
\$1 MILLION VENTURE: INTERACTIVITY PLUS TRUST MARK ARIZONA BANK'S REVAMPED WEB EFFORTS

National Bank of Arizona makes \$1 million commitment to web

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By Steve Cocheo, executive editor. Readers: Does your bank have a fresh angle on the internet or social media? Tell us about it.

The scene: A friendly neighborhood bar. The players: A guy in good shape with a drink and a good-looking woman who consents to let him buy one for her. The drink is poured and she takes a sip. The guy hands his debit card to the bartender, and … DENIED.

He doesn't have anything else to pay with.

He looks at her. She looks at him. She drifts away.

The bartender hands him a towel. Someone's going to be washing dishes.

The message comes on screen: “Avoid life's awkward moments. Check out your overdraft options from National Bank of Arizona.”

Not your typical bank commercial, but then, this is not your typical bank internet effort, either.

When was the last time you saw a bank commercial start in a bar? National Bank of Arizona is making more than one

point in this online spot, described in the article. Click to watch the spot.

This is one of a series of online videos that \$4.5 billion-assets National Bank of Arizona has been "airing" on its revamped website. Another features a mother undergoing similar embarrassment after her young son has not only started the chocolate cone that she discovers she can't pay for, but has also dropped most of it on the ice cream parlor's floor. The spot closes with her doing the mopping up.

National Bank has been launching a good many slick efforts on its website and in social media as part of a \$1 million commitment to improving customers' experience, both online and in-branch. At the same time as the Zions Bancorp subsidiary has gone for very up-to-date look, feel, and functionality, it has also stressed customer security and a disciplined approach to social media compliance.

Commitment to interactivity

Before unveiling its revamped website earlier this year, National Bank had little more than an online brochure, according to Jathan Segur, senior vice-president of marketing. Management decided that the bank's online channel had to become leading edge, reflecting a growing customer preference for being able to do business with their bank on all fronts.

Online banking and web-based information and contact "is an "and," not an "or,"" says Segur.

As part of the bank's \$1 million push, it is gradually adding wifi service to all 72 branches and in 15 selected locations "technology lounges" will feature video walls with market and other information and other interfaces. Some branches will provide iPads for customer use. This reflects the fact that many among the bank's traditional base, business customers, spend a fair amount of time in physical branches, but don't want to fall out of touch with the internet.

While urban dwellers casually regard every coffee house as a hot spot, Segur points out that in the bank's many rural markets, free wifi is not so ubiquitous and so the bank's rollout will provide a needed convenience.

A robust web and social media effort is an "and" for today's customers, not an "or," according to Jathan Segur, National Bank of Arizona

Feet in both worlds

The bank sees a need to blend both real space and cyberspace. "We've married the interactive group here with our marketing and public relations operations," says Segur. "And we've shifted a large portion of our advertising budget to interactive forms."

The bank has fledgling efforts on all major social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, and LinkedIn. Segur says the bank sees its revamped website as a hub, with the social media avenues as spokes. Each platform tends to have its own demographics, he points out, but all lead to the website.

"There are a lot of branches to a strong, interactive road map," says Segur.

Indeed, this was part of the thinking behind the revamp.

"I've seen some players get on Facebook, for instance, and yet they don't really link back to anything meaningful," he explains. "It looks like 1995 on their website and yet it's 2011 in their social media. You have to ask, 'What are we driving people to?'"

While social media is about "conversation," as the pundits say, Segur believes a bank has to decide what it is trying to say. National Bank avoids outright product promotion,

"Clients today are looking for the bank to help them by offering knowledge, and pushing them towards sources of knowledge," says Segur. "You may be giving them tools, but you have to give reasons to use the tools."

Among the places a customer can follow the bank's social media outreach is on a subpage called "Social Buzz," which currently features links to the bank's presence on three major platforms, plus a Facebook feed box, and instant access to selected videos.

You have to think about what your web goal is or look foolish "It looks like 1995 on their website and yet it's 2011 in their social media." — Jathan Segur, National Bank of Arizona

Even where the bank still uses traditional media, an effort is made to provide a gateway for customers to interactive media. For instance, says Segur, print advertising, as appropriate, includes QR codes—those unusual-looking square graphic codes that can be scanned by smart phones for linking to internet site, downloading files, and more.

“We can see real time impacts from advertising right at hand,” said Segur.

Metrics are very important to Segur throughout the bank’s online approach. “Everything is measurable,” he explains. The bank wants to know where internet visitors came from and where they go once they come into the bank’s online sphere.

Future tools for customers

Segur says that, in keeping with the bank’s view that there needs to be a blending of the online and physical aspects of its customer contact, it is looking at developing enhanced interactivity through its website.

One such tool is a scheduling function. Rather than having customers simply show up a branch, Segur suggests it would make more sense for them to have made advance appointments with the officer they need to see, based on their needs. The bank is looking at scheduling software that would assist customers to set up appointments over the web with branch managers or other appropriate bank representatives. At this point, the software would create and confirm live appointments. Down the road, other possibilities might arise.

Segur also wants to take a page out of the online merchandise seller’s playbook. Most such sites, from Amazon.com on down, gather customer purchases into “shopping carts” for overall review and decision. By contrast, typical bank sites treat each product need as a separate deal. Segur wants to see the bank use more of a “cart” approach.

Related to this is his wish to put some type of “recommendation wizard” on the website, to help guide customers towards the right products to fit their needs. The bank recently simplified its product lineup, he noted, which would fit well with the wizard approach.

“Today, you’re continually revising your website,” says Segur. “You’re never done.” Your site is a living, breathing entity.

One effort to incent customers to bridge the physical-internet gap will be contests, with prizes funded from the \$1 million war chest. The bank is getting ready for a contest that will invite business customers to do their own web-ready videos explaining why their business is Arizona’s “next great business.”

Social media compliance in a “sandbox”

Often, when the subject of social media arises, bankers immediately fret about compliance. The issue of controlling employee and official social media communications to avoid triggering violations remains top of mind.

National Bank appears to have a good answer to this, which Segur refers to informally as a “sandbox.”

Nothing goes out on the official bank social media channels without Compliance okaying the effort, says Segur. This is administered through a special widget that the bank developed to run under Salesforce, a customer relationship management platform that Segur grew familiar with in 15 years of managing sales teams at other firms.

The widget is a project management tool. When the marketing team has a tweet, Facebook posting, or otherwise, the proposed item goes to a shared area. Compliance reviews it and only after a mutually agreeable form is found does the marketing team put it into a scheduling tool that tees it up for planned release through social media platforms.

This attention to compliance detail is of a piece with other aspects of the bank's online effort. The website, for instance, is secured by Entrust, the online verification service.

In addition, through the website the bank provides, free of charge, Trusteer Rapport software, which is intended to protect customers from identity theft when they use any website that contains personal or private information.

The other side of social media

Many bankers fret about employees going hog wild with social media and getting the bank into trouble in the process. National Bank addresses this in two ways.

Subject to bank social media policy, employees are allowed to use social media, says Segur. However, they are explicitly instructed to distance their own social media communications from their bank jobs. They are instructed to state that their communications in no way reflect on the bank. The bank provides training in social media to make clear what is appropriate.

Further, the bank is very strict about who speaks for the bank in social media.

Only five bank employees speak in social media for National Bank. One is Segur, and there are four more. And one of those is a member of the bank's executive committee.

Employee impact

Like other banks in the Southwest, National Bank has had issues in the downturn and has seen its share of expense control and more in the last two years. Making a big splash about \$1 million in spending on these efforts, notably the website, might seem like a morale buster.

Far from it, says Segur.

"It's been a morale boost," says the marketer. "Our employees are excited by the new website." In fact, he says many have been asking him for collateral materials so they can explain what the new effort is providing to customers.

Readers: Does your bank have a fresh angle on the internet, social media, and related efforts? Tell us about it. Send an email to Steve Cocheo, executive editor.