



ACT Small Commercial Rating – Carrier Bridging Best Practices

Using input from ACT’s **Small Commercial Rating** work group as well as input from identified ‘best practice’ carriers, ACT has compiled this Best Practices Recommendations document. We thank our Work Group participants and our Best Practice carriers for their considerable time and input.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why a ‘Best Practices’ recommendation for Carrier Bridging? We feel it is an important step to reaching the ultimate goal of Real-Time Comparative Rating. It will also increase Bridging adoption among agents in using carrier portals and ultimately help carriers become the ‘carrier of choice’ of their agents. And ultimately, it will increase the return on investment in carrier portals.

To set an even understanding, the term “Bridging” refers to:

The process of an agency transmitting existing quote data from their AMS where data is exported (‘bridged’) from the AMS, then ‘bridged’ into the carrier’s agency portal to complete the quote in fewer keystrokes. A quote may or may not be returned to the management system. Carriers may also create interim web screens to assist agency reps to verify needed data (sometimes referred to as ‘interview screens’).

The scope of these recommendations for Bridging does not include comparative rating at this time.

The primary **existing problems** identified are that there is too much variation between carrier Bridging workflows, too many carrier-specific questions, not enough data pre-fill, and inconsistent error handling.

We offer this comprehensive ‘best practices’ document to carriers across the independent agent distribution channel as a verified strategic template to implement and/or improve Bridging functionality from Agency Management Systems (AMSs) to provide accurate, streamlined quoting functionality for Small Commercial Lines.

While the desired end-state we are working toward is Real Time rating, we also feel that beginning with consistent quoting functionality using management system Bridging will provide a great improvement in workflow for agents in their current workflow.

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Bridging Best Practice Recommendations

Guiding Principles for Development

Best Practice carriers indicate Bridging development should focus on the following as guiding principles (*listed in order of priority assigned by surveyed carriers*):

- Agent ease-of-use (overall intuitive flow and integration into workflow)
- Minimal field entry
- Data prefill functionality wherever possible
- Intuitive error messages (guides correction on edit mismatch, or missing field entry)
- Good training & support (dedicated team to handle training & support)
- Minimal underwriting questions
- Speed – returning a result quickly
- Interview’ process (screen dedicated to confirming accuracy on required fields)
- Quote accuracy (returning a **bindable** quote)
- Use of ACORD XML

ACT Small Commercial Rating – Carrier Bridging Best Practices

Additional: BP carriers indicate that while development is critical, having a dedicated support team is critical to ensure that any issues encountered with initial implementation and use are addressed. This leads to increased utilization across agency plant.

DEVELOPMENT Phase Learnings

- It is critical to understand how specific fields map from the management system to carrier system.
- Be aware of key differences between the upload process across management systems, and how they must be handled differently. This may also be true of differences from various management systems offered within vendors (ex: Vertafore Sagitta vs AMS360, Applied TAM vs Epic).
- Various pages within carrier policy systems may have required fields that need to be completed in order to "save" any of the data on that specific page. In Bridging situations, the carrier needs to determine how to handle this when the data isn't bridged in the agency management system – One option may be to require that the agent provide the information during the "interview" process before submitting, or alternatively to change the rule within the policy system.
- Understand CSR workflows; ultimately, they are the ones getting the quotes and submitting the business. If your portal doesn't flow well with their workflow, they are less likely to consider your company to get a quote – even if your line being quoted is priced competitively.

TESTING Phase Learnings

- During the Testing phase, ensure testing personnel have necessary quoting and agency management system knowledge.
- Ensure quality data is used to fully test all scenarios. Also test bad data to see how your system reacts, pops up error messages and assists agents in correcting the error.
- If carrier systems work with 3 third-party systems, ensure scenarios are developed to identify potential errors and code/adjust to compensate.
- Test all data prefill functionality, and determine how agents will get assistance if something goes wrong.

ROLLOUT Phase Learnings

- Consistently and continually market the benefits of using Real Time to both agents and internal carrier personnel. Some carriers hold contests and targeted training for agency and carrier employees. Some also incent agents with contests, and/or incent carrier employees (Sales organization) with bonus money for high usage of their agents.
- Acknowledge that agents use their systems differently, and/or have different workflows. Some workflows may need to be modified, but typically working with and not against these workflows gains agent adoption.
- Some agents may have had a negative experience with upload in previous years. Dedicate a part of your rollout program to convince/encourage agents to try again.
- Success is highly tied to accuracy of data on the AMS, and making small adjustments to work flow. Data is only as good as the source – part of the Rollout program may need to be training agents how to ensure 'good' (accurate) information is entered into their management system.
- Leverage carrier support staff to aggressively address Bridging issues as they arrive (as close to 'Real Time' as possible). Use weekly, monthly agency quoting reports to target issues – Carriers may want to prioritize by percentage of business.

Success through an Iterative process

Of those carriers surveyed, over 83% indicated they needed to create/use an iterative process to improve their Bridging functionality.

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Carrier Bridging Best Practices

- Agency feedback is critical to ongoing improvement as well as addressing issues – Use input from agency technology groups, key advisory agencies, and feedback obtained from support centers.
- Carriers created a genesis within their Bridging to give the option of a full quote or simply Bridge the data to carrier site to complete the quote process there.
- Carriers also learned they need to adjust their error messaging to ensure the agent is absolutely clear on the action they need to take.
- Some carriers employ an iterative process used in other development and rollout for other products:
 - 1st Ensure it is working well for a small group (10-20) to catch major errors, flow restrictions.
 - 2nd Ensure it works in a 'native' agency environment (200-300) with a larger control group across all possible variants.
 - 3rd Full rollout to agency plant. This can be state-by-state, a group of initial states, or across all agencies.
- Release of updates to the Bridging process may be as encountered at a scheduled point (monthly, annually).

Getting it right, out of the gate

Key things best practice carriers would make certain they do if they had the chance to start again:

- Ensure that all the commercial lines business area understands the benefits of Bridging, both on the agent side and the carrier side.
- Offer training to all carrier associates who may want to learn the process of Bridging, not for support purposes but for general information. This helps greatly in spreading the accurate word about the carrier's offerings.
- Ensure a strong focus on error handling and messaging.
- Determine immediately whether there are the ability/resources to provide bindable quotes from the bridge, rather than simply a quote 'indication'.
- Integration of external third-party services (i.e.: credit bureau, MVR, MS&B) are critical, leveraging these to provide faster, more accurate quotes, and reduce field entry/keystrokes. This might be communicated as changing from 'interrogation' to 'validation'.

What agents like best

- Easy to use.
- Speed of transactions.
- Reduces repetitive data entry/keystrokes.
- Having Bridging functionality available for all the major lines of business and that it's available for any size commercial risks regardless whether it is Small, Middle or Large Market business.
- Agents appreciate having a quick indication – even if not bindable – so the agent knows whether they will pursue with the individual carrier.
- Adoption will take time, set incremental goals and adjust where necessary to meet them.

Set realistic expectations

Carriers sharing best practices indicate that by and large, they did not see the utilization they expected – At least initially. Over 65% of respondents stated consistent utilization, but not what was estimated from their project justification process.

Utilization increased dramatically (by 30-40%) when carrier employee and agency incentives and training were employed.

ACT Small Commercial Rating – Carrier Bridging Best Practices

What else?

- ✓ Consensus is that a form of 'Appetite Guide' is a critical part of the overall workflow, whether it is within Bridging (at the point of entry into carrier agent portal), or the end-state real time comparative rating flow. Work group representatives discussed several vendor options including Market Appetite, Reference Connect, CoreLogic, etc., as sources that could be integrated.
- ✓ A high-level best practice is to ensure communication lines stay open, and to provide support and training. Many users resist change - It is important to demonstrate the positive changes upload can have to their business.
- ✓ Success within the carrier is a multiple team effort. The IT support team, Commercial Lines business area, and Sales areas must all be on the same page. Company-wide support and understanding of the process is key to success.
- ✓ Understanding the difference between what agents are currently using (carrier portals) and what the workflow they prefer to use is key in driving carrier leadership commitment. In a 2018 Big 'I' Agency Universe Study, 64% of agents confirm they currently quote directly within carrier portals, however the majority (44%) indicate they would prefer bridging from their management systems.
- ✓ Investment decisions to deliver connectivity solutions is directly impacted by agent adoption - both for current items and future plans. Ensuring agent involvement in design through rollout is key.

ACT wishes to thank the Small Commercial Rating work group members, as well as key 'best practice' carriers, for their input and time to create this document: Cincinnati Insurance, Columbia Insurance, Hanover, The Hartford, Selective, and Travelers.

