

Virtual customer service: It's not a game!

Having a son in college, it is amazing what I have observed regarding the game box consoles, video games, and the experience they deliver.

Games, such as Call of Duty ‐ Modern Warfare 2 (published by Activision), takes complete advantage of the functionality that is available through game consoles such as the Sony Play Station 3, which not only offers the opportunity for multiple people to play the game, in one site, but also the opportunity to use the internet to link up to 18 players from anywhere in the world. You can set up friend lists and arrange to get together. You can play in teams or as individuals. Instead of strategic planning retreats, financial institution executives and managers would be well served spending the time and learning how to play this game!

It get's better

Some consoles also have wireless voice options allowing participants the ability to communicate with the group over the internet while playing. Of course, it is a different type of talk, but communication none the less and it can really enhance the experience. Bandwidth can be an issue, but if all of the participants are using at least DSL or cable modems, the experience should be just fine. The video gaming technology is nothing short of astounding. The question is: how will video gaming affect or impact banking or banking services?

For starters, the gaming experience will become the de facto emulation expectation when it comes to online interaction with any website, store or financial institution. Based on my recent trip to the Consumer Electronics Show in Vegas, the future is closer than you think.

It is just a matter of time that our virtual play and network space will be expanded to include a virtual presence between us and our financial institution. As customers, we will be assigned to a virtual customer service group or team, similar to our friend lists. Our use profiles and preferences will be preloaded and linked to our virtual identity. Instead of contacting a call center or voice response unit (that is so 2001), we will click on a web service short-cut, where an avatar, group banner, or picture of your customer service team will be displayed (on your smart phone, laptop or desk top). They will know us and we will know them. You may even receive, as a gift for enrolling, a holographic display app to enrich your virtual experience. It's better than real person! Even if you don't agree with that, your customers may.

Smart phones today can be equipped with projectors, so logic would suggest that a holographic projector will be next. And totally cool! Wherever you are, you'll receive the same image and experience when you connect with your financial institution. The experience will follow you, a personal virtual bank that is integrated with you. This is scary to some, but exciting to others.

Regardless of how people connect with their financial institution, a constant and consistent service presence will be there. That means at the drive-thru lane, walk up service area (unmanned, of course) or ATM. The interaction at each connection point will be the same.

Question: will tellers of the future morph into a virtual talking head at holographic avatar generating service terminals… the new Avatar Teller Machine (ATM)?

The Wombat!

About the Author

Dan Fisher is president and CEO of The Copper River Group, a consulting firm headquartered in Fargo, N. D., that focuses on technology and payment systems research and consulting for community financial institutions. For nearly 30 years, Fisher has worked in the financial industry using technology to improve the bottom line. He was CIO of Community First Bankshares (now part of BancWest), has served as a director of the Federal Reserve Board of Minneapolis, the chairman of the American Bankers Association Payment Systems Committee, and was a member of the Independent Community Bankers of America Payments Committee. Fisher has written numerous articles on banking technology and the payments system. He has authored or co-authored six books and recently published a book titled, "Capturing Your Customer! The New Technology of Remote Deposit." You can contact Fisher at dan@copperwombat.com.

P.S. To understand Dan's nickname, check out "About the Wombat" on his website, www.copperwombat.com