

Firms Back Variable Annuity Product Launches With Aggressive Online Marketing Campaigns

By Ben Pousty, Corporate Insight

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With variable annuity sales down, firms are intensifying online product marketing campaigns to reach more prospective investors.



**Fidelity MGGI Public
Homepage Image**

No annuity product was hit harder during the financial crisis than variable annuities. Many variable annuity contracts saw significant drops in value, in many cases 30% or more, due to the products' heavy exposure to the financial markets. For an investment that supposedly offers a guaranteed retirement income stream, variable annuities had been exposed as flawed and ultimately risky investment vehicles.

Despite the firms' best efforts to evolve variable products to fit the new financial landscape, variable annuity sales remained flat throughout 2009 and were down significantly in contrast to 2008. In response to the lackluster sales numbers, firms have intensified their online marketing campaigns to the public, placing additional promotional muscle behind high-profile variable annuity product launches.

Fidelity and AXA Equitable have both released memorable, multi-faceted online sales campaigns for new variable annuities over the last three months. Fidelity's November launch of the MGGI (MetLife Growth and Guaranteed Income) variable annuity was backed by homepage promotional imagery that integrated the firm's flagship GPS campaign theme and linked to a comprehensive product page.



**Fidelity MGGI Public
Homepage Image**

Aside from offering pertinent details about the MGGI variable annuity and a good selection of literature, the product page also features an engaging video and new product-focused calculator. The video is three minutes long and creatively highlights key product features and strengths using vivid imagery and audio commentary.



Fidelity MGGI Promotional Video

The MGGI calculator has an attractive, user-friendly interface and is easy to complete. After inputting age, lump sum investment value and market return, a hypothetical illustration displays the MGGI's target income payments. The results can be viewed in a summary, chart or table.

The calculator interface is titled "MetLife Growth and Guaranteed IncomeSM". It includes a "Summary" tab and links to "See this data in charts" and "See this data in a table". The main section asks for "What is your current age?" (55) and "What is your spouse's age?" (55). It shows the effect of a "\$120,000 investment" and "market returns at 2%". A "Start monthly payments in" dropdown is set to "8 years". On the right, a "Summary" box states: "Based on your inputs, your pretax income payment won't decrease below \$400 at a 0% return or \$400 at the selected 2% hypothetical return, unless you take excess withdrawals.*". Below this, a callout shows "\$400/mo is guaranteed for life starting in 8 years with 0% market return" and "Cumulative income of \$118,400 in 30 yrs & may grow more". At the bottom, it says "This is for illustrative purposes only. It does not represent the past, present or future performance of any actual investment." and provides the phone number "877-357-2175".

Fidelity MGGI Calculator Interface

The AXA Equitable Retirement Cornerstones variable annuity was introduced online in creative fashion in January. A relatively straightforward homepage image links to the Introducing Retirement Cornerstone sitelet, which contains an interactive cube that highlights key product features.

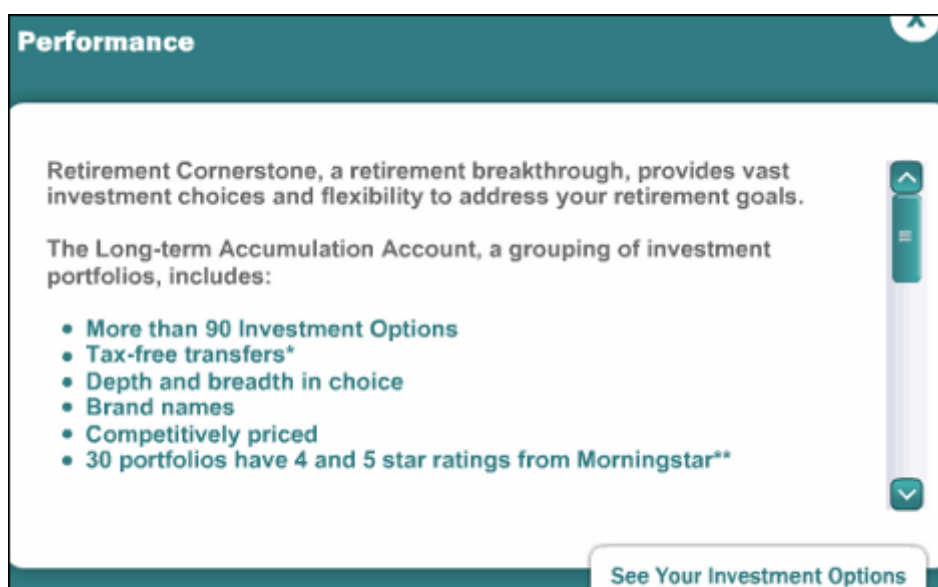


AXA Equitable Retirement Cornerstone Public Homepage Image

The interactive Retirement Cornerstone cube focuses on four areas - Tax Deferred Single Platform, Performance, Protection and Retirement Cornerstone. Product structure, key features, available underlying accounts, performance data and account management are clearly explained. Links to the Retirement Cornerstone product information page and related literature are offered in all four sections.



AXA Equitable Interactive Retirement Cornerstone Cube



AXA Equitable Interactive Retirement Cornerstone Cube – Performance

Over the last year, firms have worked tirelessly to mold variable annuities into safer, more cost-efficient

retirement investments that pose fewer risks to both consumers and issuers. It is clear that aggressive and engaging online marketing campaigns will play a large role in selling prospective investors on variable annuities as reliable retirement income solutions.



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