



Perfecting the Waiting Experience in your Credit Union Lobby

Imagine it's noon and you've entered your favorite restaurant for lunch. It's a busy day, and you're left waiting in the lobby for someone to greet you and begin your service. As the minutes pass, do you notice a change in your mood or behavior? Do you watch anxiously to see if others are served before you? Does the delay in service create a concern about running late? Do you worry that you've been forgotten? Most importantly, does the waiting experience negatively alter your opinion so much that you might not visit again in the future?

Clearly, there's a big difference between the service at a restaurant and the service at a credit union. There is one common element to both experiences, however, and it has nothing to do with whether you're serving sandwiches or savings accounts. It's the psychology of waiting. Regardless of the service venue, people waiting for service are likely to suffer the same "waiting anxieties" that can permanently alter one's opinion of and loyalty to a business.

A study by management consultant David Maister¹ tells us there's a common psychology to waiting. According to his study called "The Psychology of Waiting Lines," waiting customers frequently experience a fear of being forgotten. Uncertain waits seem longer than known, finite waits, and unexplained waits seem longer than explained waits. Anxiety is higher for people waiting for service than it is for those who believe the service has begun. The longer the clock ticks, the greater the customers' anxiety grows. When the customer is ultimately served, they are likely to have developed a level of irritation that can negatively impact the entire consumer relationship.

What can credit unions learn by studying the psychology of waiting? According to Rick Poulton, President of Better Branches LLC, the key is recognizing the psychological impact of immediately starting the service process the moment the member comes through the door.

"If you enter a restaurant and the hostess quickly brings you a menu and water, you feel acknowledged and assured that your service has started—even if you must continue waiting for the person who will ultimately serve you," says Poulton. "Credit unions can give lobby visitors a similar reassurance and lessen their waiting anxieties. By immediately acknowledging the member's presence and recording their purpose for visit, credit unions confirm to the member that service is underway—even when an additional wait is required.

One of the best ways to manage the member service visit is to use an automated lobby tracking system. According to Poulton, "a good lobby management tool can help you manage the member's wait expectations and explain longer than expected waits. Furthermore, lobby management reports can help you plan for and manage future traffic flow so that long wait times are lessened or eliminated."

Poulton states that a lobby management solution should enable credit unions to:

- Record the member name and purpose for visit
- Measure and monitor the time the member waits
- Assist with skills-based service assignments
- Provide real-time reporting capabilities

If there isn't a live service representative available to greet members as they walk in the door, lobby management tools can offer self sign-in kiosks that alleviate lobby-waiting anxiety.

"By signing in at the kiosk, the member feels their presence is acknowledged - before they even speak to a live person," says Poulton. It's a way to lessen stress by giving the member some control over the service process."

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