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Local spotlight

Firm resolves mystery of health insurance buying

Web site offers clear answers for health and life policies in Michigan and eight other states

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Lorne Zalesin has an answer to the seemingly endless forms and guesswork that come with buying health or life insurance. Zalesin is head of new Web site called MyInsuranceExpert.com, a user-friendly online tool. Based in Bloomfield Hills, MyInsuranceExpert.com helps individuals and families research and purchase health insurance policies.

Industry experts like Zalesin and others say more individuals will need to turn to resources like his to help them contain their insurance costs.

“Businesses can no longer afford to offer a benefit (to employees or contractors) that will go up 25 percent a year,” Zalesin said.

As a result, Zalesin said the site’s numbers have been growing steadily. They wrote 1,400 policies in 2007 for a total policy value of about \$2.8 million. And things show no signs of slowing this year—the firm wrote 400 policies in January alone, Zalesin said.

He anticipates his total policy value for all of 2008 could top \$20 million, especially with the addition of a life-insurance division in March to capture some of the growth in that marketplace.



Lorne Zalesin, CEO of MyInsuranceExpert.com., and employees gather at their Bloomfield Hills offices. Zalesin hopes to be operating in 40 states with a staff of 150 employees by the end of 2009.

(Mark Bialek / Special to The Detroit News)

MyInsuranceExpert.com is available in Michigan and eight other states, and Zalesin hopes to expand that to 40 states by the end of 2009. So far, he said the site's biggest business comes from states like Texas and Florida, where there are fewer companies offering insurance to employees.

Zalesin employs about 20 people now and expects to add another 15 over the next few months. The long-term goal is

to have 150 employees or more by the end of 2009 to support the company's growing into more states.

The individual health care insurance market is a growing one, according to the research division of America's Health Insurance Plans, a Washington D.C.-based trade organization.

AHIP said individual coverage is purchased by people of all ages, but mostly by those between the ages of 45 to 67 years old. Also, of the about 2.9 million policies written between 2006 and 2007, annual premiums averaged \$2,613 for single coverage and \$5,799 for family plans.

Zalesin launched the Web site in November 2006. Previously, he had a career in real-estate sales and home building. However, with the state's slowing economy, Zalesin said he looked at MyInsuranceExpert.com as a way to "feed my family" as well as develop a successful new business.

MyInsuranceExpert.com has a business model similar to Quicken Loans, Zalesin said. People go to the site to receive online quotes and ultimately purchase their insurance policy. But they also have personal, licensed advisers who work with each client to ensure they have the most cost-effective policy possible, he added.

Zalesin encourages people to call his company to determine whether an individual policy might be more cost effective than receiving it through an employer. Buying individual coverage versus a group policy can have considerable cost savings, he said.

Karen Dybis is a Metro Detroit freelance writer.