

BANKING ON A POSITIVE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

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In banking similar products can be obtained at most financial institutions, interest rates don't vary by a large margin, and most checking accounts are free of service charges, the consumer may not have a reason to bank with only one institution, it is up to you to give them a reason to choose yours.

Let's consider what makes a retail experience memorable and pleasant. First, we must remember, "Keep it Simple – Smart". All of us have had both pleasant and distasteful experiences. The common thread that separates a positive experience from a distasteful experience lies in the perception of how we have been treated. If we leave feeling important, that our business matters, and that we have been treated with respect, we will most likely continue to do business with that institution. In fact, we probably will become more amenable to purchasing other products based on our experience.

Advantage Branch & Office Systems, LLC (Advantage Branch) understands that an environment significantly contributes to the experience had in that building space. That is why Advantage Branch pays close attention to the details. Advantage Branch is affiliated with The H.L. Turner Group Inc. of Concord New Hampshire, the creators of The Advantage Classroom™. The Advantage Classroom™ sets a new standard for an enhanced learning environment, taking into account environmental elements such as indoor air quality, daylighting, acoustic performance, as well as other factors, which have improved both the teaching and learning experience while creating a positive sustainable environment.

Advantage Branch applies a similar thought process to each and every design project it undertakes, delivering a final design that contributes significantly to the overall effectiveness of the branch environment.

How do we as bank designers take advantage of the innovative processes developed over many years of quality branch design? We develop and design environments for banks that are not only visually appealing, but actually make the branch a more pleasant place to work in. In turn, for customers a very pleasant environment in which to conduct their business. That is the primary mission of Advantage Branch & Office Systems.

What exactly can we do to ensure a memorable customer experience? We can pay attention to our customers' needs and make them feel important! At Advantage Branch, we understand that in retail environments, space that involves the customers and assists the employees will contribute greatly to providing a positive and memorable experience.

To start, we have to make your front-line employees, your tellers, feel important. They routinely interface with your customers, have opportunities to promote and cross-sell your products, and contribute to your customers positive experience. It sounds pretty simple - make your employees happy and they will keep your customers happy. In many retail endeavors, we have heard that the most important thing is location, location, location. Important yes, but just as important is perception, perception, perception. Perception is the key in increasing your customer base, retaining your customers, and improving your bottom line. We have stated that we must not only produce a branch that is visually pleasing (form), works well as an interior space (function), but it must also contribute to improving the overall attitude of all your branch employees (environment).

Consider some important factors that effect how employees respond to changes in their environment, and how these changes influence their reaction. A very important study conducted many years ago at the Hawthorne Plant of the Western Electric Company in Cicero, Illinois. Professor Elton Mayo researched the effects of the physical and environmental influences of the workplace, and later studied the psychological aspects contributing to employees' overall demeanor and productivity. You might ask what means of measurement can be used to determine the overall contribution of designing a workspace that improves the teller's environment? If applied properly, designing teller stations and branches to be user friendly, promotes a sense of importance for the teller. By doing so, we are creating a culture that will improve the daily attitude of your workforce.

With this in mind, how does Advantage Branch deliver designs aimed at doing just that? Let's consider some factors that lead to an Advantage Branch Design.

1. We understand the daily routine of the tellers - their likes and dislikes as it relates to physical environment. Typically, this includes teller stations and the work area directly behind the teller lines.
2. Its imperative to provide an individual workspace for each teller that avoids the feeling of a McJob which according to the Merriam Webster dictionary, is defined as a job usually in the retail or service sector that is low paying and offers little or no opportunity for promotion. By paying special attention to a tellers' individual needs relative to: temperature, lighting, noise, humidity, air quality, and physical accommodations, we are reducing teller fatigue and improving overall comfort. The Advantage Branch approach also allows for the implementation of a meaningful teller incentive program, when if properly installed will lower the turnover rate of your front-line employees saving you money and in turn improve customer loyalty.
3. We pay close attention to individual ergonomic variables such as height, computer placement (keyboard and monitor), seating (when used), placement of cash drawers and forms, as well as other frequently accessed items. Where

possible, we accommodate individual differences to allow for as much customization as possible and practical.

4. As budgets allow, and as technology become more affordable consider installing cash dispensing systems instead of typical under counter steel. This feature can improve transaction times and provide better shift end cash reconciliation. A significant decrease in the need for vault calls will be realized; which improves efficiency and therefore contributes to better customer service.
5. Determine the optimum placement and quality of the drive-up system, in order to minimize negative factors such as excessive interior noise and temperature fluctuations.
6. Provide workstations that define space. This will provide a positive connection to a teller's individual space and in turn create a positive attitude. Again, this will contribute to your customer's satisfaction when conducting business with your branch.

Creating a High Performance Environment

We have discussed the need to upgrade the teller's area and the teller's workspace, but in order to deliver a branch that truly delivers a high performance design. We examine the remaining elements of the branch. In building design we create each individual area or zone to make them function and relate seamlessly. Some designers define the various zones within the branch as sales zones, transaction zones, operation zones, investment zones, etc. From our perspective, the entire retail floor of the branch is a sales zone. We define this as retail space; where you have an opportunity to inform customers about products and services.

Every inch of space delivers a message through the effective deployment of a merchandising program. However, merchandising programs are there only to support the various branch functions such as loans, investments, new accounts, and other financial services. We create a clear connection from one functional area to the other. Paying very close attention to the functional relationships allows our designs to integrate all the zones into a seamless envelope promoting teamwork and maximizing efficiency. We will create an environment that allows the various functions to act as one so that customers feel comfortable in approaching anyone regarding any banking matter. This makes them feel important, and as stated earlier, making your customers feel important and respected will help you meet your financial goals by improving both your cross-sell ratio and customer retention.

BRANDING

“Branding” is a term frequently used by many companies and individuals involved in the design of retail space. What exactly is “Branding”? It is a term that relates to “Brand” identification. Then, just what is your “Brand” identification? Is it your logo - your choice of color palette, your use of space, and your well thought out advertising program? Perhaps it consists of all of the above. Why do we budget so much to achieve this “Branding”? Many of the companies involved with the design of financial institutions lead us to believe that a customer should leave a Branch having had a memorable experience based on the application of “Branding”.

Applying the Advantage Branch approach to the design of a branch provides an environment that is familiar to your customers. In which many elements are part of every branch within your network. We do this by creating a consistent placement of the functional areas throughout your network. The waiting areas of each branch will have a common theme; the teller areas will have a familiar appearance and feel, and your customers will intuitively understand how to best access each service your institution offers. By accomplishing these goals, we can reinforce.

Your brand states that you value your customers and their time. It also states that you have addressed the things that contribute to making their visits pleasant, non-threatening, and most of all makes them feel welcome. Please contact us for analysis of how we can create a branch environment that will help you exceed your expectations and goals.



Solutions . . . that matter.

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