



Wells Fargo's Petaluma Brokerage Thrives with Help of Digital Insurance

SITUATION: TOO MUCH WORK; TOO LITTLE TIME

About 40 miles north of San Francisco, just west of the lush Sonoma Valley vineyards, the Petaluma, Calif., office of Wells Fargo Insurance Services, Inc., has nicely prospered over time, like a carefully cultivated grape. Over the past eight years, the brokerage's small business special accounts team grew from one employee generating \$140,000 in annual revenue to five staff members managing \$1.4 million in business.

In January 2005, while still under another agency's ownership, Vice President and Team Leader Leslie Robbins discovered an ingredient vital to the office's growth: a relationship with Digital Insurance. Digital handles the broker's smallest employee benefits accounts – those with annual revenue totaling \$5,000 or less. Although they produce minimal income, servicing these customers requires monumental resources.

"Health insurance is very expensive to manage these days," says Robbins. "Groups with 10 or fewer lives take as much time as a group of 45. You end up doing the same amount of work.

Because Digital now handles our smallest accounts, our staff is able to focus on bigger, more profitable pieces of business."

Robbins was hired at the Petaluma location when it was operated by ABD Insurance. Wells Fargo acquired the business in 2007. Headquartered in Chicago, Wells Fargo Insurance Services is the fifth largest insurance brokerage firm in the world, according to Business Insurance magazine, and the largest bank-affiliated insurance brokerage firm in the United States. The company provides insurance brokerage and administrative services, as well as a wide range of financial and consulting services to thousands of customers. Today, it has 200* offices across the nation with more than 9,600* professionals who place more than \$15.5 billion* in risk premiums. (*Figures include Wells Fargo Insurance Services, Inc., Wells Fargo

AT-A-GLANCE

Company	Wells Fargo Insurance Services, Petaluma Branch
Business Lines	Financial services, employee benefits and consulting services
Location	Petaluma, Calif.
Established	Formerly ABD Insurance; acquired by Wells Fargo in 2007
Size	\$1.4 million small business special accounts

Partnership:

Since 2005, Digital has managed accounts that generate \$5,000 or less in annual revenue; operates under the Wells Fargo brand

Primed for Success:

- Small customers were draining time and resources; branch needed time to focus on larger accounts
- Desired partner that was knowledgeable about California regulations
- Partner required to operate under the Wells Fargo brand and return customers whose annual revenue grew past \$5,000

Bottom Line:

Digital offers the people, systems and flexibility to successfully partner with a branch of the world's fifth largest insurance brokerage.

Insurance, Inc., Wachovia Insurance Services and Rural Community Insurance Services.)

Customer service is very important to Robbins, who has worked closely with many of the firm's clients, which include wineries, non-profit organizations, private schools, manufacturing businesses and high tech companies. When an ABD executive suggested partnering with Digital, she was apprehensive about turning over these relationships to an unknown entity. "We did our due diligence and visited Digital's offices to see how this could work." She was pleased with what she found then and has discovered in the years since.

"Digital builds great relationships with our clients," Robbins explains. "I still keep in touch with some of them, and they'll report how wonderfully someone at Digital handled an issue. The company -- which manages the largest market share of small group benefits business in the nation -- assigns specific account managers to our business, so our customers interact with the same people over and over again."

SOLUTION: FLEXIBLE PARTNER OFFERS SERVICE LEADERSHIP

The Petaluma office positions Digital Insurance as a partner under the Wells Fargo brand that specializes in small group business. Digital's name is not visible to customers, but the advantages it delivers are compelling. "It offers a toll-free number that employees and employers use to speak to a live representative and get questions answered," explains Robbins. "The firm also has a website, providing information around the clock. This level of service would be difficult to efficiently and effectively maintain for this group of clients."

"Digital has this type of account management down to a science," Robbins continues. "Its approach and people are very efficient and organized. I'm impressed with the way its phone system ties into its computer system. When a call comes in, the representative has all the information they need at their fingertips, from the policy, to the contacts, to financial reports."

Another aspect that impresses Robbins: "Digital wants to work as a partner;" she says. "The firm is not interested in taking business away from us." Occasionally, accounts have grown under Digital's auspices. Once revenue surpasses \$5,000, the client returns to Wells Fargo.

"I really feel like Digital is an extension of my team." In fact, Robbins still likes to maintain a presence with a few of her cherished, smaller clients. During open enrollment, "I

can conduct the meeting," she says, "but Digital does all the legwork. It takes a lot of responsibility off my desk and makes my job so much easier."

With shrinking budgets due to the recession and anticipated challenges in response to healthcare reform, Robbins is managing many meetings these days. She and her staff spend a lot of time educating clients about HSAs and other cost-containment measures. "We don't just sell; we have a broad range of knowledge and advise customers about overall benefits." With Digital handling issues for the smallest accounts, Robbins' team has more time to devote to these important sessions for large customers.

"My team handles about 500 clients," the Wells Fargo VP explains. "Without Digital, we wouldn't be able to service them as effectively, and service is absolutely crucial in today's marketplace." She says the Atlanta-based firm enables the Wells Fargo office "to grow our other accounts, and build strong relationships. Digital Insurance enables us to maintain the quality of our business and still grow it."



IN THEIR WORDS

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--**Leslie Robbins**, Vice President and Team Leader, Wells Fargo Insurance Services

