

Channel Surfing

MY FIRST JOB IN INSURANCE involved the calculation of loss elimination ratios for the extended coverage endorsement of a dwelling fire policy. Sounds scintillating, doesn't it?

However, without another job offer at the time, I hung in there. And over the ensuing years, I've watched my profession grow in stature and become recognized as a leader in the evaluation of complex risks. Earthquake and terrorism modeling, insurance-linked securities, hedging and derivatives, retiree health care, enterprise risk-management, and long-term care insurance are but a few of the topics on the current actuarial agenda.

Ron Pressman, president and CEO of GE Insurance Solutions, sees an increasingly important role for actuaries. At a recent meeting of the Casualty Actuarial Society, he remarked, "Actuarial science has perhaps never had a better moment to shine and lead in this industry... We ask our actuaries for leadership in a way we never have before. You're not spectators or scorekeepers... you're called on to be the conscience of this industry and our business."

With such an ambitious challenge, I have an idea for the next step in defining our profession. Imagine, if you will, that you're channel surfing one evening and you stumble upon a cable network devoted exclusively to insurance and actuarial programming. As you watch, you soon realize that this is not staid, single-camera coverage of educational seminars à la C-SPAN.

To your amazement, you learn that this network offers a full-fledged lineup of dramas, comedies, reality shows, news, and weather to rival those on the major networks:

Law and Order: Insurance Investigation, starring an ambitious district attorney tracking schemes of bid-rigging and finite reinsurance in stories "ripped from the headlines."

The 441, a sit-com following the trials and tribulations of reinsurance actuaries and their families on the island of Bermuda, with episodes such as "Learning to Ride That Moped" and "Registering Your Unborn Child for Private School."

Beyond the West Wing, a reality-inspired series, where government actuaries seek ways to reveal the true cost of social programs to the populace while evading detection by political appointees.

RICHARD T. ZATORSKI is chief actuary at the Guard Insurance Group in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. Suggestions for innovative actuarial programming may be sent to Sullivan@actuary.org.



The next day promises to bring episodes of:

Real World: Hartford, a series depicting the relationships that develop among a group of 20-something actuarial students who live together while studying for their next exam;

Extreme House Makeover, a fantasy show where property insurers compete to pay claims and rebuild hurricane-damaged homes as quickly as possible;

Celebrity Poker, an insider's look at the backroom pricing models of excess and surplus lines insurers.

Who could resist shows like these?

You learn that topical news broadcasts are offered by *The National Underwriter*, A.M. Best presents a weekly *Upgrade/Downgrade Show*, and the Weather Channel sponsors real-time hurricane tracking (under both the RMS and EQECAT models).

For movie fans, there are insurance adaptations of *Back to the Future*, about the inevitability of underwriting cycles, and *Grumpy Old Men*, featuring baby boomers caught without Social Security benefits thanks to a quirk in the actuarial funding formula.

And, of course, there are frequent reruns of Jack Nicholson's portrayal of a retired actuary in *About Schmidt* and Russell Crowe's role as a kidnap and ransom insurance specialist in *Proof of Life*.

I know. It sounds like nirvana, doesn't it? A station like this might even make the remote obsolete.

In the September/October 2004 issue of this magazine, Patrick McGuigan wrote an article, "The Evangelical Actuary: A Call to Awaken the Quiet Profession," in which he remarked: "Actuaries affect the lives of the average person in a myriad of ways, and yet the public has limited insight into this important profession.... The public's perception of risk is askew, and the need for evangelical actuaries to disseminate the truth about risk has never been more pressing."

I say, what better way to disseminate that truth than over the airwaves?

It's time to let the secret out. Hollywood, here we come!

Note: Suggestions for innovative, actuarial programming may be sent to the editor of this publication. But if you're considering anything co-starring Jennifer Garner as an actuarial student, I'm already way ahead of you. ●