

Click on the Dotted Line

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Electronic signatures are designed to help businesses close the deal at the point of sale, but Garden State Life Insurance discovered there's more to the technology. The use of the Silanis ApproveIt Web Server has allowed the carrier to perform straight-through processing, as well, relates Deanna Walton, assistant vice president of field systems for American National Insurance Co. (Garden State is a subsidiary of ANICO.)

Making electronic signatures available to its customers offers the instant gratification Internet shoppers have become accustomed to, notes Walton. "[Customers] actually get their policy number when the process is complete," she says. "We don't show them their policy print, but we give them a policy number for their reference."

When the application is completed, the data is fed automatically into Garden State's policy administration system, which has helped the carrier end several manual processes. "They apply online; it feeds the admin and image system. Once the policy has been printed in our batch cycle, it is delivered to the customer in the mail," says Walton. "It's almost real time. In fact, we're working on a process right now to feed the admin system in real time."

The challenge Garden State looked to meet in its initial step into the e-signature market back in 2002 was to develop an ability to perform complete end-to-end processing on its Web site, recalls Scott Luchesi, president and CEO of Garden State. "The goal was to be able to take people who were merely inquiring about our products and allow them to get a personalized rate quote, complete an application and any supplemental questionnaires, and pay the initial premium if the application was approved all online and in a single session," he says.

Visitors to Garden State's Web site can get online quotes or directly apply for insurance. Once customers start the application process, their personal information is obtained, and when customers have answered all the questions, the process will take them through signing the application, explains Walton. The only applicants who don't sign electronically, she adds, are the ones who are declined due to information provided.

"It's digital click to sign," she says. "The form is rendered with all the information filled in that was gathered through the process, and the applicants click the places they are required to sign. Once the signature process is finished and they've signed in all the appropriate places, the process continues to the payment stage."

At the time Garden State began looking at e-signature solutions, Luchesi found most other companies active on the Web were limited to providing rate information online or completing most of the application online but then having the paramedic obtain a wet signature when the medical exam was given. "Since our process did not involve a medical exam or any other physical contact with the applicant, we needed a way to get the required signatures, and e-signature seemed the way to go," he says.

Garden State's IT department was instrumental in the evaluation and selection of the Silanis product, according to Luchesi. "At the time we were investigating this capability, there were not all that many vendors to choose from," he says. "There were several discussions of public key encryption and digital signature pads but very few alternatives that would meet the needs of our direct marketing model." When there is not a lot to choose from, he points out, the selection process is made easier, if not necessarily better. "It should be noted Silanis seemed to have done the most homework on analyzing the legal issues surrounding e-signature and providing a product that addressed the guidelines that existed at the time for an electronic signature to be accepted as evidence of a legally binding contract," adds Luchesi.

The Silanis product gives users a very intuitive process, which, Walton explains, was one of Garden State's requirements when it selected the product. "It had to be easy to use," she says. "We didn't want people to abandon the process either because they didn't trust it or it was too complicated."

Filling out a life insurance application is not a quick process for customers, states Walton. "You have to fill out a significant amount of information in order to get the application completed," she says.

Since Garden State is a direct marketing company, the e-signature initiative was done to open up more marketing channels. Today, it is driving many of the marketing efforts on the carrier's Web site, reports Walton. "It was a pretty expensive project to test the waters, but it has been quite successful," she says.