

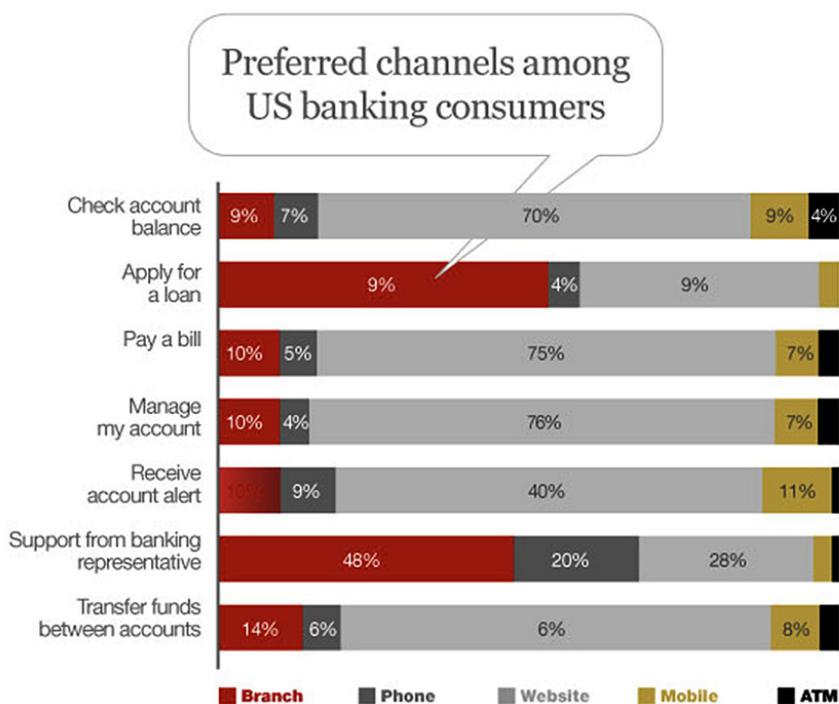
Understanding how customers really want help

By guest blogger, JP Nicols



On the same day I published a post on the [Clientific](#) blog about the sometimes disappointing allure of technology ([Technology is Not a Silver Bullet](#)), the always insightful [Discerning Technologist Brad Leimer](#) shared a post from [The Financial Brand](#) on LinkedIn ([Big Study Examines Retail Channel Preferences](#)).

The study, sponsored by Cisco, showed strong consumer preferences for non-branch channels such as web, mobile, phone and ATM for many types of interactions. However, branches were the preferred channel for such things as “Apply for a loan” and “Support from banking representative”. (See below)



What explains the stark differences? First of all, as [Ron Shevlin of Snarketing 2.0](#) says, just because a person visits a branch for help or to complete a transaction doesn’t necessarily mean they prefer to do it that way. It may mean the bank’s website or phone representative was inadequate to meet the customer’s needs.

Secondly, customers really don’t want your help. Until they do.

Results, Not Process

Much has been written about the “customer experience”—it encompasses everything a customer comes in contact with during their lifetime interaction with your brand, direct and indirect, obvious and subtle, conscious and unconscious. Successful firms correctly attempt to measure the expressed and latent needs of customers. The best keep in mind the words of the great ad man David Ogilvy, who has been quoted as saying multiple versions of “People don’t want quarter-inch drill bits, they want quarter-inch holes.”



I have long found inspiration in the work of now-retired Harvard Business School professor David H. Maister, and I have been using some variation of his 2x2 matrix (shown here) for at least a decade.

Maister uses a healthcare analogy to describe the key operational and profitability metrics of different departments, and I have found this matrix useful to help financial firms think through their various activities and how they provide value to their customers.



Pharmacy: Low Touch/Standardized Process

As a comparison using the matrix above, for a financial services company, the following *basic services* are things customers need to get done quickly and accurately on a regular basis, perhaps with little preference as to how:

- Account opening
- Transactions
- Balance reporting
- Transfers
- Basic service issues

Brain Surgery: Low Touch/Specialized Process

Like healthcare, in financial services, some activities require specialized services wherein the real value comes from applying the expertise, not necessarily from the advisor/client relationship:

- Custom credit
- Asset allocation
- Trust administration
- Complex assets
- Estate planning

Nursing: High Touch/Standardized Process

For *more complex needs on basic services*, customers may need more hand-holding. Good customer service can go a long way to increasing overall satisfaction:

- Standard credit
- Product advice
- Estate settlement
- Discretionary Trust
- Complex service issues

Psychotherapy: High Touch/Specialized Process

For financial institutions (especially wealth management firms), highly complex, specialized services are the top of the value chain. Diagnosis is key, and what happens here drives most loyalty/at-risk measures:

- Goal setting
- Financial planning
- Complex estates
- Succession matters
- Nonfinancial issues
- Moral support



Bringing it all together

Customers may be willing to use your new mobile app to make transfers, your website to download transactions, and your call center to change their address. These things may improve your operating margins-- as long as they work.

The face-to-face interactions that do the most to improve the customer experience are not the ones that solve the issues that could have been (and should have been) solved via other channels. The interactions that matter most are those where customers are really receiving time and attention from someone who understands their situation and their goals and is helping them get to where they want to be.

Customers don't want your help. Until they do.

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