SELECTING AN
AGENCY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

A GUIDE TO HELP YOU MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE

Selecting a Management System that Best Suits Your Agency

Selecting an agency management system can seem like an overwhelming task. Whether this is your first management system or you are replacing an existing system this is an important decision for any agency. Requirements may vary from agency to agency due to lines of business, accounting operations, document requirements, digital marketing, integration with current systems, carrier downloads and budget. In order to assist you with this process, the IIANC Agency Management and Technology Committee has put together this workbook focused on questions to help in your system selection.

You may also seek assistance from staff, consultants, and management system vendors who can help you evaluate your specific agency requirements. Once you have narrowed down your selection, take time to locate referrals and get a feel for the vendor's support, pricing increases, and user group resources.

Finally, don't forget to ask about implementation and training options. Implementation and ongoing training can be the difference between success and failure. Determine the training options available from the different vendors and establish a training guideline for your staff. Staff should only attend those sessions that pertain to their job description. We hope this document provides guidance for your agency as you seek to select the best system for your agency.
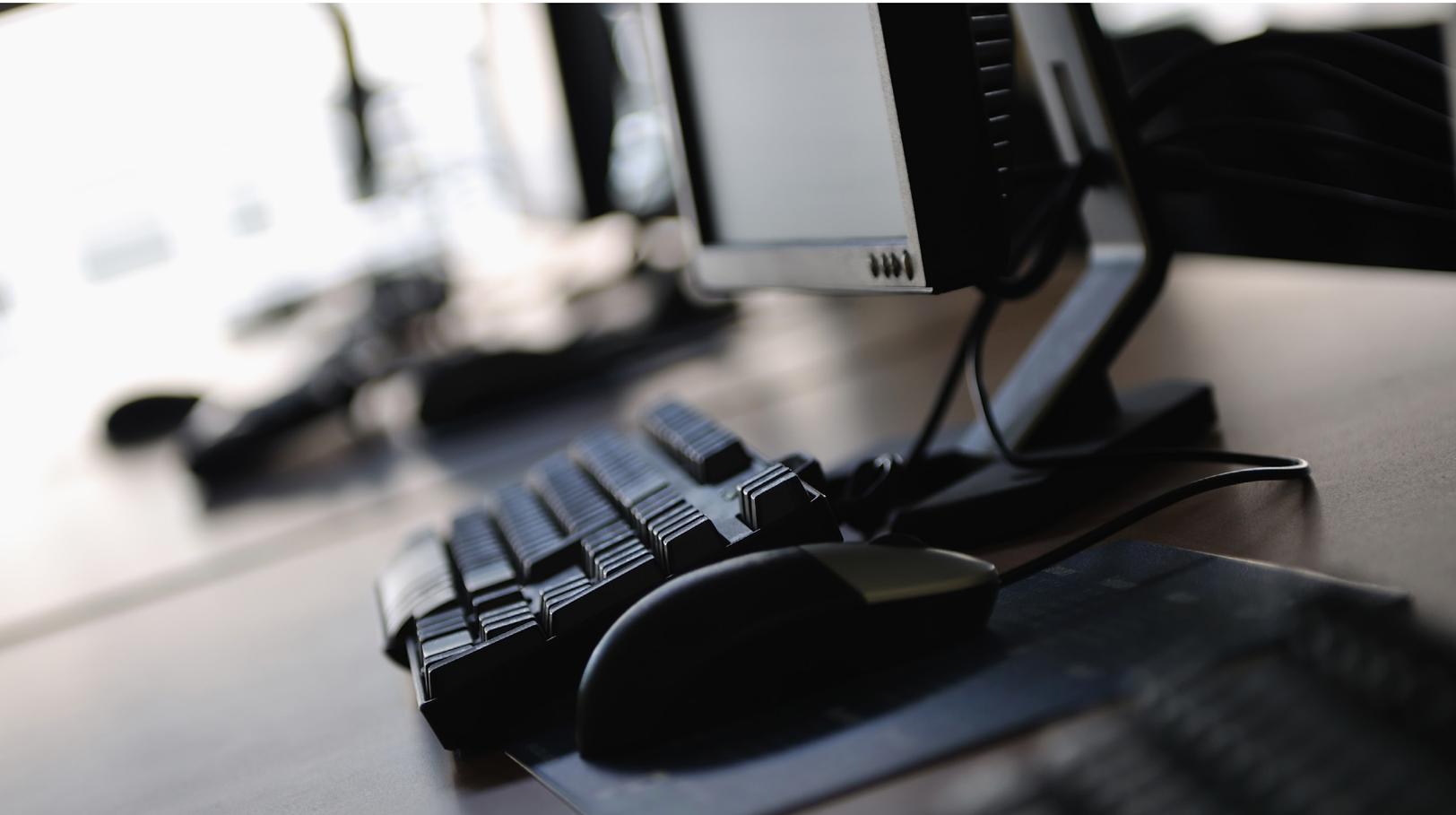
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Questions an agency should consider during the system selection process:

1 What is your business class split? (i.e. Personal Lines, Commercial Lines, and Life & Health)

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2 What more do you want/need out of an Agency Management System (AMS)?

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3 Is your current system out of date or not being supported by the vendor?

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4 Has your bookkeeper/CPA completed an overview and demo of the accounting functionality and integration?

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"Never before in the history of the independent agency system has technology played such a critical role in the success of an agency. Equipping agency owners with tools that will help them in making the best technology decision for their agency is an important role that IIANC can play. Through the shared expertise of agents and consultants on our Agency Management & Technology Committee, the information in this guide can be an extremely valuable resource for our member agencies."

- Aubie Knight, IIANC CEO

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5 Have you incorporated the top commercial/personal CSRs in the demonstration and overview process?

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6 Are there ANY gaps in the prospective AMS that you cannot live without and will the prospective AMS fix them?

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7 Are there any plug-ins that might enhance the current AMS?

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"When selecting our agency management system, we involved the staff along with our accountant. Each person reviewed the potential systems based on their department's needs and provided their input. Management evaluated the overall performance and workflow productivity along with financial reporting necessary to make business decisions. As you make your selection, include your staff and listen to their feedback. This will help you to not only select the appropriate system, but have a more productive and successful implementation."

- George Robertson, Rockingham Insurance Agency

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8 Understand that the new prospective agency management system is not going to be your old AMS. What are your plans to involve staff in the selection process and implementation of new system?

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9 What is the technology behind the platform and can it serve your agency for next 10-20 years?

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10 What does conversion look like from the perspective of what data will convert to new AMS and what current system data is downloadable?

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11 What ongoing customer service channels does the vendor provide to support your agency on the system?

In person phone support _____

available hours _____

E-mail support _____

average reply time _____

Online chat _____

available hours _____

Online support _____

(FAQs, videos, troubleshooting tips, etc.) _____

User groups _____

12 How much does the new agency management system cost versus your current solution?

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13 What is your budget for the system and have you completed a time value analysis?

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14 Do you need document management with the system?

_____ YES _____ NO

15 Does the system support the methods used to send and receive client communication?

_____ YES _____ NO

**16** Does the system support remote offices – (cloud based)?

_____ YES _____ NO

17 Does the system support digital marketing – campaigns?

_____ YES _____ NO

"An Agency Management System is one of the most important decisions that an agency owner will make. It is the lifeblood of the agency and a great AMS will allow your agency to operate at a maximum potential whereas a poor AMS will slowly cripple your agency. There are many what I call "minimums" that an AMS must have for you to not only be successful today, but in the future. It must be able to integrate with other applications such as your accounting, CRM, and rating software to name a few. It must be able to send and receive text messages. It must be able to run any and all reports that you need. It must be able to be accessible anywhere, meaning no longer being tied to a server or having the ability to access it in the cloud if it is server-based. These are a just a few of the minimums to consider when choosing your next AMS, and with the assistance of IIANC, you'll be ready to make the right choice for you and your agency."

- Joshua Lipstone, ISU-Lipstone Insurance Group

Are You READY?
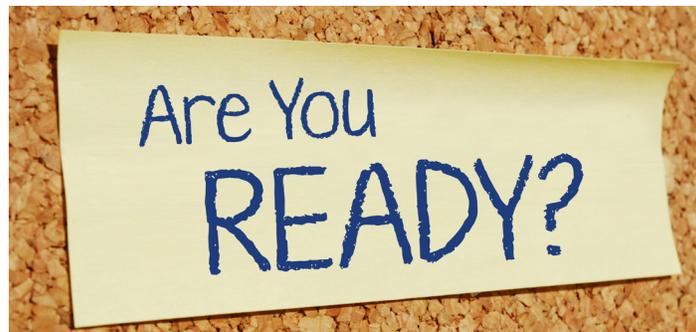
IMPLEMENTATION, CONVERSION & TRAINING

Once the decision on system selection is made, these are some questions you should consider for the implementation and conversion process:

1 Have you discussed with the vendor how much data you want to migrate to the new system? Is all your data able to migrate to the new system? If not, do you have a plan on how to handle this issue?

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2 There is a considerable amount of staff time involved when implementing a new system due to system training and likelihood of reduced productivity while adjusting to the new system. Based on your agency workflow, when is the best time for you to launch?

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"As an agency owner and manager for 37 years, I have grown to realize just how important automation plays in our operations tool box. Just like the Swiss Army knife comes in all sorts of sizes and configurations, so do Agency Management Systems. You can go big, or you can go small. When considering what you want to include, remember time is your most expensive resource. A system that integrates accounting, policy management, claims reporting and management, download, upload and real time interactions, Customer Relations Management, rating, marketing, document management and secure email and other activity controls are some components to include maximizing your investment. Consider the IIANC resources to assist you when the time comes to evaluate the AMS decision."

- Rick Heckle, Dean, Heckle & Hill, Inc.

IMPLEMENTATION, CONVERSION & TRAINING

Training, Training and More Training...

Be prepared for the substantial amount of time involved in training your agency staff on the new agency management system. It is crucial that you invest adequate time in training in order to get the best value out of your new system functionality. Making a commitment to staff training will pay off in the long run to minimize the disruption to your agency workflow and to maximize your investment in the new system capabilities. Make sure you discuss all the training options available with your vendor and plan accordingly for adequate training. Best practices demonstrate that that completion of training before implementation, onsite training support on the go live date of the new system, and additional training 60-90 days after the implementation date is an effective approach.

3   What does the vendor anticipate will be an adequate amount of training time for your staff to be proficient in fully utilizing all the capabilities of the new system? What does the vendor training entail? What are your options for onsite agency training and will there be a follow up training after implementation (i.e. 90 days, 3 months, etc.)?

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TIP: Joining a system user group is a great way to get ongoing support after implementation. There is a limited amount of information you can learn from manuals and vendor training, it is beneficial and cost effective to have a network of experienced users to reach out to when you have questions. User groups are a great source of information and provide the ability to network and exchange information. They range from virtual meetings, live meetings, and conferences.

4 What types of downloads are supported by the carrier or the vendor? (i.e. policy data, claims, edocs, etc…) What type of edocs are supported?

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5 Have you set up your IVANS account for in order to process downloads from the carriers?

_____ YES   _____ NO

6 Integration with current systems?

_____ YES   _____ NO

7 Does the system provide limited access capabilities to different staff members? What are the product security capabilities?

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"Being an agency principal, I see the value of having an Agency Management System. It's not a luxury, but a necessity in order to run a productive and profitable business. Having a system that incorporates policy management, client management, accounting, marketing, rating, secure email transmission, upload and download capabilities and in many cases, real time capabilities, is imperative. It would be really easy to make a wrong choice with your AMS and its many capabilities. Having a resource provided by IIANC that helps you sort through the clutter that comes with reviewing various systems for consideration, is a great luxury to have. Time is money, and the IIANC resources available for us as members of the association for agency management and technology does just this. The material cuts through the clutter and uncertainty, and does so effectively when making the right choice is critical. It does so in a timely manner. Please consider the IIANC resources to assist you with this decision, so that you can make the right decision, ensuring you have a more productive and certainly more successful implementation for your agency."

- Ralph A Whitehurst Jr., Whitehurst Strategic Partners