

Is it good to be a lemming when buying technology?

The term lemming is often used when describing organizations that tend to follow the lead of other organizations they consider to be like themselves.

I am sure that it is not news to anyone reading this that many credit unions are often said to be lemmings. In fact, a common vendor strategy in the credit union market is to create product momentum based on product adoption rather than real product success. You know the kind of marketing I mean. Things like: "XX more credit unions sign with vendor X" or "Vendor X's credit unions represent over \$XX Billion in assets and serve over XXX million members."

But, is there really anything wrong with being a lemming if it enables you to make decisions more quickly by following the perceived successes of other credit unions? It depends.

Let's start with the origins of the term lemming:

According to dictionary.com, a lemming is "any of various small, thickset rodents, especially of the genus *Lemmus*, inhabiting northern regions and known for periodic mass migrations that sometimes end in drowning."

Yikes! It's clear that the term lemming is not intended to be flattering, and in fact, it is down-right insulting!

Let's start fresh. Based on the intended meaning of a lemming, no credit unions are truly lemmings but rather, and rightfully so, they want to benefit from the experiences and battle scars of other credit unions when making technology decisions. But what are some of the key things a credit union should consider when looking to other credit unions for selecting technology?

- 1. Evaluate the "forest" not just the "trees":** Start by defining how the technology under evaluation fits within your overall strategies and get feedback from other credit unions that directly relates to your broader goals. When making technology decisions, it is always critical to find technology that is effective in dealing with your immediate needs while having the capabilities to scale with your needs over time.
- 2. Look outside the industry for input:** Experience counts for a lot. In addition to input from credit unions, you will want to solicit feedback from organizations in industries that have been using a particular technology (and others like it) for several years. A great example of this is when dealing with technology focused on improving member service and support. Many other industries have been using this eService technology (including knowledge management) for years, and they are well abreast of what technology is needed and what a multitude of vendors competing for their business have to offer. Unless the technology is unique to credit unions, beware of vendors that have not successfully competed against seasoned products in industries well-acquainted with a given technology.
- 3. Get the facts that relate to your membership:** Opinions are like noses, everyone has one. Be sure to get to the facts that support opinions and see how they relate to the short- and long-term expectations of consumers. Creation of a matrix that defines and rates vendors against critical features is always important. An essential part of this assessment is to understand how features actually work by talking to existing customers and through product demos. Don't accept "we can do that" and "it's easy to use" without seeing the functionality in action for yourself.

- 4. Involve the right stakeholders within your credit union:** For any material technology decision, it is crucial to involve the credit union staff that will be responsible for using the technology along with staff that have a broad understanding of your credit union's strategies and goals. Operational areas are often so busy dealing with immediate issues that their perspective becomes too narrow to adequately assess technology beyond what it will mean to their day-to-day operations. While this is an important factor, it only represents a portion of what the decision should be based on.
- 5. Find a financially solid partner that is committed to the credit union movement:** More than just a vendor, you will want to find a partner that will be around tomorrow and brings to the table core competencies for optimizing the effectiveness of the technology for your credit union. This is one example where talking to existing credit union customers will provide you with great insights.

Technology decisions are difficult and have far-reaching implications to your credit union and its ability to remain competitive. Completing a detailed evaluation involving relevant people internal and external to credit unions will significantly increase your likelihood of making decisions that will make sense for years to come.

Be sure to look for next month's white paper that provides specific things to look for when evaluating eService offerings. Want to get something sooner? Click [here](#) to request the must-have criteria developed by the Washington State Health Care Authority for selecting an eService solution.

About the Author

Chuck Van Court is the President and founder of Fuze Digital Solutions, an eServices and knowledge management software solutions company based in Seattle, Washington. Chuck's educational background is in computer science and finance, and his expertise is drawn from over 20 years in the information technology and banking industries. Prior to founding Fuze, Chuck was the CIO for a \$45 billion bank in Seattle and president of a Web-focused professional services company. Chuck is a recognized expert in knowledge management and eService strategies and has authored several white papers and articles featured in industry periodicals.

About Fuze Digital Solutions

Fuze provides a web-based, robust eService and knowledge management solution that includes a customized and searchable knowledge base, email and contact management, 2-way secure communications, eAlerts, core system integration, usage analytics for target marketing, secure chat, and personal finance content. The Fuze Suite offers credit unions large and small the ability to affordably extend an effective online support channel and unify support across web, phone, and in-person channels. With the flip of a switch, credit unions can use and pay for its integrated modules when needed. Fuze Suite 5.0 is available in both licensed and hosted models. For more information, call 425-649-1246 or visit online at www.fuze.com

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