**Want to Cross-Sell? Focus on Service**

By Devon Kinkead

MAY 3, 2012 1:00am ET

In this revenue compressed environment, I hear a lot about initiatives to change bank culture from service to sales to drive badly needed cross-sell revenues.

Let's ignore the many initiatives that are not being driven by the CEO — they can't work because culture comes from the top. In the CEO-directed programs, one question remains: Does a strong sales culture lead to strong cross-sell results? Perhaps, but, as I look at data Brad Strothkamp of Forrester found in his report "[2011: Solving The Cross-Sell Imperative](http://www.forrester.com/2011+Solving+The+CrossSell+Imperative/-/E-WEB8326)," it's not clear.

USAA, with 3.5 products per customer, and Navy Federal Credit Union, with 3.1, top the list in the number of products owned per customer, based on a survey of more than 300,000 North American consumers. Those figures are well above other financial institutions — some of which, like Wells Fargo (WFC) with 2.6 products per customer, are legendary cross-sell focused organizations.

I recently met with former Wells CEO Dick Kovacevich, who spent much of his career focused on cross-selling, to ask him about the challenges of cross-selling and learned that it takes years of CEO focus and determination to achieve meaningful results.

That said, is it the additional insurance products that USAA and Navy offer that are deepening customer relationships, or their unique membership, both, or something else?

My personal experience, which is mirrored in Forrester's results on customer trust where again, USAA and credit unions top the list in terms of customer advocacy, is that the people of USAA are totally service-oriented and decidedly not sales-oriented. In fact, one of my business partners just moved all his accounts from a top 4 bank to USAA citing service excellence and trustworthiness as the decision drivers throughout the many years he'd been with USAA.

While cross-selling success, as measured by products owned per customer, is dependent on many things including: the breadth of product offerings, the CEO's commitment to deepening relationships with customers, customer tenure, and other factors, it's clear that a strong sales culture alone doesn't lead to better cross-sell results.

So, what's a banker to do? Here's an idea — again, pioneered by USAA: keep all the prospecting online. Ask them simple questions, and then suggest products related to their individual responses. USAA does this with their "Quick Question" and it's very engaging.

Leads can then be followed-up by staff. This approach leaves the customer service people to do what they do best: service customers and build trust.

The urgency to move the bank revenue needle is real. However, that urgency is mismatched to the timeline to change organizational culture, particularly when it's not clear how effective that change will be. So, instead of viewing your service culture as an opponent needing to be stopped, view it as an asset needing to be leveraged.

http://www.americanbanker.com/bankthink/you-want-to-cross-sell-focus-on-service-culture-usaa-navy-1049002-1.html