

## Looking for a Wookiee - Must be 7 Feet Tall

by [Steve Brown](#)

We remember the first Star Wars film when it came out. The film was a space adventure with a full symphonic sound track recorded by the London Symphony. However, the business model in the movie industry in the late 1970s was focused on films like Saturday Night Fever with lots of dancing and a disco sound track. Star Wars was widely expected to be a dismal failure and as a result, the original release only went to 43 theaters nationwide. Now, 5 sequels and a gazillion bucks later, it is clear there actually is a market for a space adventure with symphonic music and funky characters. Work has even begun on a 7th Star Wars film and we were excited because there is a casting call for a male 7.0' to 7.3' tall with a slim build. That sounds like a Wookiee to us and while we unfortunately don't qualify, it would likely be fun.

It is interesting how the film industry builds anticipation of new movies by leaking tidbits of news. By advertising for a Wookiee-built actor, Disney/LucasFilm is giving the sci-fi crowd something to speculate about for years to come. Disney creates buzz by indirect means a full 2Ys in advance of the film.

Most community banks don't have a seven foot tall fur-covered spaceship pilot on staff, so it is more difficult to create a buzz in the community sometimes. While there are probably more ways to try and raise your bank's profile than there are Star Wars characters in all of the movies combined, there are some methods that are tried and true.

These include such options as networking aggressively, sending your teams out to community events, holding a contest, rewarding customer loyalty and becoming a go-to source for the press to name a few. Customers love it when you call on them and give them insight into all things financial. Sure, they run a small business, but that is exactly why they like to hear from the financial experts like you so get out there.

We know that getting attention in a world where customers are bombarded with information flows is difficult, but you can persevere with a focused and consistent approach. Our advice is to go and burn some shoe leather, see your best clients, ask them how things are going and where you can help and run an internal contest to see who can use up all of their business cards first (and have to reorder). You will have fun, you will get to visit with your clients and you will hear firsthand what you need to do to get more business based on what they are facing.

To develop a plan, you might even want to start with the results of a TD Bank survey of small business owners. It found their biggest challenges right now are growing their business (51%), the economic environment (45%) and cash flow (34%). Bankers are experts in all three of these key areas so you are already very well equipped to help. Help them grow their business by first doing some research and then comparing what they do vs. other similar businesses you may already bank right now. Don't share anything proprietary, but some general knowledge of what peers are doing can go a long way to help these customers help themselves (and your bank). On the economic environment, talk them through things by helping them understand their options when rates rise and when they fall. You might not have all the answers, but you can help educate at the very least. Finally, focus on

their cash flow to understand where dollars are coming and going and whether you have a product or service to assist.

Banking is difficult, but like making a space movie in the era of disco, in the end those efforts may have a longer lasting impact. By the way, if you know any 7 foot tall bankers out there let them know the casting call is coming soon in case they want to try out.

# BANK NEWS

## **M&A**

New Century Bank (550mm, NC) will buy Select Bank & Trust (265mm, NC) for \$31.1mm in stock.

## **Office Consolidations**

National Bank Holdings Corporation (\$5.2B, CO) said it will exit 4 banking centers in CA and consolidate 32 limited service retirement center locations into its existing banking network. National was formed in 2009 to buy failed banks and after this will have 97 branches operating in CO, KS, MO and TX.

## **Division Sold**

USAmeriBank (\$2.7B, FL) has sold its insurance division to Hub International for an undisclosed sum. USAmeriBank bought the insurance agency last year and will continue to refer clients with insurance needs to Hub.

## **Closure Impact**

A quick update on federal areas that could impact banks as a result of the government shutdown. Still open because funding does not come from the government: FDIC, Fed, OCC and CFPB. Shut down or partially shut down: SBA, Treasury, IRS, FHA, HUD and FINCEN. Open until the cash runs out: SEC.

## **Smaller Branches**

Bank of America joins other large banks in announcing new, smaller branches it calls "express centers," as it adjusts to changing consumer habits and seeks to reduce costs. The smaller branches are about 2,200sf vs. 4,100sf to 5,900sf for the average BofA branch. BofA said the branches will have video screens, ATMs and other features.

## **Settlement**

Wells Fargo has reached an agreement with FHLMC to resolve essentially all loan issues it sold to the agency prior to 2009 for \$869mm.

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