

## Meet the Expert

# 'Refer online-buy offline continues for now'

In a real digital world, customers refer offline and buy online: SBI Life executive

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Insurance, like other businesses, has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, in terms of new business premium and risk management. While the insurance industry is heavily dependent on face-to-face advisory, most insurers were able to leverage digital platforms for various processes, from policy issuance to claims, says Anand Pejawaar, President - Operations, IT and International Business, SBI Life.

**What is your digital strategy for policyholders, considering the lockdown?**

The company adopted API (application programming interface) integration to enhance the digital end-to-end experience in insurance.

A classic example of this integration is the 'YONO' platform offered by SBI where a customer can buy SBI Life term plan in just

three clicks. The Certificate of Insurance is then made available on the same platform immediately on transferring the premium amount. All the other transactions like payment of renewals, policy details, etc. can be obtained from this application.

Another instance is the e-Certificate of Existence submitted by the annuitants every year. The process is completely digitised and secured, and can be done by the annuitants from the comfort of their homes.

In such times, this has helped senior citizens, who otherwise would have to travel to a bank branch or government offices to get the same certified.

We have also been encouraging our customers to manage their policy-servicing needs with 'Easy Access', a mobile application that provides products and policy-related information on their fingertips.

We have developed a web and mobile application,

'Customer Self Service (CSS) Portal' for customers to view and make transactions for all issued policies with SBI Life under a single login. Not only this, we also have an AI-driven chatbot, 'RIA - Real Intelligent Assistant', that assists users with queries.

**Have you been able to onboard new customers/entertain renewals during the lockdown period?**

Yes. This was possible because of our in-built digital solutions.

To contain the spread of the pandemic, we enabled a work-from-home policy, wherever required, and equipped our employees, distributors and partners with necessary digital tools.

For instance, we could onboard new customers and issue policies, 100 per cent digitally, with Alternate Sales Process which is a paper-less tool; collected renewals through M Connect and Smart Advisor Plus mobile platforms that empower sales personnel to assist customers with their queries.

**Which types of policies were issued during the lockdown?**

**How did you undertake the medical test (if required),**

**given the restrictions on movements?**

Depending on the insurance needs of customers, we sold policies, namely pure term insurance, ULIPs, traditional insurance policies, etc. Medicals – wherever applicable, up to a certain level of sum assured – got done through the tele/video-medical process.

We advise customers to provide correct information to the medical consultants over phone or video so that they face no challenge during the claim settlement process.

Policies with a sizeable sum assured that includes complete medical tests were kept on hold for some time as customers were not willing to leave their homes and get the tests done in diagnostic centres; many of them were closed because of the complete lockdown.

**How have the digital services helped, in terms of claims initiation and claims payment to policyholders?**

At SBI Life, customers can intimate claims online. All the information on procedure and claim forms is available on the website or the CSS portal. Lately, we received claims for 10 policies arising from Covid-19 cases, which were settled in the shortest period – within three days.

As far as survival and maturity benefits and lapse termination refunds go, almost 100 per cent of the payments were done through electronic funds transfer.

**How soon are the claims settled after the submission of documents?**

In life insurance, the claims are of two types. The first one is categorised as 'early death claims' where the death has occurred within two years of

the insured taking a policy. As per regulations, within 90 days, the company needs to settle or repudiate the claim by conducting necessary investigations, if required. However, at SBI Life, we have put in a mechanism which helps us settle genuine claims within an average of 15 days, including investigations, if required.

The other category is the 'non-early death claims' where the death of the insured has occurred after three years of taking the policy.

Here, as per regulations, 30 days are provisioned to take a decision and settle such claims. But at SBI Life, our normal turnaround time is less than three days in settlement of such non-early claims.

**Do you see digital-only policies taking off post-Covid-19?**

Organisations have leveraged digital platforms for various processes, starting from sourcing to issuance and policy-servicing.

While it is definitely a good move for the industry towards a digitalisation, we don't expect this situation to eliminate human intervention in terms of advisory.

In India, most people utilise the online platform either to do a quick research on the product features or compare products etc, but prefer buying the product offline after consulting their insurance advisors.

In my view, this 'Refer online-purchase offline' sales would continue. The real digital world would be where people refer offline and buy online on their own.

While this will take some time, organisations will continue to invest in newer technologies and create awareness towards online buying.

### Profile

Beginning his career with LIC in 1983, Anand Pejawaar has more than 32 years of experience across the banking and insurance sector



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