

## **40 years of CBPF: how relationships remain essential for success**

The insurance industry, and the premium finance sector, have changed dramatically in the past 40 years, especially in how technology and regulation have shaped how the services on offer are provided to brokers and customers. One element that remains constant, however, is the way relationships form the bedrock of business success, says Paul Trail, Sales Director at Close Brothers Premium Finance (CBPF).

“In many ways, nothing’s changed,” he says, as he puts down his iPad and locks his smartphone – both items would be like something out of a science fiction film to someone in 1977. “The value of relationships is still there. 40 years ago, everything was done on relationships. And if you take price out of the equation, the only thing different today is the technology we use. Relationships remain essential.”

Today’s premium finance sector includes aggregator websites that allow customers to compare and choose their insurance, signing up online, all the while hardly needing to speak to another human being. How then, with this digital customer journey, are human relationships still so key to sales success and business growth?

The digital nature of the relationship that customers have with insurers and premium finance providers may well be firmly entrenched in today’s insurance and premium finance arenas, but the choice by a broker of which premium finance provider to use, is still a “human” process, says Paul.

“People still gravitate to people they have a strong relationship with, and the relationship will be a major factor in decisions a person has to take.” This is why you will see clients and accounts following individuals when they move to a new company, he explains.

In the world of sales and winning new business, today, as it was 40 years ago, ultimately the first consideration is price – but it’s not the be-all-and-end-all, says Paul. Even the strength of price in the decision-making process can be variable, if the strength of your relationship with the client and the data science you can offer justifies the extra cost.

### **The human connection and trust**

Why is it, then, that some customers will choose a service provider who might even be marginally more expensive than the competition? What is it about relationships and human connection that can override even this fundamental factor?

“At the heart of relationships, or rather good relationships, is trust,” says Paul. “It’s about knowing what the other party is all about. Brokers know we are experts, they know we have the backing of Close Brothers bank, and that we have teams of people working in areas like Credit Risk and Compliance. Whereas if you don’t have a relationship with someone, you are an unknown entity to them, and they won’t give you their trust that easily,”

“Relationships have helped us through difficult times, because people trust you and your word, and they are loyal to relationships, because of this valuable thing called trust,” adds Paul.

## **Sticking to your word**

Winning the trust of clients and business associates is one thing, but you need to follow it up with reliability.

“Credibility is essential in relationships. Honesty forms part of that – we work hard to ensure we have honest, open relationships with our brokers. When we promise something, we deliver it, because being reliable – sticking to our word – is so important in keeping up our end of the bargain in these relationships,” he says.

## **Technology in concert with relationships**

In an age when technology is changing so much, it’s important to remember that it doesn’t guarantee success. Without good, experienced sales managers with strong reputations, you lose business, says Paul – and you can lose a lot of business in as little as a matter of months, without the right kinds of people looking after your relationships with clients.

Nonetheless, technology needn’t be in competition with relationships, in trying to be the top tool for business growth and sales success.

“Every relationship needs managing, and you need a good system to help you oversee the relationship and the information you work with. We all meet so many people in the average week, and you can’t expect your brain to retain all the information you gather,” says Paul. A reliable CRM is essential for collecting, storing and retrieving data, and for him this tool of the trade is all-important.

From his viewpoint, the modern technological era has certainly not dimmed the importance of relationships for Paul – he believes the opposite is true.

“The world has changed – increased regulation, advanced technology – and our brokers have changed too, as a result of this. We have had to change in our role, too, from being a service provider to brokers, to becoming a trusted business partner to them. They trust us to train them, to know about regulations and laws that affect our sector, and to have the resources and data to help them grow their business,” he says.

“That is a big responsibility, but putting relationships first, and above all else remaining human, can help us fulfil the needs of our clients and serve them well,” he says.