

Report for insurance carriers

# Independent agents on improving carrier partnerships

PROCESSES, COMMUNICATION,  
AND TECHNOLOGY



# The agent experience in 2024

In a crowded, competitive insurance landscape, the key to unlocking growth and market share for carriers may be hiding in plain sight: the independent agent. Specifically, refining the experience a carrier provides to independent agents from a process, communication, and technology standpoint.

An excellent agent experience is no longer just a nice-to-have; it is strategically imperative. Independent agents are frontline professionals, often serving as a carrier's direct line to their customers. In order to gain more customers via the independent agent distribution channel, carriers must address the needs, wants, and frustrations agents encounter as part of their ordinary work.

This report offers a deep dive into the perspectives of nearly 1,300 independent agents and includes direct feedback for carriers in the agents' own words.

## Read more to:

- Learn what agents want and need to drive future success.
- Transform strong agency relationships into a competitive differentiator.



# Highlights from our 2024 agent experience survey include:



## Where carriers should focus to get more business from independent agencies

We asked independent agency professionals how carriers could get more of their business; just below competitive products and price, **responsiveness of underwriting** ranked as the most important consideration for 84% of survey takers.



## Factors important for placing business

Among specific factors that influence independent agents when placing business, **claims service** emerged as the most significant, as indicated by 75% of respondents.



## Licensing, onboarding, and compliance components

When it comes to areas for investment, 77% of respondents agreed it was important for carriers to invest in **better onboarding and licensing tools and processes**.



## Compensation considerations

Surprisingly, 67% of survey takers noted **clear and accurate compensation statements** as the top compensation-related factor for working with carriers, while competitive commissions came in second.



## Technology capabilities

Weighing the importance of various carrier technologies, 69% of independent agents said **digital personal lines rating and submission** was a must-have—the most for any technology.

# Table of contents

<b>2</b>	The agent experience in 2024	<b>15</b>	Underwriting
<b>3</b>	Highlights from our 2024 agent experience survey	<b>18</b>	Compensation
<b>5</b>	Our 2024 survey respondents	<b>21</b>	Servicing and claims
<b>7</b>	The agent lifecycle	<b>24</b>	The importance of technology
<b>8</b>	Licensing, onboarding & compliance	<b>29</b>	The final takeaway
<b>11</b>	Selling	<b>32</b>	The InsurTech partner of choice

# Our 2024 survey respondents

To collect detailed perspectives on the agent experience, we shared this survey with Vertafore's vast network of independent agencies. In total, **1,290 insurance professionals participated.**

We received input primarily from **account managers, agency owners and principals, producers (and others with sales titles), customer service representatives (CSRs), and operations professionals.** A smaller number of responses came from administrative, human resources (HR), data, or accounting professionals.

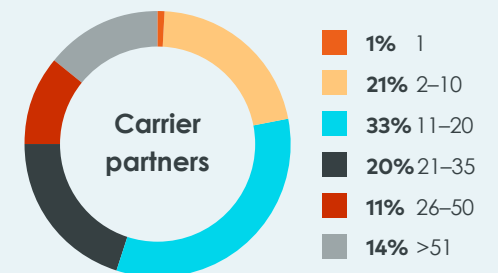
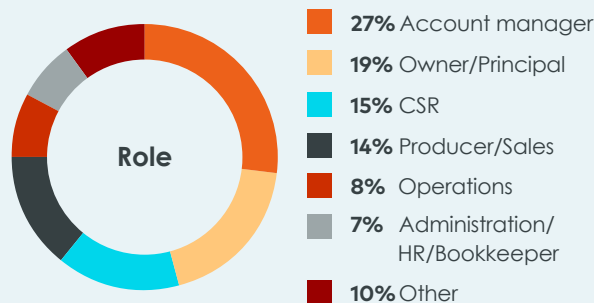
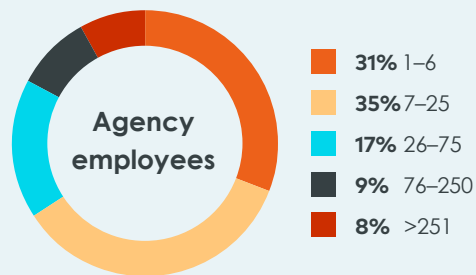
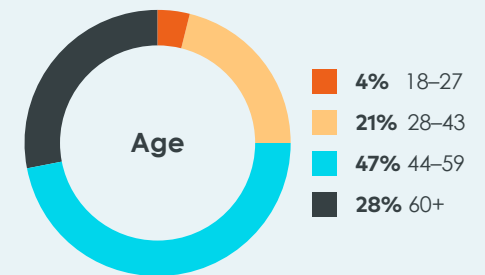
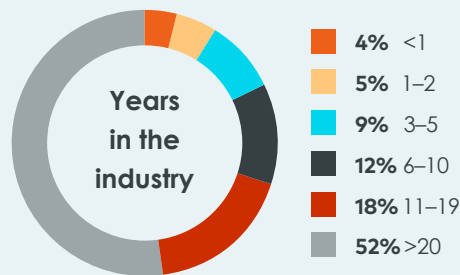
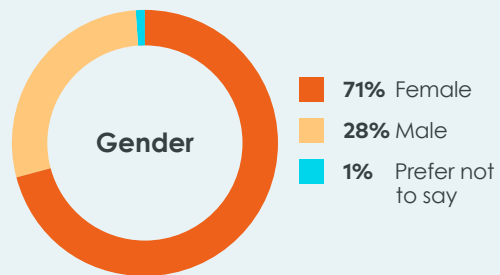


## A representative sample of independent agents

These agent survey responses reflected a broad range of experiences and interactions that spoke to many different carriers' processes, as **the largest segment (33.2%) reported working with between 11 and 20 carrier partners on a regular basis.**

Given the primary focus on independent agencies, only one percent of respondents reported working with a single carrier partner.

While these survey results reflect a diverse spectrum of opinions, this survey's most well-represented respondents—the modes—can be summarized as: Gen X, women, having 20 or more years of experience in insurance, being in an account manager role, at independent agencies with 7 to 25 employees, and working on behalf of 11 to 20 carrier partners.



# The agent lifecycle

## A look at industry processes and opportunities for improved collaboration

When evaluating these perspectives, carriers should pay close attention to the process, communication, and technology touchpoints with their agency partners to more consistently deliver an excellent agent experience.



Licensing,  
onboarding  
& compliance



Selling



Underwriting



Compensation



Servicing  
& claims

# Licensing, onboarding & compliance

When it comes to deciding what's important in producer onboarding and compliance, agents expressed clear expectations of their carrier partners, as well as some frustration with the status quo.



Licensing,  
onboarding  
& compliance



Selling



Underwriting



Compensation



Servicing  
& claims



For industry veterans—those with 20 years or more in the industry—dissatisfaction with onboarding, licensing, and compliance was significantly greater than all respondents. Only 25% considered the service their top carrier partners provide to be great in these areas.

**77%** of respondents said it was **important for carriers to invest in better onboarding and licensing tools and processes.**

Similarly important to note, being able to **easily view authorization, appointment, and renewal status** is not merely optional: 64% of respondents said it's a must-have functionality. For the newest entrants into the insurance industry, that percentage climbed even higher: 79% of respondents in their first year of selling insurance said this visibility around appointments is a necessity.

Having **simple, efficient onboarding processes** and a clear point of contact for licensing were also highly important, with slightly more than half of all respondents (52%) describing these as necessities, too. Having a multi-carrier process for onboarding and licensing also stood out, as 87% of respondents ranked it a must-have or nice-to-have capability. Some voiced their displeasure with the challenge of differing onboarding processes between carriers, too.

**Only 33% of all respondents felt their primary carrier partners offered great service in their onboarding, licensing, and compliance practices.**



“

**On the administrative side, carrier online onboarding is absolutely the worst experience in the insurance world. It is difficult, and it is different for every single carrier.**

”

A strong desire for straightforward **training on carrier tools, processes, and product offerings** was evident among respondents as well. Half of those surveyed considered this type of training essential. When combined with the respondents who noted these features were nice-to-have, overall positive sentiment rose to 94%. Only 2% indicated indifference—that it didn't matter at all—in terms of these aspects of working with their carrier partners.

“ **Most carriers are doing a better job [with compliance and onboarding]. I just went through a licensing process with [a major national carrier] for their independent agents program all handled by Sircon, and it was very easy.** ”

**For a better agent experience in licensing, onboarding, and compliance, it's most important for carriers to prioritize:**



# Selling

Producers and account managers are currently navigating a complex, rapidly changing insurance landscape. With rising premiums, stricter underwriting standards, and limited coverage options due to market conditions, these boots-on-the-ground professionals are facing immense pressure to reach their targets. Each day they balance the needs of their clients with carrier constraints while keeping sales goals top of mind.

For carriers to reach their own goals in their independent agent channels, it's essential to consistently deliver an excellent agent experience to ease the pressure of these practical realities.

We asked survey takers plainly: **How could carriers get more of your business?**



Licensing,  
onboarding  
& compliance



Selling



Underwriting



Compensation



Servicing  
& claims



It's no surprise that virtually all agents expect their carrier partners to deliver when it comes to competitive pricing and products—that's table stakes, and our survey results showed these to be the most important factors in getting more business for 99% of our respondents.

**86%** of producers and account managers said that **responsiveness of underwriting** is also critically important.

**78%** said improving **ease of communication** would be another top way carriers could get more of their business.

**76%** noted that a **fast underwriting decision** was highly important to them when placing business with a given carrier.

When asked more about the impact of specific factors on placing business, producers and account managers ranked claims service as their most important criteria. In fact, 75% of respondents deemed it a must-have, followed by personal relationships with underwriters at 60%, and technology capabilities at 50%.

**In addressable areas such as these, there are opportunities for carriers to better differentiate themselves with the quality of agent experience they deliver.**



When asked where else carriers should focus their investments, 77% of producers and account managers said **efficient, effective, and navigable carrier portals** is a top area to improve. At the same time, 50% said **participation in commercial lines raters** is also an important area for carriers to invest in (versus 42% who cited the high importance of the ability to bind within a comparative rater for personal lines). The same percentage also said it's important for carriers to integrate with their agency management system.

**So, what's the takeaway?** Carriers still need effective portals. Carriers also need to participate in comparative raters, or risk missing out on future business from independent agents who say it's among the most important areas for carriers to invest. As carriers continue investing in better technology integrations, agents' expectations for more streamlined, accessible tools will only increase.

“ Agents do not have time to enter the data over and over on each carrier's portal. We have to have access to single-source platforms! ”

“ Labor is our most expensive cost in the agency, and the time to manually input all the information that is being requested today for rating is so time consuming that raters are the only real option. Carriers need to understand that independent agents are going to compare rates, so make it easy. ”

“ Being able to bridge from a comparative rater with accuracy is the best use of the agent's time. Building quotes in the company's platform is duplication of effort. ”

“ For commercial lines, the companies that have online rating are always my first choice. ”

Producers and account managers also highlighted areas that are less important for carriers to prioritize.

Despite years of increasing mobile accessibility, 23% of respondents said **mobile tools** are only minorly important or not important at all in terms of how carriers could get more of their business. This may reflect the reality of agents continuing to work largely from their laptops and relying on their mobile devices merely for on-the-go or ancillary support.

Furthermore, **contests, incentives, or preferred producer programs** were of relatively minor importance to 25% of respondents, particularly those who have worked in the industry longest. Importantly, competitive commissions was not deemed a less important factor: a full 95% of producers and account managers ranked this to be an important or highly important area for carriers to invest.

In terms of where carriers should stop investing, 30% offered the opinion that little to no investment should be made in additional marketing materials, a view that may be influenced by carriers' seemingly ever-present direct-to-consumer advertisements.

“ [In selling] we care about products, underwriting, claims management and ease of doing business. The rest is important but secondary. ”

### The most important factors for getting more business:



Competitive price



Competitive products



Responsiveness of underwriting



Ease of communication

### The least important factors for getting more business:



Contests or incentive programs



Mobile tools

# Underwriting

Independent agencies everywhere are facing the challenges of a complicated underwriting environment, as market conditions have forced even major carriers to reduce their capacity for risk or exit certain markets. Agencies struggle to place new business and find quality, cost-effective coverage for their customers. To continue meeting the needs of consumers, it's more important than ever for carriers to partner effectively with agencies. As an industry, insurance remains entirely dependent on the power of a solid promise and strong personal relationships.



Licensing,  
onboarding  
& compliance



Selling



Underwriting



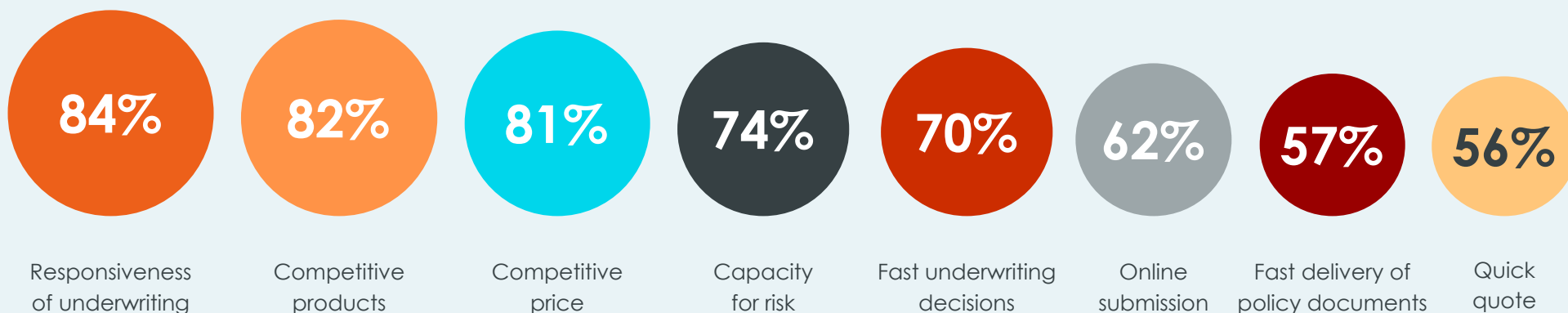
Compensation



Servicing  
& claims



## Ranking must-have capabilities in underwriting



Our survey takers shared other critical thoughts on the underwriting process; when asked to rate how well their top carriers perform in underwriting, **only 28% said they provided great service**. Almost half, 46%, described their carrier partners' service as average. Somewhat concerningly, **26% of respondents said they typically experienced below average service**.

When asked to evaluate importance of specific underwriting capabilities, **responsiveness of underwriting** ranked as a must-have factor by 84% of respondents. Similarly, the same percentage of total respondents, not just producers and account managers, shared that responsiveness of underwriting was an important area for carriers to invest in to win more business. The basic expectations of **competitive products and competitive price** were rated next, followed by capacity for risk, fast underwriting decision, online submission, fast delivery of policy documents, and finally quick quote.

“

**Having a designated underwriter, especially in commercial lines, is so important to me and how I write business. I find, with carriers where I have a single underwriter to work with, this allows me to write business that may otherwise have been declined. Because of the relationship I've built with my underwriter and that trust, I am able to write larger accounts that normally would be declined by carriers when they have multiple underwriters working on whoever's submissions come in.**

”

It's clear that agencies deeply value their **personal relationships with underwriters**. Among all respondents, this emerged as the second most important factor for placing business, though some respondents expressed concern in their comments over the lack of experience they're seeing in new underwriters.

“

The market changes have truly impacted the underwriter as carriers struggle for profitability. The box has shrunk, and the lack of actual underwriters has impacted turnaround times and the ability to process more complex risks.

”

“

Digital is great, but we also need to be able to get in front of real underwriters, real decision-makers, real seasoned team members.

”

“

Several of our top carriers have declined in service for underwriting and claims. The turnover of experienced underwriters and adjusters is having a poor impact on the process.

”



# Compensation

Compensation is a cornerstone of every agency-carrier partnership. When it comes to agent experience, a fair and competitive compensation structure fosters stronger relationships, motivates agencies to prioritize high quality risk, and incentivizes the sale of profitable products. Conversely, insufficient compensation leads to agency attrition, decreased production, and a detrimental focus on short-term gains instead of long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships.



Licensing,  
onboarding  
& compliance



Selling



Underwriting



Compensation



Servicing  
& claims

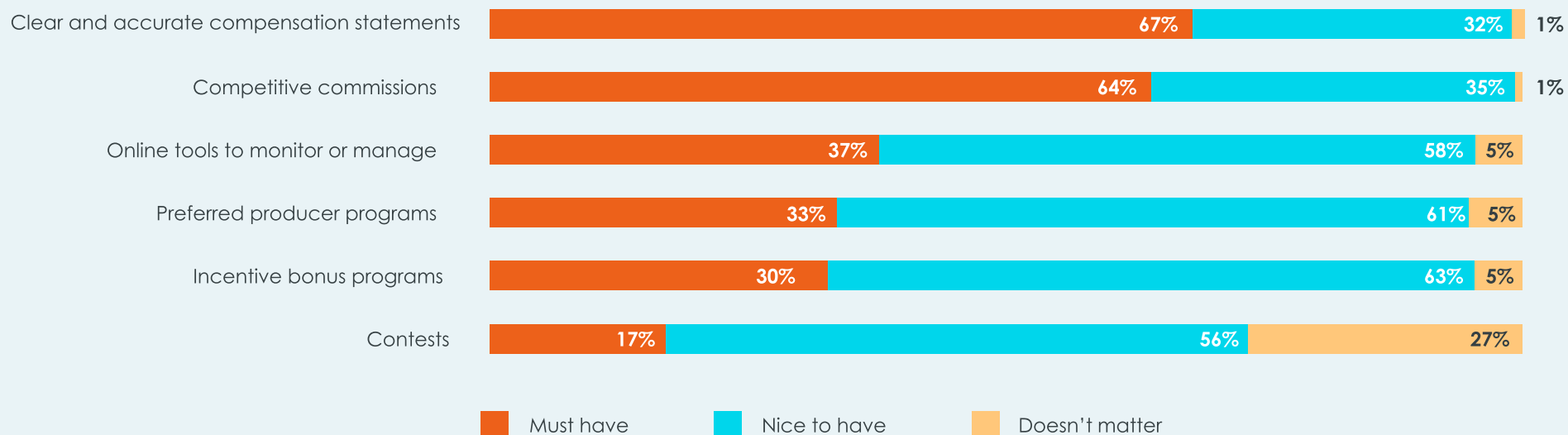


Survey participants identified two specific areas that carriers should not overlook. First, **clear and accurate compensation statements** narrowly ranked as the most important factor with 67% of respondents noting this as a must-have, and competitive commissions ranked at a close second by 64% of respondents. Perhaps some degree of modesty (or a preference for different

wording) factored into the rankings, because the figure jumps to 99% when combined with respondents who described **competitive commissions** as a “nice-to-have.”

Money, as would be expected, remains an important part of the relationship between carriers and agencies.

### How important are the following compensation factors?



**Online tools to monitor or manage compensation** were rated a must-have by 37% of respondents, while 58% said they were a nice-to-have feature. Additionally, while some find them motivating, **27% of respondents said contests do not matter at all**, 56% called them a nice-to-have, and only 17% deemed them a must-have. It's worth nothing that, accounting for years in the industry, those with the most experience were the least motivated by contests, and the newest entrants were the most likely to be motivated: **53% of the industry's newest hires felt contests were a must-have.**

Additionally, when cuts to commissions are necessary, carriers risk damaging their agency relationships if they do not effectively communicate this change. Agents still need to be able to trust that they are in partnership with their preferred carriers.

“ Stop reducing commissions. Get things figured out in your own house before you try tearing down ours.

“ We have received some reductions in commissions in commercial auto without any discussion. Our office has been extraordinarily profitable in commercial auto—yet we have been penalized, and the carriers have withheld participation in their profit-sharing programs on this line of business.

“ Compensation is what keeps agencies open. It is hard to understand when carriers cut agent compensation, but then read about senior management at carriers receiving increases in compensation.

# Servicing and claims

As the main support to customers whenever they must navigate complex insurance products and processes, CSRs build lasting client relationships through personalized service, expert guidance, and unwavering support. Ultimately, these trusted advisors aim to cultivate customer loyalty through a strong sense of satisfaction with the agencies they represent—but in every customer interaction they're protecting both the agency's and carrier's reputation. To continue delivering on that objective, CSRs depend on effective communication with carriers who prioritize their own exceptional support for agency partners.



Licensing,  
onboarding  
& compliance



Selling



Underwriting



Compensation



Servicing  
& claims



In CSRs' responses to this survey, two focus areas emerged for carriers to prioritize in servicing. First, 83% said the **ability to check policy holder billing status online** is the most important area for carriers to invest in. Nearly as many—80% of CSRs—also shared that the **ability to view and make changes to policies online** remains an important area for carrier investment. For account managers, producers, and sales professionals, claims service was the top consideration for placing business with 75% noting this as a must-have factor for carriers.

“ Remember, most of our clients still think of me as their carrier. They call me for service. Especially in the small business world, they are busy running their business—so anything I can take off their plate makes me more valuable to them. ”

“ Due to the rapid turnover of experienced carrier representatives and the influx of younger, less experienced replacements, we have observed a decline in carrier service and resources. However, we are optimistic that this will be temporary. The younger generation is seizing this opportunity to learn, grow, and refine their skill sets, which we believe will ultimately lead to improved service and resources. ”

**The most important servicing and claims partnership factors for carriers:**

-  **Claims service**
-  Ability to check policy holder billing status online
-  Ability to view and make changes to policies online

Upon analysis of all survey responses, only 23% of survey takers considered their primary carrier's claims service to be excellent. Ultimately, their feedback amounted to a plea for greater empowerment to best serve their customers.

“

The relationship with an agency is reflective of the relationship the carrier will have with the client in the event of a loss.

”

“

Don't ask agents to be the front line on claims unless you provide claims download.

”

**Access to information is absolutely fundamental to the effectiveness of CSRs.**



# The importance of technology

## A closer look at the tools and systems that connect agencies and carriers

Next, we have focused on opportunities for carriers to ensure an excellent agent experience digitally through streamlined tools and effective systems. Across the entire agent lifecycle, trusted technology platforms generate simpler, smoother processes and better communication.



## Technology doesn't replace human expertise, but when leveraged effectively it makes daily work easier for independent agents.

At the top of the rankings, survey respondents cited the necessity of **digital rating and submission in personal lines** as the most important technology capability, with more than two-thirds—69% of them—rating it a must-have. For **digital rating and submission in commercial lines**, 51% called this a must-have.

**Digital document and policy delivery** demonstrated its widespread utility, too, with 59% of respondents agreeing it

was a must-have technology when engaging with their carrier partners. **Direct bill and commissions download** (57%), as well as **digital appetite and eligibility solutions** (53%) ranked highly as must-haves, also. Importantly none of these top five technologies inspired more than 3% of contrarian-inclined respondents to say they did not matter at all.

Doesn't matter at all	Which technologies do agents really need?	Must have
2%	Digital personal lines rating and submission	69%
1%	Digital document and policy delivery	59%
3%	Direct bill and commissions download	57%
2%	Digital appetite and eligibility solutions	53%
1%	Digital commercial lines rating and submission	51%
6%	eSignature solutions	47%
19%	Mobile apps from carriers	25%
38%	Automated chatbots	15%

**Notably, the importance of certain capabilities depends on an agency's number of carrier partners.**

When comparing results with the number of carrier partners for an agency, a theme emerged in their differing technology usage: Agents who interact with the most carrier partners—more than 50—have somewhat greater technology expectations, particularly in **direct bill and download, digital claims communication, and digital document and policy delivery.**

For carriers, **this underscores the importance of having effective, easily navigable technology, particularly when partnering with the largest independent agencies.** As one might expect, respondents from agencies with more than 250 employees were the most likely to report having more than 50 carrier partners.

### Which technologies matter more to larger agencies?

#### 50 or fewer carrier partners

56%

MUST HAVE digital document and policy delivery

47%

MUST HAVE digital claims communication

52%

MUST HAVE direct bill and commissions download

#### More than 50 carrier partners

73%

63%

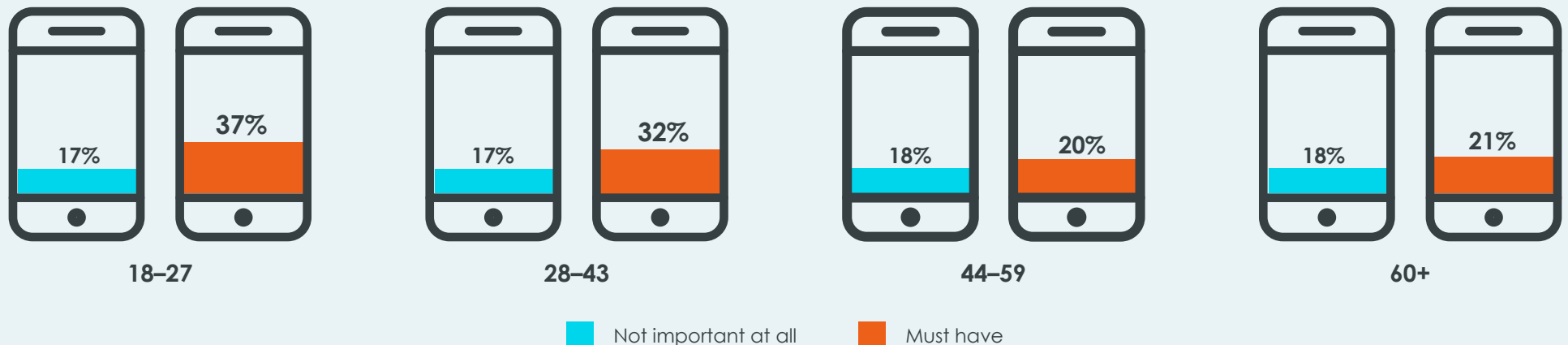
67%

## Some generational differences are reflected in technology preference, which should inform carriers' long-term technology strategies.

When comparing results with respondents' age, the biggest technology trend influenced by age centered on carrier's mobile apps. **Younger agents were significantly more likely to consider mobile apps to be more than a convenience:** 37% of respondents aged 18 to 27 and 32% of those aged 28 to 43 labeled carrier mobile apps a must-have technology. Only 20% of those aged 44 or greater expressed the same preference for mobile accessibility. However, most respondents in every age group considered mobile apps to be a nice-to-have feature.

As newer generations enter the agency workforce, it is likely this preference will continue to grow, though a static 17-18% minority in every age bracket shared the view that mobile apps did not matter to them at all.

Importance of mobile apps by age group



## The demise of carrier chatbots would be greatly celebrated.

Most notably, a widespread distrust of automated chatbots came through loud and clear in both response statistics and commentary. An overwhelming **38% of respondents said this technology did not matter to them at all**—the largest negative sentiment for any technology capability. In the comments section, many independent agents voiced frustration with carrier chatbots and urged their carrier partners to make access to live assistance from real, seasoned team members more readily available.\*

“  
Bots need to go! I want to talk to a person.”

“  
We hate chat bots! It’s always harder to get an answer from a chat than from a live representative. I would hold for five minutes to talk to a live person any day rather than be sent a bunch of articles that don’t apply to what I’m asking about.”

“  
I despise automated chat bots—every other human being does, too!”



\*It should be noted that this survey did not distinguish between automated chat bots and live chat. Given the stated preference for direct, person-to-person interactions, live chat with a knowledgeable representative would be preferable to most agents over automated chat bots.

# The final takeaway

Ultimately, the **relationships** between independent agents and their most trusted carrier partners—underwriters in particular—strongly influence the amount and quality of business that the independent agent channel generates. Naturally, these relationships develop around three pillars: **processes**, **communication**, and **technology**. How well carriers manage these central elements directly shapes the agent experience.



## Process, communication, and technology

### 1. Carrier processes

Efficient, streamlined processes are the foundation of a strong agent-carrier relationship. Whether it's onboarding, underwriting, or claims handling, agents rely on carriers to deliver consistent, cooperative experiences that minimize administrative burdens.

**When processes are efficient and well-organized, agents are able to focus more on serving clients and growing their book of business**, rather than navigating difficult workflows.

However, when carrier processes are duplicative or burdensome, they create delays, which can lead to frustration and impact the volume of business placed with a carrier. For carriers, investing in process refinement is not just a benefit to agents—it's a proven and effective long-term business strategy.

### 2. Clear communication

Clear, prompt communication is critical in nurturing agent relationships. Independent agents act as intermediaries between carriers and clients, and speed and quality are essential to the information exchange between all parties. From underwriting decisions to policy updates, **responsive communication empowers agents to confidently advise their end-insured clients**.

Conversely, delayed or inadequate communication erodes trust, leaving agents feeling less inclined to place business with a carrier that struggles to deliver. In communications with the independent agent channel, personal connections plus responsive service set top-performing carriers apart.

“

**If carriers have underwriters who know their agents, then I believe everyone wins and makes more in the long run.**

”

### 3. Carrier technology

The insurance industry is undergoing rapid technological transformation, and independent agents expect carriers to keep pace. **Effective, modern technology**—from user-friendly portals to digital document delivery—can make or break the agent experience.

Carriers that invest in **integrated, easy-to-navigate systems** can significantly reduce the time agents spend on manual tasks, allowing them to focus on higher-value work.

Outdated or difficult technology is a major point of frustration for agents, who may place more business with carriers that offer a simpler digital experience. Importantly, superior technology drives efficiency in processes and enhances communication between agents and carriers.

Measured collectively, these factors—**process, communication, and technology**—define the overall agent experience that carriers provide their agency partners. Carriers that prioritize improvements in process, communication, and technology can strengthen their relationships with independent agents and thereby increase the volume and quality of business the independent agent channel generates.

Delivering an **exceptional** agent experience is a key differentiator, and in a competitive industry it is certainly better to provide a more **positive experience** than the competition.



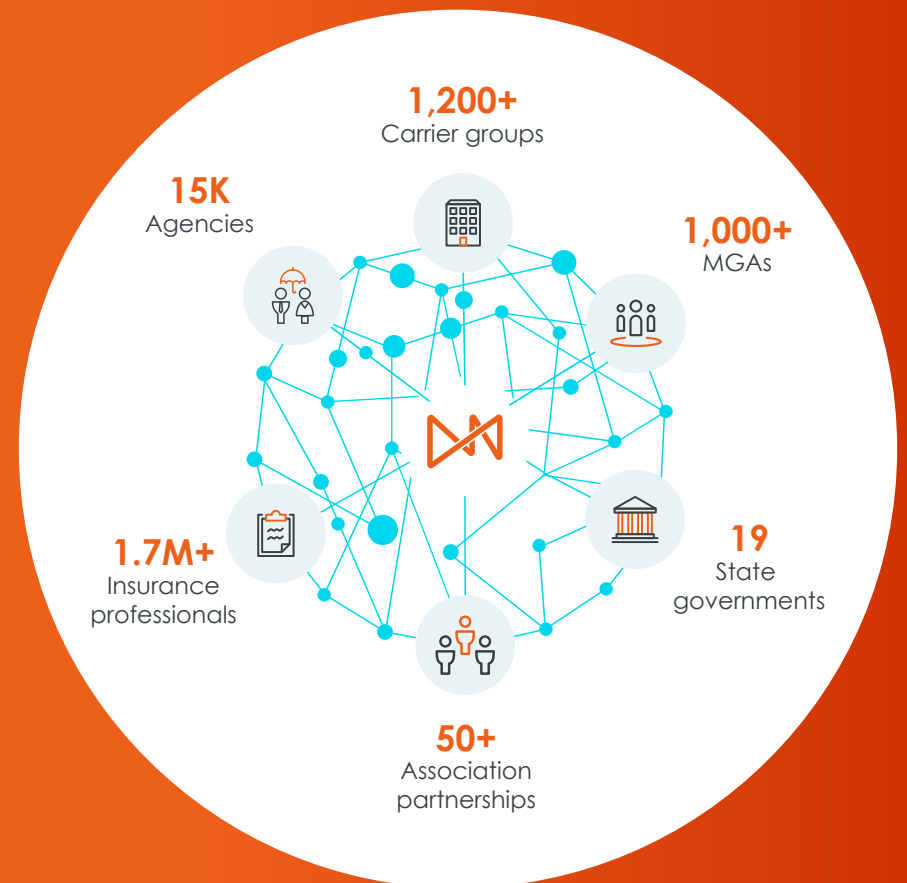
# The InsurTech partner of choice

Since 1969, Vertafore, the leader in modern insurance technology, has built and delivered best-in-class InsurTech solutions to connect every point of the insurance distribution channel. Carriers can streamline operations, improve efficiency, and ultimately strengthen their position in the market.

## With Vertafore's integrative and connective insurance technology, carriers can:

- Improve ease of quoting and underwriting response times for stronger sales.
- Ensure agent compensation is accessible, reliable, and competitive.
- Deliver clear and timely information to agents during claims so they can provide better support to their end-insured customers.
- Digitize and automate manual processes so they can be more readily updated to meet evolving business needs.

“ The technology capabilities of Vertafore are unparalleled. ”





999 18th St | Denver, CO, 80202 | 800.444.4813 | [Vertafore.com](https://www.vertafore.com)

© 2024 Vertafore, Inc. and its subsidiaries. All rights reserved. Trademarks contained herein are owned by Vertafore, Inc. This document is for informational purposes only. Vertafore makes no warranties, express or implied, with respect to the information provided here. Information and views expressed in this document may change without notice. The names of actual companies and products mentioned herein may be the trademarks of their respective owners.