



After that online surge, Bank of Scotland's new branch sales supremo **Brian Brodie** sees branches fighting back by presenting themselves more like retail stores, writes **Robin Mathison**

COUNTER ATTACK

THE WORST LOCATION for a retail store – according to retail psychology – is next to a bank. Why? Because it takes 25 feet to slow down from a quick walk, and consumers typically pick up speed when walking past a bank as there is invariably nothing to look at in the window to divert them.

Brian Brodie, Bank of Scotland's new Sales Director, Branches, is well aware of this fact and is relishing the task of applying best retail practice to BoS's branches – 43 of which he has visited to date since taking up this newly created position four months ago. The thought of customers sprinting past their local branch is one that clearly pains him.

While recognising that consumers are unlikely to view banks in the same way as other High Street outlets, Brodie wants the whole branch experience to be as welcoming as possible.

"The headlines over the last few years during the emergence of online banking are being proved wrong – branches are not dead," he asserts. "In fact, they are alive and kicking – most of our customers still use their branch regularly. What we have to do is recognise that banking is now multi-channel, with branches now just one way in which customers can communicate with, and purchase from, their bank.

"We need to reinvent the branch network and refresh the whole branch experience for customers to reflect these changes."

The Bank of Scotland has already been revamping many of its branches over the last few years in terms of layout and ambience. What Brodie, with a background in customer services as well as sales, is tasked with now is converting this new approach and philosophy into product sales. In short, revamping the bank branch as a retail outlet is at the forefront of his strategy.

"We shouldn't be afraid of talking about the need to generate product sales in branches. Sales is not a dirty word – we have a responsibility to shareholders as well as customers," he says. "This means we need to think more like retailers than bankers, and ensure that our service and sales process benefits both customers and the Bank. Delivering excellent service and the right financial product for each customer's circumstances will ensure we become their first choice provider."

The unique selling point of branches as a channel, when compared with telephone and online banking, is the face-to-face communication it allows. "Non-verbal communication is still important," says Brodie. "Customers like to be able to look

someone in the eye when conducting important financial transactions – it's about trust.

"The evidence I've seen suggests that many people are researching products online or on the telephone and going to the branch to put pen to paper. Making branches more welcoming by addressing what is most important to customers will ensure this continues. But, we can never be complacent.

"The challenge now, for branches and branch staff, is to be able to recognise and maximise the potential sales

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opportunities which present themselves. It's about advice-based service and encouraging customers to take advantage of financial check-ups at their branch and regularly review their needs – much in the same way as they would put their car through its MOT. The owner may think there is one particular part needing attention, but on investigation, even more needs can become apparent."

In the retail environment Brodie recognises that it is the way in which staff serve customers which matters, and that they take care of all of their requirements. He wants all branch staff to feel valued as face-to-face specialists, equipped with the right sales knowledge to recognise and act on each customer's needs.

"Sales have to be needs-driven," explains Brodie. "We have to sell the right product to the right person in the right way. If we don't you can guarantee they'll walk down the road and get it from somewhere else."

This involves providing staff training in sales techniques, on-the-job coaching from branch managers and looking at the branch sales management and processes. The evidence so far, according to Brodie, is that it is working and many staff are now proving expert at dealing with customers' financial needs.

Returning to the science of understanding consumer behaviour, another piece of retail psychology quoted by Brodie is that, on entering a store, shoppers invariably head towards the right.

That's quite apt, because the right direction is what he has in mind for BoS's branch sales as well.

