

## BACK TO THE FUTURE OF BANKING (RE-VISITED)

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Remember how banking used to be in the days of the *brass and marble* edifice. Do we need to return to that level of pomp and circumstance? Banking was a solemn experience, even somewhat eerie. Your footsteps echoed when you walked on the marble floors. It was *just like a museum*. How do we contrast these memories of a bygone era with today's banking experience? Today, Madison Avenue resides in the hearts and minds of thousands upon thousands of marketing people. Their job is to produce stuff that gets people to buy other stuff, so that more stuff becomes available. When the economy is booming, advertising and marketing budgets rise proportionally to insure that companies can plant seeds motivating you to purchase their products and services. They promise a better way life, a bigger home, a step up in your community. Some of the messages are fine, but some are targeted at getting your customers' attention (and money) at any cost. Maybe it is time to take a deep breath and assess where you are in relation to your branch network, most importantly how to determine where you want to be and how ultimately will benefit your customers.

In order to answer either question, you must first consider the most important variable, your customers. They are the primary reason you take any action to change and improve the branch environment. They will respond favorably or negatively to the changes you implement.

What is the ultimate experience you can provide to your customer? It's easy. Make them feel important. Your branch exists for them and meeting their banking needs. It is your total commitment to service that wins the loyalty of the customer. By creating a banking environment based on service, you are sure to remain profitable and an important part of your customers' lives. How is this accomplished? Maybe by looking at banking's past with an eye focused on banking's future.



*The good old days, or were they?* We try to remember the good things and put aside those experiences that were unpleasant. Banking for the majority of people was cut and dry. On payday you went to the bank and deposited money into a checking account, presented your savings passbook for an additional deposit, possibly put money into a Christmas club, or other savings vehicle. You discussed the neighborhood with the teller, said hello to the branch manager, had a conversation or two with neighborhood acquaintances and went on your way. All in all, a pleasant experience.

Today your customer may not come into the lobby, ATM's abound, a PC resides in many homes, and free on line banking services are offered by many financial institutions. Customers don't know the branch personal, and in too many cases tellers are constantly changing. Many customers have never met the branch executive (he's not from our town), and your customer service representatives hide behind walls with curtains drawn. If this scenario sounds familiar, then maybe a change of the branch culture and environment is just what you need. How can you become more customer-centric? and how do you make changes that will give you the greatest utilization of your facilities investment?.

## The best of the past meets the best of the future.

OK, I agree banking in the old days also had problems, but as a customer you felt respected, banking was a dignified experience. Bankers were knowledgeable, professional, and you trusted their financial advice. Maybe there would be fewer financial consultants if your customers still felt secure in seeking financial advice from your institution.

Instead are we greeted by tellers who seem somewhat disinterested, who may never make eye contact with your customer, their eyes remain focused on the computer monitor or do they just take your customers money, and miss an opportunity to explain new products and services to your customer. If asked a question about your products and services, do they direct your customer elsewhere, asking them to wait for a customer service representative. Does your first line staff have in depth product knowledge? if not (*this may not be a pleasant banking experience.*) . You go to the super market and you are accosted in the aisle by a person dressed up as a head of lettuce, with a pin saying let-us show you our CD rates, or as a bunch of beets saying you can't *beet* their rates. Kind of funny, maybe, but (*not a pleasant banking experience.*)

You stand in a queue line, waiting to be served while another teller window closes up for lunch. (*again, not a very pleasant banking experience.*)

The question is, how do we take the best from the past of banking and integrate it with the technology and sophistication of today's banking process? How do we convince our customers, young and old, that we can provide them with service and information to help them make sound financial decisions? Most importantly how can we do all this while providing our customers with the privacy and dignity they expect in their primary banking relationship? The answer is not so complicated, in fact it is in your grasp. By now, I think you get the point, and that is, banking is people, it is a relationship between your customer and you. Whether in person, or on the phone, it is this personal experience that will ultimately determine how many customers you retain, and how many of your products that customer purchases.

How can we at Advantage Branch & Office Systems help you attain your vision?

We at Advantage Branch have developed products to help your branch personnel interface with your customers. Our Advantage Branch Console™ is more than a teller station it is a tool that promotes communications between the teller and customer. It provides privacy, helps impart product and community information and helps your staff make every transaction a pleasant experience for every customer. Let us show you how installing the Advantage Branch Systems Solution™ will allow you to enhance the customer experience and make every customer feel important and respected. Advantage Branch along with our partners will deliver a branch environment that will improve customer loyalty every day. Please call us to see how we can help you meet your goals for one branch or your entire branch network.



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