CUNA OpS&S Newsletter - January, 2005

Many Happy Returns! Better Lobby Management Keeps Members Coming Back For More

How do branch visitors feel about waiting in your lobby? Does the experience encourage them to return to buy more products and services, or does the lobby "wait" leave the impression that your credit union is less efficient or professional than they deserve?

The lobby is the beginning of many customer service experiences. Unless a member is coming in for teller or ATM services, they will likely have to wait in the lobby for a few minutes before being served. Low rates alone are no guarantee that the member will be satisfied with the branch experience, or be willing to come back for more. To take and keep market-share from larger financial institutions, credit unions must consistently provide a good member experience - beginning with the first impression created in the lobby.

While examining one credit unions deposit account process, we discovered that the visitors lobby experience was an untapped area for service improvement opportunities.

Better Lobby - A Solution For SAFE Credit Union

When SAFE, a community credit union in North Highlands, engaged us to re-engineer their deposit account process, CEO Henry Wirz and SAFE's Board made a strategic decision to invest in superior work processes, cost-effective technology, and staff training setting a goal to make their lobbies among the best managed in the industry.

When we surveyed the market for existing solutions, we found several mature, industrial-strength lobby solutions available, but they seemed better suited to very high-volume, impersonal situations like motor vehicle offices rather than credit union lobbies. The low-end, share-ware applications had extremely low acquisition costs, but met few of the credit union's other needs.

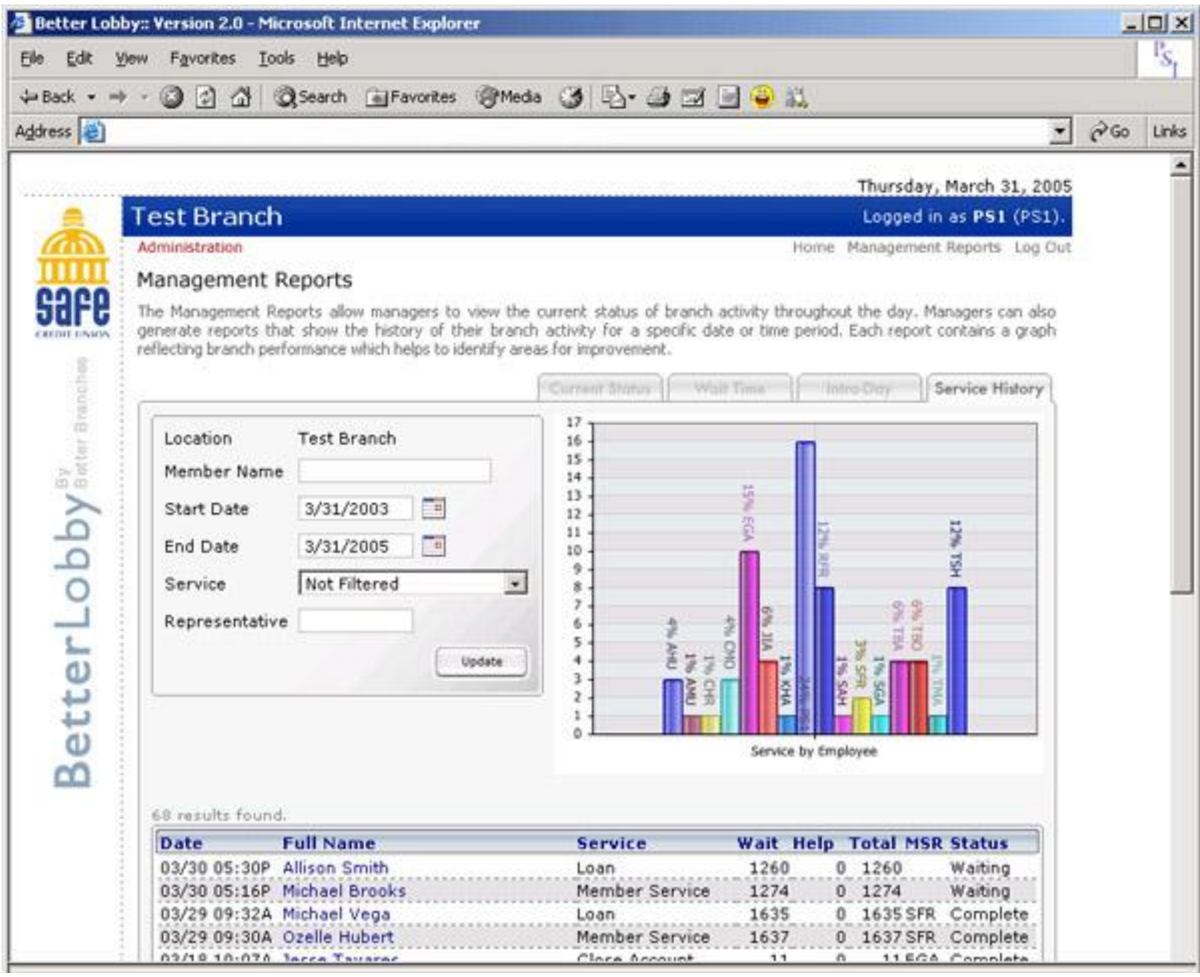
Since none of the available solutions were a good fit, SAFE made the decision to develop a new lobby management application and make it available to all credit unions. As a result, a solution called Better Lobby is now available through a SAFE-sponsored CUSO.

Better Lobby allows any staff member to place a visitor into the lobby queue from any computer in the branch. The queue is visible to all branch service staff as well as credit union management, whether on-site or remote. Only the visitor's name and visit purpose is needed to start the process. MSRs select the member they will serve from the queue and, when the service is complete, close off the service event. Basic follow-up reminders are provided if a call back is needed. All branch MSRs are notified of new additions to the queue and of any visitor that waits longer than the established standard.

Better Reporting Provides A Real-Time Peek Into Branch Activity

In addition to bringing order and visibility to the branch lobby, Better Lobby provides remarkable reporting on service events that were previously very hard to measure. Better Lobby's "Service History" report illustrates this point well. The report shows the number of members served by each SAFE MSR at one of the credit union's 10 branches during the period of July 8-9. The real-time report was created part way through July 9th, so some visitors are shown as either still "waiting" or "being helped".

Employees are identified by their initials next to each bar in the graph. At the bottom is a list of members who were served during the reporting period, together with their "wait time," "help time," "status," and the "MSR" who served them. More information is available by scrolling through the report. Other reporting needs are met by three additional real-time reports that function in a similar way.



Lobby Service History Report. Member information is fictitious.

Criteria for Choosing a Lobby Management Solution When it comes to choosing a lobby management solution, the size of the branch is a determining factor. Very small branches do not need lobby management technology to provide good service. Their size alone means that visitor volume is typically low. As a result, members receive a level of personalized service that contributes to a perception of high-service quality.

But branches with six or more total staff are likely candidates for lobby management improvements. The ideal Lobby Management Solution should meet the following criteria:

- Require very little effort to learn and use.
- Encourage best work practice and enable great customer service.
- Provide immediate benefits to CU staff at all levels of the organization.
- Provide real time reporting – what is happening in the branch right now!
- Help establish and monitor employee performance standards.

- Actively discourage bad practices (like serving customers out of order due to sale incentives or because the service request is "easier" to handle).
- Be affordable and easy to setup and administer.
- Integrate with the host and other systems – and use current technology.
- Produce an attractive return on investment (ROI) – be paid back in months, not years.

Assessing Your Credit Union's Lobby Experience To determine whether or not your credit union needs to implement a lobby management solution, begin with an honest, thorough analysis of your current lobby experience.

Why do members (or potential members) visit the branch? How many new accounts were opened yesterday in your branches? What staff representatives opened them? How long did it take? Of course, some of this information is available from existing systems, but it is a rare credit union that can apply time measurements to "customers served" and "products sold".

How much time are my platform staff spending with members? What portion of their day do they actually spend providing face-to-face service? Which MSR handles the most traffic? When do the peaks and valleys occur?

How long do members really wait in your branch lobbies? You can better manage the customer experience when you know exactly how much time members spend in the lobby. Don't be satisfied with averages. The average may seem reasonable to you, but members' needs vary depending on their circumstances. The same member, who happily waits 20 minutes on their day off work, may be very dissatisfied with an unexpected wait of 20 minutes during their lunch break.

Of course, the average time may not represent the actual wait times that are experienced by members at different times of the day and in different branch locations. Your average wait time for the month may be 4 minutes, but what is the longest wait time - and what percentage of your members exceed a wait of 10, 15 or 30 minutes? Achieving short wait times requires either active lobby visitor management or over-staffing; a nd we all know that over-staffing is not a sustainable practice.

If long waits are unavoidable, make sure you learn from the situation and take action to improve. Long waits contribute to a bad perception of your CU's professionalism, reliability, and competency in the mind of the member. This perception will influence where they buy their next financial product or service.

The conclusion: branch lobby management is an untapped opportunity to improve service quality, employee performance, and sales. More information about Better Lobby is available at www.BetterBranches.com, by emailing sales@BetterBranches.com, or by contacting Rick Poulton at 866-444-8344.