



Come Together

Assurex Global's case study reveals how a Web-based software program helped to boost productivity.

by Jim Hackbarth

Like most large organizations, Assurex Global struggled with how to share its collective brainpower and information with the rest of the enterprise.

It is a network of independent insurance, risk management and benefits brokers located in more than 85 countries and generating \$29 billion in annual premiums. And while the network offers its agent-partners

strength in numbers, its size can also present challenges.

How could firms identify and access the right resources quickly and efficiently to leverage the Assurex Global organization? And equally as important, how could Assurex Global hold its partners accountable for actively contributing to the network?

Finding specialists among Assurex Global's 20,000 insurance professionals was an informal, inefficient and often ineffective process. Historically, agency representatives such as marketers, producers and agency principals could come together at meetings and con-

► **At Issue:** Different segments of large global firms may find it difficult to collaborate with one another.

► **What Happened:** Broker network Assurex Global chose a Web-based software platform designed for the commercial insurance industry to boost productivity and sales collaboration.

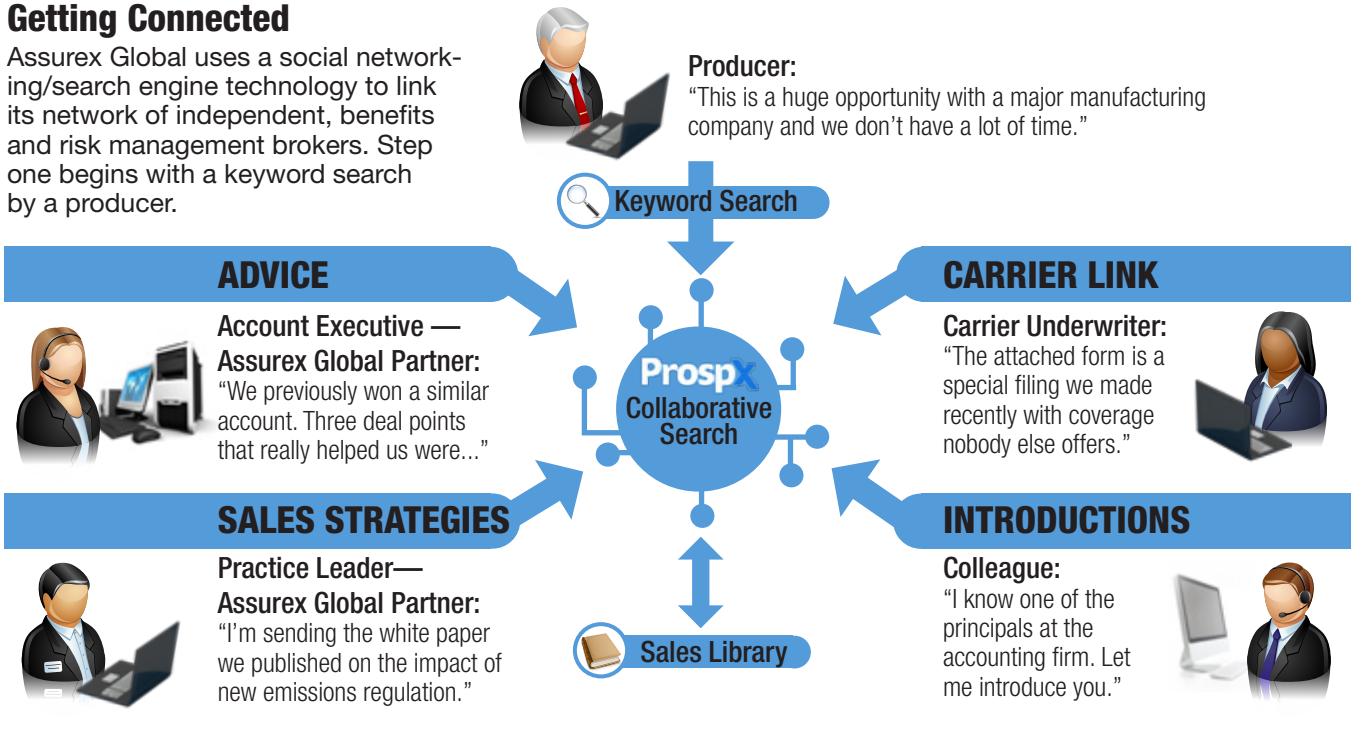
► **The Payoff:** The platform connects brokers with relevant resources, which helps everyone write more business.

ferences to discuss best practices and the general state of the industry. While the conferences have been effective, attendance is limited by time and travel restrictions. Getting valuable meeting information to flow from attendees to everyone else in the organization is often a slow, inefficient process.

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Getting Connected

Assurex Global uses a social networking/search engine technology to link its network of independent, benefits and risk management brokers. Step one begins with a keyword search by a producer.



Sales and renewal business rely heavily on relationships, best practices, collaboration, research and effective communication among clients, agents, brokers and carrier partners. This is especially true when it comes to the complexity of commercial line sales. Assurex Global realized that if it could connect its network of specialists and resources, it would be able to finally automate this complex, multiparty process—one that relies just as much on who you know as what you know.

Social media are having a significant impact on the ways relationships are formed and the way both individuals and businesses communicate. Assurex Global sought technologies that could incorporate these same networking and collaboration capabilities in the day-to-day sales process. The company also wanted to control information flow so that its agencies could maintain the confidentiality and privacy needed for effective deployment within an enterprise setting while providing transparency into who is helping others and to what extent.

The solution also needed to be easy to use and deploy, to address the challenges that typically arise with the introduction of new technology and new ways of doing things. The network of

agencies would need to actively engage and use this technology as a key tool in their daily sales efforts. Unless the new technology worked the way the brokers envisioned, there was little chance of successful widespread adoption.

Winning the hearts and minds of the brokers required a solution to boost productivity quickly and easily through:

- Identifying and soliciting meaningful information from the most qualified "specialists" within the network.
- Providing access to the best, most relevant sales content within the network.
- Interfacing with insurance carriers to manage their involvement early in the sales cycle.

Going from vision to reality led to the rollout of Assurex Global's most important technology initiative in 2009: the implementation of a commercial insurance specific enterprise social networking and search engine technology platform that could add scale to their natural, networked way of doing business.

Well-Connected

After trial-and-error with various horizontal customer relationship management solutions touting collaboration capabilities, Assurex Global began looking for alternatives. Months of research

and careful evaluation led the company to choose a Web-based software platform from ProspX Inc.

Designed specifically for the commercial insurance industry, the solution combines enterprise social networking and search engine technologies to enable Assurex Global firms, for the first time, to connect and collaborate in real time.

The new platform is based on the format of social networking, but operates in a specific enterprise setting. It has streamlined this once-manual process and has helped Assurex Global brokers automatically to identify specialists within their network who possess expertise in a given area.

In February 2009, Assurex Global began identifying and uploading subject matter experts and sales assets in the network across various niches. These resources would be made accessible to anyone working on new or renewal business opportunities.

After completing additional solution customization, security enhancements, Web site integration and establishing a training curriculum, the initiative was officially launched across the entire network in September.

Each Assurex Global Partner now has access to ProspX via a Web-based login and is provided with training, on-site

and/or via weekly instructor-led webinars. Because the solution offers an on-demand delivery model, no on-premise installation of hardware or software, or IT intervention, is required. Security measures also have been established to ensure information remains confidential and accessible only to appropriate Assurex Global agencies, unless a decision to share is explicitly made.

Finally, Assurex Global is working jointly with ProspX to bring its top 25 property/casualty carriers into the network.

How It Works

To put it in the simplest terms, think Insurance Google meets Insurance LinkedIn. A producer typically initiates a keyword search specific to a new or renewal business opportunity. The search scours the enterprise knowledge base associated with the Assurex Global social network, which includes the knowledge base of the agency itself, relevant external partners and even insurance carriers that may have identified themselves as having an appetite for that particular type of opportunity.

The search returns specialists and sales assets relevant to the opportunity. The broker may then reach out and collaborate in real time with the identified specialists, determining on an individual basis what information about the sales opportunity they'd like to share. The system accounts for the fact that

they may be collaborating as partners on one opportunity while competing on others.

All data, conversations and shared content are continuously tagged and indexed to both tie them to the specific business opportunity and archive them in a virtual sales library for ease of retrieval and reference for future opportunities. The communications concurrently drive a pipeline tracking process that can be customized. Brokers can even rate resources, similar to what's done on eBay, as a basis for feedback as well as prioritization for future use of information and expert resources.

The on-demand, collaborative software platform has opened up the lines of communication within and across the Assurex Global network, connecting everyone with the best sales materials, tools, insights and expertise to help them work more efficiently. That same knowledge is then delivered from carriers in the network when they need it most, enabling more effective sales conversations.

Assurex Global agencies have access to better information more quickly, and spend less time reinventing the wheel, which frees them to work on more and bigger deals and focus on building relationships with clients. When brokers spend their time cultivating client relationships and can quickly get to the information they need, when they need it,

success is at their fingertips.

With the new collaboration and enterprise social-networking approach, Assurex Global has boosted sales productivity by:

- Arming brokers with the best sales content, insights, and industry intelligence, enabling them to deliver value-based solutions to their clients.

- Enabling accelerated and better preparation prior to each sales conversation, leading to shorter sales cycles and more time to invest in pipeline development.

- Harnessing the collective brainpower of an entire organization so that everyone, regardless of their level of experience, has access to the "A Team" for every opportunity.

Through this initiative, Assurex Global is promoting a team sales culture across its network, expecting better communication early in the sales process, reducing trial and error, increasing margins through shortened sales cycles and achieving higher win rates and larger deals for its agencies and brokers.

Assurex Global now has the tools to empower its brokers, while at the same time gaining visibility into which firms are actively contributing to the network and which are not. The company has essentially eliminated the previous communication challenges that existed when trying to forge successful partnerships. **BR**