

## IMPROVING SALES IN BANKING

by [Steve Brown](#)

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Let's face it, most people don't think about their bank when they think about selling. Financial stability - yes, selling - no. Yet, to get more customers, boost profits and survive the current economic downturn, bankers need to sell now more than ever. Heck, everyone sells something at some point in their lives, so we provide a few tried and true things bankers can do to make the most of opportunities that surface.

Begin with the customer. Stay focused on what they are saying and about what your company can do to help them accomplish their goals. In this way, potential customers are more likely to embrace the opportunity. Really good sales people focus not on getting some widget sold, but rather building a longer-term relationship that is beneficial to both parties.

Raise customer awareness. People don't like to be pushed into doing business with anyone. Oftentimes, in fact, they will fight doing so even if they know it will hurt them financially. Instead, focus your efforts on what other customers of yours have done with your company that has improved their situation. Providing case studies, testimonials and providing outright contact between customers builds credibility and speeds the sales effort.

Do what you say. We cannot tell you how many times we have been frustrated when dealing with people or companies who say they will do something and then never do. Simply calling back or sending an email will keep customers happy and have them telling everyone about you and your company. The worst sales you can make are those that get the first transaction, then fade back into the weeds and disappear. To stay in the front of customer's minds, you have to call back promptly. Unfortunately for many companies, this skill seems to be dwindling away, forcing the customers themselves to try and find the right person to get an answer.

Learn about your customer. Time and time again, study after study, bank customers say they value the financial institution the most that tries to get to know them and their business. In so doing, bankers stand a better chance of solving customer problems, understanding specific needs and helping clients achieve their goals and objectives. Top salespeople learn about their customers, think about what they are trying to achieve and focus efforts on providing products and services that help clients meet their specific needs.

Be educated. Bankers that understand the nuances of their company's products and services and can answer customer questions are in the greatest demand. Talking to a customer is important, but knowing when to provide information and when to say "I don't know the answer but I will find out" builds instant credibility and a deeper relationship.

Support sales efforts. It isn't all about the sales person, as organizations themselves must also help to drive superior performance. Executives should focus efforts to reducing administrative tasks on sales teams, focus on essential needs, tie processes/pay to building customer relationships, improve marketing, enhance training and support new products when they launch. Banks these days need to think about sales efforts as some of the most expensive time they have to give and ensure such

valuable efforts are fully supported by management. By surrounding sales teams with strong technology, people and processes, banks ensure they maximize effectiveness and efficiency.

Now as you go out there to sell something we leave you with some fun thoughts to consider. In sales speak: "revolutionary" means "this one is slightly different than our competitors;" a "breakthrough" means "you finally figured out a way to sell the product;" and something that has been "improved" means it didn't work the first time." Have fun out there.

## **BANK NEWS**

### **Overdraft Fees**

The FRB has proposed overdraft restrictions on all banking transactions including ATM withdrawals, check and debit purchases, and automatic payments. Banks would be required to offer customers a choice to opt-out. 20% of bank customers paid overdraft fees in the past year. Of those 14% would have preferred the bank to have refused funds. Conversely, 85% of those struck by fees, were glad to have the payment covered.

### **Fannie and Freddie Bailout?**

A Barron's report said it is increasingly likely the government will need to bail out both FNMA and FHLMC. Barron's also predicted the bailout would mean losses for holders of the companies' preferred shares and holders of their combined \$19B in subordinated debt.

### **FDIC Staffing Up**

The FDIC has recruited back many of the people who helped clean up the S&L crisis 20 years ago. The agency brought back about 80 people, mostly retirees, and anticipates needing to hire back many more.

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