



By  
Gates Ouimette

**M**ost everyone has heard the saying that "the best time to invest is in a down market." While that may be true for those fortunate enough to have money or a budget "hanging around," the fact of the matter is that in business it's rare to see any company—insurance-focused or not—making those investments during a continuing down global economy (as of this writing, at least).

When viewed as core infrastructure that is there to keep an insurer or broker operating, IT often gets put in the same

**cation Tools for Tough Times** to continue to drive down communications costs.

- **Autodesk's Assistance Program** (<http://autodesk.com/assistance>) for insurance adjusters or underwriting specialists, or those wanting to move into specialist roles in the field by adding computer-assisted design tool skills.

While some of these offerings are sold out, such as Adobe's Flex Builder 3 Professional solution for unemployed developers (15,000 requests at <https://freeriatools.adobe.com/learnflex/> were received within a few months of program inception), these solutions are not limited to North America. For instance, there's also Singapore Poly-IBM Seminar, "Simple Solutions In Tough Times—Cost Saving, Business Efficiency and Growth through Innovation."

These solutions also aren't limited to individuals, as evidenced by CGI Group's Solutions for Tough Times ([www.cgi.com/toughtimes](http://www.cgi.com/toughtimes)). In addition to more traditional IT consulting service packaging, CGI's solutions include more business-strategic offerings such as debt collections management—a no up-front-cost service to meet the growing collections challenge head-on (bottom line results can be generated within three to five months) and claims auditing and fraud detection service—in which CGI audits, identifies and implements programs that detect fraudulent claims and improve recoveries.

In nearly all of these tough-times solutions, an insurer's IT staff can more easily prove out potential return on investment by working with IT vendors to "try and buy." Creativity and flexibility can lead to having more formally documented, defined ROI results before any financial investment is required.

While a down economy is almost never a good thing, it can have a silver lining for insurance IT executives wanting to introduce strategic new ideas to their client businesses. IT vendors are making their own strategic investments to make it easier for these insurance executives to realize business benefit. As a result, this down economy may actually turn out to be the best time for insurance IT executives to invest. **BR**

## Here and Now

Information technology solutions help carriers tackle a down economy.

cost-cutting bucket as facilities (e.g., close buildings, shrink existing space) and utilities (turn off lights). Help-desk support close to the business unit may become scarcer while upgrading software versions to "stay current" may get delayed.

However, for those insurers able to continue having a strategic view at a business level, there are certainly opportunities for technology investments delivering positive returns. While projects having short-term returns can more easily overcome current budget constraints, there also are longer-term, larger-impact investments options available.

By using today's economic scenario to their advantage, insurers can avail themselves of numerous "tough times" solutions introduced specifically for this currently tough economy by numerous IT vendors, from services firms to hardware and software manufacturers to communications equipment providers.

Reviewing press releases from the end of 2008 and continuing through the first half of 2009, an insurance IT executive can find:

- **Sun's Career Stimulus Package** (<http://learning.sun.com/stimulus>) for free, online training and software downloads to accelerate onboarding for potential new hires.

- **Cisco's Business Communi-**

**A down economy can have a silver lining for insurance IT executives wanting to introduce strategic new ideas to client businesses.**

*Gates Ouimette is a Best's Review columnist from Massachusetts. He can be reached at [gateso@yahoo.com](mailto:gateso@yahoo.com).*