IATS Grows Up

MAIA responds to membership call for expanded technology services

By Wayne Joubert, MAIA VP Communications and Information Technology

Just as computing power has doubled every few years, so has the complexity of agency automation. Microsoft.Net, Web Services and Wi-Fi are but three terms unheard of five years ago but commonly tossed about in automation discussions now.

MAIA has long wrestled with keeping its members up-to-date on ever-changing standards and trends in technology. Fortunately, over the years, it has been helped in this task by the consistently visionary agent leadership of MAIA's Technology Committee, responsible for services such as Great Lakes Automation Day (the state's premier automation event for agents) and First-Call Free Automation, which offers members free automation consulting.

In the past decade, no state association automation committee in the nation has brought to its members more hot-off-the-press national automation studies, books and reports than MAIA's Technology Committee has. More recently, the Committee created its annual Tech-Camp, providing agents with two days of intensive training in software and hardware.

All of these efforts have become a model for other states, giving MAIA's Independent Agent Technology Services (IATS) recognition as a leader in agent automation services.

Yet, despite these successes, MAIA's recent membership survey identified the delivery of technical assistance to members as among the lowest rated service by the MAIA. Only 31 percent of the members indicated the Association delivered this service "Very Well." Couple that number with another in the survey in which automation issues were identified as agents' third greatest concern—right behind market access and adequate staffing/perpetuation—and you have the makings of a membership call for action.

Fortunately, the survey served to confirm a direction the Technology Committee had been heading for several years in exploring expanded technology services for members. And now, within one year of the survey, IATS is ready to unveil two money-saving and leading-edge automation programs for MAIA members, both of which promise, once again, to set the standard.
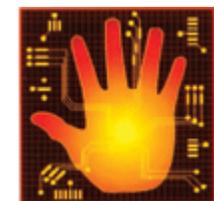
**Service #1:
Full-Service Technology
Solutions From CNS**

Most agents in Michigan familiar with agency automation recognize the name Computer Networking Services (CNS), a full-service technology provider with independent agency expertise second-to-none. Since the company was founded in 1990, CNS President Jerry Fetty and his highly qualified technicians have helped literally hundreds of independent agents in the state with everything from simple technology consultation to systems design, installation, training and support.

Much of CNS's success has come as a result of Fetty's maintaining high professional and certifications standards for his employees. Without exception, every new CNS technician must obtain various certification levels within a period of time to maintain employment at the company. Fetty

practices what he preaches. He himself has nearly a dozen certifications from top technology companies such as Microsoft and Cisco.

Fetty (CNS) has created an independent agent focused technology services company designed to deliver not just a blanket solution, but the right, customized solution to meet each agency's needs, plans and budget.

Together with his team of engineers and technicians, Fetty has created an independent agent focused technology services company designed to deliver not just a blanket solution, but the right, customized solution to meet each agency's needs, plans and budget.

Having utilized the expertise of CNS for responding to First-Call Free Automation calls for the past two years, MAIA has gained firsthand experience of CNS's service, knowledge and professionalism.

Recently, as a natural growth of the Association's relationship with CNS came the idea to develop a means for all MAIA members to access CNS services for a special member-only price. That idea is now a reality. Following approval earlier this year by the MAIA Technology Committee and Agents Assistance Corporation, CNS has become MAIA's endorsed technology provider.

Over the next few months, through mailings and a special area on the MAIA website, members will be reading more about the many services available through CNS, but here are just a few:

• Wireless and Wired Network Consulting

• Systems Design & Installation

• Support & Maintenance

• Training Programs

• Cable Installation and Certification (Copper & Fiber)

• Hardware and Software Sales

One of the most exciting discounted services available to MAIA members is CNS's "SMART" service, which brings expert systems support directly from CNS's Technical Support Center to agencies. SMART, which stands for Support, Monitor, Administrate and Remote Technical Services, allows offsite trained and experienced systems engineers to review and manage a computer system while agencies go about doing what they do best: selling and servicing customers.

SMART is a non-invasive, silent partner, proactively monitoring servers, workstations and other critical networking components every five minutes, 24/7. SMART also provides data backup and integrity, antivirus management, software and hardware upgrades, all designed to ensure optimal network performance.

Small or mid-size agencies that can't afford to hire a full time IT staff would stand to benefit most from SMART services. However, even larger agencies owe it to themselves to see how SMART services can help their operations as well.

MAIA's new partnership with CNS means that members can receive the finest technical assistance available at a reduced cost.