



## Five Steps For A Successful Universal Banker Model

technology branch strategies human resources employees

**Summary:** Universal bankers, who can handle a myriad of customer needs, are not new. According to Zippia, there are over 121K universal bankers in the US. If you don't have any universal bankers, you may want to revisit this particular role. As many transactions are handled online, traditional teller roles are evolving to meet customer needs more effectively and efficiently, boosting an institution's ROI. Here are five steps to get there.

Did you know that the origins of the Swiss Army Knife reside in neighboring Germany? In the 1880s, the Swiss Army needed a knife to open canned food and disassemble service rifles. Yet, no Swiss company had the production capacity for these knives, so German Wester & Co. produced the order for these multi-functional knives for the Swiss Army in 1891. The knives were delivered to the Swiss Army with a single blade, rotary cutting tool, can opener, and screwdriver. Yet, Karl Elsener of Switzerland soon took over the business and the Swiss Army Knife was officially born.

For many community financial institutions (CFIs), the role of the teller is evolving into a similarly multi-functional resource — a universal banker who can handle a myriad of customer needs. While this may make good business and customer service sense, how do you make sure that your investments in training, higher pay, and possible technologies to augment the universal banker model will pay off?

Universal bankers, or any other name for NextGen tellers, have grown in popularity as fewer customers frequent branches for routine transactions, opting instead for digital channels or ATMs. Even before the pandemic, the BLS was projecting 15% fewer tellers in 2029 than in 2019. For those remaining in branches, many now have much broader roles, including the ability to open and close accounts, issue credit cards, process certain loans, manage IRAs, and troubleshoot customer issues.

The evolution of tellers has further accelerated during the "Great Resignation," as many employees are looking for higher-paying, more purposeful careers, and financial institutions are overhauling branch positions in an effort to keep them. *"When an employee can perform several functions, you can pay them more, provide better options for growth, and, in most cases, you will have a more engaged and fulfilled employee,"* says a Midwest CFI executive.

The universal banker model can generate a positive return on investment, when implemented appropriately. Here are **five steps for a successful universal banker model**.

1. **Select the right branches.** Employing a universal banker model across an entire branch is best suited for branches that have steady traffic for basic transactions. Universal bankers can work with customers at pods or desks, eliminating teller counters. High-volume branches with peak hours should still utilize traditional tellers at counters to minimize customer wait times, though some universal bankers can be employed to accommodate customers with other needs. To ensure customer needs are met as promptly as possible, concierge bankers stationed at the entrance can greet customers and direct them accordingly.

2. **Test out models.** Once you have selected the appropriate branches for the universal banker model, you might want to conduct pilots to make tweaks as necessary. You may even want to create different levels of universal bankers, depending on the typical customer needs within each branch.
3. **Add branch technologies.** To make universal bankers more productive, consider giving them tablets and also installing cash recyclers, interactive teller machines, and video kiosks for customers to speak with offsite specialists if needed. This way, they can focus on the activities that require more time and assistance, while still managing a high workflow.
4. **Prepare employees.** Provide ongoing training, coaching, and mentoring – not just on additional tasks, but also how to discern customer needs, dealing with difficult conversations, and how to proactively suggest appropriate products and services. You will likely need to incentivize them with higher pay. With more cross-sell opportunities, the extra incentives should be recouped easily. When recruiting new staff, consider those with strong retail or customer service backgrounds to be the most effective universal bankers.
5. **Set the culture.** Increase employee engagement not only with higher pay, but also with the knowledge that the role of a universal banker can be more purposeful. This could attract those recruits and employees that are searching for more meaning in their careers. Learning more about other aspects of banking through the role of a universal banker will also entice many looking for career growth and could speak to younger recruits with a desire for development opportunities.

Universal bankers are not necessarily new. However, these roles are becoming more useful in the performance and efficiencies of the branch, while also attracting people looking for more meaningful jobs. Setting up a universal banker model properly could keep your institution from unnecessarily losing employees and give you an ROI that makes it all worthwhile.

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## ECONOMY & RATES

Rates As Of: 01/28/2022 06:46AM (GMT-0700)

Treasury	Yields	MTD Chg	YTD Chg
3M	0.20	0.14	0.14
6M	0.43	0.24	0.24
1Y	0.75	0.37	0.37
2Y	1.18	0.44	0.44
5Y	1.65	0.39	0.39
10Y	1.83	0.31	0.31
30Y	2.13	0.22	0.22
FF Market	FF Disc	IORR	
0.08	0.25	0.15	
SOFR	Prime	ORER	
0.04	3.25	0.07	

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