



# The Broker Management System Buyer's Guide

How to choose a system that helps grow your brokerage

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# Introduction

## Today's changing industry



The insurance industry is conservative by nature. We help people prepare for uncertainty and plan for change in their lives. We're in the business of minimizing risk, which by necessity means adopting a level-headed approach to life. Taking big chances just isn't in our DNA.

But technology changes the way we all do business, and the insurance industry is no exception.

Today, customers have high expectations when it comes to technology. Whether it's their travel agent, their dentist, or their cable provider, customers want the companies they do business with to use technology to serve them better.

As an independent broker faced with an evolving insurance industry, you need a management system that meets customer needs 24/7. Yesterday's systems often can't keep up with growth or increasing customer demands.

## Everyone wants more



Your customers demand self-service and timely assistance.



Your managers want dynamic reports so they can make appropriate decisions.



Your staff needs quick access to information, anytime and anywhere.



Everyone is searching for quick, easy solutions that don't require a lot of computer expertise.



# Your best approach: personalization



Your competition now includes big players who are entering the insurance industry for the first time. These companies may not have the depth of insurance expertise and the deep portfolio of customers that you've built over the years, but they're very familiar with technology.

The biggest edge that independent broker have is personalization—the time-honored ability to build and nurture long-term relationships with their customers.

But you need to work smart. You need to use tools to keep that competitive edge and focus on your business. Managing your broker with a hodgepodge of unrelated systems costs you time and money, and takes your attention away from the most important aspect of your business—your customers.

# What's inside



Acquiring a new broker management system is a major decision for a brokerage of any size. A new management system will be in place for the next five to 10 years, so it's not a decision that should be made overnight or on a whim.

But it doesn't have to be overwhelming.

“Nothing is particularly hard if you divide it into small jobs,” Henry Ford famously said. In the following pages, we're going to take you step by step through the process of choosing the right system for your business.

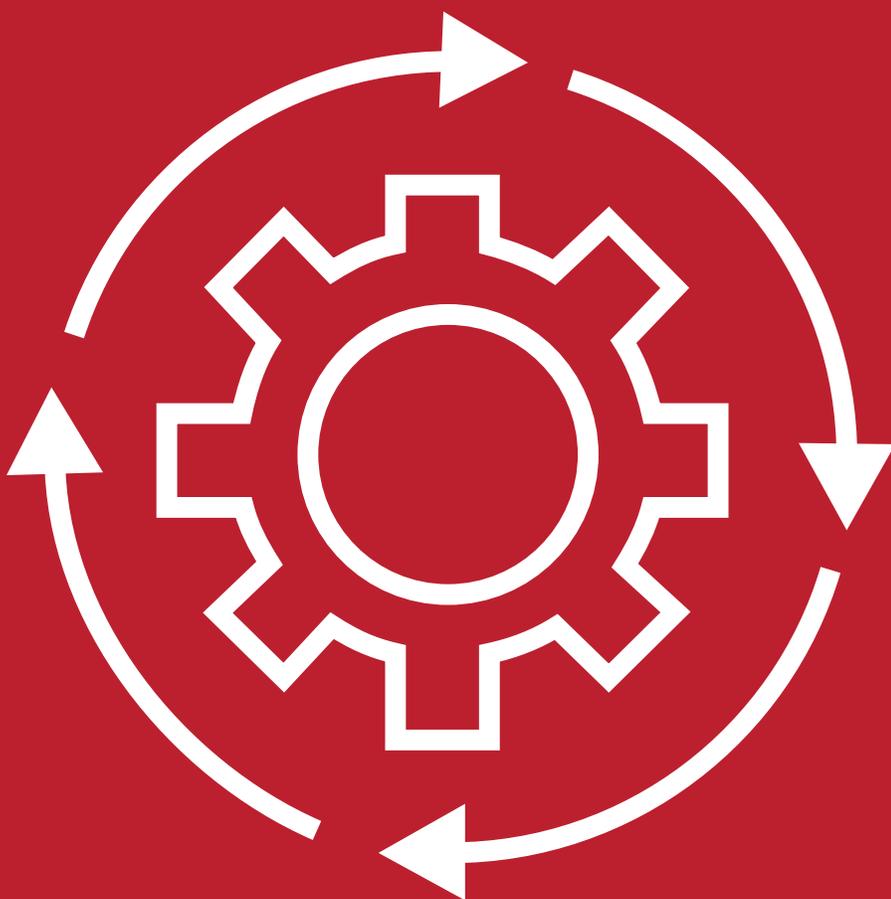


# 10 things you'll learn



1. When to upgrade your existing system and when to buy a new one
2. How automation helps you focus on your customers
3. How to choose a system that works for your brokerage today and tomorrow
4. Who should be on your evaluation team
5. Why a broker management system is essential to business growth
6. How your brokerage can become more efficient and cost effective
7. What successful integration looks like
8. How a broker management system helps you get new business
9. How a proper broker management system empowers the people in your organization
10. Why moving data to the cloud keeps things safe and accessible

# In search of solutions





# Why would you need a new Broker Management System?

As insurance brokers grow, their management systems don't always keep up with them. Slowly, often unnoticed, their technology becomes inefficient and outdated. At some point, the patchwork of systems and software that has grown along with their business suddenly blocks future growth.

Technological changes happen so quickly that it's hard to keep up, but if you adapt and invest in the technology that your customers are using now, when changes come—and they will come—you'll be ready.



80% of brokerage use a broker management system

Source: IIABA Agency Universe Study, 2014



# You want to communicate in real time



“We knew that if we wanted to grow, we would have to invest in a management system that gave us more capacity, and would help us service our customers more efficiently. We live in a world of texts and instant messaging. Our clients expect that same type of immediacy from us.”

**Lincoln Salmon,**  
*President, The Salmon Agency*



Demographic and technological changes march relentlessly on.

Savvy brokers know that in order to expand their customer base, they need to find a way to communicate electronically with younger customers, without losing track of customers that still communicate via paper and telephone.

Customers used to expect their broker to be in the neighborhood; now geography is less important.



# You want information, now

You need to answer billing, claim, and policy questions immediately, and that means having customer information at your fingertips. The days of searching through spreadsheets or trying to track down customer information in stacks of paper are in the past. You want to find the appropriate customer information and assist customers quickly and easily.



## Red flags

These warning signs mean it's time to think about a new broker management system:

- Do you have paper stacked everywhere?
- Are your customers calling you a second time looking for information?
- Do your CSRs have stacks of mail on their desks?
- Do you have to re-enter the same customer information into different systems?
- Is your staff spending their time issuing certificates of insurance instead of talking to customers?





# The personal touch

Today, big tech companies are entering the insurance market, disrupting the traditional business model. While you may not be able to compete on price with these giants, you have one key advantage: the personal touch.

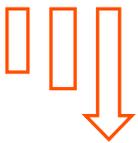
Independent brokers and their employees know their customers' names, their families, and the challenges and opportunities they're facing. Most large companies don't value

personalization, but many customers still want a one-on-one relationship with their broker. The right broker management system can reduce inefficient work and help you become a trusted advisor to your customers.

Some may argue that it's too costly and complicated to update or replace their current system. But in this day and age, can you afford to fall behind?



## Top 5 reasons brokers replace their management systems



### Poor return on investment

Price increases, poor technical and customer support, and decreasing efficiencies can force brokers to search for a solution that provides more value per dollar.



### End of life for legacy systems

Technology keeps moving forward, and ultimately even the most innovative systems become obsolete. When vendors phase out support for outdated systems, change happens whether a broker likes it or not.



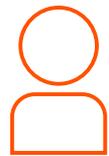
### Moving to the cloud

More and more brokers are moving their data to the cloud to increase security and ease of access, which often means upgrading their management systems.



### Centralizing data, unifying workflow

Creating consistent workflows, a single location for customer information, and a permanent audit trail are essential for brokers that want to thrive in today's competitive market.



### Focusing on the customer

Forward-looking brokers use systems that support multiple lines of business to stay competitive and allow them to spend more time on their customers.



# How efficient is your broker?

Sometimes, brokers stick with outdated, inefficient processes when better, more cost-effective solutions exist. Take a moment to appraise the efficiency of your brokerage's current processes.



Add one point for each box you check, and then total your score at the bottom.

- Are your customers calling you a second time looking for information?
- Do you have to re-enter the same customer information into multiple systems?
- Do daily processes take 40–70 percent of your time, leaving little time for insurance and customers?
- Is your current management system or broker software more than six years old?
- Does your current system allow you to track changes to policies?
- Do you spend more time on software or IT updates than on selling insurance and servicing your clients?
- Do your producers have to personally ensure version control between documents?
- Do you measure a quote's cycle time in days instead of hours?
- Does your current system improve communication between your staff or hinder it?
- Are your producers spending more time on administrative tasks than on revenue-generating activities?
- Does your staff have to physically be in the office to do their jobs properly?
- Do you have to switch between multiple screens to view all the files you need?
- Is it difficult for your broker to track work that been completed or is in progress?
- Do your business processes rely on staff to remember what to do at each step?
- Have you had to add staff just to keep up with your current workload?
- Total**

## Determine your brokerage's efficiency by adding up your score.

### 1–3 points

Like any business, you have some inefficiencies, but they're not severe and likely can be addressed by fine-tuning existing processes rather than adopting new technology.

### 3–8 points

Your brokerage has some significant efficiency issues when it comes to technology, processes and procedures, or both. Adopting new technology and improved workflows would allow your brokerage to stay competitive in today's changing market.

### 8+ points

Major efficiency challenges are affecting your ability to match customer expectations and grow your business. Your issues could best be addressed with a comprehensive management system, which includes smart automation, cloud-based data management, and efficient processes.

Work smarter,  
not harder





# How an Broker Management System empowers the people in your organization

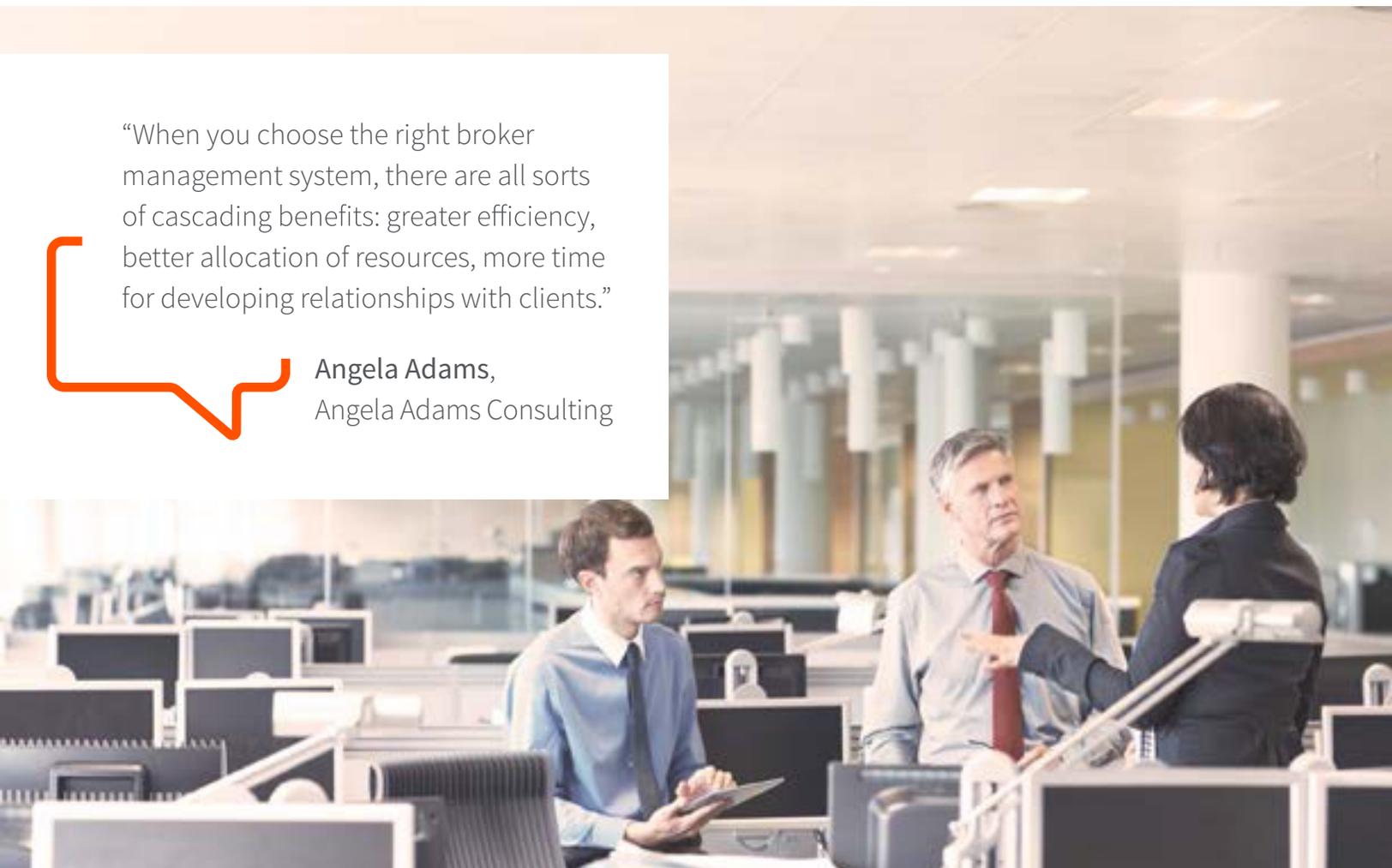
Ironically, technology can bring you closer to your customers. With the right technology in place, you can cut inefficiencies, grow your business, and focus on the customer experience.

The proper broker management system allows you to work more efficiently and focus on your customer. It gathers all the programs and functionalities you need in one place and automates common business, accounting, and data management functions so you spend less time behind the computer and more time in front of your customers.



“When you choose the right broker management system, there are all sorts of cascading benefits: greater efficiency, better allocation of resources, more time for developing relationships with clients.”

**Angela Adams,**  
Angela Adams Consulting





# What is workflow?

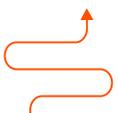
Procedure books are a thing of the past. To increase efficiency in your broker, processes and procedures can now be automated into “workflows” in your broker management system. When you automate common procedures into workflows, you reduce errors while saving time and money.



## Taking stock

Because broker management systems are designed to increase your productivity and perform key tasks more efficiently, it’s a good idea to take a look at your broker’s high-frequency, high-impact activities. What are the inefficiencies and drawbacks with your current processes? Could these common, crucial tasks be simplified through automation?

## How entering data by hand hurts your bottom line



### It’s inefficient

Hand-keying the same data over and over again is a poor use of staff time.



### It’s risky

Manually entering data is an error-prone process that exposes your company to risk.



### It’s frustrating

Your staff would rather focus on value-added tasks, not data entry.



### It’s slow

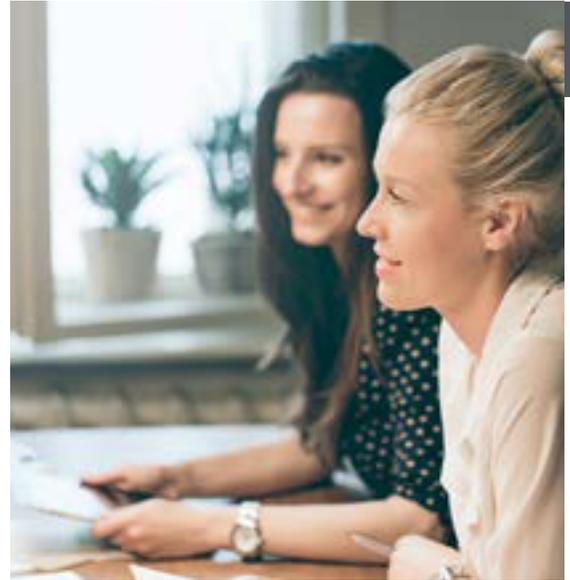
Manual data entry is just not the fastest way to enter data.



# What is automation and why do you need it?

Automation uses technology to ensure that common tasks are completed without human intervention. When your systems automatically perform important but time-consuming tasks, your staff is free to focus on customers and on generating business.

Independent brokers with limited resources can particularly benefit from automation that helps them further personalize relationships with existing customers and generates new leads.



## Automation makes it easier



### Accounting

Keep in balance and on top of your books with integrated accounting functionality that ensures that sub-ledgers are always tied to the balance sheet.



### Insurance companies quotes

Save hours of data entry time by using a single interface to bring together quotes and endorsements from different insurance companies.



### Policy details

A system that offers one view of policy information allows your staff to access customer data in one standardized framework.



### Streamlined outputs

Save time, money, and headaches by automating claim reports, premium quotes, policy issuance, and other common forms.



### Data integrity

When you are receiving your customer's data as a copy of the data the company is using to settle claims and administer the policy, you've reached a level of expertise and professionalism that only automation can help you achieve.



## Personalization matters

A coordinated system that automatically generates reminders can be a powerful tool for fostering relationships with customers new and old. Remembering your customers' birthdays or anniversaries gives you an edge on your competitors, and being able to suggest better coverage when policies need to be renewed helps your broker's bottom line. Personalization is one way to distinguish yourself in the crowded marketplace—but only if you have timely access to the information you need.



### A last word on empowering your brokerage

It's just as important to invest in your employees as it is to develop your customer relationships. Empower your staff to do their jobs by giving them the right technology and tools.

“You really do waste a tremendous amount of time if you don't have the right technologies. That wasted time could be better used for activities which bring in more revenue, like cross-selling or upselling the accounts.”

**George Robertson,**  
*Robertson Consulting*





# Conduct an internal review

Save time and money by conducting an internal review of your broker's practices with the people who know the work best: your staff.

A broker management system exists to help your employees do their jobs better, so it's important to understand exactly what tasks those jobs entail. By figuring out how your broker works and what its goals are, you can make sound, strategic decisions about the kind of management system you need.



Here are a few questions to get you started:

**Q** Where is your accounting stored? Your marketing files? Customer data? Which system are you already using?

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**Q** How comfortable is your broker with technology? Does your staff welcome innovation or resist change?

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**Q** How old are your current processes? Why does your broker follow its current processes and procedures?

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**Q** Do the limits of your current system create inefficiencies, errors, and frustrations?

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# Making the right choice for your brokerage





# How to choose a Broker Management System that works for you



After considering your broker's needs and plans for future growth, you've decided that you need to acquire a new broker management system.

Choosing the right system for your brokerage doesn't have to be a daunting task—you'd be surprised by how many answers you already have.

Yes, it can be an expensive and complicated endeavor. And yes, insurance professionals like you are experts in their chosen fields, and many find wading through the wide range of software features and choices intimidating.

To select a system that actually works for your business, you can seek out the help of a third-party consultant or advisor, who will provide their expert perspective on the technology that would work best. However, you may have all the answers you need right inside your brokerage.



# It's about people, not computers

Save time and money by conducting an internal review of your broker's practices with the people who know the work best: your staff.



A broker management system exists to help your employees do their jobs better, so it's important to understand exactly what tasks those jobs entail. By figuring out how your brokerage works and what its goals are, you can make sound, strategic decisions about the kind of management system you need.

## What's your brokerage personality?

### HOW

- How do you manage your information now? Which system are you already using?
- How comfortable is your brokerage with technology? Does your staff welcome innovation or resist change?
- How do you view your brokerage internally?

### WHY

- Why does your brokerage follow its current processes and procedures?
- Do the limits of your current system create inefficiencies, errors, and frustrations?

### WHAT

- What's the best part about the system you're using now?
- What are the system's shortcomings?

### WHEN

- When do you need to make changes to your system? Right now, or in the future?
- When will your broker reach the crisis point where you must change?

### WHERE

- Where can your staff access your system? In the office or remotely?
- Where is your brokerage going? Do you predict that your company will stay independent? Do you plan to acquire, or be acquired by, another broker?



# How your broker operates: digging deeper

Don't assume you know how your broker's operations work; sometimes the shortcomings of a management system will force your employees into coming up with creative workarounds and ad hoc procedures to get their jobs done.



To get an accurate picture of how your staff works, we recommend:

## Interviews

Talk with system users at every level of your broker to find out what works and what doesn't.

## Observation

Sit with system users while they work to observe system shortcuts and deficiencies that don't come up in interviews.

## Documentation

Compare system documentation with how your team actually uses the system.

## Surveys

Conduct anonymous internal surveys to find out what your staff really thinks of the system's strengths and weaknesses.



## Do you really need to change systems?

Not always; sometimes brokers can mitigate or solve problems using the tools at their disposal.

After getting a better understanding of operational procedures, it's time to investigate whether a new management system is the answer to your problems, or whether you can improve operational efficiency and customer service by upgrading your existing system.



# Every broker has different needs

Think about the following fundamental features when selecting your new management system.

Don't be distracted by bells and whistles you may never use; choose a system that will most efficiently handle tasks your staff performs hundreds of times a day.



# Top 10 features in an Broker Management System



- 1. Timely renewals; increased customer retention** – Automatically track renewals so you can contact your customers at the right time. Increase your retention rate and say goodbye to inefficient paper reports.
- 2. Streamlined, effective marketing** – Market your broker’s services consistently with simplified, automated campaigns that help you acquire new customers and cross-sell to existing customers.
- 3. Information, anywhere** – View policy details and make changes from any supported web browser or tablet. Close deals and service your customers no matter where you are.
- 4. Customer empowerment** – Give your customers access to their complete policy details in one convenient view, and enable them to change and update their information as needed.
- 5. Accounting that works for you** – Stay in balance with comprehensive cash or accrual-based insurance accounting tools that are completely integrated with the rest of the system.
- 6. Multiple companies, one interface** – Get endorsements and process quotes from multiple companies through one simple interface. Save time and hassle by automatically downloading personal and commercial lines as well as commission statements.
- 7. Accurate, updated data** – Keep track of any and all changes with document management tools that give your staff up-to-date, accurate information.
- 8. Reports that make a difference** – Make data-driven decisions with customizable reports and real-time performance monitoring that can be easily accessed and shared.
- 9. Secure data in the cloud** – Keep your vital data secure and backed up, but access it easily from any supported browser or mobile device.
- 10. Automated workflows** – Reduce inefficiencies and time-consuming busy work by automating common procedures, allowing your staff to spend more time with customers.



# Searching for vendors

With a better idea of your system requirements, you're now ready to research broker management systems and gather a list of suppliers.



You may already have an idea of which supplier's system will meet your needs, but we suggest keeping an open mind and conducting a general search regardless. Consider the following sources:



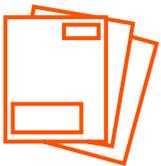
## Firsthand feedback

Your industry colleagues and brokers in other markets can be tapped for information about their experience using their management systems.



## Vendor websites

Well-established supplier's have a wealth of practical information about their systems on their websites, from case studies to downloadable content.



## Industry publications

Insurance industry websites and publications often discuss trends in technology and provide further insight into management systems.



## System reviews

Blog posts from insurance professionals and system reviews from industry websites can offer helpful perspectives.



## Social media

YouTube often has system reviews and tutorials, and many companies have a Facebook or LinkedIn presence with relevant content.

The more information you gather, the more you can refine your list of system requirements.



# Making the most of supplier demonstrations

The vendor demo: a crucial part of the selection process that you can't afford to skip.



Because the supplier may not be in the same city or time zone, the first demonstration may be conducted via an online meeting. As you continue to work with a vendor, additional demonstrations might be done on site with your team.

Regardless of whether supplier demos are on site or via the web, be sure to schedule some "hands-on" time so your team can actually experience the system interface.

## Demo tips



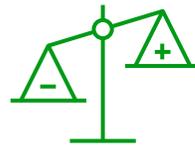
### Form the team

Ideally, your entire system selection team will see a number of demos from different vendors so they can compare and contrast the benefits of the different systems.



### Take notes

It's important for your selection team to take detailed notes of each demo; after a few presentations it can be difficult to remember the specifics.



### Keep score

Scoring the different features of the competing systems numerically is a great way to compare their pros and cons.



### Take charge

Make sure the supplier addresses the questions in your RFI before diving into the bells and whistles of the system.

"We came up with a checklist of things we wanted to see and learn during each demo, which was very important. You need to spell it out to the supplier ahead of time, so you both have the same expectation for what a successful demo looks like."

**Christine Perreault,**

*Commercial Risk Management Operations Leader, Baldwin Krystyn Sherman*

# Building your system evaluation team





## How to use the expertise of your staff to choose a new system

Buying a new broker management system is a major undertaking for a brokerage of any size. It's not a decision to be taken lightly, and it shouldn't be the sole responsibility of the broker owner. Although you should consider any recommendations your IT officers make regarding a new system, it's important to solicit the opinions and expertise of other members of your team.

By forming a diverse advisory team to evaluate potential new management systems, you can ensure that you'll choose a solution that meets your business needs and poises your broker for future growth. As a bonus, you gain crucial buy-in from key staff that can help you manage the migration to the new system.

So how do you select the people you'll need to help with the evaluation and decision process?





# Who are the key players?

A system evaluation team consists of various members of your brokerage who will help select a new broker management system.



Ideally the team will consist of staff who represent different departments and varying points of view. This diverse group will be charged with researching, evaluating, and recommending a management system based on how well it meets the broker's requirements (see Chapter 4, "Making the right choice for your brokerage").

Of course, it's up to the brokerage owner or executive team to make the ultimate decision, but in order to make an informed choice, they must rely on the judgment and expertise of the evaluation team.

## Your team should include:



### Managers

The industry expertise and practical perspectives of account managers, commercial and personal lines managers, and office managers are valuable when choosing a new system.



### IT staff

Larger brokers will want the chief IT officer and possibly senior IT staff to weigh in on the technical challenges and opportunities in any new system.



### Frontline users

It's always good to include people who will use the new management system every day, such as CSRs or members of your accounting team.



### Producers

The input of your sales staff and brokers is crucial during the selection process, because any new system can greatly affect their productivity.



# What does success look like?

Each role within a broker has a different definition of success and expects different outcomes from a system solution. Let's look at our team members again and see how they define success.



## The manager

“Success to me is a user-friendly system that enhances lead generation and customer service. I need to have strong accounting functionality and the ability to easily run reports, so I can have a better idea of how our team is doing.”

## The tech professional

“Success to me is good integration with the software we already have, online data security, regular backups and updates, and having tools that are easy to maintain on the back end.”

## The frontline user

“Success to me is a system that helps me do my job more quickly and efficiently. If I can issue a certificate of insurance in two clicks instead of eight, it saves a lot of time, money, and frustration.”

## The producer

“Success to me is a fully functional system that allows me to access data on the road, helps me cross-sell, and ensures that I'm receiving accurate commissions.”

“Everyone has different points of view about what makes a good management system. Your accounting folks have a completely different set of priorities than your service manager or your president does, which is why it's so important to pull together a team that represents all aspects of your business.”

**Janet Schoenfeld,**  
*Assistant VP of Accounting,*  
*Landscape Contractors Insurance Services Inc.*



# Change management tips

Migrating to a new broker management system doesn't have to disrupt your business, though some changes and adjustments are inevitable. Data must be shifted from one system to the other, new workflows have to be implemented, and the staff has to be brought up to speed on the new system.

But you can turn this time of change into a time of growth by making use of the expertise and leadership of your system evaluation team to help bring the rest of your brokerage onboard.



## Prepare your staff

“It can take up to three months to get everyone in a brokerage proficient with the new system,” says broker technology consultant Steve Anderson. “Clearly communicating why a change is needed and how your staff’s work will change is vital, because adopting a new system means everyone in your brokerage has to change.”



## Use your evaluation team

Your system evaluation team has the most familiarity with the incoming system. By using them as “ambassadors” to the rest of your staff, you can help communicate the benefits of the new system and prepare your brokerage for the transition.



## Train internally

Adopting a new system means learning new workflows. This can be disruptive. Make sure you have an adequate training program to get your staff started, and then provide internal mentors and accurate documentation. Be sure to take advantage of any training your supplier offers.



# 18 questions you should ask any supplier

Before entering into a relationship with a broker management system supplier, it's best to clearly determine how they approach support and customer service at every stage. The following questions will help guide your conversation with any potential vendors and ensure that there are no surprises down the road.



## Implementation

- How easy is it to get your management system up and running?
- Can you explain how we'd migrate our current data to your system?
- What kind of technical support do you offer during implementation?

## Training

- Do you offer training for different roles in my brokerage?
- Do you have interactive web instruction, online classes, solid documentation, and detailed manuals?
- Will you send a sample training schedule so we can plan ahead?

## Support

- How responsive is your customer support team?
- How do you handle troubleshooting, IT tickets, and day-to-day technical glitches that arise?
- How often do you upgrade or fix bugs in your system?

## Communication

- Do you answer questions via email, web chat, or telephone?
- Will you send a representative out to meet us in person?
- Do you offer around-the-clock technical support or 9-to-5 availability?

## Security

- How often do you update your data security?
- Do you offer cloud-based data storage?
- If so, who is your cloud service provider?

## Pricing

- Do you offer a consistent, predictable pricing structure?
- Is your pricing based on the number of users?
- Do you have ROI testimonials, case studies, or examples of successful adoption?

# Investing in success





## Let's talk budget

As an independent broker, you have to spend every dollar wisely. You can't afford to dump your IT budget into a system that doesn't meet your basic needs, nor do you want to underspend on a bare-bones system that ends up costing you more in the long run.

There's no magic answer to how much of your IT budget you should devote to an broker management system, but you can learn from the success and best practices of other brokerages to make an educated choice.





# Incremental spending

You may not have to buy an entire management system outright—work with your IT department to determine whether phasing in system functionality over time is a viable option. By spending incrementally and slowly scaling up your capabilities, you may be able to meet your business needs while staying within budget.



## Don't settle for “good enough”

The downside to underinvesting in a management system becomes apparent once it's in place. “Some brokers are more concerned about cost than anything, and that limits their choices,” says Stephanie Barnes, commercial account manager with Leavitt Group of Boise. “They find out later that the system they saved money on doesn't have marketing ability, or accounting and reporting functions.”

## How much should you spend?

Percentage of insurance broker IT budgets devoted to broker management system, by size of brokerage		
Average number of employees	Annual revenue	Percentage of IT budget
7	\$1.25 million	73%
14	\$1.25–\$2.5 million	47%
23	\$2.5–\$5 million	33%
46	\$5–\$10 million	41%
90	\$10–\$25 million	30%
265	\$25 million	29%

Source: IIABA Agency Universe Study, 2014, and list price comparisons of leading broker management systems at various price and functionality points.

# Generating new business





# Acquiring new customers and keeping the ones you have

Among your other duties, an independent agent has two important tasks: looking for new opportunities and keeping current customers happy. The right management system can make these two jobs a little easier through automation.

By keeping track of important customer dates and information, you can enhance your customer's experience and provide a higher level of service than the industry giants can hope to match.

“We used to be able to provide insurance any way we wanted to and folks would just be happy with that. But today we can't do that; we've got to be smarter about the services we offer and how we communicate the value of those services.”

**Joyce Sigler,**  
*Vice President, Jones & Wenner*





# How technology helps

## Customer retention

Some of your customers might still prefer paper statements, but more and more of them prefer to be able to view their policies electronically, on their computers, smartphones, or tablets. And both you and your customers would benefit from being able to view their information and make changes to it in real time.

## New business

At the same time you're working on keeping current customers, you need to be able to market your services consistently so you can gain new business. The best way to generate new leads is by building campaigns and engaging in outreach using the tools built into robust broker management systems.

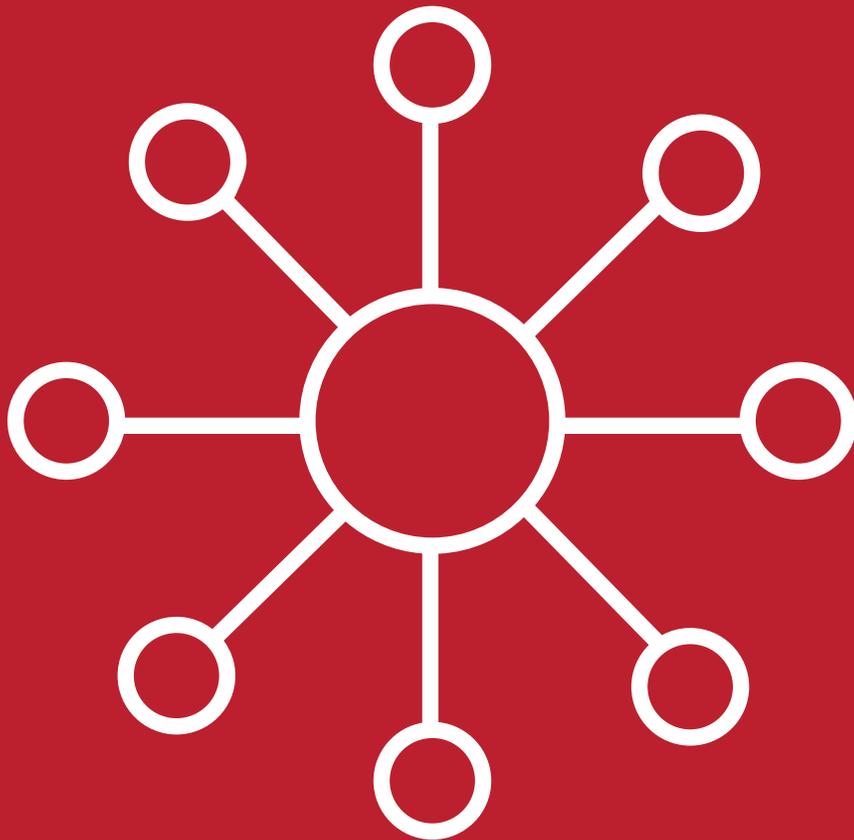


“The more policy details and changes you can show your customer (especially where you've saved them money), the better. You've got to know where your customer needs to go and present a solution before they know they have a problem.”

**Joyce Sigler,**  
*Vice President, Jones & Wenner*



# Straightforward integration





## Choose a system that works with your current technology

If your separate systems don't work together, it can cost your broker time, money, and customers. Many brokerages don't have the resources or inclination to throw out all their old programs and start anew, which is why any broker management system you purchase needs to work with the legacy systems that you're keeping around. If your new accounting software can't export to Excel, for instance, that can really slow you down.



“The integration piece is vital. Proper integration lets your existing software interface with your broker management system, which in turn means accurate metrics, more reports, customer self-service, and more. If your systems aren't integrated, you're not making the most of their abilities.”

George Robertson,  
*Robertson Consulting*





# APIs: a cost-effective solution

An API (application programming interface) is a software tool that makes it possible for different computer applications to interact with each other.

APIs enable your broker management system to talk to your company website and to third-party applications. They can save you time and money by allowing your management system to share data with the programs you already have in place.

For example, sending the customer information you collect on your website directly to your broker management system via automatic uploads can save hours of time-consuming data entry—and help you better serve existing customers and target new leads.

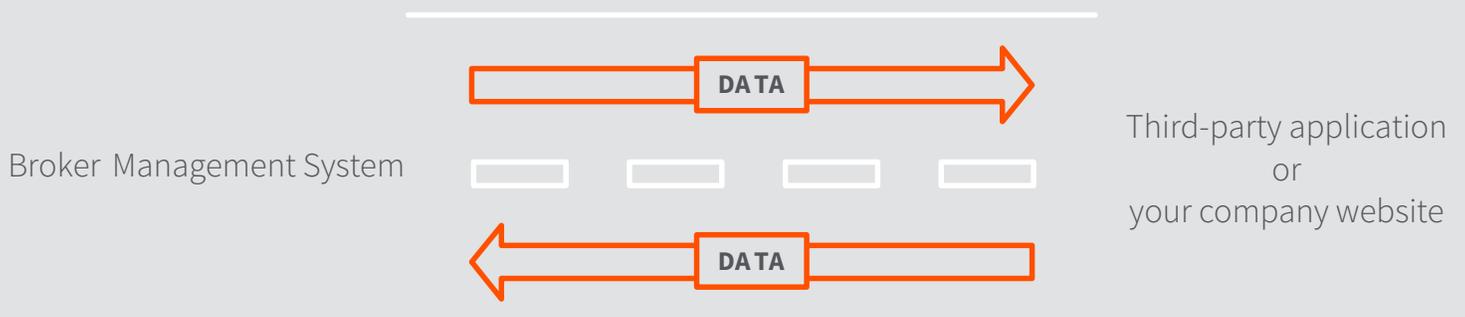
## Features of a good API

- APIs give applications running on different operating systems, such as Microsoft and UNIX, the ability to send and receive message object data requests.
- API architecture provides different technologies and programming languages the ability to share data-processing capabilities.
- APIs allow you to perform simple operations like retrieving data for email campaigns or complex operations such as automatically importing leads gathered through your broker website.
- APIs let you control who is authorized to perform various operations with your broker data. You can restrict access to particular operations or data to any user.



## The API highway

APIs create a bridge that seamlessly moves data into and out of your broker management system.





# Determine your brokerage's goals

Take a few moments to write down your brokerage's goals in the following four categories.



Even if you think a goal is so fundamental and obvious that it's not worth spelling out, write it down! You'll need a clear picture of your priorities so you can select the right management system. Use a separate piece of paper if necessary.

## Productivity/Efficiency

**Q** What do you want to focus on in terms of productivity? More prospecting and marketing for producers? Getting more done for CSRs and account managers?

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## Growth

**Q** What are your priorities in terms of growth? Are you planning to open new offices, expand your product offerings, or acquire another brokerage?

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## Revenue

**Q** What are your future goals for revenue? Will you prioritize new account acquisition and cross-selling to existing accounts, or will you adopt a balanced approach?

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## Service

**Q** What goals have you created to match rising customer expectations? Customer self-service? Remote desktop access for your staff? Reduced quote time?

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# Storing data online





# Why you should consider moving to the cloud

In the days of paper and filing cabinets, data used to be hard to access and keep secure. Information could be misfiled, lost, or wiped out in a disaster. When brokers digitized, they began hosting their data in servers on site—where information could still be misfiled, lost, or wiped out in a disaster. Not much of an improvement.

Now, thanks to the cloud, brokers have the ability to work remotely, entering and updating important policy information online. Everyone on your team can access information at the same time and share one view—if they have the right system, that is.

Storing data in the cloud makes sense in today's evolving market, but is it the right decision for your brokerage?



# Still up in the air about moving to the cloud?

If your valuable business data only lives in computer servers on-premises, you're taking a chance with agency and customer information that you may not be able to recover if disaster strikes. It's more important than ever to ensure that your customers' data is secure and accessible—which means moving it to the cloud.



## What is the cloud, anyway?

“The cloud” is a metaphor that refers to Internet-based computing where services are delivered to an organization's computers online. Data stored on the cloud is vastly more secure and useful than data that is stored on local servers or device hard drives.

When you store data in online servers hosted in secure data centers managed by reputable vendors, you're not only protected in case of disaster—you'll be able to access customer information from anywhere, at any time.

With the cloud, you'll be able to get to important information whether you're at your desk, meeting with a customer, in a hotel room on the other side of the country, or waiting in an airport.





## Remote access means greater engagement

With more and more of your customers working remotely, you and your staff need to be able to access and view their data the same way. Allowing controlled access to your system isn't just a smart productivity decision, it can also increase customer engagement.

Today, many customers hold their insurance broker to the same high standards they have for their bank or favorite retailer: they want service around the clock. Moving customer files to the cloud makes customer self-service possible, allowing customers to update their information, renew their policies, print out proof of insurance paperwork, and more.





# 5 good reasons to move your data to the cloud



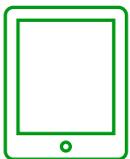
## Self-service

When you store data online, you can enable your customers to access their accounts wherever and whenever they like.



## Software updates

You can benefit from the latest software updates without having to install or update anything yourself.



## Easy access

Work from anywhere with a laptop, smartphone, or tablet and an Internet connection.



## Security

When your data doesn't live in vulnerable hard drives or servers on-premises, you'll worry less about unauthorized access.



## Data recovery

Power outages do happen and servers can crash, but it's easy to recover customer data from the cloud, anywhere, anytime.

“There’s a tremendous advantage to hosting your data online and offsite, both in terms of security and cost. You’re protected in case disaster strikes, but it also helps make sure your broker is compliant with state and federal regulations.”

Stephanie Barnes,

Commercial Account Manager, Leavitt Group of Boise





# How safe is your brokerage's data?

When you store data on safe online servers, you can access customer information anywhere, at any time—even after a natural disaster. Data that is stored in cloud-based servers is backed up regularly, protected by state-of-the-art security, and monitored by professionals around the clock.

Many brokers still feel they can keep customer data and financial records safe by hosting servers in their offices—but is that really the safest approach?

## Your security scoresheet

To get a better idea of how vulnerable your data is to disaster, theft, and corruption, fill out the questionnaire below. Give yourself one point for every “no” answer, and zero points for every “yes” answer.



**300%** increase in natural disasters from 2000 to 2009

**80%** of this growth is due to weather-related events

*Source: New England Journal of Medicine, “Natural Disasters, Armed Conflict, and Public Health,” November 2013*

Yes	No	
		Could you fully recover your brokerage's data tomorrow if you had to?
		Have you tested your internal data backup abilities recently?
		Is your data backed up every night?
		Has your state experienced natural disasters or power outages in the last three years?
		Are your servers physically located in your office?
		Does your data management system have privacy protections?
		Will your broker data and financial records stay intact for the required time period?
		Do you have server experts on your staff that stay current on data security trends?
		Are you using up-to-date technology and infrastructure for data storage?
		Can you access data during a power outage? Snowstorm? When someone is at home sick?
		<b>Total Points</b>

## How did you do?

Total up the number of times you answered “no” above. If you have more than seven points, your brokerage and your customers would benefit from a modern, cloud-based approach to data management.

Strong support,  
dedicated service

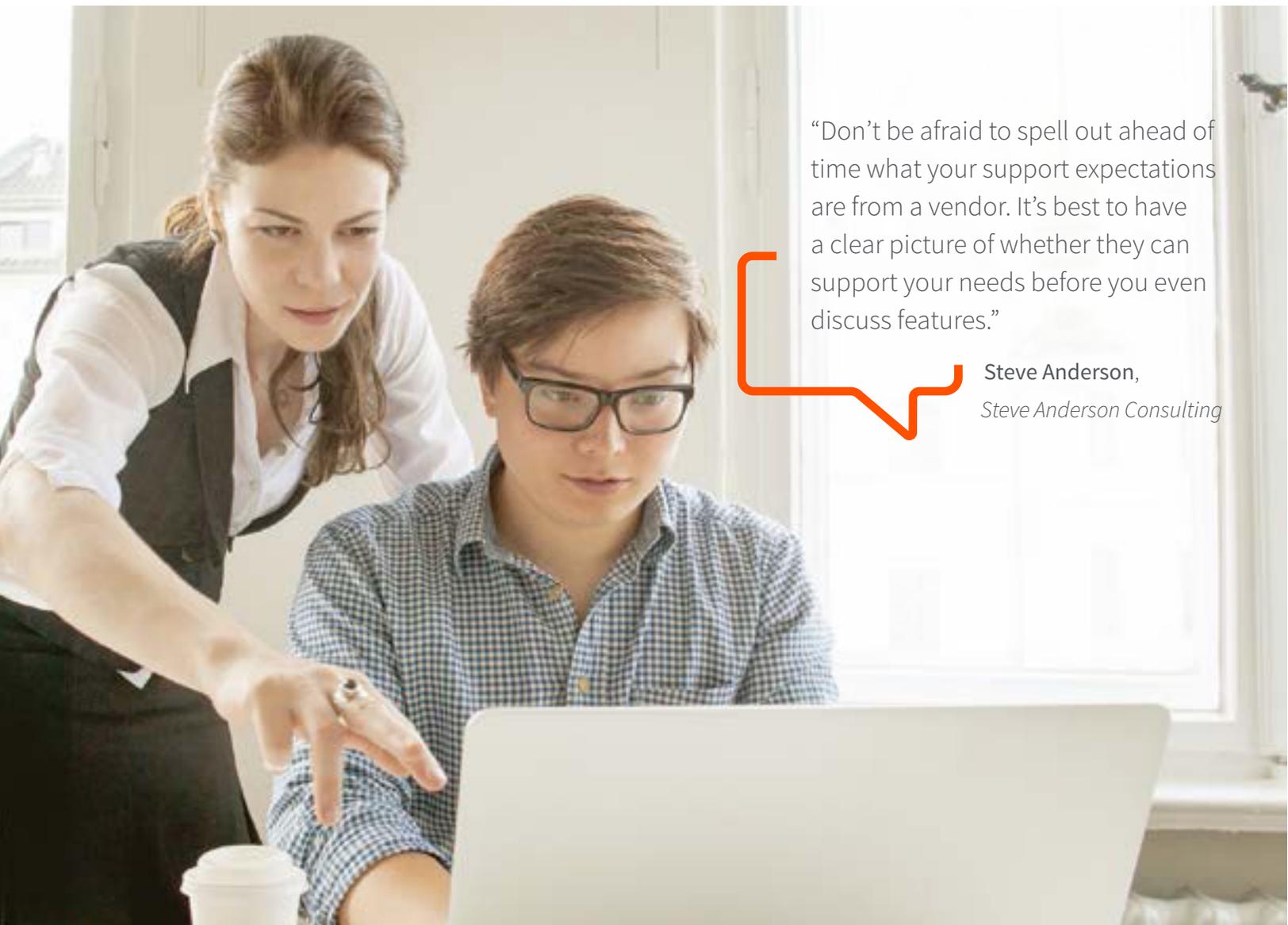




## You're not in this alone

Each broker requires a different level of support when changing systems. Some need little to no help with implementation, while others need some training to get their staff up to speed on the new technology. Some brokers need only minimal attention after launch; other brokers require ongoing support.

If you have IT staff involved in the buying process, they'll be able to assess the level of support you'll need.



“Don't be afraid to spell out ahead of time what your support expectations are from a vendor. It's best to have a clear picture of whether they can support your needs before you even discuss features.”

Steve Anderson,  
*Steve Anderson Consulting*



## With you every step of the way

Before entering into a relationship with a supplier, it's best to clearly determine how they approach support and customer service at every stage. Regardless of how technically proficient your IT department is, you'll still need help during the following three stages:



### Implementation

Can you easily get the new system up and running? Does the supplier offer technical help during implementation, or are you on your own?



### Training

Does the vendor you're considering offer onsite training, interactive web instruction, solid documentation, and detailed manuals? Will they tailor the training curriculum to meet your brokerage's particular needs?



### Ongoing support

Will the supplier be available to support you during the product's entire life cycle? How will they handle troubleshooting, IT tickets, and day-to-day technical glitches that arise? How often do they upgrade or fix bugs in their solution?

## Let's talk about communication

Figuring out how you'd like to communicate with a vendor is an important part of preparing to evaluate new solutions.

- Does your prospective vendor answer questions via email, web chat, or by telephone?
- Will they send a representative out to meet in person?
- Do you need around-the-clock technical support, or are you fine with 9-to-5 availability?

Once you determine your communication preferences and needs, it will be much easier to evaluate whether a vendor is ideal for your brokerage.

In closing





# Take your time and make the right decision

Choosing a new management system isn't just a financial investment—it's an investment of energy and time.



For twenty-first-century brokerages, the broker management system is the beating heart of the organization. Adopting a new system is like performing heart transplant surgery on your brokerage — it's not something to be undertaken lightly or quickly. By searching for a new management system in a deliberate, thoughtful way today, you can avoid rushing into a decision that you'll regret tomorrow.

## Just take it step by step:

- Start by understanding your broker's personality, goals, and strengths.
- Dig deep to get a better grasp of how your brokerage actually operates day to day.
- Make a comprehensive list of your business requirements for new systems.
- Build a diverse system-evaluation team from key members of different departments.
- Explore multiple supplier solutions and observe demos, scoring each potential system.
- Review the evaluation team's final recommendations.
- Make a purchase decision based on the team's input.

The proper management system can make your brokerage more effective and efficient, so choose wisely!



# Do you need a new Broker Management System?

Fill out the scorecard below and total your points to see if it makes sense to upgrade to a full-featured broker management system.



## Your current system's capabilities

<b>3 points</b>	
Customer search/view	
Inquiries about billings, claims, etc.	
Payments	
Real-time insurance quotes	
Endorsements	
Cloud-based data storage	
<b>2 points</b>	
Alerts/activity notifications	
Claims handling and reporting	
Carrier loss runs	
Insurance-specific accounting	
Integrated certificate distribution	
<b>1 point</b>	
Policy issue	
Microsoft Outlook and Office integration	
Remote access from any device	
Automated database backup	
Dedicated IT support	
<b>Total</b>	



# Total your score



## Score

### 30-33

You may be missing a few features, but your brokerage currently has a robust, state-of-the-art broker management system, and no change is needed.

### 18-29

Your brokerage has the basic functionalities in place, but is missing a few key capabilities. It may make sense to upgrade your current system.

### 0-17

You're missing important features that your competitors have and your customers expect. Your brokerage would greatly benefit from modernizing or acquiring a management system that will help you work more efficiently, save money, and serve your customers better.





# Your next steps

Choosing a new management system isn't just a financial investment—it's a commitment of time and energy as well. It's an important decision, because the management system is the beating heart of the modern independent broker. By searching for a new management system in a deliberate, thoughtful way, you can avoid rushing into a decision today that you'll regret tomorrow.



Whether you're in the YES, NO, or MAYBE stage of the buying process, we have some suggestions for your next steps.

## **YES** I'm interested in a new management system

Next steps:

- Make a comprehensive list of your business requirements for new systems.
- Build a diverse system-evaluation team from key members of different departments.
- Explore multiple supplier solutions and observe demos, scoring each potential system.
- Review the evaluation team's final recommendations.
- Make a purchase decision based on the team's input.

## **MAYBE** I need more information before making a decision

Next steps:

- Do you understand your brokerage's personality, goals, and strengths?
- Dig deep to get a better grasp of how your broker actually operates day to day.
- Make a comprehensive list of your business requirements for new systems.

## **NO** I don't think we need a new management system at this time

Next steps:

- Visit [keal.com](http://keal.com) to learn more about how our other broker management solutions could help take your business to the next level.

The proper management system can make your brokerage more effective and efficient, so choose wisely!



We hope we've helped you streamline the broker management system buying process so you can get back to what you do best: building relationships with your customers.

Visit us at [keal.com](http://keal.com) to learn more about how our broker management solutions can help take your business to the next level.

