

Preparing for Joint Sales Calls: Go in the Know

By Cathy Berch

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Engaging internal partners on joint sales calls is a powerful play. It can also be a losing game, if the approach is either disorganized or uncoordinated. The risks of not properly planning a joint call are high: losing an immediate business opportunity for the bank or, worse, losing the entire client relationship. Because joint calls are expensive, it's imperative that commercial relationship managers maximize the time spent on pre-call planning with their internal business partners.

Determining Your Effectiveness

To get a feel for how your institution is doing, evaluate yourself based on five statements included in a diagnostic designed to help you gauge how well your commercial relationship managers are preparing for joint sales calls (see sidebar, "Commercial Relationship Joint Sales Calling Preparation Survey").

If your institution scores 40 or higher, you are effectively leveraging all of your institution's resources for the benefit of your customers. If not, you will want to take steps to improve the performance of your commercial sales team in this important pre-call planning by reviewing the purpose and benefits of joint calling.

• **Purpose of joint calling.** Owners of small- and medium-sized businesses want a banker who proactively brings them new ideas that can help them achieve their business objectives. Given the complexity of today's financial services and the broad range of needs of today's commercial customers, it's next to

impossible for any commercial relationship manager alone to be able to effectively do the following: Explore the business and personal credit and noncredit financial needs of their clients; design a comprehensive solution that addresses these diverse needs; and present a compelling multifaceted recommendation to the client.

• **Benefits of joint calling.** The value of a successful joint sales call is threefold:

1. Clients win by understanding that the bank is interested in their total financial well-being, and receiving a more effective, comprehensive solution to their financial challenges. With a team approach, each of the bank's product specialists can ask the appropriate questions, more effectively address the client's concerns and present products in their area of specialty in a more targeted and compelling way.

2. Calling partners can win by quickly gaining knowledge and skills from observing their colleagues across disciplines, as well as gaining additional revenue and income for their department.

3. Relationship managers win by creating a network of valuable internal contacts and referral sources, as well as gaining knowledge and skills from their product/service partners.

Huddling Before the Joint Sales Call

High-performing commercial relationship managers assemble and lead a sales team that brings the right resources to explore, confirm and sell to the unique needs of their clients. The huddle before every joint sales call by

internal business partners must be well planned in order to execute the call flawlessly.

Although being flexible and responsive to client needs is essential, being prepared to deliver client value (i.e., going in the know) is even more critical when the sales call involves multiple partners. Here's how you go in the know versus winging it with a calling partner:

1. Schedule call-planning appointments. This meeting of the internal joint calling team sets the stage for the entire relationship: among partners and between partners and client. Depending on the client's needs and revenue potential, partners may be selected from the branch, wealth management, merchant services, cash management, leasing, insurance and even employee benefit areas. Be sure to give your internal partners plenty of lead time to prepare for your internal meeting.

2. Share your business objectives for the client with the team. By articulating your business objectives, partners can then better focus their research and planning efforts to provide additional, targeted opportunities and strategies to win the client's desired business.

3. Forward company research in advance to your team members. Sharing information about the client before the call-planning meeting ensures that all partners can contribute optimally to the meeting. Information about the client's industry, products and services, the markets in which the client's offerings compete, and the client's competitive position within each of these targeted markets can be helpful in stimulating new ideas and insights to help

Commercial Relationship Joint Sales Calling Preparation Survey

Instructions: Rate your effectiveness for each question using a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being an apprentice level of effectiveness and 10 being mastery.

Question:	Score
Our commercial relationship managers schedule call-planning appointments and forward client information and research to their partners in advance.	
Our commercial relationship managers share their business objectives so partners come prepared with additional strategies for growing the client relationship.	
In the pre-call planning meeting, our commercial relationship managers ask for advice and listen to their partners.	
The joint sales call team decides on a strategy and works together to create the call plan to: identify, describe and confirm additional client needs.	
The joint sales call team develops a detailed tactical plan for the client meeting.	
Total Score	

Readiness Scale:

Score of 1 to 9 - Some thought has been given to the need for joint sales call planning with internal partners.

Score of 10 to 39 - The desire to maximize the use of the joint call has been acknowledged, and steps have been taken to accomplish this objective, with varying degrees of success.

Score of 40 to 50 - Commercial relationship managers regularly and effectively plan for joint sales calls with their internal partners in a way that maximizes cross-sell opportunities and client loyalty.

both the client and their business achieve their objectives.

4. Ask for advice and listen. The joint calling team, made up of partners from across the bank, is like any other team; it can work well or be a disaster. All studies about teams that excel agree that good communication is vital to the team's success, and it begins with respect for and listening to each team member. The banking specialists gathered in preparation for a joint call have a wealth of knowledge to share. Respect their knowledge and use it to the team's mutual advantage.

5. Decide on a joint call strategy. This is the primary focus of your call-planning meeting. In jointly creating a call plan you will be identifying both minimum and maximum call objectives, articulating your individual and collective strategic positions, selecting the information you will share with the client, brainstorming client questions, anticipating obstacles to your achieving the team's call objectives, and selecting the appropriate solutions for the client to consider. Document the team's decision by using a call planner.

6. Choreograph the sales call. A good

tactical plan will include many, if not all, of the following: Who is going to be team captain for the call? Who owns the client? (That partner should be in the lead role, even if there are more senior parties attending the meeting.) How are introductions going to be handled? Who will be introduced first, second, etc., and what background information will be shared? The client should never be surprised that there are partners included in the joint call! This should have been communicated previously.

Other questions to be answered include: What are the roles and rules for the team? (High-performing teams have clearly defined roles and agreed upon ground rules for interaction. For example: no interrupting and no rescuing. Be wary of jumping in to rescue a partner because that may be perceived unfavorably by the client and your partner.)

When and how will transitions be made? How will you pass the ball? What is the silent communication strategy? What about seating positions? (It is helpful to intermingle team members, rather than having all bankers seated across from the client.) Who is responsible

for note taking? Will one person take notes, or will everyone take their own notes and compare them later?

7. Rehearse the opening of the sales call.

There is nothing worse than stumbling during the first three minutes of a meeting with a client. Practice introductions and the first two or three questions that the team will ask.

The ability to expand commercial client relationships vertically across the organization requires the talent and resources of a diverse sales team. High-performing sales organizations recognize this. They reinforce joint sales call activities by internal business partners. They also clarify and reinforce expectations for pre-call planning as outlined in this article. The return on the investment in pre-call planning is more sales calls that consistently end with new business from prospects as well as more business from existing customers. Make certain your sales teams never leave for a joint call without "going in the know." **16**

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