

Insurers' determination to cut costs has resulted in brokers being left hanging on the telephone says Laura Jones

Why service matters

“Your call is important to us, please continue to hold.” Being a broker caught up in an insurers' phone queuing system can be frustrating. In today's competitive SME marketplace, major insurers are desperate to retain the support of brokers, but can this be achieved with this type of service?

Long gone is the visit and cover note audit from local composite inspectors and few would mourn the passing of such a time-consuming and costly tradition.

However, with developments in technology it is noticeable that personal relationships have often been replaced by call centres and communication via web-based portals.

When used efficiently for data exchange, electronic transactions have benefits; speed, ease of use and documented audit trails. But it's hard to build a rapport with an inbox.

Genuine negotiation of terms, through discussion of risk features, can only ever take place between a broker and empowered underwriter. It is not so much the closure of local branch offices the typical broker laments, but the loss of relationships.

Changing costs

Migration to technology-driven commercial lines regional centres has, no doubt, brought savings for the major carriers. But what proportion of these costs have been passed onto brokers, through increasing time spent negotiating switchboards and double-checking documentation?

Many brokers will also point to the lack of technical skills of insurers' underwriting staff.

According to Graham Anderson, Managing Director of BSSA Insurance Brokers: "It's clear that the staff within an insurance broker's office are generally more qualified than the underwriters they deal with. This makes it difficult to establish a rapport where decisions are always based on standard screen terms and rates."

No one can dispute the objectives of insurer consolidation and rationalisation of branch networks, but the execution has undoubtedly left many commercial brokers feeling short-changed.

Folgate has been working with BIBA to offer members a quality SME commercial combined policy, which also comes with high levels of service.



by **Laura Jones**,
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What Folgate offers

Folgate Underwriting Agency Commercial Lines (FUACL) are specialist underwriters providing a range of commercial SME products. FUACL underwrite the BIBA Business Plan policy, part of BIBA's exclusive Schemes Portfolio.

The business has no voice manager system. Underwriters do not have a voicemail facility - telephone calls are picked up by experienced and empowered underwriters.

FUACL believe that high levels of service, combined with the quality of

relationship between an underwriter and a broker, are the key drivers in ensuring clients' needs are met. To deliver these aims, FUACL will:

- Provide direct access to nominated, experienced underwriters via Direct Dial numbers and email addresses
- Develop a meaningful Joint Business Plan outlining key objectives and commission levels, and arrange regular progress meetings
- Arrange joint broker/underwriting team meetings

- Agree realistic service standards based on brokers' requirements
- Undertake product training for brokers' account handlers and account executives

A provisional agency with FUACL is required before quotations can be provided.

To find out more about the BIBA Business Plan policy, or to arrange a provisional agency, please call Laura Jones on 01708 333836 or e-mail laura.jones@folgate.co.uk