

Insurer with old-fashioned values uses new technology to increase profits, cut costs

“By pairing OnBase and SharePoint, our agents have instant online access to everything from claims to commission statements. We’ve made it easier for them to do business with us.”

– Jennings Carpenter, IT Manager

OnBase
a Hyland Software solution



The Challenges

- Improve existing agent satisfaction
- Attract new agents to increase profits
- Decrease internal processing costs and time

The Results

- High adoption rate for online payments
- Double-digit increases in written premium
- Increased work capacity without additional headcount

The Customer

What does jam and jelly have in common with Mennonite Mutual Insurance Company (MMIC)? They were both the brain-child of J.M. Smuckers, a devout Mennonite and resident of Orrville, Ohio in 1895. MMIC originally sold insurance only to members of the church, but that restriction was lifted as the company grew. The carrier sells its personal, commercial, farm and church insurance products through independent agents in Ohio and Indiana.

The Challenges

MMIC is reliant on the success of its independent agents. When those agents voiced concerns about MMIC's processes, the insurer listened. Agents weren't writing business with MMIC because it took too long to get the business on the books, there was no simple way to submit payments to the carrier and commission statements and payments were sometimes delayed. Further, because many of these processes were paper-based, MMIC and its agents spent thousands of dollars each year on paper and postage between offices.

The Journey

A loyal OnBase customer for several years, MMIC had already once turned to technology to spur growth. In 2002, the company identified enterprise content management (ECM) as a means to increase efficiencies and profitability and purchased OnBase. After implementing the system in underwriting and claims, MMIC saw an increase in profits.

So this time, when agents began to request ways to make it easier to write business with MMIC, the insurer again turned to technology. MMIC wanted to find a way to serve existing agents faster and attract additional agents to sell its products. With OnBase and Microsoft® as its technology keystones, MMIC sought a solution that would marry the two and serve its agents better.

The Solution

OnBase, SharePoint® combine to empower agents

The answer to MMIC's problems lay in integrating OnBase with Microsoft SharePoint. "It was really easy to integrate the two," says Jennings Carpenter, IT manager. "What we've done is given our agents access to a SharePoint Web portal where they can access documents and workflows in OnBase."

Combining the two products allowed MMIC to further develop its ECM strategy. The carrier would rely on SharePoint for collaborative projects and knowledge-sharing; OnBase would be used to better organize documents and processes related to transactions, including new business and claims.

From the SharePoint Web site, agents can access virtually all information they need to do business with MMIC. Everything from transactional documents like claims and underwriting specifics to business information like newsletters and manuals is accessible. Even though the transactional documents are stored in OnBase, agents do not need to actually log into the system to see the information. "The agents love this," Carpenter says. "It's easy to use and intuitive to understand."

After logging in, agents see only information that pertains to their interactions with MMIC.

This eliminates potential confusion and security concerns. "We completely control what agents can and can't see," Carpenter says. "Some – but not many – agents were a little hesitant about this system at first, but now that they have used it, the value is clear to them."

Because MMIC relies on its agents to make money, it is imperative to keep agents happy. "This is all part of an ongoing initiative to stay top-of-mind with agents," Carpenter says. "They wanted self-service capabilities and we've done that. The feedback (agents) have given us is that we are ahead of other carriers that are triple or quadruple our size for self-service satisfaction. That makes them more likely to sell our products."

Keeping agents happy is an issue insurance carriers of all sizes face. Providing self-service tools for agents and exceeding their expectations helps give MMIC a competitive advantage.

Integration solves problems, provides faster answers for agents

For agents, virtually every interaction with MMIC can be completed via the SharePoint portal. From submitting policy applications to making payments to viewing commission statements – everything an agent needs to do business with MMIC can be found online.

For example, before the OnBase-SharePoint integration, a quote for a policy application could be faxed, e-mailed or sent via U.S. mail from MMIC back to the originating agent. The agent would then relay the quote to the potential customer. If the customer accepted, they would pay the agent for the policy and the agent would have to send a check to MMIC. MMIC's accounting department would process the payment and commission for the agent and send a commission statement to the agent.

Although with OnBase MMIC was able to greatly reduce its paper handling internally, agents didn't reap as many benefits. Thus, for them, the application – acceptance – commission process was paper-intensive and could be lengthy. Also, if any mistakes were made, agents had to wait a month until the next commission statement came to see the change.

Now, agents can not only submit policy applications online, but receive quotes for potential insureds there as well. The agent can present the information from the Web site to the prospective customer and, upon acceptance, submit all information back to MMIC. From the SharePoint portal, the agent can access all information MMIC stores in OnBase for the policy – from correspondence to photos to scanned check images.

Additionally, when the agent needs to submit payment from the insured to MMIC, this can be done in SharePoint and automatically stored into OnBase for retention. Now, agents don't have to spend postage to forward the payment, they have immediate proof of receipt and can reconcile all transactions by date. "The reception for online payments has been phenomenal," Carpenter says. "This was something our agents really wanted and we're happy to be able to offer it to them."

When it comes to getting paid, agents are now a step closer to instant gratification because of the OnBase-SharePoint integration. "We don't need to mail commission statements anymore," Carpenter says, "And any changes that need to be made are done so in real-time."

In fact, the only thing that MMIC continues to mail to agents are reinstatement notices. "Other than that, we are completely paperless," Carpenter says.



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In addition to instant access to documents and information, agents also have instant support as well. Should they encounter a problem viewing a document or interacting with the system, they can immediately notify MMIC of the problem. MMIC can then access the agent’s system remotely to fix the problem. In a disconnected, paper-based world, answers could be hours, if not days, away.

Cost, productivity benefits to insurer as well

Just as MMIC experienced increased internal efficiency when OnBase was initially implemented, MMIC continues to benefit in this phase. The OnBase–SharePoint integration brings benefits not just to MMIC’s agencies, but to the insurer itself. In addition to doing much less sorting, mailing and printing, MMIC saves costs on paper and postage. All of this allows MMIC to accomplish more work with fewer people.

Since the initial OnBase implementation, MMIC has reduced the number of processors it employs by about 40 percent. Because of the drastic decrease in paper consumption, the insurer’s number of document processors decreased by the same margin.

Despite these reductions in staff, MMIC is writing more business than ever, with up to 15 percent annual increases within a year of implementing OnBase. Further, the carrier had its greatest underwriting profit in history last year.

With decreased costs, increased productivity and profitability leaps, MMIC is able to further its growth strategy. “We’re now licensed to sell to farms and churches in Indiana,” Carpenter says. “We’re using our OnBase and SharePoint integration to help expand into new markets and attract more agents.”

Why OnBase?

By pairing OnBase and SharePoint, MMIC is able to extend OnBase functionality to agents without custom coding. Working in a familiar Microsoft environment, even users with no OnBase experience can master the system in minutes. This not only encourages agent adoption of the system, but encourages them to sell more MMIC products.

time to make a difference.

Get more information out of existing business applications. Reduce, even eliminate, wasteful, redundant tasks. Now you can spend your time on the things that really matter. That’s effective document and process management.

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