



## **Farmers Insurance Group FCU Increases New Member Growth By 25 percent with an innovative member education program**

By Les Ginoza

June 24, 2005

In 2003, our credit union was at a crossroads. We had established a strong track record for superior service to our members, but we needed to seek innovative ways to penetrate our non-member base.

Our relationship to our primary sponsor, Farmers Insurance Group, was good, but we needed to find ways to increase our penetration among non-members and increase our services-per-member ratios. As a single sponsor credit union, we had to grow the organization by deepening our relationships with existing members and attracting non-members through programs not available elsewhere.

After extensive surveys and member focus groups, it became clear there were several needs expressed by the membership that weren't being met, such as retirement planning, saving for college and reducing debt. Members knew they could trust the information they received from Farmers Insurance Group FCU and they wanted to use the credit union as a resource when they needed to make critical financial decisions. Based on these findings, we decided to make member education one of our top initiatives for 2004.

### **Finding a Partner**

We knew early on that the member education program needed to be far more than just financial information:

- **We needed to find a program that was powerful enough to make an enduring impact on members and truly differentiate Farmers Insurance Group FCU from other financial institutions.**
- **The program also had to be completely unbiased.** We did not want members being lured into inappropriate financial products, services or investments; nor did we want to compete with the insurance and investment products offered by Farmers Insurance Group.
- **The program had to service a field of membership that was spread out over 17 branches in 12 states.** Because of the wide geographic coverage of our branches, the member education program would have to be flexible enough to service the needs of members in various locations and time zones.
- **We needed to increase financial education expertise among our staff.** Developing staff expertise in every area of our business is a key strategy in providing outstanding member service. We realized pretty quickly that our front-line staff did not have the increasing level of sophistication needed to address the financial needs of our membership. It was important that we obtain a vendor that would allow us to train and develop our staff while providing additional resources so we could redirect membership questions to financial experts. In essence, the vendor of choice needed to meet the needs of two groups, our staff and our membership.
- **We wanted to find a provider that could serve members through multiple media—on line, in**

**person, over the phone and through printed materials**—so that members could access the education anytime, anywhere, in any format.

- **The program needed to be personalized for each individual member's circumstance**, so all members could receive the necessary guidance to make the financial decisions that would shape their lives.

After a thorough vendor search, we chose Financial Finesse, Manhattan Beach, Calif., to deliver our member education program. Financial Finesse met all of Farmers Insurance Group FCU's requirements. As one of the nation's leading providers of unbiased financial education programs for credit unions and corporations, Financial Finesse does not sell any financial products, investments or securities. As a result, the company is able to offer financial education that is free of any conflicts of interest.

Financial Finesse also has the ability to educate members on any financial topic through a wide variety of live, personalized, and online services, and has extensive experience educating employees as well as members. In addition, all the education is developed and delivered by a team of certified financial planners, each with multiple professional designations and more than 10 years of experience. Financial Finesse provided a depth of knowledge that we believed would distinguish our member education program as a significant member benefit.

### **Ready to Launch**

After a few months of testing in 2003, we rolled out a full-service member education program that covered all financial topics, from severe debt issues to retirement and estate planning. The program was tailored to meet each member's personal financial needs through a wide variety of services they could access at their own convenience, including:

- a series of live workshops at 15 of 17 Farmers Insurance Group FCU branches on multiple financial topics, personal financial basics and retirement planning;
- unlimited access to a toll-free Financial Helpline that members could use to get instant answers to any of their financial questions from one of Financial Finesse's on-staff certified financial planners;
- personalized financial consultations; and
- award-winning online content and tools on such topics as autos, credit cards, kids and money, identity theft and scams, home ownership, small business, taxes, and retirement planning as well as calculators.

The program was very well-received by members, as seen in the following results:

- 99 percent of members who participated in the program said they were better prepared to make a financial decision.
- 99 percent said they would recommend the program to someone else.
- The online financial content and tools quickly became one of the most popular areas of the Farmers Insurance Group FCU Web site.
- We received regular calls and e-mails from members thanking the credit union for the education.
- HR departments from the different Farmers Insurance Group offices were very impressed, and began requesting more workshops.

Within months, the program had attracted a very strong word of mouth following and we had to dramatically expand the program to keep up with the demand for the services:

- We purchased additional workshops to accommodate requests from members and HR managers of the different Farmers Insurance Group offices who wanted to expand their financial knowledge to cover additional topics, such tax planning, buying a home, estate planning and planning for college education expenses.
- Usage of the Financial Helpline doubled in the third quarter of 2004, so we decided to expand the service, which was previously available only to online banking members. Today, all members of Farmers Insurance Group FCU receive unlimited access to Financial Finesse's Financial Helpline Service and usage continues to grow.
- Page views of the online content and tools increased steadily, prompting us to launch an online Member Education Center.

### **The Result: New Member Growth Tops 25 percent**

As of September 30, 2004, new member growth at the credit union increased by 25 percent over the previous year. We attribute a significant portion of the member growth to the new member education program. The program increased member growth in two critical ways:

1. **With the launch of the financial workshops, the credit union was able to attract new business.** With multiple workshops at 15 of 17 Farmers Insurance Group FCU branches, the credit union was consistently in front of sponsor employees. This not only created a buzz among members, but it impressed non-members as well. These seminars also attracted the attention of some Farmers Insurance Group HR departments around the country. The HR departments saw the benefit of the seminars and are now working with the credit union to help promote them even more vigorously throughout the organization. It was a great way to boost recognition of the credit union, develop closer ties with our primary sponsor and give us greater access to nonmembers!
2. **Branding the credit union as a trusted resource for all members' financial needs.** Members now have the ability to get critical financial information from an unbiased resource—their credit union. This enhanced Farmers Insurance Group FCU's reputation and helped strengthen our position as a value added provider. The program not only made Farmers Insurance Group FCU competitive with larger financial institutions—it actually gave our credit union a competitive advantage.

**Les Ginoza** was VP/marketing at \$545 million/38,000-member Farmers Insurance Group FCU, Los Angeles, before he left to work at a nonprofit in Thailand aiding tsunami victims.

*Financial Finesse provides unbiased financial education programs for credit unions' employees and members. Award winning financial content is delivered in multiple formats: live through workshops, online through articles, tools and online seminars and via the phone with a Financial Helpline service and Personal Financial Coaching sessions. To attract new members or increase member loyalty, our services can differentiate your credit union as a better resource for financial information and ultimately, financial transactions. Call 866.733.2677 or e-mail [info@financialfinesse.com](mailto:info@financialfinesse.com).*