

An ATM with a personal touch

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Consumers still demand human interaction in the financial space. It's the main reason bank branches have not disappeared.

While convenience is key, says Gene Pranger, CEO at uGenius Personal Transaction Technologies, so is assurance. UGenius has developed an assisted self-service solution called the Personal Teller System — a system that incorporates self-service financial transactions such as check and cash deposits with video-teller assistance.

UGenius calls it video banking, and Pranger says it is revolutionizing financial services. Simply put, the Personal Teller System incorporates ATM/self-service functionality with live assistance from a videoed-in teller. (See video: BAI RD: uGenius demos its video banking system)

How it works

The PTS is a video banking solution that leverages video and remote transaction processing, connecting users and tellers via an environment that allows two-way interaction.

The PTS videos in bank tellers from a centralized call center that the bank or credit union sets up and staffs. If a teller is not available when the user logs on for service, the PTS displays a wait message on the touchscreen. Pranger says wait-times are rare; if and when they do occur, the average wait-time for a teller is 24 seconds.

Users access tellers via a high-speed two-way audio and video connection from the PTS, which allows users to conduct 95 percent of the transactions typically conducted at a teller window — deposits; check cashing; cash, coin and check dispensing; payments and transfers; bank account and loan initiation; and balance inquiries, to name a few.

The uGenius system is activated when a user presses the "Start" button located on the PTS touchscreen. After activation, a pre-defined call is routed through the uGenius server, which resides behind a bank's or credit union's firewall and establishes an audio and video connection between user and a teller.

The teller and user have two-way communication, with the teller using a teller application to control the PTS and assist the user with his or her transaction.

The uGenius Teller Enterprise application is integrated with a financial institution's core processing platform and manages all transaction processing between the PTS and the core platform. The TellerNow! application facilitates the same system functionality, though it is a stand-alone application that is not integrated with an FI's core processing platform. After the customer and teller complete the transaction, a receipt is printed and the information associated with the transaction is captured on the uGenius server. The transaction information may be retrieved via the uGenius Network Manager.

'Best of both worlds'

The PTS offers consumers the best of both worlds, Pranger says.

"I think that convenience is the key," he said. "So now a financial institution can be open for as long as they want, and it gives consumers ultimate flexibility to conduct transactions on their terms. Consumers like the machines because they connect them to a live person."

To date, uGenius has signed PTS deployment deals with five U.S. FIs. The company expects that FI number to triple by the end of 2010.

Coastal Federal Credit Union, based in North Carolina, was the first to sign up to deploy. It now has 40 terminals deployed in 12 branches covering the Raleigh/Durham region.

Kingston, N.Y.-based Mid Hudson Valley Credit Union is another uGenius client, with 14 PTS terminals scattered among its branches.

Bob Michaud, senior vice president and chief marketing director of Mid Hudson, says the deployment, initiated two years ago, has been well received by members.

"People tell us they love using it. Often companies sacrifice the personal touch for technology; but with this, we are able to offer the best of both," Michaud said. "It's a portal to personal customer service." But is that personal touch really necessary? Given consumers' global acceptance of self-service technology, coupled with the advent of advanced ATM functions such as automated deposits, is contact with a live teller necessary?

Michaud says "Yes."

"We typically set up the Personal Teller in an ATM vestibule, so we use it primarily to offer after-hours banking," he said. "The ATMs we have in these vestibules do not offer extra functionality; they only dispense cash. We use the Personal Teller for the advanced functions."

Just more than a year ago, Mid Hudson opened a teller-less branch in an area that caters to, as Michaud defines it, an "older and more affluent" member base.

"You would think of this market as being 'high touch,' but we have the highest cross selling and highest customer service scores in that market, where we only use the PTS," Michaud said. "We feel that we have proven that using these machines is not a barrier to good customer service, since this particular branch has the highest transaction volume."

Had the branch been deployed with advanced-function ATMs, such as those with automated-deposit features, Michaud does not believe the transaction volumes would have been the same.

"As soon as the customers see how easy the machines are to use and they see the video link and the teller that they can talk with, they are convinced. It always ends up with a 'Wow!' Michaud said.