

Mortgage Banker Uses BlackBerry To Drive Reorganization and Customer Service

Aegis Funding Corporation helps mortgage brokers in 200 U.S. communities secure mortgages and loans for their customers. In 2003, the company reorganization made them wonder how they would keep in touch with more than 200 sales people no longer tied to a specific branch office. At the same time, this forward-thinking company saw an opportunity to leverage its current BlackBerry® investment to reduce hard costs associated with deploying costly laptops, while improving customer response time.

Aegis deployed 250 BlackBerry handhelds to its mobile sales force and executives on the BlackBerry Enterprise Server™. In addition to having a highly portable, integrated handheld for phone, email and calendaring, they are using an intranet-based solution to access financial and corporate information and to increase their customer service efforts. In a short time, the solution has proved so effective, Aegis plans to deploy another 150 handhelds to other companies under their organizational umbrella.

The business case for future deployments is based on their current return on investment, which includes:

- A cost-effective solution for keeping the sales force connected and productive
- Reduced need for buying or maintaining up to 200 expensive laptops
- Ease of deployment in the existing infrastructure
- Access to intranet-based financial and corporate data via the BlackBerry Browser
- Quicker customer response times

In 2003, Aegis decided it was time to rethink their old customer service model. They moved from a branch network, with physical locations all over the country, to regional operation centers. In the process, more than 200 sales people were left with no physical location to work from. Aegis had to decide how to keep their people connected to the larger organization, continue to increase their customer service efforts and compete more effectively.

Industry

Financial

Situation

In 2003, the Aegis Funding Corporation changed from a series of branches to regional offices. The reorganization meant 200 sales people no longer had a branch office to work from. Aegis used its reorganization as an opportunity to improve customer service.

Company Profile

Located in Houston, Texas, Aegis Funding Corporation is one of the top 40 largest mortgage production franchises in the U.S. The \$12-billion enterprise works directly with customers and independent mortgage brokers to finance home purchases.

Solution

Aegis deployed 200 BlackBerry handhelds to the sales force to replace the need for expensive laptops or physical offices. Intranet-based access to financial and corporate data helps sales people to serve customers more effectively.

Results

Aegis sales people are working more effectively, with an improved ability to respond to customers and make decisions faster. The successes with this deployment are paving the way for the future.

They reviewed various wireless options and found shortcomings with the hardware. Then Aegis decided to leverage their existing executive level BlackBerry investment to serve their sales team's needs.

About 220 sales people were given BlackBerry handhelds. Existing laptops were retired because they were no longer needed for communicating via email. Integration into their Microsoft® Exchange environment was seamless.

"It was an incredibly easy fit, architecturally, as well as from a maintenance standpoint," says Neil Notkin, President. "It just works – it does what it's supposed to do. Rolling out 200+ handhelds really involved very little effort with the BlackBerry Enterprise Server we already had in place."

Mobilizing the Sales Force

"When we reorganized, we really had two issues," says Notkin. "What did we need to spend to keep our sales people productive and in touch and how could we build on our customer service efforts? Deploying laptops was not an option. Our sales people found them cumbersome, and we found their costs prohibitive to maintain and manage."

BlackBerry was an ideal fit for the uses of the Aegis sales team and specifically served the needs of an organization looking for a cost-effective way to restructure. Push-based email meant that no matter where a sales person worked, they didn't miss an email or have to report back to a particular physical location to catch up on communication.

The integrated functionality on the handhelds meant one piece of equipment replaced several devices, including cell phones and laptops. Users liked the one-stop access to phone, browser, email and calendaring capabilities. They even use the speakerphone feature of their BlackBerry handheld to conduct conference calls.

The response was unanimous from the sales force. "To have access to the information you need in the palm of your hand is probably one of the most exciting things you can have in business," says Notkin.

Access to Data Serves Customers Better

From a customer service perspective, Notkin says BlackBerry has helped them respond to customers faster, which he admits is imperative in the competitive mortgage marketplace.

"Our goal is to reply to our customers in an immediate fashion – give them quick responses," says Notkin. "When a sales person is in the field, and a client asks a question, such as the status of a file, they may not be able to get to that information fast enough. BlackBerry has provided the sales people with an immediate tool to get important customer information."

To help sales people perform more effectively, Aegis extended their intranet-based financial and corporate data to the field using the BlackBerry Browser. Sales people can now pull up revenue reports, daily production volumes, associated revenue, exception management, fees earned, projected income levels, interest rates and closing rates as easily as opening a web page.

Notkin says even, when out of coverage, it doesn't limit the effectiveness of their browser solution. "If I think I'm going to be out of coverage, I can save the particular page I need to my handheld and pull it up when I need it," he says.

For his customers, Notkin believes using BlackBerry says something about their commitment to serving them. He is proud to represent an organization that shows it's committed to delivering on promises and turnaround times.

The ROI

Although their BlackBerry deployment is in its early stages, Aegis sees many possibilities for the future. Because they are pleased with their first forays into corporate data access, they are considering how much more BlackBerry could do for them deployed with a robust CRM solution. Like many businesses that try an initial BlackBerry deployment, access to critical information becomes so compelling, they soon look to see what else they can do.

"We're in the process of analyzing how our new structure is helping our business, so we can't quantify in dollars what BlackBerry has done for us just yet," says Notkin. "But I can tell you that we are spending the hours in our day more productively. We are providing customers with quicker response times and quicker gratification. And they, in turn, rate their association with us more positively."

Numerous account executives report that providing prospects with timely information from their BlackBerry handheld is winning new business.

Some of the other early benefits Notkin can identify with their new solution include the following:

- A cost-effective solution for keeping the sales force connected and productive
- Reduced need for buying or maintaining up to 200 expensive and cumbersome laptops
- Ease of deployment that fits the existing infrastructure
- Access to intranet-based data
- Quicker customer response times

For additional BlackBerry case studies, success stories and customer quotes, please visit www.blackberry.com/go/success.

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*Neil Notkin,
President*