

THE DASHBOARD REVOLUTION

To get the right risk and loss prevention data in the hands of operations managers and everyone else throughout the enterprise, provide that data with an easy, accessible technology.



By STEPHEN MADDEX

Keeping risk management and loss prevention top of mind for busy operations managers can be a challenge. Realistically, how much time do managers have to truly stay on top of their key performance indicators related to costs, risks and operations? Across the self-insured industry, the answer is... precious little!

While risk management and claims professionals feel a little tingle along the back of their necks when they see something in the data that indicates a preventable trend, the managers running their facilities, departments and business units just don't have the time to devote to analyzing monthly reports and pulling out insightful information. How can we make it easier for them?

ALERTING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

It's a challenge for risk and safety managers to continually engage the rest of their organization in efforts to actively prevent accidents, minimize risk and better manage claims. The best advice is this: Get as many people involved in the information revolution as possible.

The concept of the democratization of risk information is certainly nothing new. You can see its effectiveness in the national Amber Alert program, which allows authorities in multiple jurisdictions to use road signs and other media to alert the public of potential child kidnappings. Within minutes, millions of motorists can be on the lookout for suspects with a quick summary of the basic facts. Over the past eight years, Amber Alerts have helped recover nearly 500 children.

Similarly, risk and claims organizations can take advantage of the existing technology and distribution networks to alert employees at all levels--from chief executives to claims adjusters--about risks, safety concerns and operational issues. The ideas generated and corrective actions taken can be just as meaningful.

DASHBOARDS FOR MANY DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

To heighten awareness, a growing number of organizations are using dashboard technology to deploy relevant key performance indicators (KPIs) in an easy-to-digest, at-a-glance view. Dashboards have been around for years, used widely in the manufacturing process, but instead of tracking the production of widgets, the occurrence of defects and expense fluctuations, risk management departments are creating dashboards to depict claims volume, costs and other information.

Before deploying dashboards, organizations need to answer several questions. What is the best format for viewing the information? How often does the information need to be refreshed? What detailed data might help to explain dashboard results? And finally--who could benefit from having a dashboard?

One of the most common mistakes made in creating a dashboard is trying to cram too much information into it. Remember, the dashboard is simply an easier way to visualize the same data that's available in spreadsheet format, so the actual graphics you use to display the information--such as charts, dials and gauges--affect the user's ability to quickly comprehend what's being depicted.

For example, if you're trying to look at the relative performance of 100 business units, a pie chart is probably not going to be very helpful because most of the slices will be too thin to see. Instead, users might be better served to see the information across a series of gauges.

Ultimately, a good dashboard is one that you can glance at quickly and see where there's a problem. That's why so many dashboards are organized around the colors green, yellow and red, which are already synonymous with safety conditions.

To make the process as efficient as possible, the information feeding your dashboards should come directly from your risk management information system (RMIS). Depending on the capabilities of your back-end system, real-time information can be continually fed to your dashboards--and include month-to-month, year-over-year and year-to-date data. By the same token, dashboard users often need to quickly drill down to underlying data points such as types of claims by location. That's why the dashboard must be equipped with simple buttons and dropdown menus that allow nontechnical users to filter and sort the data or dig deeper.

TAILORED TO EACH USER

To be effective, dashboards must be specifically tailored to each user in the organization. For example, a chief executive may only need to see actual expenses, budgeted expenses and reserve amounts, with the capability to drill down to individual regions or business units. Managers and employees who are closer to the actual claims need a more detailed view.

The type of business also dictates the specific data points that should be depicted on a dashboard. For instance, an emergency-room director for a healthcare group needs real-time information on patient volumes, the number of complaints/claims per 1,000 patients and the types of complaints--ranging from slips and falls and excessive wait times to accidental needle sticks and improper medication dosage.

A real-time dashboard could help the emergency-room director immediately see negative trends by comparing the incident rates of all departments in one hospital--or of all emergency rooms across all hospitals. That high-level view of how that director is doing compared with others helps focus attention to the situation and the underlying causes.

Similarly, dashboards showing accident rates can help the distribution manager for a trucking company identify which routes are most hazardous and what times of day they should be avoided. Or a facilities manager for a manufacturer can view employee injury data by location to identify emerging safety issues.

For claims organizations alone, dashboards can be valuable tools to managing operations. Say, a third-party administrator (TPA) wants to distribute dashboards to its clients to depict claims-handling turnaround times and compliance with service level agreements.

Within the claims organization itself, managers can use dashboards to monitor workloads and the performance of the entire department or individual employees, allowing them to shift work or take other corrective action. Further, claims adjusters can use dashboards to view their own workloads by claims type, allowing them to triage their claims by severity and potential costs and make the most efficient use of their time. Collecting good risk and claims data is only half the battle. Distributing that information to the people who need it--in a format that's useful and easy to understand--is the key to the dashboard revolution.

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