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Studying beer to sell insurance: A lesson in sales and marketing

It has to be about more than traditional marketing to get the ear of a policyholder or prospect these days.

By **Justin Guerra** | August 14, 2018



Insurance agents need to get creative using blogs, social media and in-person networking among other things to connect with the industries they serve on their level. (Photo: Shutterstock)

I drink beer for a living. Ok, that's not entirely true.

I'm a former travel writer turned content curator for a program administrator specializing in insurance solutions for breweries and wineries. It's my job to visit breweries, talk to their owners, brew masters, staff and guests, find out their stories, and yes, sample their goods. Then, I write about the breweries and share their stories on our company blog, via social media and more.

Building relationships in insurance

In the business of insurance, building relationships is critical. Building relationships within the

industries in which my insurance company specializes is my job. [Storytelling through blogs](https://www.propertycasualty360.com/2015/09/03/storytelling-an-underutilized-selling-skill-for-in/) (<https://www.propertycasualty360.com/2015/09/03/storytelling-an-underutilized-selling-skill-for-in/>) allows my company to connect with the beer industry and demonstrate to those within the industry that we too are passionate about beer.

Related: [6 important tips for insurance agency content marketing](https://www.propertycasualty360.com/2016/04/01/6-important-tips-for-insurance-agency-content-mark/)

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We get excited about the same things they get excited about. We are not always trying to sell; we are trying to connect.

But blogging is just one way that insurers and agents and brokers can build those relationships. It has to be about more than traditional marketing to get the ear of a policyholder or prospect these days.

Insurers need to get creative using blogs, social media and [in-person networking](#) (<https://www.propertycasualty360.com/2018/07/26/7-business-networking-reminders-414-133397/>) among other things to connect with the industries they serve on their level. At [PAK craft beverage insurance](#) (<https://pakprograms.com/>), we've used these tools, among others to connect with our industry. We'd like to share some insight we've learned along the way on connecting with the insurance industry beyond trying to make "the sale."

Blogging

"[Hoppy Thoughts](#) (<https://pakprograms.com/hoppy-thoughts/>)" — that's the name of our blog for our brewery program. When considering adding a blog to your insurance agency's marketing repertoire, don't think of it as work. It can be, as it is in my case, a passion project as well as a useful marketing tool.

Online readers today want short and sweet, let's say about 450 words to start. It should be smart but can be casual and colloquial. This can be a great tool to connect with younger members of the industry as well.

With "Hoppy Thoughts," we write about beer. We visit and interview the breweries we insure. We taste their beers, learn their stories, soak in the atmosphere and write about our experience. We learn what makes them unique, whether it's local ingredients, a certain tie to the community or something else. Then, we share their stories.

But it's not just our policyholders we are writing about. We visit breweries all over the country. I've been to more than 50 so far in the year I've been doing this. When visiting new areas, we check out the brewery scene, stop in and have a drink. We write about those experiences as well to share with our readers what's going on in the industry with no strings attached — in other words, no sell.

Connect with your community

Hoppy Thoughts has not taken off because it's about beer; our readers enjoy it because it's about their industry. We've found that when you take the time to ask questions and get to know people, they open up and want to share and have a conversation. From this, trust is born. This formula could work for any industry.

Connect with your industry or members of your community at their level. Find out their stories and what matters to them. By showing your interest in them, you are demonstrating that you are invested in them and their businesses. Not to mention, small businesses will like the attention — as a shout-out on your blog can provide for them exposure to a different audience of potential customers.

Related: [Insurers must rethink communications to secure customer loyalty](https://www.propertycasualty360.com/2018/03/02/insurers-must-rethink-communications-to-secure-cus/)

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If you are an agent or broker with a business that caters to residential and small business customers, use your blog to profile individuals or events in your community. Talk about changes to new businesses in town whether it's a remodel or expansion or charity endeavor. Profile local families and share stories of events featuring local sports teams and marching bands etc.

For insurers focusing on specialty industries, get to know those industries even more than you already do. Talk to people within the businesses, learn their stories and share in their success. Connecting with them will help you earn their trust and when they're ready to think insurance, they'll think of you.

Be part of the gang

For the brewery industry, like many others, there are key must-attend events that folks get excited about. For the beer industry, it's the Great American Beer Festival. The event takes place over a three-day period in early Fall in Denver. The event involves — pace yourself, literally — 4,000 beers, 800 U.S. breweries and about 60,000 attendees.

Pak Programs attends annually with the primary intention of drinking good beer and socializing and networking with our policyholders and the beer community. We are not there to sell policies or push our business on prospects. We don't even have a booth.

We are sponsors of the event and are sure to roam the floor and be a part of the scene. We look forward to it all year! And best of all, we are often the only insurers there, because it's not perceived as a grow-your-prospect-roster event.

Videos

Last year, we took a unique approach to the conference. Based on our experience with the blog, we wanted to find a way to further get to know our policyholders and help them share their stories, so we brought a video camera. We scheduled interviews with many of our brewery policyholders ahead of the event and met with them for 10-minute interviews on the exhibit hall floor.

A small video camera and microphone was all we needed. A natural-born microphone master, our program manager played the role of reporter. He asked each policyholder a series of questions including:

- What do you like about this event?
- What's your favorite beer?
- What beer did you bring to showcase this year?

He also slipped in a few insurance-related questions to get a glimpse of their risk management concerns.

Share on social media

We posted the video vignettes to social media and tagged the breweries. The breweries were excited to share the videos on their social accounts and websites as well — getting our PAK Programs' logo more social media mileage.

Related: [5 ways social media can keep insurance agents in front of prospects, clients](https://www.propertycasualty360.com/2015/07/14/5-ways-social-media-can-keep-insurance-agents-in-f/)
(<https://www.propertycasualty360.com/2015/07/14/5-ways-social-media-can-keep-insurance-agents-in-f/>).

This was a fun encounter with our policyholders, not a business transaction or sales meeting. We talked about the conference, laughed together and made videos to share that will continue to make their way around social media.

Again, this tactic could work for any insurer. Video is one of today's most popular mediums for communication and is easier than ever to do without a big investment. Use the camera on your smart phone and get out in your community or within the industry you serve and get to know people on camera.

Be there in good times & bad

Aside from breweries, we also provide insurance programs for wineries. Last Fall, wildfires ravaged the Napa and Sonoma regions, devastating homes, businesses, wineries and more.

It was impossible to imagine what our colleagues in the industry were experiencing. It was the connection we've forged with our clients and within the industry that motivated us to act. We had friends and business partners suffering. We knew right away that we had to be on the ground, experiencing the devastation with our community and providing support.

We flew in immediately, talked to the community, empathized with them, met with our policyholders and toured their fire-ravaged properties with our claims adjusters while distributing claims checks where we could. When we were on the ground, people were still missing. Others had lost their homes. It was complete devastation.

We were there to be supportive and as a blogger, I was unclear at first how or if to report on the tragedy. It was only after being on the ground, seeing the situation unfold and hearing the stories from clients that I was inspired to write a blog post, photo-documenting the scene and sharing some of the victims' stories.

I wrote about what we were seeing — detailing everything from the helicopters above to burnt-out cars and barns and communities in a state of shock, and shared the images on social media. For us, it was key to be there as it was happening. While we were assessing damage and distributing claims checks, we were there to be a part of the wine community, not insurance guys.

It's not all about the beer

Transform some of your marketing efforts to make real connections within your industry and your community. Turn off your inner salesman and just be a member of that community. Find out what their passions are and try to share in that passion. This way you can bridge that gap between what you do and

what they do.

After you make the commitment to be a part of that community, share your experience on social media. Share articles that are relevant to the industry, write your own blog and share content and photos, and use video where you can.

Though technology is changing the way we operate and market our businesses, some things will never change. The communities we are a part of, whether it's the neighborhood community or industry, will always value personal interaction. By getting to know your industry and community you can make invaluable connections that will, in time, boost your business exponentially.

Related: [10 common claims from craft breweries](#)

(<https://www.propertycasualty360.com/2016/11/03/10-common-claims-from-craft-breweries/>)

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