

Teach Your Clients Well

How Truebridge's turnkey system made referrals easier for Anchor's branch staff.

BY STEVE GARMHAUSEN JANUARY 1, 2010

Anchor Bank wasn't looking for a way to increase referrals to brokerage-it just stumbled on one.

The \$4.6 billion thrift, in Madison, Wis., was redesigning its website and looking for a content provider when it stumbled across Truebridge Financial Marketing in Boston, which "provided that content and, it turns out, quite a bit more," says Christopher Boyce, executive manager of Anchor Investment Services.

Before long, Anchor executives had bought into a referral solution from Truebridge that would parlay educational materials and retail-banker training into impressive cross-selling results. The system, rolled out in January 2006, helped boost gross commissions from \$2.3 million to \$3.4 million in 2007 and \$3.6 million in 2008. Commissions stayed at that level in 2009-despite the market crash.

"Without the leads, which were constant, I think we could have had some slippage," says Boyce, who is also the bank's chief investment officer. And these were quality leads. He reports that 30% of the referrals from Anchor's 76 branches to its 20 financial consultants result in investment product sales.

Anchor owes much of its success to what Boyce describes as an unusual approach. One pillar of the system is Anchor's online Financial Answer Center (FAC), a virtual library of dozens of personal financial goals and how customers can meet them. Another pillar is a series of training webinars to educate bank staff on engaging customers.

Before 2006, most customers knew little about how the bank's brokerage business could help them reach life goals, says Lynn Erd, vice president and regional retail manager at Anchor. "The whole investment world was scary to them. This content has helped to change their perceptions."

Even before Boyce had heard of the company, he was touting a no-strings-attached financial education in a brief and understandable format. "I've always held

the belief that if you can educate customers, you will own them," he says. "They see you as an expert and will come back to you."

It also helps win over retail bankers, says Boyce. Referral programs often try to turn bankers into salespeople, which many bankers resist despite the incentives, says A. Stewart Rose, president of Truebridge: "It's like asking them to change their stripes."

But educating bankers about investment products that can help their customers meet their life goals makes referrals a lot easier, says Boyce.

Anchor's main problem, however, is that referral generation goes through peaks and valleys. When Truebridge reports show that fewer guides are being viewed and printed, a committee, with representatives from retail, marketing, training and brokerage, can schedule more banker training, remind branch managers to use Truebridge's tools more, and recognize branches that are doing well, says Erd.

Nonetheless, the system has been an overall plus for the bank. Even amid the financial turmoil, referrals remain 10% above Anchor's pre-Truebridge days, notes Boyce.

HOW IT WORKS

Anchor receives referrals from personal bankers and tellers, and sometimes from customers who contact financial consultants directly.

The best time to make referrals is when bankers are setting up accounts for new customers. Anchor's staff uses discussions with customers about financial goals to look for referral opportunities. But they have educational tools at their disposal to help start the dialogue.

Before the "quiet time," when bankers leave the customer to process their applications, the employee will ask that customer to look over a checklist of financial services topics titled "Get your Free Education

Guides.” When the banker returns, she might find that the customer has checked “Paying for College: College Funding.”

The banker can go online to the FAC and print out an “education guide” on that topic for the customer. Because she’s read the guide herself, she’s comfortable having a general discussion about it. That can lead to suggesting a meeting with a consultant. The worst outcome for Anchor? Its customer learns that it offers much more than deposit accounts and home loans.

If the customer agrees to a meeting, the banker uses Anchor’s scheduling software to set the appointment, and the customer, having read the guide, arrives at the meeting more prepared; he even knows what the consultant looks like because the guide includes a photo. Reading the guide may also allay his fears of a having a product pushed down his throat, says Boyce.

The guides are written at a seventh-grade level to demystify what can be intimidating topics, says Rose. “You’d be surprised how many people don’t understand time horizons and asset allocation and they’re afraid to ask.”

Tellers are trained to look for “triggers,” such as a customer rolling over a CD or making a large deposit, that prompt them to start a dialogue. They can hand out the guides although regulatory concerns require them to step out from behind the teller area to do so.

Customers can request appointments by clicking a link on Anchor’s website to reach the FAC. If you click “Paying for College,” you will hear an understanding voice describing why so many parents delay saving. “You know the feeling: Young parents face far more pressing financial whoppers such as buying a house, paying off their own college loans....”

The parents can then read about different savings vehicles, from 529 plans to student loans to scholarships. If they click a nearby link to “Contact a Financial Consultant,” and their hometown, a photo of their designated consultant, and his contact information, will appear. Customers can also request to be contacted on topics of interest.

SETTING UP THE SYSTEM

The prebuilt, hosted referral solution took Anchor only about two months to get up and running. Truebridge created a version of the website that carried Anchor’s branding and matched the look and feel of the bank’s own site, from the color scheme to the typefaces.

Anchor was responsible for placing links to the FAC on its website and providing Truebridge with photos of

its product specialists to be inserted into the education guides and other materials. Finally, Anchor’s third-party marketer Uvest had to sign off on the content for compliance.

Training sessions for new personal bankers cover the referral system and with the help of Truebridge’s webinars, teach everything from how to engage customers in discussions to how to find and print out the educational guides.

The need that brought Anchor Bank and Truebridge together in the first place-interesting, easily grasped content on the bank’s website-is hardly a footnote, says Chris Schell, first vice president of marketing and retail product management at Anchor. “The more quality education we have out there, the more credibility it gives us with customers and prospects as that approachable expert to whom they will always return.” ■

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