

Creating Business Solutions for Community Banks

Anita Gentle Newcomb became president and chief executive officer of America's Community Banking Partners Inc. in November 2001. She brought over 20 years experience as a banker and strategic consultant to banks. Since that time, the ACB subsidiary has undertaken a vast number of new initiatives. Community Banker interviewed Newcomb recently, to learn more about her vision for ACB Partners.

CB: What is ACB Partners doing for ACB members right now?

Newcomb: We are providing member-advantaged business solutions that meet their business needs through products and services from best-in-class vendors—our partners. One of the biggest challenges is identifying our members' needs and desires. Then we look at opportunistic areas where we can address those needs. Finally, we look at potential providers to see which ones we want as partners.

CB: What does “member-advantaged solutions” mean?

Newcomb: It means delivering business choices that community bankers cannot get on their own—advantages in pricing, technology, products and service delivery. It takes our negotiating strength as an association with 1,200 members with over \$1 trillion in assets to win the deals that make a difference for our members' bottom lines.

CB: Just how much can an ACB member save through Partners?

Newcomb: It is incredible. Some of our members tell me that their sav-

ings more than pay their ACB dues—especially through our mortgage solutions options. That is a wonderful deal to offer.

CB: What is Partners doing to become even more valuable to ACB members?

Newcomb: We are now much more focused. We have built a strong, dynamic business model with emphasis in four key areas. First, we have built a strong team comprised of an active, experienced board of directors of bank CEOs chaired by Bill Donius, president and CEO of Pulaski Bank in St. Louis, and we've added experts in mortgages, payments, and financial and capital markets. Second, we've embraced a culture of delivering business solutions developed by community bankers for community banks. We've activated committees of members with varied experience to ensure we meet evolving needs. Third, we have attracted and continue to seek out best-in-class partners that share our commitment to successfully serve the nation's community banks. And, finally, we've shifted to a consultative sales approach.

CB: In a highly competitive environment, how does Partners differentiate itself in the marketplace?



Anita Newcomb, ACB Partners president & CEO, is committed to delivering real business solutions for bottom line value to community banks.

Newcomb: By making certain that the partners we have are best suited for our market. We are focusing on where we are strong and where our member-advantaged solutions have a broader outreach to our membership base. We want our partners to have a national marketing platform to reach all our members. And we expect them to share our commitment to success.

CB: What are “consultative sales”?

Newcomb: Consultative sales is a deliberate process to identify our members' needs and offer opportunistic solutions to address those needs. One of the ways we are achieving this is by having members with expertise in various areas work side by side with us and advise us on potential partners. That gives us a member perspective.

As calls come in from ACB members, and as we talk to our members at meetings

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around the country, we are able to probe deeply enough to understand their business needs so we can make suggestions from our portfolio of business solutions that will help them. Our job is to find ways to grow their bottom line.

CB: Tell us about your mortgage solutions.

Newcomb: Our members are part of an industry that generates 23 percent of the mortgages in the United States. ACB is unique as a trade association because our members are focusing on the mortgage side of banking. Our role is to look for mortgage solutions that will benefit our members.

Already we've had exceptional results. About 25 percent of ACB members participate in one or more of our secondary mortgage market solutions with Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, Principal and Countrywide—delivering \$12.5 billion in mortgage loans in the last ten months. These relationships are a key reason that ACB has been able to increase its institutional membership this year. That is a very impressive outcome in a consolidating industry.

CB: What comes next for Partners?

Newcomb: The focus for 2003 is to build out our mortgage solutions suite of products and services. We will continue to look at niche opportunities in that area. We are also going to be focusing on solutions for the financial and capital markets, and for payments and technology.

We have a direct credit card relationship with Certegy that lets banks own and

control their card portfolio. In April, we launched an agent credit card relationship with InfiCorp that is incredibly successful. It gives community banks a private label credit card for their customers without the risks. We are also working to enhance our debit card program and looking at other payment products, such as ATMs and electronic bill payment and presentment.

CB: Have you enjoyed your first year as Partners' president and CEO?

Newcomb: Yes. I enjoy most a business environment that is both challenging and energizing. Truly this year has been all of that and more—our results are evidence of that. We have a highly experienced and engaged board of directors giving valuable guidance. We have an internal team of experts in their respective fields. And, we are well positioned to continue making a difference in community banks' performance, with real bottom line results. For me, that is quite exciting.

CB: How can ACB members learn more about the opportunities that Partners offers?

Newcomb: We want them to look to us first when they have a business challenge. Contact me directly by phone at (202) 857-5574 or anewcomb@acbankers.org. Or visit our Web site at AmericasCommunityBankers.com/partners. Ask us if we have a partnership available to address your business problem. The answer could help grow your bottom line. **15**

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