

Asking Customers the Right Questions

One of the turnkey approaches PIA agents can use to achieve the goals they set for themselves as part of The PIA Partnership’s “Closing the Gap – Growth & Profit” is focused on asking customers the right questions. The Garlow Insurance Agency in Charleston, West Virginia, a PIA member agency, has achieved excellent results using this approach.

Where does agency growth come from? Current or new customers? The answer is both!

The Garlow Insurance Agency has proven, through its success, that achieving growth and profitability comes from taking a balanced approach.

How successful has Garlow been? Philip Garlow, the youngest of four kids from a local Charleston, West Virginia,

family, started the agency from scratch in 1995. Today, it has expanded to six locations, strategically bracketing the greater Charleston area. Sixty-five agency employees now offer a full range of insurance products and benefits with more than \$60 million in combined premiums. And on the property and casualty side of the house, their combined PL/CL retention is 91%.

As the agency’s owner, Phil Garlow explained that the key to their success has been consistent activity on the sales side. “We focus on proactive contact of existing clients and reactive sales activity when clients contact us, using very specific questions covering all lines of insurance, referral generation, re-underwriting and updating contact information.”

The Garlow Insurance Agency has been following this straightforward formula for success over the past 17½ years, and every agency employee’s participation is NOT OPTIONAL. When a new employee is being interviewed, they are told what to expect. The most important requirement — no matter what the position — is that they contact three existing clients a day and ask

How often do you want to hear from your current insurance provider?

The following shows the percentage choosing each:

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Combined Total: 73% | 19% Monthly |
| | 32% Quarterly |
| | 22% About 30 days in advance of renewal |
| | 25% At policy renewal |
| | 2% Other |

the “nine questions” Garlow has developed (see page 9). In addition, they are to reactively pivot every service call into a sales call — based on those same “nine questions.”

Garlow knows from experience that this formula works; it produces results. He said, “We track sales very carefully. Everyone has a monthly goal — it’s 15 new policies or \$15,000 in new policy premium. It’s not egregious. We have a quality validation system — and the numbers don’t lie.”

But it isn’t just “sink or swim” for the employees. Individuals are surrounded with a seasoned sales staff made up of sales and service employees who work with them to help them achieve their goals. And for unique and complex accounts, there are teams who work together. However, the goals are not negotiable and are a requirement for everyone in the agency.

“We think of our customers as warm leads,” Garlow said. If a customer calls with a question, he doesn’t expect a customer service representative (CSR) to ask all nine questions, but he does expect them to know what to ask. Garlow explained, “For example, they may see in the management system that we are already write their home, auto, boat and umbrella —

Accuracy of our research:

Our research is national in scope and scientifically accurate with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of plus or minus 4%.

This survey is highly reliable and fully representative of the U.S. insurance buying public.



Learn more at www.agency-growth-profit.com



QUESTIONS TO ASK EVERY CLIENT, EVERY TIME:

1. Do we have all of your personal insurance? We offer competitive auto, home, flood, cycle, 4-wheeler, RV, boat, jet-ski, umbrella, and inland marine (jewelry, guns, furs, coins) coverage.
2. Do we have all of your commercial insurance? We offer competitive auto, property, general liability, builders risk, umbrella, workers compensation, and inland marine coverage.
3. Do we have your health insurance? We offer individual and group health, individual and group life, dental, vision and AFLAC supplemental products.
4. Do you have life insurance on you, your spouse, children, and grandchildren? May we quote it? Multi policy discounts apply which can reduce your auto and home premiums.
5. Do you have long term care or disability insurance? May we quote it?
6. Have you recently changed jobs? May we advise you on retirement plan rollover and investment options?
7. Is there anyone you can refer us to? Please provide their name, e-mail address, mobile phone, and contact information.
8. Do we have your correct personal information? E-mail address, home phone, work phone and mobile phone for all occupants of your household.
9. Is there anyone you would like us to contact in the event of a severe claim on your policies? How do we contact them?




but don't have all of their current contact information. 'Can we get your cellphone number? Your wife's cellphone? Any kids? Your email? Say, is there anyone you can refer me to? Oh, can't think of anyone right now? Okay, in the event of a severe claim and we can't get in touch with you, is there anyone you might like us to contact?' They just need to be adaptable, friendly and non-threatening."

But in Garlow's view, sales can only be successful when you are able to demonstrate that you provide the service and value that customers expect. And that means proactive contact. Research recently conducted by The PIA Partnership through its "Touch Points – The Voice of the Customer" project clearly demonstrates that customers want to be contacted more often than most agents connect with them. In fact, it shows that 73% want to be contacted more frequently than just at renewal.

According to Garlow, "That's why we ask for contact information. We have a newsletter, so we want their email addresses. We want those soft touches. We want them to email back to us. With today's technology, we know when a client opens a newsletter, whether or not they've read it and what they've clicked on for more information. Everyone is more sophisticated today. You have to show them product — show them pricing. They want deductible options — diminishing deductible options. They have complex questions. They need a professional. With cell phones, email addresses, text and the Internet, we can contact clients about additional products and ser-

vices. We can solidify relationships with existing clients and develop relationships with new clients — all in a conversational and non-threatening manner."

Garlow believes that, in many ways, our industry has become its own worst enemy by teaching clients that we are nothing more than a price. He described how he markets his agency to the public, saying, "Our billboard here locally is 'No lizards, no cavemen, just great rates and local service.'"

And business in Charleston is great, as he summed it all up with, "I feel that the best days for this agency are ahead of us because of our simple business model — focusing on warm leads." 

Next month in PIA Connection:

A PIA member conducts a successful Young Driver Seminar, using the materials in "Closing the Gap – Growth & Profit"