



Florida title agency defies odds by growing in turbulent market

Bill Stueber's reputation in high technology is well-established from his extensive experience in the wireless technology industry. He's been a senior executive in that space for more than 25 years.

Just ask **Dave Brown**, vice president of Advanced Wireless Services at Brightpoint North America, who describes Stueber as one of the "few executives today who can bring together technology expertise, business savvy and communication skills the way Bill can."

Last November, Garden Home Title (GHT) promoted Stueber from business technology expert to chief executive officer — a move that brings a wealth of business automation expertise as well as corporate leadership and strategic alliance development experience.

Stueber's background in technology has paid dividends for GHT and is helping it survive and thrive in the down market. Since 2006, Stueber's firm, Title Advisor's Group LLC has developed ASP-based software solutions for the title and escrow industry.

"Over the past two years, we have automated and streamlined our process flow, from order entry right through post closing activities, through a series of technology layers," said Stueber, who founded the investment and strategic consulting firm Telecom Partners Group LLP and was the former CEO of Wireless Assets Inc. and Securfon America Inc. "Each layer has brought us significant cost efficiencies. We have been fortunate enough to actually grow in this market, so the additional capacity has allowed us to take on more business without the traditional incremental overhead."

By leveraging its expertise in automated title, escrow and closing services, the Sunrise, Fla.-based company reported 107 percent growth during the third quarter of 2007 despite the slumping market. While title industry revenue declined nearly 12 percent across the country, GHT watched its total revenue grow 69 percent.

"This growth is due to our intuitive technology which delivers services rapidly, accurately and still with a personal touch," said **Gary Singer**, GHT's president. "As one of the fastest growing title companies anywhere, we are proud to be a preferred title partner of developers, mortgage firms and real estate brokerages nationwide."

In order to stay on top of the changing market, Stueber said a title company's sales force needs to constantly be touching base with its customers and developing relationships with individuals, not just the organization they work for at the moment.

"The market turbulence will continue to shift around loan officers, real estate agents and other gate keepers — it is important that the relationship stays intact when they move on," he added.

To keep the order pipeline full, Stueber said sales teams should help transfer and cement the relationship that has been forged with each client over to their operations counterparts who are responsible for keeping the customers happy.

"Salespeople need to dovetail with operations to the extent that loyalty problems are identified early enough for remedial action," he said. "And they should religiously adopt and use a customer relationship management system to identify customers and prospects in a way that brings each through a pre-determined cycle, bringing clarity and order to the process of maintaining top-of-mind marketplace awareness with a minimum of wasted effort."

While GHT relies heavily on referrals and focuses primarily on the lending and development communities for title orders and leads, the company is also shifting attention to non-traditional real estate models such as investors from abroad, reverse mortgage providers, relocation specialists and developers of mid-low priced housing.

GHT has met the needs of its current client base and new customers by expanding its business hours, providing around-the-clock access to files, integrating with loan origination systems and bundling products for one-stop shopping. The company also has been able to maintain or lower service charges when it benefits from internal cost efficiencies.

"We really encourage our customers to open up and tell us how we can provide better service levels. Then it is up to us to build out those capabilities," Stueber said. "You need to be patient and stay in front of prospects in order to capture their business when they re-valuate current relationships."

While GHT operates in all 50 states, it has grown particularly strong in its home state the past two years, but has also been successful in California, Nevada, Texas, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania and South Carolina.

The company utilizes Stewart Title, Fidelity Title and The Fund as its underwriters. While all the relationships have grown, Stueber said Stewart has taken the most time to understand GHT's business model and operational plan.

"Investing time in new companies is a risk in a market that has markedly scarce resources," he said. "Many of the customers that have allowed us to grow in this down market are a product of the symbiotic relationship we have developed with Stewart."

Stewart Holley, a Florida-based district manager for Stewart Title Guaranty Co. said, "GHT is one of those rare companies whose team understands what it takes to consistently deliver stunning customer experiences. We see GHT as a long-term valuable member of the title and real estate communities."

Bill Stueber is using his extensive experience in the wireless technology industry to help Garden Home Title survive and thrive in this down market.