



## *Trent's Comments*

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Germantown, Tennessee

### **Three Reasons Your Bank Needs a Call Center Now**

In my conversations with community banks, I'm surprised at how many still feel they are "too small" for a call center. On the contrary, smaller banks should be the first to move toward a centralized telephone point of contact for customers. Here are three reasons why.

- 1) Optimize Staffing
- 2) Improve Service Quality
- 3) Support Your Virtual Branch

#### **Optimize Staffing**

Old habits die hard. Many community banks are clinging to the idea of a dedicated receptionist at each location, whose job it is to greet customers, answer the phone, and distribute the calls. As branch volume drops, it is likely that most of the people your receptionist greets are salespeople or other visitors. And those all important phone calls? Most businesses, including banks, have moved to phone systems that feature DID - each extension can be dialed directly from outside the bank. Thus, bank employees can provide customers with a number that rings on their desk, or even a cell phone number.

The concept of a receptionist prevents you from providing excellent service (customers want to talk to someone with solutions, not a traffic cop), and artificially inflates salary costs. In an upcoming issue, we will discuss branches and branch staffing in detail, but here's a glimpse: *your branches will be staffed with associates who are cross trained on all products and services, and they will meet each customer or prospect at the door - not wait behind a desk or teller line.*

## **Service Quality**

The key to better service is addressing and resolving the customer's issue, not passing them around the bank trying to find someone who can. Call center employees can be trained to handle a wide variety of customer inquiries, which improves service and reduces costs. Over time, you will gain a better understanding of why customers are calling, and be able to proactively address at least some of these issues. Much like the new branch associate mentioned earlier, these call center staff will be "super bankers" and will go a long way toward increasing customer satisfaction. They will also build credibility with customers, allowing them to influence customers toward self-service delivery channels.

## **Support Your Virtual Branch**

National advertising has set the stage for 24 hour customer service. "Jake from State Farm" nattily dressed in khakis and red polo, is awake and ready to help at 3 a.m. Eventually, your customer base is going to expect that too. For now, expanding service hours to meet your customers' expectations is important. Don't panic - I didn't say you needed 24x7 coverage yet, just that you need to think about it. The modern call center will support customer contact via phone, email, on-line chat, Twitter, and Facebook, to name a few. This is a far cry from simply deciding who answers the phone at the branch. It is important to start planning for this. In fact, recent studies indicate that chat from mobile devices will be a huge component of customer service and interaction in coming months.

Here's the reality: you are promoting and encouraging the use of delivery channels that customers have access to at all hours. In order to ensure that customers embrace these technologies, you have to ensure that you can support them. Experience teaches us that a successful first use of any new technology is critical. The best "plan B" for a poor support experience is quick, responsive follow up when the customer reaches out for support. Expanded support hours is not just about supporting technology. It is about making your bank more accessible to busy customers at hours that are convenient to them. In the past, you may have opened your drive in early, or kept it open late - its the same idea. Convenience. *If you are ever in doubt, remember that customers will opt for convenience every time.*

*Here are five things you can do now:*

- 1) Track the nature and volume of calls received, by location.
- 2) Determine if your current phone system supports call center features including identification of the number being called, the number of the caller, and the ability to selectively route calls, and roll calls over if certain lines aren't answered. The goal here is to get to an inbound caller to the right person the first time, and get their issue resolved quickly.
- 3) Determine if your core vendor offers a "call center" inquiry screen. Such screens feature shortcuts to allow staff to quickly find information that is commonly requested by callers. It will serve as a precursor to more formal call center technology.
- 4) Start the discussion in your bank about how you can improve service to those customers who choose to use voice communications to reach you.
- 5) Consider supporting non-voice contacts, including email, chat, and Twitter

Your branch network can remain a strength for your organization, if you leverage it properly. When supported in conjunction with the electronic delivery channels your customers are demanding, it gives you a tremendous advantage over the "Internet Only" banks. If you don't leverage your branch network, it becomes a liability that increases your costs and diminishes your value in the eyes of the customer. A well staffed call center is an important step toward providing the levels of support customers demand. If you've already taken this step, I commend you. If not, please do give it some consideration.

If you'd like to continue this conversation, visit my Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/thetechnologyadvisor](http://www.facebook.com/thetechnologyadvisor), or tweet me @techadvisor, and share your comments, success stories, or opposing viewpoints. I look forward to hearing from you!

## ***Recent and Upcoming Speaking Engagements***

### **June 2013**

- **13 Banker's Bank of the West: *BankCard Conference***

### **August 2013**

- 27 Independent Banker's Association of New York: *Annual Conference***

### **September 2013**

- 17 Wisconsin Bankers Association: *Technology Conference***

### **October 2013**

- 10 Missouri Bankers Association: *Young Bankers Leadership Conference***

- 22 Iowa Bankers Association: *Technology and Bank Operations Conference***

*Trent's Comments* is published six times each year and provides insight into strategic topics facing financial institution executives. Please feel free to share this with your staff and colleagues. Should you not wish to receive this newsletter, simply send me an email and I will remove you from future mailings.

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