



THE LAST WORD

Tracy Ashfield

The Race to Electronic Just Got Faster



We decided on this issue's theme, The Race to Electronic, in early January. One would think we'd had a crystal ball. Not so.

In fact, our decision to focus on making the mortgage process more digital was because credit unions had been slow to adopt e-closings, e-delivery of notes, even paperless mortgage files.

We thought it was time to share stories of those that had pivoted and highlight best practices for moving away from paper. Little did we know that COVID-19 would have credit unions racing at top speed toward electronic solutions. And race they did!

- Mortgage originators had to find ways to connect and form relationships with members and Realtors absent of in-person meetings.
- Our technology solutions were put to the test.
- How quickly could we get processors, underwriters and closers fully functional working remotely?
- Did our servicing systems allow us to process members' forbearance requests from a home-based office?

THE END OF A PAPER TRAIL?

We have learned so much about the features and functionality we need from our "tech stack" of solutions. We

also learned that when we rely on paper, it's all so much harder.

So, will this meteoric shift to paperless and e-processes stick for the long-term? I certainly hope so.

Does that mean we don't need that "personal" approach that credit unions are famous for? Absolutely not!



Will this meteoric shift to paperless and e-processes stick for the long-term? I certainly hope so.



We need to find the way to balance all these new tools and processes with what members uniformly want: proactive, clear communication and seeing their transactions fulfilled with ease.

Although many in your mortgage staff may love working with paper, paper isn't what helps us provide great service. In fact, paper slows things down.

INVENTION AND INNOVATION

The adage "necessity is the mother of invention" has certainly proved to be true this year. Necessity has also been the mother of *innovation*.

I believe credit unions will keep the positive innovations and build on them.

Why? It's a matter of history. Credit unions' share of the mortgage market doubled quickly and continued to grow after the 2008 credit crisis.

In that case we kept our doors open and continued to lend when others faltered. During this pandemic we may not have kept our doors open literally, but we certainly did virtually. From that I expect we'll see another jump in market share.

This column will remain the "Last Word" but whether it remains the last word on paper for credit union mortgage lenders in 2020 remains to be seen. More certain is this: Lenders that make the loan process easier will be the ones that succeed. ▲

Tracy Ashfield is the President of ACUMA. She also speaks at industry conferences and examiner seminars, and keeps current with credit unions by running Ashfield & Associates, a consulting and training business that assists with mortgage lending.