



CloseUp

Feeling the credit squeeze?



The 'credit crunch' has made headline news in recent weeks in a way that few financial issues ever do. The reluctance by banks and other financial institutions to lend money, because they are not sure how risky it might be, is clogging up the financial system.

Despite the injection by central banks of billions of pounds, dollars and euros, interest rates on inter-bank lending are still unusually high. And banks have tightened up on their lending to individuals and companies, restricting the amount of lending as well as making loans more expensive. There are also thousands of dollars worth of short-term debt obligations that will fall due in the next six months, which could further depress the market if no buyers can be found for them.

As a result of all this financial markets turmoil, we know that our brokers and, indeed, their clients are having a tough time with the big banks not lending funds as freely as before. In October, we took the unprecedented step of reassuring our customers, through both direct contact and the insurance trade media, that we are continuing to provide finance – in other words, it's business as usual.

This should be great news for our customers as it means that hopefully you don't need to worry

about sourcing funds elsewhere. It also means our brokers will continue to enjoy an uninterrupted earning opportunity, and that we can still make available the necessary funds to assist with brokers' business development needs, subject to the usual criteria and credit review. Funding lines are so critical to the successful running of a business that this is a crucial message for us to communicate. Everyone here at Close has been tasked to ensure that we continue to make the point whenever we can and reassure our brokers that one thing they don't have to worry about is their premium finance service.

Our premium finance remains very much open and available to existing and potential customers, and it's great news for us as a business that, due to the way our parent company Close Brothers is funded, we remain in a very liquid and strong financial position. Indeed, the Close Group has no exposure to US sub prime debt.

We can all expect the markets to be choppy for a while yet, but beyond the usual benefits of premium finance, we should all see the opportunity in the credit

crunch, as well as being aware of the threat, to add real value to those customers that are not currently using premium finance by identifying our services as a highly economic additional line of credit.

If you have any comments on the credit crunch, or the Close messages relating to this, please drop me an email on twilson@closepf.com. I always welcome broker views on market developments.

Surveying our service – how satisfied are you?



The insurance business is a service business, and for us in the premium finance side of the market, that holds truer than ever. It's absolutely crucial that we continue to respond to the changing needs of our customers and what their concerns and challenges are at any point in time. To that end, we recently undertook our annual broker satisfaction survey, which ran from April to June and produced some very positive results.

95%

of brokers are either very satisfied or satisfied with our services.

UK Personal and Commercial Lines brokers were invited to participate when logging in to i-prompt and the survey consisted of 25 questions about our key service areas. If you were one of the brokers that gave us your feedback – thank you very much, it's really valuable to us in terms of improving our service to you!

The headline statistic was that 95% of brokers are either very satisfied or satisfied with our services. Similarly, 95% of our brokers rated the way we handle telephone and i-mail queries positively and our collections and recoveries process had a 94% satisfaction rate. Most of the other areas fared well too with i-prompt – speed of use, navigation and ability to access Management Information polling a combined 98% satisfaction result.

The freeform responses presented us with improvement areas, including more training and managing i-mail notifications, both of which are covered in this newsletter. We also picked up a few comments on areas that need clarity, such as our speed of response and our flexibility. Some brokers were unsure as to how well we did on this front whilst others like Hayes Parsons, the broker opposite, felt we succeeded.

Case Study

Hayes Parsons

Hayes Parsons is a long-standing Close customer, and the key to the longevity of the relationship is flexibility of service. The commercial insurance broker reviewed the premium finance service it was receiving from Close back in 2005 when Sharon Watts was appointed as the firm's new managing director, but it quickly became obvious that the rapport and trust inherent in the relationship was extremely valuable to both parties.

As a result, rather than even considering a re-tender process,

Hayes Parsons continues to strengthen its relationship with the team at Close and to take advantage of the flexible suite of services offered by Close to its customers.

Sharon Watts, MD of Hayes Parsons, notes: "The rapport we have with Close is key – when we have anything that doesn't fit the box, we get a lot of help and flexibility from Close with keeping those clients happy."

"We had one instance when we needed some payments made to us before the usual 28 day period – Close just went ahead and dealt with the situation and didn't even charge us for the early payment as this was a one off situation – to me, that's a genuinely flexible service."

"We also have a great relationship with our account handler, Anna Bence, and as a result, all of the premiums across our three service lines – commercial, marine and educational services – are financed through Close."

Managing i-mail notifications

A popular subject raised in our satisfaction survey was i-mail notifications. Most brokers found our secure email facility very useful with a few querying why they receive alerts for loans managed by other executives. This is easily sorted by your administrator, so here's how it works.

The situation arises where the login of the executive processing the loan expires and no alternative executive is set up for the notifications. The i-prompt system then automatically issues the notification to all the executives in the broker's office so as to ensure this is received and acted upon.

The solution is to change the settings and nominate an alternative executive. This

change can only be implemented by your administrator and quite often, it is the administrator who becomes the alternative executive. It is also worth ensuring that you and your colleagues update your passwords regularly as this will reduce the volume of redirected i-mails.

Once set correctly, this facility becomes really handy as brokers are informed of

defaults and cancellations promptly and loan queries can be managed without your leaving i-prompt.

If you need assistance with managing i-mails or identifying your administrator, please contact your account manager or our i-prompt Helpdesk on 0870 607 8120.

More training for you



Broker support is a key concern for any good premium finance provider – we understand that brokers have other issues to focus on and let's face it, premium finance isn't the priority. That's why we provide all the support we can to make promoting finance easy for you – we choose account managers that understand the broking business, provide a 24x7 online facility and supply sales aids such as the Cost Benefit Calculator and our client flyers. And now, we have also introduced our very own broker training resource.

Established to provide face-to-face training for broker staff, this service is managed by Carly Stevens, with account managers raising the requests. Our Employee of the Year in 2006, Carly is skilled in using both our Commercial and Personal products and is drawing from this experience to provide training on promoting the benefits of premium finance, using our products and i-prompt.

Carly has already started doing some broker training and is also developing hand-outs for future training sessions.

In addition, we have introduced a new email, productquery@closepf.com for any product info brokers need.

If you feel that your office would benefit from some premium finance training, please contact your Close account manager in the first instance. And, if you have a general product query, don't forget to refer to the Working with You pack available on our website, www.closepf.com

Left: Carly Stevens Broker Training Resource

Know your account manager?

In the last year, we've had some account manager moves to ensure all our brokers have the quality of service they expect. You've probably seen a letter introducing these changes but we want to ensure you know who to call when you need to discuss the management of your account or to request training. So here are our account managers.



Andy Appleton
Our Southern Regional Sales Manager, Andy believes that mutual respect and understanding brokers' requirements are key to building a profitable partnership. Andy is a semi-competitive rugby player and a keen skier.



Amy Noble
An ex-broker herself, Amy sees herself as a business partner, working with each broker to increase volumes and income. A natural entertainer, Amy always has a smile on her face and a few minutes to chat to people. She also recently won our Employee of the Year award.



Anna Bence
Anna's focus is to ensure all her brokers have the best possible experience when using our products and she thrives on identifying new business initiatives for her brokers. Anna is passionate about travel, taking every opportunity to lie on a beach somewhere exotic or ski down a mountain slope.



Michael Braithwaite
There are 3 occasions when you are guaranteed a call from Michael – when you've left him a message, when Michael is doing his regular checks and if there is a large policy coming up for renewal. A member of the East Essex Triathlon Club, Michael is a keen triathlete and aims to partake in the Ironman Triathlon in 2009.

Sales Support



Responsible for managing our smaller brokers, this team is very knowledgeable on our products and, between them, the 3 team members have worked in most Close departments. Amy, Graham and Carly are a lively team, all 3 enjoying holidays in the sun and dining out, specially Chinese meals.

Key Accounts



David Cunningham
Our Head of New Business and Key Accounts, David ensures our biggest brokers receive a consistently top-notch service whilst also looking after Close's prospecting opportunities. In his spare time, David enjoys skiing, windsurfing and golf.



Steve Cowdery
Steve takes care of our north-based key account brokers, playing a major business development role to ensure these brokers meet their premium finance objectives. Steve is a keen West Bromwich Albion FC supporter.



Elliot Hayes
Elliot manages Close's larger brokers in the southern region, providing support and proposing new income earning opportunities for his accounts. Elliot can be found on the football field or golf course at week-ends.

Field Sales



Steve Taylor
As the Head of Broker Sales, Steve's mission is to get everyone thinking commercially, after all account managers are not just problem solvers – they are there to help brokers be as profitable as possible. When not supporting his sales team, Steve is home following Hull FC Rugby League club and Hull City.



Glenn Marshall
Glenn is one of our longest serving sales people and the Regional Sales Manager for the North. Glenn is an avid dog-lover, helping care for rescue dogs and doing fundraising for PDSA. He is also a Manchester City FC follower.



Simon Bailey
Being our newest account manager (previously in our New Business team), Simon's aim is to ensure all his brokers know that he is always contactable and will help with any queries. Simon is another of our regular golfers and enjoys travelling to far eastern places like Langkawi and Singapore.



Brian MacKay
Our dedicated account manager covering Scotland and the North, Brian has extensive experience in the insurance industry and has built very strong relationships with his brokers based on honesty and transparency. When Brian is not talking to brokers, he is either working in the garden or watching football on TV.



Helen O'Neil
If there's one priority for Helen it is delivering to the agreed timescales, be it on answering a query or introducing a new product! Helen is dead keen on the outdoors, enjoying kayaking and cycling trails around Rutland Water most week-ends.



Michael McShane
Michael's belief is that premium finance should contribute to the bottom line, which is why he is so keen to identify new income streams and cost-cutting facilities for his brokers. Recently back from honeymoon, Michael enjoys travel to sunny far away places. He is also a big sports fan.

Insurance Leadership Group of the Prince's Trust



The Insurance Leadership Group (ILG) is a unique forum for leaders of the insurance industry in the UK that aims to grow charitable support for The Prince's Trust. Since its launch in January 2006, over £2.5m has been pledged to The Trust through ILG.

The Prince's Trust helps young people to overcome barriers and get their lives working through programmes to support the most disadvantaged young people across the UK.

ILG provides members with innovative solutions to their corporate social responsibilities, while also affording them networking benefits with industry peers and potential customers. Finally, ILG also works to promote employment and training opportunities within the insurance sector.

Here at Close, we're enthusiastic backers of ILG, and we'd urge other leading lights of the insurance business to get involved, if they haven't already.

You can be confident that there is a real benefit of strength in numbers – ILG can achieve what few, if any of us, could aspire to do alone.

But there's also some real benefit for the individuals that make up the companies in ILG. For instance, we recently took part in a charity football game organised by ILG, which was tremendous fun for all involved.

ILG supporters are listed on The Trust's website, which gets around 50,000 individual visitors each month. Their events receive coverage in the insurance trade press and can be sponsored by companies looking to further their profile within a specific industry area. Take a look at www.princes-trust.org.uk/insurance for more information.



Prince's Trust

i-prompt

If you haven't used i-prompt recently, you may want to login and see the recent changes we've made – we've improved the functionality behind-the-scenes to make i-prompt faster and taken this opportunity to update the look at the same time. Access to our reports, client history and all broker functionality remains unchanged.

And if you haven't logged in, you couldn't have seen our series of i-news on the benefits of premium finance? These messages have been issued weekly to inform brokers that we are "business as usual" even though many financial organisations have tightened their lending criteria due to the credit squeeze. If you want to know more, ask your account manager.

Are you a Coffee Break winner?



Have you visited our website and played one of the games in our Coffee Break? If so, you may be one of our winners but if you haven't yet tried your hand at Keepy Uppy or SuDoClose, give it a go during your next break and you too could win a bottle of champagne.

Here is one of our winners, Joe Howard of FC Gardner, with his bottle of bubbly.

Congratulations to all the winners!

Did you know?

Clients can settle accounts in arrears using our 24 hour credit card payment line?

All they need to do is call 0870 220 3192 and follow the easy instructions to make payment on outstanding accounts.

You have access to full product information on our website? Simply visit www.closepf.com and you

will find our Working with You product pack available to download as well as a list of FAQs and glossary terms.

We provide premium finance for brokers in Spain?

If you have a Spanish office or are considering expanding into Europe, remember to talk to us about our overseas services. For more details on our Spanish set-up, visit www.closefs.es

Upcoming events

It's been a busy few months and before we know it, we'll be preparing for BIBA again. In the meantime, here are details of events we've recently supported and some we'll be attending in the next few months:

COBRA Network National Conference
15th November
Post's Question Time
15th November
Insurance Times awards
7th December

Would you like to know what Close can do for your broking business? Why not speak to your account manager or give Allan Oliver at Close a call on 020 8339 6247 and find out?

Close Premium Finance
21st Floor, Tolworth Tower,
Ewell Road, Tolworth,
Surrey, KT6 7EL
T 0870 241 3418
F 0870 241 3419
E marketing@closepf.com
www.closepf.com