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Get a Life

## Taking It To The Bank

### How A Windsor Life Insurer Is Using Banks To Help Its Bottom Line, And The Web To Help Banks Attract More Customers

By Matt Brown

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Windsor-based Vantis Life Insurance Co. says 2011 year-over-year results should end up almost 25 percent higher than 2010 – an outcome largely attributed to the success of its almost exclusively bank-centric sales strategy, and its expansion outside Connecticut.

The huge increase in new premium sales continues an ongoing trend. The company reported 2010 growth of 21 percent over the previous year. And for the first nine months of 2011, Vantis was up 29 percent over a year earlier.

Craig Simms, Vantis senior vice president of marketing, told the Commercial Record recently that growth for the full year "is trending right around 23 or 24 percent."

And the company said it owes much of its success to its strategy of selling through partner banks.

"The banks we brought on at the end of last year have really come on," he said.

Vantis sells its life insurance products through 25 banks in Connecticut and 80 outside Connecticut, where it has concentrated its growth strategy in recent years.

"We haven't made any acquisitions, but the majority of our growth has come from outside Connecticut," Simms said. "Connecticut growth is 2-5 percent. The rest of the country is 30-40 percent, using the model we developed here in Connecticut."



Gregory Shook

#### Migrating North

That model makes selling life insurance "a small part of the overall responsibility in the bank," Simms said. With customers already in the door, all the banker has to do is "uncover those needs."

Also, banks that may be having a hard time reaching income goals can boost results by offering Vantis' wealth management and other fee-income-generating products.

Gregory Shook, president and CEO of Essex Savings Bank, said banks looking to offer life insurance products can't help but notice Vantis. Not only is the company one of the only players in the market, but "they're an excellent-rated insurance company and it's great to have earnings; the odds of it being there and paying out is very important to families."

In a recent report, A.M. Best said Vantis "is the only bank distribution-focused life insurer that offers a full selection of easy-to-sell...products from a web-based platform."

Vantis claims \$5 billion in life insurance in force and \$900 million in assets.

Selling life insurance doesn't have a huge impact on his bank's bottom line, Shook said, but it is helpful.

"We treat it as a service point to offer a customer. It is not a big money earner, we provide it as a service, a so-called blue collar service, and we also have customers seek it out," Shook said. "You might be buying a house and you might want to have a little more protection for your family."

That's how Vantis sees it, too.

"Most career agents are migrating north in income scale" for clients, Simms said, leaving the "lower middle-income and even upper middle-income clients underserved."

The web-based platform that so impressed A.M. Best is also key.

Along with banks, Vantis is feeling its way into the tech-saturated market, where younger customers and potential customers do business.



Craig Simms

And while banks claim customers do still appreciate and expect service at branch offices, customers in their late 20s through early 40s – prime targets for purchasing life insurance – “are migrating online,” Simms said.

“We’re developing ways to attract younger clients,” Simms said. “To sell protection products in the bank channel is difficult. We’re walking into banks with a unique solution, and we’re the only ones calling on them.”