

APPOINTMENTS FOR BANKING

by [Steve Brown](#)

A few years ago, LabCorp, which operates one of the largest clinical laboratory networks in the world, rolled out an online system for making appointments. This was a welcome alternative to customers used to dealing with long wait times. Their competitor, Quest Diagnostics, also has an online reservation system, which many customers find significantly reduces their wait time and frustration. There are appointments for so many of the services we frequently use - from doctors' to dentists, hairdressers, accountants, financial advisors, realtors, plumbers, appliance repair and more.

That's why we were so intrigued by a recent Celent blog discussing how some banks are turning to banking by appointment for added customer convenience, improved channel capacity and better preparedness.

Two banks that are currently doing this are Bank of America and Bank of Montreal (BEMO). At Bank of America, customers and non-customers in select locations can make an appointment online to meet with an associate to discuss most types of personal or small business banking needs. The online form allows users to choose from a list of options they'd like to discuss, such as opening up new accounts, existing accounts, loans or learning more about mobile banking. Small businesses, meanwhile, can opt to discuss applying for business credit or other services. If the desired topic is not listed, users are directed to choose the one that is most similar to their needs and to write further information in the comment section. For those worried about running late, the bank says it will hold an appointment for at least 10 minutes, depending on the queue.

BEMO has a similar booking initiative, which it launched last year. Customers simply fill out an online form and arrange the day, time and topics they'd like to discuss. They can also call the bank to arrange an appointment with a specific representative if they prefer. Appointments can be made for up to 180 days in advance. After customers make an appointment, the bank emails them the details about the representative they will be meeting with, which obviously will vary depending on the topic, the time and the day customers select.

According to Celent, the BEMO initiative has been a big hit. Through the first six months since launch, the bank reportedly has booked nearly 19,000 appointments, resulting in 8,355 product sales. Roughly 50% of appointments were booked through BEMO's public website. On average, 1.8 products were sold per appointment, according to Celent. The mix of products includes investments, loan and mortgage insurance, checking and savings accounts, mortgages and credit cards.

Given the upside potential, we suspect more banks will roll out similar initiatives in the coming months. For banks reticent to start from scratch, there are third-party providers with software that allows customers to instantly book in-branch or phone appointments through bank websites, email loyalty campaigns and via social media interactions. To be perfectly clear, we haven't tested this particular software yet, but the idea and traction is interesting enough to start down that road.

There is no magic number for what a customer is willing to wait, but popular thinking seems to be that any wait time is too long. Banking by appointment could be a good way to boost customer satisfaction, manage employee time and generate revenue.

BANK NEWS

M&A

Reverse M&A: The parent company of Triumph Savings Bank (\$301mm, TX) will buy the parent company of THE National Bank (\$937mm, IA) for an undisclosed sum. M&A: Brokerage firm Piper Jaffray will buy Seattle Northwest Securities Corp. for about \$21mm. M&A: A Deloitte survey of 800 consumers who had gone through a bank merger found 17% of people moved at least one account, of which, 64% did so in the first month following the merger. Also interesting, of those who switched, 21% did so in 2 or 3 months, 7% jumped in 4-6 months and 8% did so in 7 months or more.

Layoffs

FIS said it will lay off 301 employees in its WI operation, as it consolidates services with other locations. More Layoffs: Brokerage firm Raymond James will layoff 160 people related to its acquisition of Morgan Keegan.

Increased Risk

Spain's unemployment rate hit a record 27.2% and has increased for the past 7 quarters in a row. Meanwhile, youth unemployment has jumped to 57%.

New Currency

The Fed said it will begin circulating the redesigned \$100 bill in Oct. The bill has a 3-D security ribbon and is being launched more than 2Ys after originally planned due to design delays.

Social

Gartner reports 70% of the 1,000 companies it reviewed in a recent report now use social technologies.

New Biz

The Kauffman Index of Entrepreneurial Activity on business creation in the US finds startup activity has fallen to about 0.30% in 2012, about the level of 2007 and down from the peak of 0.34% reached in 2010.

Biz Activity

Kauffman reports states with the highest entrepreneurship rates in the country in order from 2011 to 2012 were MT, VT, NM, AK and MI.

Busted

The former CEO of Community Bank of Smith County (TN) has pled guilty to bank fraud and now faces up to 35Ys in prison. He reportedly made unauthorized loans to a company he controlled, stole cashier's checks and transferred money in and out of customer accounts without their knowledge.

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