



AGENT FOR THE FUTURE™

# DIGITAL ACCELERATED

VOL

2

The expert guide for  
independent agents

# INTRODUCTION

2020 changed the pace of digital adoption in the insurance industry. As COVID-19 disrupted business operations and state lockdowns forced many agents to work from home, agents had to quickly learn how to use digital tools to connect with their teams and their customers. In just a few months, technology use accelerated faster than it had in years.

Like most people, our team at Agent for the Future had to completely rethink our plans for this year. As we watched agents quickly adapt to digital, we set out to help by gathering advice on digital tools from forward-thinking agents and industry experts. We shared what we found in an article series that culminated in an e-book. “Digital, Accelerated Vol. 1” covered topics such as setting up a digital “office,” using video to connect with customers, protecting your agency from cyber threats and much more. It also included a digital self-assessment to help agents identify opportunities for growth.

However, we know that digital is not just a stop-gap until things are back to “business as usual.” This year more than ever before, digital tools have transformed every aspect of how people connect with co-workers, communicate with customers and operate businesses. Digital tools are here to stay. Future-minded agents are constantly looking to evolve their technology and use digital to make things easier and faster.

So we’re introducing “Digital, Accelerated Vol. 2”, designed to help agents take their digital offerings to the next level. Once again, we talked to agents and industry experts who are leading the way in technology. In these pages, you will find stories of digital innovation, practical tips about how to get the most out of your digital tools and predictions about how this time will transform the insurance industry.

How can you reach your ideal clients online? What data do you need to learn how to improve your agency? What tools might you need to level up your digital engagement? Keep reading to learn the answers to these questions and more.

We’re excited to see what’s ahead for the independent insurance agent channel. We hope that wherever your agency is with digital, the ideas in this e-book inspire you to think big and keep striving for growth.



**AGENT FOR THE FUTURE STAFF**

**Share your stories and ideas about digital!**



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# 3 reasons agents should be digital-first

Insurance companies and brokers need to recognize and prioritize customers' desire for digital. Far from just viewing digital as an occasionally helpful tool, we need to be "digital-first," focusing on digital as a key part of how we operate and serve customers.

Being digital-first is really about being customer-first. But it also can help agents grow their businesses, streamline operations and serve customers more effectively.

## 1. Drive growth

Agents for the future are growth-focused. They understand that their value is in offering consultative guidance and their time is best spent prospecting.

By streamlining internal operations, digital tools free up valuable time that agents can use for prospecting and proactively building strong relationships with clients.

## 2. Streamline the customer experience

At Liberty Mutual and Safeco, we aim to keep our digital experiences completely frictionless and as close to one step as possible. We want our digital experiences to be so simple that customers can find all the information they need to complete their interaction online.

While a "one-step" process won't work in all areas, agents can use digital to offer easy self-service options and build a consistently excellent experience for clients.

## 3. Offer customers the customization they want

Customizing insurance to a client's needs is one of the top value propositions of anyone who sells insurance. Customers want solutions that fit them, but they don't want to spend a lot of time and energy figuring out exactly what those solutions are.

Digital tools allow agents to leverage customer data to identify a customer's unique needs and customize solutions that fit them.

Investing in digital tools now will help agents successfully adapt to continue winning into the future.



**EMILY FINK**  
CHIEF DIGITAL OFFICER, LIBERTY MUTUAL INSURANCE

## 5 crucial tools for putting digital first

### 1. Agency management software

Good agency management software lets agents keep track of client information, run audits and proactively manage renewals and communications.

### 2. Search engine optimization

An agency website isn't just a "build it and they will come" thing. Investing in search engine optimization and paid search helps people find the site if they are searching using insurance keywords.

### 3. Chat and texting

Many people don't like calling on the phone, so leveraging proactive chat on your website can ensure you don't miss a potential customer.

### 4. Self-service options

Regardless of age or income, customers are demanding the ability to self-serve on their own terms, whenever and wherever they want.

### 5. Paperless processes

Agents can use e-signature and e-pay options to keep customers paperless from the beginning. During onboarding, they can explain self-service options and prompt customers to download relevant mobile apps.



**DSHANYA REESE**

BRAND MARKETING MANAGER, WATKINS INSURANCE GROUP

# Using digital marketing personas to reach your ideal customers

In my work as an independent insurance agency marketer, I've found it helpful to create marketing personas to help me identify my agency's ideal customers. By creating these fictional personas, I can hone in on where different types of customers engage with content and what types of content will be most useful to them.

## Questions to create your marketing personas

I created five personas to represent different types of clients. When creating a persona, the first thing I do is give it a name – say "Amber Smith."

Next, I define demographics. These start with the basics: How old is Amber Smith? Is she single or married? Where does she (and her spouse, if relevant) work, and what is their household income? What's her education level? Does she have any kids? If so, what ages?

Then, I dig a little deeper. What are her hobbies and interests? What does her typical day look like? What are her favorite stores, brands, websites? How does she prefer to receive information? How does she find the companies she does business with? The more detail I can create for this person, the easier it is for me to create digital content exactly for them. I can identify the problems they may be facing that my agency can help solve, then craft specific marketing messages to address their questions.

## Creating content for different platforms

Digital marketing makes it easier to reach a wide audience, but you must think through which persona is on which platform. I've found that personal lines content works better on Facebook and commercial lines content works better on LinkedIn.

Crafting different content for each platform may sound like a lot of work, but it doesn't have to be. You could shoot one video talking about flood insurance and then just slice and dice pieces of it for different platforms. One of the many benefits of digital marketing is that it gives you clear insights into what is working well and what is not. You can continually refine your approach by looking at how people engage with your marketing content.

No matter whom you're targeting or what platforms you're using, digital tools can help you reach the right audience where and when they want to be reached.

**Tools to help you create customized content**

Local business publications    AnswerThePublic.com    Google Trends    Social media analytics





**RAUTION JAISWAL**  
CO-FOUNDER AND CEO, INSUREDMINE

## The data points that will transform your agency

Used well, agency data becomes insight. It reveals where an agency did well and where it can do better, serving as a pulse check on different aspects of the agency.

However, with more and more data becoming available, it can feel overwhelming to sort through it all. So, where should agents start?

There is no one data chart that will define your business. But, for insurance agencies, it can be helpful to split data analytics into three different broad sections and start with the area that you know needs the most work.

### Pre-business: How are you driving new business?

Pre-business includes things like how many leads are coming in, where those leads came from and how many of those leads converted into sales.

Knowing this data will help you set targets to meet your goals. Analyzing data can also reveal why you are winning or losing customers. If your agency is struggling with converting leads, you can look into the data to see at what stage you lose the customer. If you're having a strong month of sales, you can explore the data to see what made you win – where those leads came from, how many touchpoints you had with those customers before closing – and then replicate those tactics.

### During business: How are you nurturing your current clients?

After you make the sale, how are you building an experience for that client? You will likely have many touchpoints over the first year. Your agency data will show you the average policies per client and reveal opportunities for cross-selling. It will also tell you which customers are opening your emails and might be receptive to hearing about additional products.

Of course, you'll also want to look at your retention rates. What are you doing to make sure your retention numbers are moving up? Which tactics get the most response from your clients? I've seen agents increase their book value by at least 20% within 12 months just by mining their current book of business to increase cross-selling and retention.

### Post-business: Why are you losing clients, and can you win them back?

If your agency loses a client, you have a small window of opportunity to win back that client. You've invested in a relationship with this client and may be able to address their concerns or frustrations. What tactics are you taking to win back clients, and how often do you succeed?

Data helps you know your agency better. When you understand your agency's strengths and weaknesses today, it will help you adapt to be more successful tomorrow.

# 3 ways 2020 has changed how we work

Times of crisis have a way of speeding up the pace of change in an industry, and COVID-19 has definitely done so for the insurance industry. This year, insurance agents and brokers had to throw out their plans and re-examine every aspect of how they operate and serve customers.

Going forward, the world is going to look very different, and I believe these changes can help drive the insurance industry forward. I fully expect that two years from now, the industry will be much further along than we would have expected. Here are some of the ways this time can prompt insurance agencies to change for the better.



**ARLEEN TAVERAS**  
CO-FOUNDER, INSURANCE LICENSING SERVICES OF AMERICA AND SPOT ON INSURANCE

## 1. More efficient ways of connecting

Before this year, a lot of agents built relationships over lunch or at the golf course. That approach allowed an agent to build a few in-depth relationships, but it wasn't easy to scale. How many lunches or rounds of golf can you get in one day? Not many. Those in-person interactions might only happen once or twice a year with each client.

Online tools give agents the opportunity to connect with clients a lot more frequently. You can set up your schedule to accommodate more quick check-ins or record short videos to share with your clients. If you make a video, you can distribute it to thousands of people in one day – that's a whole lot more reach than you ever could have had previously. To me, that's a game-changer for agents.

## 2. Work flexibility

Before COVID-19, many organizations, including ours, were reluctant to have employees work from home. Now, after months of being forced to do so, we've seen what has worked and what hasn't. We have conducted interviews via video call, used online training and onboarded employees completely remotely.

Having our offices disrupted can allow us to rethink what office life looks like. My company, like many others, will emerge from this time with a hybrid style of work.

## 3. Staying proactive

When faced with big challenges, most people have the tendency to either freeze or to jump into immediate action and ask, "What do I need to do to get ahead of this?" The trailblazing, forward-looking insurance agencies are the ones that will survive and thrive in the long-term. You have to constantly think about what's next in the industry and how to make your services even more robust for your clients.

Whether or not your agency was set up with digital tools before COVID-19 hit, you can use this time to launch the projects that may have been on the backburner. Those who take action right now can come out of this year ahead of the game, with better processes and tools that will set them up well for years to come.



**SARA HOFFMAN**  
CFO AND OWNER, RSS INSURANCE SERVICES

# Caring for your team in the era of remote work

Culture has always been important in our agency. When we received the stay-at-home order in March, I was concerned about how we would maintain our company culture and keep our team engaged with everyone working remotely.

We've been pleasantly surprised. We found that when we gave our staff the tools, training and support they needed, they were able to thrive.

## Make sure team members have the technology they need

We've used this situation as a springboard to invest in our technology, our team and our products. When the pandemic crisis ends, we plan on coming out ahead of the game.

For example, at the beginning of this year, we had a regular phone system in our office. This made it complicated to serve customers from home. We quickly got a new voice-over-IP (VoIP) system installed so everyone can use our agency phone system from home.

## Allow for frequent check-ins with managers and co-workers

One of the challenges of working from home is that people can feel isolated. To avoid this, we've implemented regular virtual meetings.

People need to feel connected and supported, so it's important to provide frequent opportunities for people to engage with their managers and co-workers, especially when we are physically separated.

## Train your team in digital networking tools

We're using this time to get set up so we can reach our clients in a high-quality manner that feels seamless. Our focus is on training our agents to sell in the environment we're in right now – using tools such as video and social media to connect with prospects.

### The digital tools we used:

#### Zoom

With state restrictions making in-person gatherings impossible, we shifted our team meetings to Zoom. We also started doing virtual happy hours periodically and holding 15-minute virtual meetups during the workday a couple times a week.

#### TPx communications

For our VoIP, we went with a company called TPx Communications. Their app, called UCx, lets agents connect to our agency phone system remotely and also includes a messaging system that allows our team to chat with each other throughout the day.

#### Cincopa

We invested in a video platform called Cincopa that will make it easy to send videos back and forth with prospects and clients. Our agents are excited about the tool because they can share their screen and explain quotes or walk new clients through the system for employee benefits.



**TIM DAVIS**

DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, POWERS INSURANCE & RISK MANAGEMENT

# How our agency used digital to rebuild our commercial strategy niche by niche

POWERS Insurance & Risk Management is a niche-focused agency, and historically, hospitality was our largest niche for premium. This year has been challenging, to say the least. However, we're on track to turn in a record new business year here at POWERS. How? Earlier this year, we scrapped our entire marketing and sales plan and rebuilt it niche by niche, focusing on digital.

## Retention leads to growth

As soon as the COVID-19 crisis hit, our agency's president, JD Powers, started issuing a series of educational and informative emails to our hospitality clients. We also created unique content specifically for restaurant owners. JD is a restaurant owner himself, so the emails included advice about what he was doing with his restaurant. Those emails went over well with our hospitality customers. Some of our clients even forwarded them to friends within the industry, and we ended up writing three new franchise restaurant chains who reached out to us after seeing those emails.

The email series was not at all a sales effort, but it turned into quite a bit of production for us. Just taking care of our clients helped us gain more in sales than any sort of marketing plan I could have created.

## Evolving our approach

Before this year, one of the more creative ways we were having success was by duplicating our marketing efforts at events our agents were attending. We would pin-drop the event's location and target people at that location with a brand-specific, event-specific Facebook ad. This meant that event attendees were seeing our brand digitally and in person. This created a lot of conversations for the producers attending the event. I'm excited to continue to evolve that approach when we can do in-person events again. For now, we have our producers using LinkedIn Sales Navigator to do niche networking and pipeline building.

## Getting on board with digital

Over the last three years, POWERS Insurance been on a journey to get the agency up to speed with technology and start on a pathway for the future. The leadership team worked hard to get everyone on board with the changes, and I've been proud of how our team has embraced digital. It allowed us to quickly transition to remote work and continue growing in spite of the challenges this year brought.

### Advice for finding your niche

Start with where your interests lie and what you're passionate about. But also make sure to look at what carriers you have. I see too often someone who wants to niche in an industry, but they give no thought to what carriers they have behind them and who's going to support their production. So don't push yourself into a niche that you can't easily have success with right away.

# Accelerating our tech investments to drive into the future

This year has driven changes in the independent agent channel faster than many of us ever would have expected. More happened in the last six months than probably the last five to 10 years. This year accelerated the independent agent channel five years ahead in six months.

Personally, I think this time has been a [good catalyst](#) to get the insurance industry moving to adopt more tech. At Excalibur Insurance, we were lucky to have many technology tools in place before COVID-19 hit. We were able to quickly shift our approach and mostly keep on track with our goals.

However, there were still challenges. Like most other agencies, we were forced into grind mode, having to quickly learn a bunch of new skills. It has been tough at times, but I believe that this time will make us a better agency in the long-term.

## Here are four of the ways we're investing in our agency technology:



### 1. Going paperless and pushing our agency app

At the beginning of this year, many of our clients were still getting direct mail from our carrier partners. When COVID-19 hit, carriers worried that the Canada Post Office might close. They started pushing digital initiatives and encouraging agencies to go paperless.

Our agency had originally planned to start our journey to going paperless this fall. We had to move up our timeline and do a lot of work on our mobile app to make it work for our client-facing documents. We made a bunch of videos explaining what paperless is and instructing customers on how to use our mobile app. All this was alongside other our communication efforts around COVID-19. We did four or five email blasts to our customers with information, built a portal on our website with articles and information, and tried to reach out directly to clients in certain industries we knew were affected.

Now, we're in the process of pushing out our mobile app to all our clients, so they won't need to get physical mail. That's going to be a huge push for the next year or two.



**JEFF ROY**  
CEO, EXCALIBUR INSURANCE GROUP



## 2. Investing in more data-driven tech

COVID-19 reaffirmed the investments we're making in technology that will help us have better control over our agency data. We knew before this year that we didn't have the right phone system in place. But we were waiting to make sure we got a system that integrated with our other technology. Now, we're in the process of deploying a new system called Croo.io, which allows full voice-over-IP controls. It also has texting built in and allows us to records calls. The parent company is working on some AI tools that will be built in so we will be able to analyze calls.

Another important factor of the new phone system is that it integrates with Salesforce Marketing Cloud, which we're also implementing. With Salesforce Marketing Cloud, we'll be able to look at who opens our emails, see who is engaging with our content and start lead-scoring our clients and prospects at a higher level.



## 3. Tracking metrics & improving the quality of digital leads

My advice for other agents is to try to build a funnel of leads through different digital sources such as paid advertising, pay per click, social media, referrals and more. This will help you get the number of leads you need to be able to sell enough business.

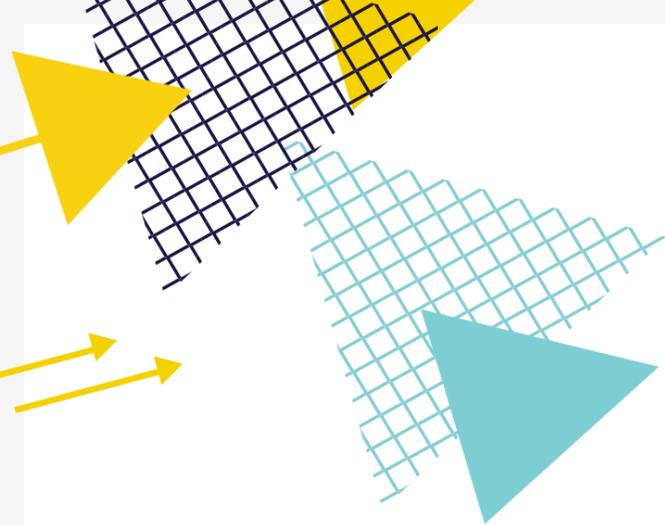
Once a lead comes in though, you need a sound process for handling those leads, and you need to [measure things](#) like your response times, your close ratios, which companies you're closing with, what areas you're writing business in.

It's important for you to know what it's costing you per click, per quote and what your overall acquisition cost is per client that you write. Knowing those metrics gives you a baseline from which to improve your agency. By learning those numbers and looking at that data over time, you can drive costs down. You can figure out how to improve conversion rates and make sure you're driving the kinds of leads that convert. At Excalibur, we're working on improving the quality of our leads and reducing our acquisition costs. Instead of doing "random acts of content" – writing blogs about any topic with high search volume – we're trying to build content journeys [based on personas](#).



## 4. Continuing to push technology forward

At Excalibur, we're continually looking to implement technology that will help us work better and faster. We know many other agents are doing the same. Right now, everyone is trying to reposition themselves in the rapidly changing digital world. The current technology tools available in the insurance industry are good, but they still aren't quite where they need to be to move us forward. Agents, carriers and vendors need to work together to push things to a whole new level. We can't be complacent and accept "good" – we want to work together toward "great."



## About Agent for the Future

Liberty Mutual Insurance and Safeco Insurance believe in the enduring value of independent agents, and the Agent for the Future platform was born out of that belief. Agent for the Future exists to help independent insurance agents succeed and thrive, now and into the future. On the Agent for the Future website, you'll find original research, actionable insights from insurance experts and case studies highlighting the tactics winning agents are using to grow and thrive.

For more information about Agent for the Future, visit [AgentForTheFuture.com](https://AgentForTheFuture.com).

## About Liberty Mutual Insurance

In business since 1912, and headquartered in Boston, today Liberty Mutual is the sixth-largest global property and casualty insurer based on 2019 gross written premium. The company also ranks 77th on the Fortune 100 list of largest corporations in the U.S. based on 2019 revenue. As of Dec. 31, 2019, it had \$43.2 billion in annual consolidated revenue.

For more information about Liberty Mutual Insurance, go to [LibertyMutual.com](https://LibertyMutual.com).

## About Safeco Insurance

In business since 1923, Safeco Insurance sells personal automobile, homeowners and specialty products through a network of more than 10,000 independent insurance agencies throughout the United States. Safeco works hard to be the carrier champion of the independent agent. In a survey conducted in 2019 by Channel Harvest, independent agents named Safeco as the carrier that does more than others to support the overall growth of agencies. Safeco is a Liberty Mutual Insurance company, based in Boston, Mass.

For more information about Safeco Insurance, go to [Safeco.com](https://Safeco.com).





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