

The Power of Personal

Using the personal approach is an excellent way for your community-oriented financial institution to acquire more deposits, more loans, and retain more customers.

By Karen Miller



Picture this: you're sitting in your living room watching TV and the phone rings. It's your bank calling you to thank you for being a customer, asking you how their service has been lately, and if there is anything you can suggest to make your relationship better.

Most financial institutions have done a great job at driving customers away.

After the shock wears off you tell the polite caller about your last experience: this past Tuesday during your lunch hour, you called to get information about applying for a home equity loan since the bank is closed by the time you get out of work. You got the automated recording, pressed "3", pressed "6", pressed "2", pressed "1", pressed "0" for a live person, then got her voice mail, she was "away from her desk" (probably at lunch). She never called you back, so you tried to call the local branch later, but found there is no way to reach the branch. On Wednesday night, the bank down the street called to ask if you'd be interested in receiving material about their new, low rate home equity loans, you said "yes" and asked a few questions, then ended up giving a five minute application over the phone, and you are closing on Friday. The following day you were able to reach a live person on the first try – they answer the phones with real people that were eager to help. Oh, and by the way, you'll now be doing all your business with the bank across the street, they're easier to reach.

This is a real story. Which bank has the right idea? Actually they both do, but the first bank got on board too late and if they're smart, they will learn how to attract more business in the future as they hear more and more stories like this one.

How "personal" is your bank? With the advent of ATMs and internet banking, most financial institutions have done a great job at driving customers and prospects out of the bank, and out of touch. They have "saved" thousands of dollars by "investing" in automated telephone answering equipment that is un-friendly and frustrating for most people. What they have failed to realize is that the personal approach works best to attract business and keep it. People always want to be treated like they're special, and they still want to have relationships with friendly, polite financial specialists who know what they're talking about.

If you want more business to come in to your bank, and stay there, *get personal*.

Back to basics

Getting personal means getting back to basics: one-on-one, live communication with your customers. The perfect way to start reaping the benefits of the personal approach is to answer your phones live with enthusiastic, knowledgeable employees, just like the "old days" before automation. This is where the smaller, community based institutions have a big advantage over the regional giants. First impressions are still important; use only your most upbeat, trusted employees who are good listeners to man your telephones.

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Conducting short “thank you /survey” calls is another great place to start. These calls are best made during the evening by professionals in order to be effective, and will serve as a baseline, pointing to areas that need immediate attention. Thank you/ survey calls should be conducted on a regular basis, and can also include information about a product or service the customer might benefit from.

Over time, these calls will serve as the glue that holds the relationship together. As your customers develop an emotional attachment to your institution through the people they come into contact with, they will stick with you and buy more.

Keep it simple

Do you have a product or service you are trying to promote? Send repeat mailings of a short and friendly personal letter instead of a full-color ad that gets thrown away with all the other junk mail. This letter should be written by a marketing professional, and should contain a few bullet points and call to action, nothing more. Make the product very easy to understand and very easy to get. Resist the temptation to include lots of brochures and forms in your mailing; keep it to the bare minimum - don't stuff the envelope

so it looks like ravioli. Most of your customers lead very busy lives and don't have time for a lot of paperwork, and most can't get to the branch easily during the day. Offer to do all the paperwork for your customer—fill out the forms over the phone, handle as much as possible via fax, email, and regular mail. Be sure to include a phone number that is answered live by a product expert. If you can have that phone answered after hours, even better. If you can't, hire professionals to do the job for you.

If you want to maximize the personal approach and bring in more business than you can probably handle, make friendly calls periodically to introduce and sell your products to busy customers and prospects. Use the simple techniques mentioned to make it easy for your customer to do business with you. These calls are also best made during the evening hours by experienced professionals that specialize in selling bank products.

The power of the personal approach to improve the bottom line by attracting and keeping more customers cannot be over-emphasized by any financial institution.

The power of the personal approach to ultimately improve the bottom line cannot be over-emphasized....