



Banking from Anywhere

Consumer Perspectives on Mobile,
Remote, and In-Person Banking





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Executive Summary

Consumers are continuing to adopt mobile and remote banking services as convenient alternatives to visiting bank branches. As such, banks must be able to deliver fast, convenient, and effective digital experiences through touchpoints like apps and websites.

However, many consumers still prefer the in-branch experience for certain types of transactions and interactions with their financial institutions. Many banks and credit unions are also adopting new digital capabilities within branches themselves, including virtual consultations and virtual branch concepts.

This report is based on a survey of consumer banking customers regarding their experiences with financial institutions' remote and in-person banking programs. It includes insights into how to improve the customer experience and what capabilities consumers expect next from their banks.

About the Respondents

The WBR Insights research team surveyed 575 consumers across the U.S. to generate the results featured in this report.

The consumers who responded to the study are 18 to more than 60 years old. Most of the respondents (55%) identify as female, while 45% identify as male.


The respondents represent households with various yearly incomes. However, 54% of the respondents are from households that earn an annual income of \$25,000 to \$99,999.


Most of the respondents (74%) bank with a traditional bank, while 26% bank with a credit union.





Key Insights

Among the respondents:


 **59%** visit one of their financial institutions' physical branches at least once per month, including 26% who visit at least once per week.

 **47%** say the pandemic changed the way they prefer to do their banking.


 **55%** will not change their banking habits over the next three years, but 40% will do more online banking and less in-person banking.


 Most prefer to perform the following **three actions** in a physical branch versus online:


- Seeking consultations or financial advice (68%)
- Opening or closing an account (55%)
- Resolving service issues (52%)

 Most prefer to perform the following **eight actions** online versus in a physical branch:


- Transferring money, such as between one's accounts (84%)
- Making bill or loan payments (83%)
- Applying for credit cards (73%)
- Conducting account maintenance, such as changing personal information (67%)
- Wiring money—for example, to other countries (63%)
- Depositing checks (58%)
- Applying for other types of accounts (e.g., CD, investment) (54%)
- Applying for loans (53%)


 **55%** ranked phone calls as either their first or second most-preferred method for receiving help or advice from financial institutions.


 **56%** would use virtual consultations at least somewhat often if their local branches offered them.


 **Only 30%** say their institutions offer “virtual branches.”

- Among those whose institutions don't offer virtual branches, or who aren't sure, 60% say they are at least somewhat interested in using a virtual branch.

 **Only 41%** say their institutions let them work with a dedicated personal banker of their choosing.

 **73%** say they would like their institutions to provide proactive advice that could improve their financial situation.

 **61%** say their institutions are “fine” in terms of innovation, while only 23% say their institutions are “exceptional.”

 **61%** say their institutions provide the same level of service digitally as they do in person.



**73% of customers
want proactive
financial advice**

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even when they don't come into the
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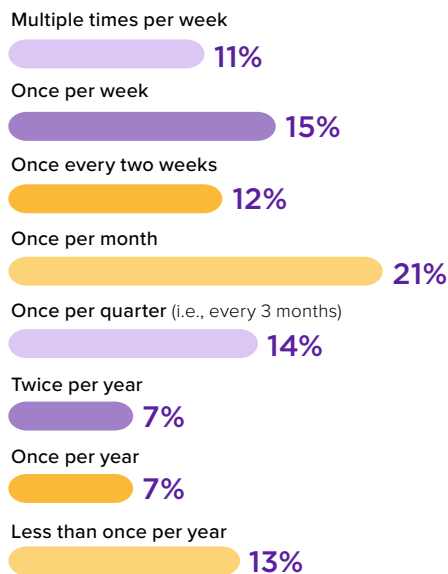
Consumers Continue to Embrace Digital Banking, But Not for Every Transaction

Consumer banking habits have shifted significantly over the past few years, most notably due to lockdown measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many banking customers stopped visiting local branches to stay safe and chose to do most of their banking online instead.

However, the shift toward online banking was already well underway before the pandemic struck. Consumers had already embraced banking apps, engaging in routine transactions from the comfort of their homes on their smartphones.

This led to a marked decrease in in-branch traffic, and evidence suggests that many consumers will continue to stick to online banking, at least for some transactions.

About how often do you visit one of your financial institution's physical branches in person?



At 59%, most of the respondents visit one of their financial institutions' physical branches at least once per month, including 26% who visit at least once per week. However, a significant number of the respondents visit physical branches less often.

For example, 13% of the respondents visit a physical branch less than once per year, while 7% only visit once per year.

This represents a notable change when compared to the results from the 2022 Banking from Anywhere study. Last year, only 49% of the respondents said they visit a physical bank branch at least once per month.

This change is likely due to the easing of concerns surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.

Did the pandemic change the way you prefer to do your banking?



Although 53% of the respondents say the pandemic had no impact on their banking habits, 47% say the pandemic changed the way they prefer to do their banking.

In verbal responses, many respondents who say the pandemic changed their banking habits say the event had an overall impact on their buying and personal habits as well.

According to one respondent from the Northeast, “I don’t like to go into stores as much as I did before, and now I can do everything online.”

Similarly, another respondent from the South Atlantic region says, “The pandemic really affected how I use my time. It made me realize that I need to use my time more wisely and start doing things online more often.”

Other respondents say they simply discovered that online banking is “safer,” “easier,” and “faster” than banking in person.

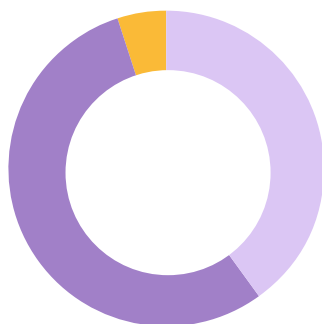
Although some respondents will likely return to in-person banking for some transactions, these responses suggest that others will continue in their current patterns, while some will engage in even more online banking

For example, 40% of the respondents say they’ll do more online banking and less in-person banking over the next three years. Only 5% say they’ll do less online banking and more in-person banking.

However, 55% of the respondents say their banking habits won’t change over the next three years.



How do you expect your banking habits to change in the next three years?



- 40%
I'll do more online banking and less in-person banking
- 55%
My banking habits won't change
- 5%
I'll do less online banking and more in-person banking

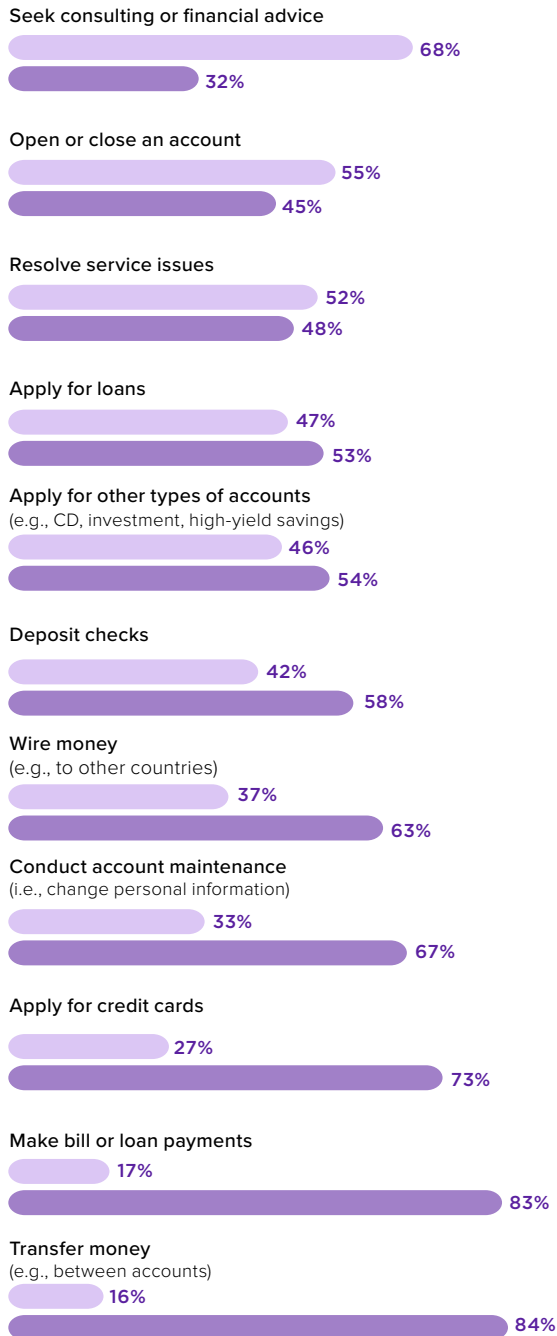
Which types of transactions would you prefer to do in a physical branch, and which would you prefer to do online?



In a physical branch



Online



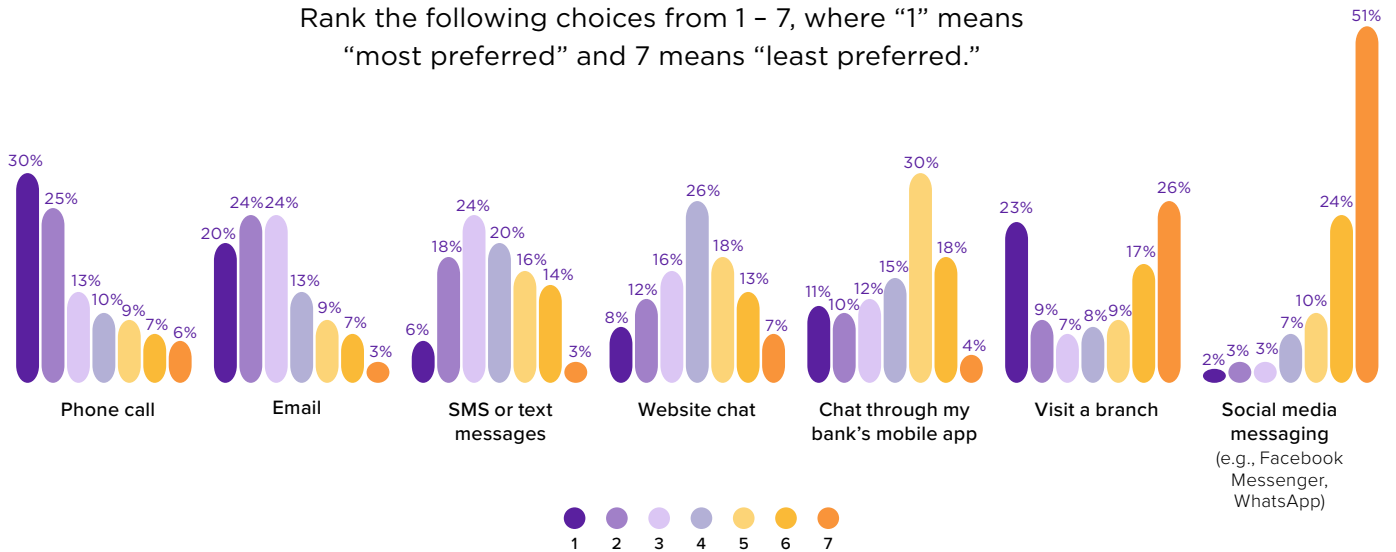
Although many consumers are now conducting the bulk of their banking transactions online, they also expect to reserve some transactions for physical branches. For example, 68% of the respondents say they prefer to seek consulting or financial advice in a physical branch. Most of the respondents say the same about opening or closing an account (55%) and resolving service issues (52%).

Nonetheless, the prevalence of online banking can't be understated. Most of the respondents say they prefer to bank online for a majority of the transaction types presented to them in the study.

Nearly all the respondents prefer to do transactions like bill or loan payments (83%) and money transfers (84%) online, while almost three-fourths of the respondents (73%) prefer to apply for credit cards online.

How would you prefer to receive help or advice from your financial institution?

Rank the following choices from 1 – 7, where “1” means “most preferred” and 7 means “least preferred.”



Despite consumers' shift toward digital banking, many still prefer to speak with a representative directly when receiving help or advice.

Most of the respondents (55%) list phone calls as their first or second most preferred method for receiving advice. Notably, 23% say visiting a branch is their preferred method for receiving help or advice from their financial institutions.

A majority of the respondents also agree that they don't like receiving help from their financial institutions via social media. Specifically, 51% say this is their least-preferred method of communication while 24% say it is their second least-preferred method

Branches Have Expanded Some of Their Digital Capabilities

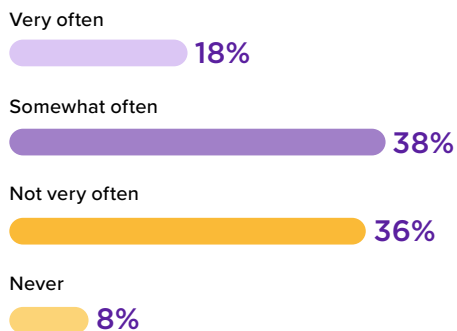
The widespread adoption of online banking by consumers has had a significant impact on the banking industry, including changes in how bank branches operate.

One major change is the focus on customer experience. With fewer customers coming into the branch for routine transactions, banks have shifted their focus to providing a high-quality customer experience for those who do visit the branch. This includes offering personalized advice and assistance with complex financial products, such as mortgages and investments.

Another change is the adoption of new technologies in bank branches. Many banks have invested in new self-service kiosks, which allow customers to perform routine transactions such as deposits and withdrawals without the assistance of a teller. Additionally, banks are using digital signage and interactive displays to provide customers with information about new products and services.



If your local branch offered virtual consultations with institution associates, how often would you use them?

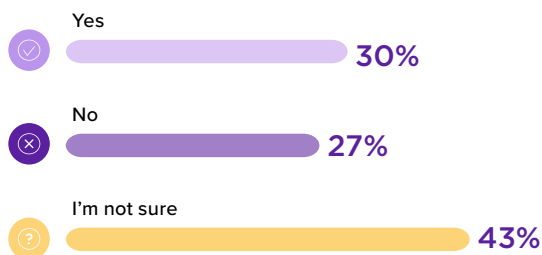


However, banks and credit unions are also adopting innovative methods for engaging digital customers via the bank branch, including remote and virtual consultations. This enables branch staff to provide hands-on, in-branch style services to customers, no matter where they are.

Most of the respondents (56%) say that if their local branch offered virtual consultations with institution associates, they'd use them at least somewhat often. This includes 18% who say they'd use virtual consultations very often.

Last year, only 40% of consumer respondents said they'd use virtual consultations at least once per month. Almost one-quarter (24%) said they'd use them rarely or never.

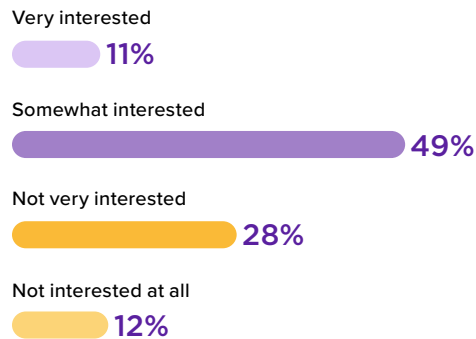
Some financial institutions are creating “virtual” branches. These are online spaces where you can get the same types of one-on-one services you can get in a physical branch. Does your institution currently offer customers virtual branch experiences?



In addition to virtual consultations, some branches are also launching “virtual branches.” These are online spaces where customers can get the same types of one-on-one services they can get in a physical branch. This strategy is gaining attention as consumers become more connected to high-speed internet, but also due to innovations related to virtual reality and concepts like the Metaverse.

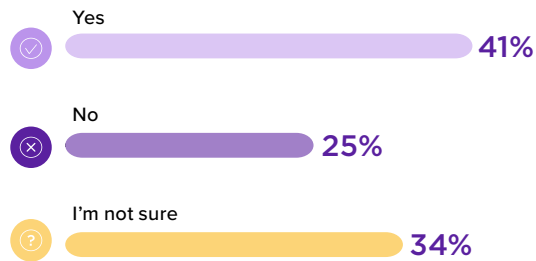
Compared the last year's results, the same number of respondents this year say that their banks do or don't offer virtual branches. Specifically, 27% say their banks don't offer them, while 30% say they do and 43% aren't sure.

Since you said, “No,” or you're not sure, how interested would you be in using a virtual branch if your current institution offered one?



A similar number of consumers this year are interested in using virtual branches compared to last year as well. Most say they are either somewhat interested (49%) or very interested (11%). Last year, 52% said they were somewhat interested while 15% said they were very interested.

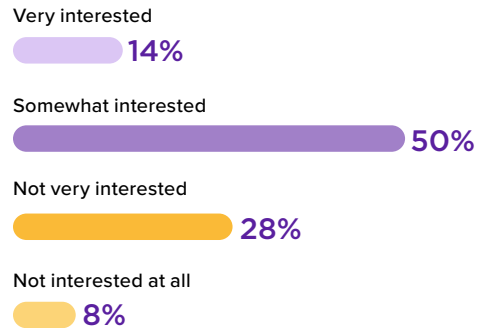
Does your institution currently let you work with a dedicated, personal banker of your choosing?



Despite a low uptake in virtual branch development, more banks and credit unions this year are allowing customers to work with a dedicated, personal banker compared to last year. Specifically, 41% allow customers to work with a personal banker this year compared to just 28% last year.

This change is indicative of financial institutions' focus on the customer experience. It may also be a response to changing customer banking habits. With more consumers using automated, digital tools for routine transactions, banks have freed their employees to offer more dedicated levels of service to individual customers regarding complex transactions, issues, or financial advice.

Since you said, "No," or you're not sure, how interested are you in working with a dedicated, personal banker of your choosing?



Customers are also interested in this capability. Half of the respondents who can't currently work with a dedicated banker through their financial institution say they are somewhat interested in doing so. Another 14% say they are very interested in doing so.

This suggests that many consumers still want hands-on, personal service from their banks and credit unions, regardless of their shift toward digital banking.

Would you like your institution to provide proactive advice that could improve your financial situation?



YES

NO

Customers would also like their financial institutions to be more proactive in helping them with financial matters. Almost three-quarters of the respondents (73%) say they'd like their institutions to provide proactive advice that could help them improve their financial situation.

Consumers now expect banks, credit unions, and other financial institutions to do more than keep their money safe and offer basic financial products. They want to be able to connect with their institutions' representatives easily, and they want those representatives to take a more active role in securing their financial health.



Most Branches Are Providing Comparable In-Person and Online Experiences

In addition to rolling out new features to connect customers with products, experiences, and financial advice, institutions have also been focusing on branch upgrades to improve the in-person banking experience as well.

Consumers are starting to take notice of these changes.

How innovative do you consider your current financial institution?

Exceptional—my financial institution is ahead of the curve.

23%

Fine—my financial institution is decent, but not exceptional.

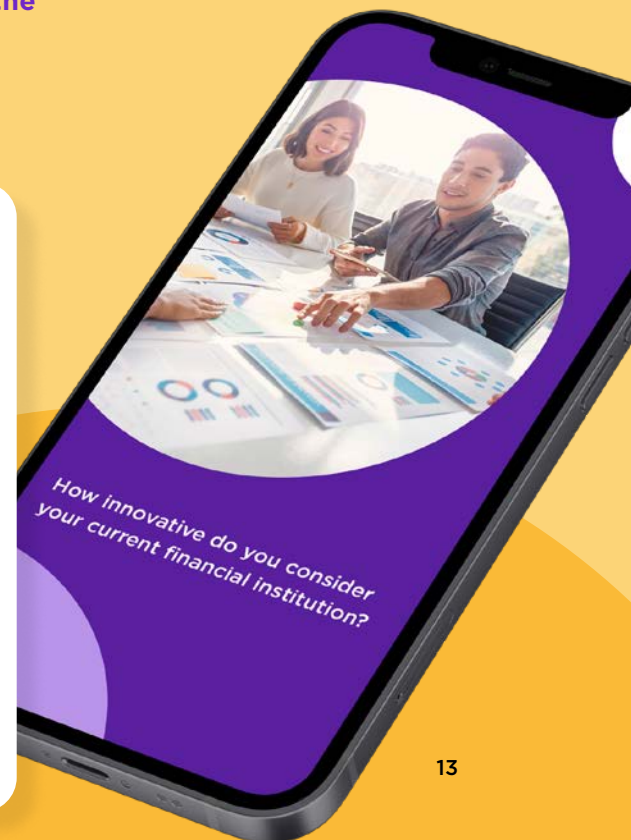
61%

Needs Improvement—my financial institution falls short of my expectations in this area.

13%

Poor—my financial institution is not innovative at all.

3%





Most of the respondents (61%) say their financial institutions are “fine” in terms of innovation. Their branch and online efforts are decent, but not exceptional. This suggests that most institutions are keeping pace with customer expectations, but they aren’t delivering above-and-beyond services that could revolutionize the industry.

However, almost one-fourth of the respondents (23%) say their institutions are “exceptional” in terms of innovation. They believe their institutions’ branches and online experiences are “ahead of the curve” and have gone beyond expectations.



Achieving this status requires a synchronized approach to both online and in-person banking. Many institutions have discovered that the two modes don’t have to be mutually exclusive. They can complement each other, and customers can get the same level of service on either channel.

Most of the respondents (61%) say their institutions are achieving this—their digital and in-person services are equal. However, many of the respondents say they receive a better online experience (19%) or a better in-person experience (20%).

Banks, credit unions, and other institutions must ensure customers get the same level of attention and service digitally as they do in person. This will require a holistic approach to customer experience design, which enables the company’s digital capabilities to inform its in-person experience, and vice versa.

Conclusion: How Consumers Think Branches Should Change

In their final line of questioning, researchers asked the respondents to describe how they think bank branches should change in the next 12 months to deliver a better experience for customers.

Some respondents say specifically that they'd like their financial institutions to take a more active role in helping them with their finances. According to one respondent, "If they could provide financial advice to help maximize my savings and investing so I can get the most out of my money. that would be helpful."

Another respondent says they want their bank to "give financial advice or perform some type of forensics analysis that can help me better plan for the future or make adjustments in my financial habits to help improve my credit score."

Other respondents say they want to access more capabilities remotely. For example, one respondent who says they travel for a living says, "It is very difficult to get into a branch at times, so anything they can do to make it easier to access online would be exceptionally beneficial."

Another respondent says they want "everything on the mobile banking app."

Several respondents indicate that they want such digital capabilities, but they also want to have a human touch when it's needed. Multiple respondents voiced their frustration with "AI," and "chatbots." One respondent says they want a "24-hour live person to answer questions or resolve issues."

Similarly, one respondent voiced concern over branch closures, saying they have "forced" them to do online banking.

Balancing these needs over the next several years will be a key challenge for financial institutions. Although consumers are embracing digital banking for the long run, they are adamant that they don't lose the types of in-person experiences that have traditionally been associated with quality banking. Financial institutions must provide their customers with digital and automated capabilities while also making their associates accessible, whether it is in-person or remotely.



Key Suggestions



Provide a balance of digital and in-person services that enable customers to access the same level of attention and service digitally as they do in person. This requires a holistic approach to customer experience design, which allows digital capabilities to inform an institution's in-person experience and vice versa.



Be more proactive in helping customers with financial matters, providing advice that could help them improve their financial situation. Some of the respondents suggested providing information about how to maximize their savings accounts, create better spending habits, or make better investment decisions.



Provide customers with more remote capabilities regarding their accounts but ensure they can always connect with a person to resolve issues. The respondents don't want to lose the types of in-person experiences that have become standard in banking.



Leverage virtual consultations and virtual banking services. The respondents have indicated that they have an interest in these capabilities, and they'd like to use them as part of a remote banking experience.





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- Carla Trombly, *Senior Vice President, Director, Branch & ATM Channel Optimization*, **SYNOVUS**
- Art Stevens, *President, Retail Bank*, **Trustmark Bank**
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About the Authors



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