple keystrokes to complete and reduces them to one or two. However, the caveat with RPA is that you need a "human in the loop" to ensure it continues to operate as expected. A single change in a procedure can break the automation and gum up the works. In fact, we have an entire development team, both in China and in Bangalore, India, who are experts in this area.



OFFER YOUR CUSTOMERS THE SUPPORT THEY DESERVE WITH THE INSURANCE EXPERIENCE CENTER

While it's possible to optimize and reassign your low-value processes in-house, there's an easier and less risky way. ReSource Pro's Insurance Experience Center (IX Center), based in Lincoln, Nebraska, is designed to deliver state-of-the-art customer experiences. Serving as an extension of your organization, the IX Center seamlessly integrates cutting-edge processes, analytics, and customer service practices to support your clients throughout the insurance policy lifecycle. All IX Center staff are insurance professionals who receive multidisciplinary training, including call center excellence, process optimization, and insurance policy management. Our services include Express^{IX} and Custom^{IX} and serve two distinct needs.

EXPRESS^{IX} FOR SMALL ACCOUNTS

This solution is designed to manage your commercial and personal lines books of business from A-Z. For many organizations, managing these accounts is unprofitable. Through Express^{IX}, we guarantee consistently healthy margins and higher service levels.

- **An end-to-end solution:** We deliver full-service account management for commercial and personal lines accounts.
- **Licensed services:** Our licensed account managers professionally write, renew, and service accounts on your agency's behalf.
- **Optimized processes:** We draw from ReSource Pro's library of best practices to streamline and optimize workflows, to keep the focus on the customer experience.
- **Responsive communication:** Whenever a policyholder calls, emails, or otherwise initiates contact, an IX account specialist responds as a representative of your agency, with a mandate to address any problem, question, or service request.
- **Performance-based pricing:** This solution increases your ROI through performance-based pricing models.

CUSTOM^{IX} FOR BEST-IN-CLASS ONSHORE KNOWLEDGE PROCESS MANAGEMENT

With our Custom^{IX} offering, you can design your own customer care solution by selecting any combination of elements from our complete service offering to improve your customers' experience, increase their engagement, and maintain loyalty.

Here are some of the services we can provide to our clients:

- **Account management support:** Assigning select account management tasks to Custom^{IX} professionals frees account managers up for more valuable cross-selling and upselling opportunities to grow individual accounts and increase customer lifetime value. U.S.-based, native English-speaking representatives provide services such as endorsements, cancellations, and loss runs so your in-house employees can anticipate customer needs, build customer intimacy, and deliver routine functions accurately, consistently, and efficiently.
- **Carrier marketing support:** U.S.-based licensed professionals can work directly with carriers and deliver the quotes necessary to close the sale or complete the renewal. This allows agencies to better understand their customers' risk profile and provide sufficient coverage to grow individual accounts and increase customer lifetime value.
- **Contact center and help desk:** Our white-label service provides U.S.-based licensed and native English-speaking customer service professionals as a representative of your agency, with a mandate to field technical help requests, billing inquiries, and other problems, questions, or service requests as quickly and efficiently as possible.
- **Premium audit:** We can meet regulatory compliance and exceed customer expectations with U.S.-based trained and licensed professionals to handle annual workers' comp premium audits.
- **Certificates of insurance:** Our certificate-specific teams are available throughout your working day to ensure fast turnaround times for on-demand requests to issue certificates and evidences of insurance (COI, EOI). Our managed service offering and standardization process limits E&O risk, providing your agency an end-to-end, turnkey solution, from request to successful issuance, even on the most complex accounts—without the need for request forms or triaging.
- **Catastrophe claims handling:** When a disaster occurs, your agency could be inundated with claims from desperate policy holders. Providing efficient, effective, and timely service is especially critical at these times. Yet scaling your claims processing adequately to meet demand can be difficult. ReSource Pro's Custom^{IX} can help you scale rapidly so that your clients receive the best possible claims servicing.

CLOSING THE DIGITAL GAP EFFICIENTLY

The business model behind a digital agency is straightforward: allow the customer to self-serve as much as possible, reducing the need for human intervention during policy purchase and servicing.

The challenge: Customers will always have questions or issues that can't be handled 100% digitally. So it's back to the old-fashioned, human customer-support model, which obviates the advantages of an all-digital agency.

The solution: The addition of a Custom^{IX} customer support team helps your digital agency retain the efficiencies of a largely self-serve, digital-first approach while also providing a human support team that can deliver exceptional service to help retain customers with a positive experience that elevates your reputation.

IN CONCLUSION

Customer experience is more than a buzzword. It is the key to success in the insurance industry. Yet there are many challenges that prevent agencies from delivering the best customer experience possible. Customer-facing human agents who can solve issues on the first call are costly and hard to come by. Meanwhile, processes that are otherwise invisible to customers, such as quality assurance, can have a negative impact on experience if done poorly. ReSource Pro's Express^{ix} and Custom^{ix} offerings can improve customer experience at critical touchpoints to ensure that your agency differentiates itself from the competition and retains the focus it needs to continue to grow profitably.

To learn more about the ReSource Pro Insurance Experience Center, visit resourcepro.com/ix-center.

ABOUT RESOURCE PRO

ReSource Pro is an insurance-focused business solutions company that integrates people, process, technology, and data analytics. Over 1,500 carriers, brokers, and MGAs rely on ReSource Pro to execute strategies that improve profitability, accelerate growth, deliver improved claim outcomes, and enhance client and employee experience. With more than 6,500 employees globally, ReSource Pro provides business process management, strategic advisory services, management and organic growth consulting, training, and compliance solutions around the clock. ReSource Pro was listed as one of the Inc. 5000 Fastest Growing Private Companies from 2009 to 2021 and has consistently achieved a +95% client retention rate for over a decade.

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