

“Sales Professionals for Your Credit Union” by Jeff Rendel, Certified Speaking Professional

“Our members already have all of their loans with us,” a staff member told her CEO. So, the CEO queried the credit reporting services’ databases and discovered that his credit union’s members did indeed have loans with other institutions – five times the total loan balances on the credit union’s books, to be exact. Is it possible that a similar multiple exists with your members’ balances elsewhere?

Before you set your full- or part-time sales team loose in search of the opportunities sitting on another’s balance sheet, make certain your strategy, system, and support are built around three principles of professional sales success for credit unions – relationships, partnerships, and entrepreneurship. Much more than cross-selling, professional sales and sales professionals seek to develop a portfolio of products and services for each member. Here’s how to start the process.

Focus on deepening existing relationships.

Credit unions can breathe a sigh of relief that professional sales does not require a phone book (as if they’re still around) and the courage to “smile and dial” your way to success (or frustration and burnout). Your credit union can provide warm leads (existing member lists) from the data it already holds for countless sets of members. These lists allow your sales professionals to create potential portfolios of products and services that add tangible value to each member’s financial state of affairs.

Credit unions can benefit from the recognized trust that members already have in their credit union. Once a member understands that the reason for your call is for their benefit, your opportunity to serve as their advocate is wide open. Your call is to explain that you learned a way (or set of ways) to improve their cash flow, increase their financial well-being, or experience a more valuable financial relationship with your credit union. It’s about creating an offer that any member would accept.

One CEO put it best regarding his expectations for his sales professionals: “Yes, we want the loans that are elsewhere, but we want more. We want deposits, insurance, investments, and more. We want relationships. If we truly offer the best for our members, it is our duty to reach out and create a compelling reason to deepen those relationships. If we want members to buy, then we must sell.”

Commit to creating shared-value partnerships.

Building a business case for more of your members’ business is necessary in the pre-call phase of planning for each opportunity. Each possibility will present a different option for loans, deposits, insurance, and investments. The sales call is not focused on your credit union’s latest promotion. Instead, the call is pre-planned, prepared, and customized to discuss an exact set of tangible benefits that can flow to your member. This is about determining and discussing how each member will win.

Your sales calls will focus on defining success with the member and communicating the value he will receive. For most members, their largest obstacles will be price, the hassle of change, and existing relationships with other financial institutions. Here’s where sales professionals must be ready to go to work for members and ease the inconvenience your member may face. Non-traditional hours, a

Saturday meeting, or handling the paperwork are common ways to take the lead for your members. Your members' success creates your credit union's success; their success should drive all sales actions.

One sales professional shared how she built a financial opportunity that drove \$17,000 (over five years) back into one member's cash flow. While that may be an extraordinary example, she also shared plenty of occasions where members benefitted by \$1,000 per year. This commitment to customized partnerships helped her credit union double its products per member in three years. This systematic approach, executed over time, across your entire member base can create partnerships that add cash flow to your members' lives and revenue streams to your credit union's top line.

Exhibit a spirit of entrepreneurship.

Sales professionals are in the business of building a book of business. Sales is a numbers game, and your numbers vastly improve as you develop lists of members with everyday opportunities for deeper relationships. The chief measure for your sales professionals to track is the number of outbound contacts placed to members, often at the rate of 40-50 contacts per day. This creates and maintains a full pipeline of opportunities to create expanded and deeper relationships with members.

Compensation is a topic which constantly leads to the same conclusion: sales professionals expect professional sales compensation. They're entrepreneurs, after all. Often, this involves a reasonable, guaranteed base (with realistic expectations) and unlimited upside beyond the minimum. Regularly, this is one part guaranteed pay to, potentially, one or two times the base in variable pay. The guaranteed pay helps keep business in line with standard growth; the variable element is designed as a reward for exceptional and entrepreneurial growth.

For example, a \$40,000 base could be augmented with product commissions and volume bonuses for an extra \$40,000. In many cases, the opportunity to build a six figure income as a full-time sales professional is attainable. Often, the fixed and variable pay mix is phased in over one year to allow for the development and management of a full pipeline of opportunities. In the end, sales professionals expect to be compensated for building a book of business that's greater than business as usual.

For greater success in sales, credit unions should ensure they develop professional sales people, processes, and incentives. Sales professionals: have an entrepreneurial spirit; are comfort with variable pay; show enthusiasm for the opportunity; and, hold the wherewithal to develop, manage, and maintain a full sales pipeline. Most important, they want to win by helping members win.

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