SALES ADVICE FROM CONVENTION CIRCUIT

Customers are starving for guidance. Try thinking like a dentist
• • • It’s experience they’re looking for
“Sales culture” equals “customer experience” to Daniela O’Leary-Gill, and the banker urges fellow bankers to dramatically shift their mindset about what that experience is.

Speaking at this fall’s Retail Delivery Conference, O’Leary-Gill, SVP, small business and personal banking for BMO Harris Bank, O’Leary-Gill said customer loyalty is low and banks for the most part are selling commodities—CDs, investments, deposit products, etc.

“It’s not about getting better at selling something, she said, “but about being sure we have what our customers want.” She suggested asking, “What could our customers be getting from us that they aren’t already asking for?” One answer could be advice.

Citing the results of a BMO Harris survey of its own and other banks’ customers, she said three out of four customers say it’s important to get guidance from their bank, but that three out of five say they aren’t getting that help today. “The opportunity is there, but they’re coming up empty,” she said. Banks have the information to help, she added, but it’s not presented well. A 2010 Forrester survey of customer experiences online found banks close to the bottom of the list compared with retailers and hotels, she noted.

Customers are looking for transparency, clarity, and guidance in a world of information overload—particularly with financial matters, which are often complicated.

O’Leary-Gill used Netflix as a powerful example of how the customer experience game has changed:

“When customers are not happy, the judgment is immediate,” she said. So quick was the backlash to the company’s announcement that it would phase out its traditional mail-based service, that Netflix’ CEO apologized to customers within 24 hours.

O’Leary-Gill made two suggestions to help banks transform from a sales to experience mindset:

• Focus on training and development. This is simple to say, she observed, but difficult to execute. Nevertheless it’s vital to “get your strategy into the hearts and minds of your employees.”

• Use social media. “You can enhance loyalty by paying closer attention to what people are saying about you.” To emphasize the importance of this medium, she pointed out that Facebook tops Google in web traffic.

She closed by quoting the late Steve Jobs who told associates during a strategy session: “Don’t move product, enrich lives.”
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Try the dentist sales approach
What happens after you’ve had your teeth cleaned (or something less pleasant)? You pay up and the receptionist schedules your next appointment. That’s what branch managers or regional managers should also do, suggested Sam Guerrieri, SVP, M&T Bank, Rochester, N.Y. “Instead of calling to get an appointment,” said Guerrieri, “you call to confirm an appointment, and you’re booked months ahead.” The banker said that the regional bank requires its branch managers to make small business sales calls 50% of their time. This requires a strong skill set on the platform, he added.

A fellow panelist, Steven SaLoutos, EVP at U.S. Bank, said their requirement is for branch managers to spend 40% of their time out working with small business customers and prospecting. Each manager should maintain 50-100 active accounts, he added.

“All good things start with small business,” said SaLoutos.

Umpqua Bank, based in Portland, Ore., takes a different approach in terms of branch sales. Colin Eccles, EVP and chief information officer, said that the West Coast bank doesn’t view the retail business in terms of transactions versus sales. It’s all considered part of serving the customer. The bank uses a universal representatives instead of tellers and platform officers.

“Associates are generalists and are empowered to work with customers,” said Eccles, who spoke along with the others as part of a panel discussion at the Retail Delivery Conference. This requires more time spent in training, said Eccles, and the infrastructure has to support it. “We feel the expense is more than justified,” said Eccles. He added that Umpqua is piloting an interactive video service called Umpqua Live Advice. This links customers

with experts in a virtual environment.