



Background Information: The Educated Investor University

The Educated Investor University was developed in part thanks to a challenge put to Joe Saari, president and CEO of Precision Information LLC, by Becky Nilsen, CEO of Desert Schools Financial Services after a presentation Saari did at a NACUSO conference in 2003. Saari was presenting on the need for financial literacy and member financial education that could be met through the distribution of Precision Information's (since) award-winning Encyclopedia of Personal Finance™, available in CD format, which could be distributed by credit unions and CUSOs to fulfill a member need for unbiased investment and retirement planning.

"After reviewing the material and seeing my presentation, Becky expressed her ideas," said Saari. "She mentioned to me that financial education was not only a 'member education' concern, but a concern for everyone. She explained that one key challenge she (and others) in the industry faced was that not only does the average American *not understand* the wide variety of financial products—with an ever-increasing and complex financial marketplace—but that personal financial knowledge is a challenge for credit union staff too."

Nilsen had "planted the seed of an idea for leveraging our course content to offer employees a personal finance certificate as a way to increase awareness about the various investing and insurance related products they offer," said Saari. Nilsen said she thought such a program would help increase awareness of the Financial Services Group at Desert Schools, and as employees became more educated, it would help drive referrals.

"I believe that when we started working with them in 2003, they had roughly 3,000 referrals and \$20M in sales of investment and insurance products. Three years later that had grown to 8,000 referrals and \$55M in sales. In short, through a strategy of internal education, strong incentives, the setting of clear expectations for employees, and hiring key people able to convert referrals to sales, Becky and her team have done a phenomenal job of deepening the wallet share of members to the credit union. Our part in that process, Becky's encouragement and the talent and dedication of her team, inspired us to launch the Educated Investor University pilot program to benefit other organizations," Saari said.

Throughout that process, and since the launch of that pilot program in 2006, Desert Schools FCU Director of Training Matt Osborn has taken the lead in helping develop the course content and the certificate program, and most recently, he led the charge for staff to participate in the "Educated Investor Challenge" and the "Retirement Readiness Course," now in progress, noted Saari. "Matt and Becky have provided valuable feedback on what topics to include, how to organize them, and the best practices on how to deploy them. They have also worked with other credit unions, including Mountain America, which is also pursuing online education efforts and seeing some strong initial ROI benefits."

Saari credited Nilsen and Osborn as the "spark" that started the process and said, "I'm very thankful to them. It's been a true privilege to collaborate as we have over the past four years. We've been fortunate to see this program evolve the way it has and look forward to exceeding their expectations in the future."