

Service mantra not evidenced on frontline

WHILE I'm delighted to see that luminaries from the insurance industry are sitting around a table to discuss property claims (*Building A Good Reputation*, *Post*, 10 May) I am concerned that the very people they consider to be crucial to the claims process were omitted from the briefing. If a representative from the contracting sector (looking after the interests of a number of firms) was present, participants may have been enlightened on a few points they appear to have missed.

The clear message from the briefing is that service, and not cost, is now the key driver for insurers. If this is the case, perhaps insurers can explain the following five points to members of the National Insurance Repair Contractors Association:

1. Why do our members have to work to a schedule of rates that have been unchanged for the last five to six years? These rates are unrealistic and do not take into account the extra costs of labour or material, nor the increased costs of complying with the new Construction Design and Management regulations.
2. Why do loss adjuster-managed networks continue to thrive? By employing loss adjusters to run the networks, 8-15% is wiped off our contract value to pay that extra tier of 'manpower' before we've even started the job. Why aren't

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insurers engaging directly with contractors? Many NIRCA members have loss adjusters working in their midst — they do understand the insurance industry.

3. When members submit an invoice, which has either a 30-day or 60-day payment period, why are they still waiting to recoup their costs some 90 to 120 days later? Other sectors pay within 14 days.
4. Why are our members pressurised by loss adjusters into providing a free 12 months'



warranty for their work when in other sectors our standard JCT minor-works agreements carry a three-month defects liability period?

5. Why are contractors expected to pull out the stops to meet capacity expectations when they are not advised beforehand what the demand

will be? Given the amount of management information held within the insurance sector, I'm surprised insurers cannot provide reliable claims-volume forecasts (I appreciate this will not apply to surge scenarios).

If we had this information, contractors could invest in resources without incurring

any major financial risk (payments permitting).

Is it fair to squeeze NIRCA members on cost, not pay them on time and expect them to provide free warranties for a longer time scale than is reasonable? And is it also fair for them to be berated by householders for others' administrative errors, hold-ups and service-delivery failures?

I agree that service must be given top priority, and as well as following the Financial Services Authority's missive of Treating Customers Fairly, how about extending this to contractors? Contractors are on that 'front line', and are often the only 'insurer representative' a policyholder meets. Our members are deliverers of your insurance promise and beholders of your brand, so please include us in your future discussions.

John Fairley
Secretary of the National
Insurance Repair Contractors
Association
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