

Insurance Is a Fun Career! Just Consider the Zombies and Bacon

Insurers use extreme measures to lure new hires, from ghoulish videos to free beer; Allstate's 'happiness guru'



Carli Miller in 'Zombacuity,' a video by Acuity Insurance. PHOTO: ACUITY INSURANCE

By *Leslie Scism*

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When Acuity Insurance wanted to liven up its image among prospective recruits, it came time to bring in the zombies.

It's the year 2023, and underwriter Carli Miller trudges through the insurer's Sheboygan, Wis., headquarters in a video Acuity has produced.

She is clearly undead—bloodless gray skin, glazed eyes, ripped clothing—bumping into zombie colleagues who have overtaken the insurer.



Acuity Insurance undead

The 27-year-old Ms. Miller narrates and rattles off what she considers Acuity's perks—the camaraderie, the “jeans days,” the great 401(k) plan. “I guess the bottom line is Acuity truly was a great place to work,” the ghoul concludes, “and it's a great place to spend eternity—even if we are undead.”

The video, “Zombacuity,” ends with a scream—which might be a sign of what insurance-industry recruiters feel these days.

For some reason, a lot of people just don't want to work for insurance companies, and the firms have been scared into taking extreme measures to lure new hires in and keep them.

Acuity posted its video online to attract prospects. It picked zombies, says Acuity communications specialist Kallyn Vandenack, 30, to show “we really like to have fun around here.”

Insurers have put in climbing walls, offered free beer and massages, and published at least one graphic novel to entice and retain new hires. At school-recruiting events last autumn, Acuity served mounds of freshly cooked bacon, whose aroma drifted around the grounds.

“All of the college students swarmed around,” says Acuity Chief Executive Ben Salzman, 61.

Americans under 30 generally aren’t enthusiastic about the industry, according to Insurance Careers Movement, an industry group that seeks to inspire young people to pursue insurance careers. “When I think of insurance,” one millennial said in recent research conducted for Liberty Mutual Insurance, “it is a sharp poke in the eye.”

The industry needs more brains, and soon. It employs about 2.6 million but calculates it must hire 500,000 newcomers over the next several years as a wave of retirements hits, says Robert Hartwig, an insurance professor at University of South Carolina’s business school.

Some insurers are taking a page from Silicon Valley’s hip offices. Allstate Corp. has a “happiness guru” in a building where it locates many data scientists.



Ferris wheel at Acuity Insurance. PHOTO: ACUITY INSURANCE

Acuity has in recent years installed ping-pong tables, a working 65-foot Ferris wheel, a 45-foot climbing wall and a 27,000-square-foot fitness center. It has twice-monthly happy hours. Years ago, it dropped its clean-desk policy banning plants, family photographs and food, Mr. Salzman says.

A graphic novel is Dan Epstein’s millennial lure. The

CEO of ReSource Pro LLC, which provides processing and advisory services to the insurance industry, co-wrote what is essentially a fancy comic book, “Tomorrow’s Insurance,” to engage young people in his company and clients about a transformation in the industry around data analytics and machine learning.

At the novel’s futuristic agency, Sigma 6 Insurance, the female owner walks among high-tech gear, escorting a mysterious guest who is assessing if the agency can insure a “Mars Colony One Project.” The guest leaves definitely impressed.

“We wanted to step out,” says Mr. Epstein, 46, “and envision what the industry could be like in 10 years.”



A detail from ReSource Pro’s graphic novel. PHOTO: RESOURCE PRO

Other businesses, too, face labor shortages, says Professor Hartwig, 53, but “it’s without question more difficult to attract a worker into the insurance industry.”

At a February Rutgers University event, lines of students waiting to meet recruiters from some tech firms ran 25 or more deep. Insurers’ booths generally had trickles of guests.

In a queue for the consultancy Accenture, finance major Nicholas Appaluccio, 23, said he wasn't interested in insurers because he considered much of the work there "cut and dried."

Graduate student Shivani Sethi, 24, approached Liberty Mutual's booth upon seeing no line. "I'm open to trying new things," she said, but ultimately took an internship at an online brokerage. Liberty Mutual says it collected 78 résumés and offered interviews to four; two were offered jobs and took them.



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#TBT Who says working in insurance can't be fun? #CareerTrifecta
#InsuranceCareersMonth [ow.ly/pmwP309fYuj](https://www.linkedin.com/company/icwgroup)

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Videos are the enticement at firms such as ICW Group Insurance Cos., which last autumn rounded up employees to freeze in position—at a time when "mannequin challenges" were an internet craze.

In a video, a camera pans the firm's San Diego offices capturing the poses: someone about to sip a drink, another pushing an elevator button, one in

midstep.

The video, says Trisha Rule, 34, an ICW senior marketing employee, tackles "this misperception about the insurance industry."

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Among viewers was Leslee Edwards, 22, who researched ICW on Facebook and "thought it looked like a fun place to work." In May, she started in the workers'-compensation department.

Interns at MMG Insurance in Presque Isle, Maine, helped create a seven-minute video modeled after "The Office" television sitcom.

In it, Melissa McKenney plays an underwriter who uses clairvoyance to size up risks. To dispel conceptions that insurance is "boring or stale," she says, "we wanted to weave in a little bit of humor."

Ms. McKenney, now 23 and an MMG full-timer, says she previously figured insurance was monotonous but has learned it can be "very high-action, very fast-paced."

To keep some new hires away from the rest of the company, Allstate, Liberty Mutual and Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Co. have put some data scientists, app developers and other innovation specialists in digs in neighborhoods popular with startups and given the operations catchy names.

Allstate's Arity operation in Chicago's Merchandise Mart has a full-time "creative culture leader" who helps in recruiting talent. "We're doing everything we can," says

Allstate spokesman Justin Herndon, 36, “minus throwing out the red carpet to try to get them in the door.”

At Liberty Mutual’s Solaria Labs, says spokeswoman Adrienne Kaufmann, 49, there was “a deliberate decision to give it a distinct personality that was more entrepreneurial in feeling.”

MassMutual opened a location it calls Haven Life in New York City where it wants “spaces that feel start-uppy” and “whimsical,” says Gareth Ross, 41, who has responsibility for data analytics at the 166-year-old insurer.

The location has free beer anytime and some conference rooms named after “contributors to mortality”: “Fallen Coconut,” “Asteroid Impact,” “Insect Attack,” “Snake Bite.”

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