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# Information Requirements for Operational CRM in Banking

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## Abstract

*Customer Relationship Management is a strategy that seeks to select, cultivate and manage an organisation's most profitable customers with a view to increasing long-term profitability. To achieve this, staff must have necessary information readily available when dealing with customers. Yet, most published papers to date focus on information requirements at a macro or management level rather than at the micro level. This paper seeks to close the knowledge gap by surveying branch and call centre sales agents within a bank to identify their information needs.*

**Keywords:** Customer Relationship Management, Banking, Information Needs, Sales Force

## 1. Introduction

Banks traditionally have placed a high value on their reputations for financial stability and accuracy in processing transactions. In addition, the important role banks play in the economy resulted in their being highly regulated and subject to mandatory prudential requirements. Meeting these requirements and valuing accuracy in processing ensured a level of quality not found in other service industries. But the development of highly competitive, global, and deregulated markets requires more. Quality now requires a commitment to enhanced customer relationships. One New Zealand bank employee put it this way:

Banking has changed very much over the past 10 years and very rapidly over the past 5 years, to a point where banks have to focus on service. At one time banks had a captive market: customers had no choice.... Following deregulation, banks had to rethink where they were going and how to get there. And the answer seems to have been quality service to the customer.

The need to understand customers has long been understood. Owners of small businesses often developed close relationships with customers, relating to each on a personal basis. Marketers in larger firms conducted research to understand the general needs of their target market, often segmenting customers into like groups. Today, with the availability of sophisticated technology, even large businesses are seeking to form personal relationships with individual customers.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is now the mantra of industry. Recognition that customers are the source of revenue is reflected in the goal of CRM, that is, to increase long-term profitability by selecting, cultivating and managing the most profitable customer relationships (CRMguru.com 2003; Ling et al. 2001). This means a company needs to understand its customer base at both the macro and micro levels. At the macro level, customer information is needed for making strategic decisions and to focus marketing efforts. At the micro level, individual customer information is required for tailoring product and

services to individual customers in order to develop customer loyalty and trust. To achieve this goal, a relatively sophisticated and complex technological solution is required, including:

- data warehouses for storing customer data
- analytical tools for better understanding and segmenting customer bases
- data mining tools for discovering previously unknown customer knowledge and
- marketing and campaign management tools for automating more focused marketing efforts

To date, most reported studies on CRM information requirements have focused on the macro level (CRMguru.com 2003; Giltner et al. 2000; Hutt 2000; Marlin et al. 2001; Meltzer; Stone 2001). Recently, practitioners have identified the need to deliver individual customer information to sales staff, preferably within one mouse click (Rountree 2002). We found no research that examined the information requirements of front line sales staff, yet the ability of these staff to deliver quality service to customers impacts customer perceptions of the organisation.

In this paper we present an exploratory study that identifies the set of information used by branch and call centre sales staff in managing customer relationships within a retail bank. A two-stage survey methodology is used, resulting in a list of information requirements rated in importance by sales staff. We examine the rated list to determine if branch sales staff and call centre sales staff appear to use the same or different information and consider whether they use, or would use, information generated from a commonly used CRM application in the finance industry.

## **2. Customer Relationship Management**

Definitions of Customer Relationship Management may take a narrow process focus or a broad strategic focus. For example, Koh and Chan (2002) define CRM as a “process of predicting customer behaviour and selecting actions to influence that behaviour to benefit the company.” By contrast, CRMguru.com (2003) define CRM as a business strategy that “selects and manage the most valuable customer relationships,” requiring “a customer-centric business philosophy and culture to support effective marketing, sales, and service processes.”

In both its narrow and broader definitions, CRM has gained acceptance (Paas & Kuijlen 2001). Today, firms must often compete against not only traditional industry players but also against new entrants to their industry. For example, banks continue to provide most of the on-call deposit and chequing services but face new competition from insurance and retail companies offering home lending, credit card and other high profit margin financial services.

At the same time, technological advances have enabled businesses to provide more and improved products and services, optimise delivery processes, and shorten product development life cycles. The expansion in Internet use and growth of e-commerce has made information more accessible to consumers. Empowered by this information, customers are better informed and less tolerant of high prices and low quality in products and services. They enjoy unprecedented choices, gaining the upper hand in the business-to-customer relationship. The net result is product commoditisation.

The realisation that customers are the source of income and the need to find a new sustainable growth strategy has led businesses to refocus on customers. Information technology, particularly Internet and call centre technology, enable personalisation, user identification, and relationship marketing at the customer level. As Levitt proposed in 1983, the creation

and maintenance of stronger, deeper relationships between businesses and between business and customers will benefit both sides. Today's technology makes this feasible.

For the purpose of this paper, we follow (Ling et al. 2001) definition of CRM, that is, CRM is a business strategy that:

“... comprises a set of processes and enabling systems supporting a business strategies to build long term, profitable relationships with specific customers. The key objective of CRM is to enhance customer value through a better understanding of individual needs and preferences” (Ling et al. 2001).

By this definition, it is recognized that not all customers are of equal value and that firms have to make a strategic decision as to which type or types of relationship they wish to build and maintain. This requires an understanding of their existing customer base, usually from a financial perspective.

### ***2.1 Customer Value, Lifetime Value and Profitability***

Customer value, sometimes referred to as customer lifetime value or customer profitability, is calculated by adding all the revenue from products and services a customer purchased in a fixed period and subtracting the costs of supplying them. This provides a simple historic customer value or customer profitability calculation for a the period. A company may use propensity modelling to arrive at the net present value of probable future revenues. Such modelling will include frequency of purchases and the channels used by a customer. The information is useful in deciding the type of relationship a customer has with firm and the potential ways of advancing the relationship (Day 2000).

Day (2000) analysed customer-firm relationships based on the types of value exchange processes between firm and customer. He described three relationship types:

***Transactional exchanges*** – where the customer and supplier focus only on the timely exchange of standard products at competitive prices. Both parties view the exchange as a zero-sum game where one side wins at the other's expense so everything rides on the negotiation of terms and conditions. This is often a short-lived one-off relationship.

***Value-adding exchanges*** – where the focus of the firm shifts from getting customers to keeping customers. The firm pursues this objective by developing a deep understanding of customer needs and changing requirements, then tailoring their offerings to these needs as closely as possible, and giving continuing incentives for the customer to concentrate most of their purchases with them.

***Collaborative exchanges*** – where firms maintain close information, social and process linkages and mutual commitments made in expectation of long run benefits with customers. This type of relationship is often found between businesses, for example firms in customised, high technology industries such as semiconductor and test equipment manufacturing.

Having decided the type of relationship to pursue, businesses can formulate strategies and practices to nurture the relationship. One of the challenges in putting CRM into practice is transferring the information about the firm's strategy, policy and about individual customer to the front-end sales staff who interact with customers daily. They have to manage the relationships in accordance with the strategy and policy of the firm, at the same time meeting customer needs. Delivering information is a major role of information technology in CRM. It

can integrate operational and informational functions to provide both the necessary relationship knowledge and the means to service the relationship (Ling et al. 2001).

## ***2.2 Information Technology for CRM***

Writers on CRM have taken differing views as to which technologies comprise a CRM solution. For example, Goodhue, Wixom and Watson (2002) take a broad and inclusive view including “operational CRM” (applications used in data capture and touch point coordination) and “analytical CRM” (applications used in analysing data, reporting, and modelling).

By contrast, Shoemaker (2001) describes CRM, ERP and KM as co-ordinated but separate technologies, restricting the definition of CRM applications to those which facilitate interactions between customers and the firm, that is, ‘operational CRM’ in Goodhue et al’s definition. ERP systems handle business transactions and the documentation trail, and KM applications transform data into knowledge ready for utilization. Despite the differences in conceptualization, the underlying processes that IT solutions support are similar.

In this paper, we are concerned with operational CRM which supports front-end sales staff. In particular, we are interested in the type of information that sales staff believe they need and hence should be delivered to them through operational CRM. The information may or may not include those generated from analytical CRM which we will call ‘analytical information’.

## ***2.3 Customer Data and Information***

Business operations require product, transactional, and customer data. In CRM the focus is on customer data – demographic and psychographic - for customer data is central to creating customer profiles. Ling & Yen (2001) describe five important data areas :

1. ***Contact information:*** postal and email addresses, fax and telephone numbers
2. ***Household Information:*** family relationships, household income, and other associations
3. ***Group Information:*** population segments a customer belongs to based on interest, profession and other factors
4. ***Account Information:*** customer purchasing, interaction and service history. In the financial services industry, this information includes account history, account conduct, account balances, credit limit and any information pertaining to customer account and
5. ***Analytical or Customer Profitability Information:*** Customer credit score and propensity to buy.

Given the breath and depth of available information, not all information can be, nor perhaps should it be, delivered to front end sales staff. Consideration of privacy laws and relevance of information are important. Would a customer be comfortable with, and agree to, the sharing of personal information among front-end sales staff? Would providing customer profitability information to front end sales staff encourage them to discriminate higher value customers from lower value customer? Is the information relevant? These concerns should be carefully thought through in designing an information deployment system. The objective is to disseminate the right information through the right channel to the right person at the right time - not to deliver all information (Ling et al. 2001).

The focus should be on information sales staff believe they need. Since they are the largest group interacting with customers, empowering them with the right customer information is important. Yet there have been few published works reporting information requirements solicited from experienced sales staff. The purpose of this paper is to fill this gap by surveying a group of front-end sales agents of a bank, both in branches and the call centre, for their information requirements in managing customer relationships.

The research questions are:

What information is required by sales staff in managing one-to-one customer relationships?

and

Which information resulting from analytical CRM applications do field sales agents desire?

The field sales force here means branch sale people (commonly known as bank consultants in the financial services industry) and call centre staff (known as customer service officers). Both user groups have direct customer contact and often have no choice in selecting customers or are unable to predict who the next customer will be.

### **3. Background to the Study**

#### ***3.1 New Zealand Retail Banking***

The case study is undertaken in a major New Zealand bank. New Zealand has a small population of around four million with about 2.6 million of working age and an annual growth rate of under 0.8% for 1996-2001, rising to 1.5% in 2002 and 1.8% in 2003. The small population base and low growth rate means few new customers, so customer retention gains increased importance. In addition, New Zealand has one of the world's most deregulated financial sectors, dating back to the reforms of the late 1980's. Deregulation created intense competition leading to heavy investment in technology to provide a diverse range of products and services, a lower cost-to-income-ratio, and improved quality and efficiency of management and services (Wright 2002).

The country now has five major banks providing similar products and services at a similar price. Non-financial institutions have entered the market on selected high profit margin products such as credit cards and hire purchase, and independent mortgage brokers have intensified competition in the lending sector. Further, a new online bank and a government-sponsored bank have entered the market in recent years. The Residential and Business Customer Survey conducted annually by the University of Auckland's Marketing Department shows that the performance of the front-line staff and value for money are two important factors affecting customer satisfaction. It also shows that 19% of bank customers are seriously thinking about switching bank and 33% of this group consider the new government sponsored bank as the preferred bank (KPMG 2004). Customer retention has become an important issue for the banks. They either accept lower interest rates putting pressure on profit margins, or lose customers. The KPMG survey showed that banks have prioritized the use of their resources by customer value, especially among business customers. However, the majority of a bank's customers are retail or personal bank customers, typically with a housing loan, transactional and saving accounts, credit cards, and accessing funds through EFTPOS and ATMs. This is the customer group the front line sales staffs face each day.

### **3.2 CRM Strategy in Banking**

Bank customers are frequently segmented into groups based on the number of products used and balances held. Customers with a low number of products and low balances may be treated as if they had what Day (2000) terms a 'transactional exchange relationship'. Here the focus is on providing cost effective services. Customers holding many products and high potential balances may fall into the 'value-adding' or 'collaborative' relationship categories.

Transactional exchange relationships may be transformed into value adding relationships when customers take up staff recommendations for additional products such as investment or higher interest savings accounts perhaps with automatic funds transfer to optimise interest. From the bank's perspective, the account becomes value-adding because the number of products and services used by the customer increases and fees earned by the Bank also increase. In addition, the increased portfolio of products decreases the probability of the customer defecting to other competitors.

In the case study bank, which we will call 'Bank N,' the many single-proprietor businesses and farmers are treated as collaborative relationships. These clients share their financial information and plans with the bank and the bank provides financial solutions tailored specifically for them including solutions to meet seasonal cash flow fluctuations and hedging of interest or foreign exchange rates. Bank N also arranges economic and business trend seminars and publishes reports for this group of customers. Specialist managers with specific industry knowledge and good interpersonal skills maintain close relationships with these clients. They visit clients on their premises to strengthen the relationship and to gather information to assist the bank in developing better solutions by better anticipating client's future requirements.

The majority of the bank's customers are transactional exchange or value-adding relationships. This large group of customers most often approach the bank through branches or call centres (sometimes referred to as customer contact centres). To manage these relationships, branch and call centre staff must be armed with both bank product and services information and customer information.

### **3.3 CRM at Bank N**

Bank N customers are serviced through four main channels; ATMs, bank tellers, banking consultants and the contact centre. The ATMs can perform quite complex transactions but customers tend to use them for simple transactions. They are used mainly for cash withdrawals, deposits, balance queries, and fund transfers between personal accounts. This channel is available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. It benefits both customers and the bank, being a convenience to customer while reducing the workload for branches, especially for tellers and banking consultants.

Tellers provide all the services offered by ATMs plus customer account maintenance such as change of name or addresses, set up of automatic payment, and changes of Personal Identification Number (PIN) on credit cards and ATM access cards. Customers seeking advice on financial products or specialised services, such as loans, are referred to a banking consultant. From the bank's perspective, the primary function of a banking consultant is to sell bank services and products. Banking consultants typically come to know many of their customers well, and become proactive in suggesting financial services to meet customers' circumstances and changing needs.

Sales and services representatives, service customers through a call centre that is available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. They have the dual role of servicing and cross selling, with much more servicing being achieved than cross selling. They provide most of the services a teller can provide, with the exception of deposits and withdrawals. They cross sell lower dollar value lending products such as overdraft facilities and credit cards. In addition, they reply to customer e-mails. Sales and Services Representatives spend an average talk time of two and a half minutes with customers, whereas Bank Consultants with wider sales responsibility spend more time in 'romancing' their clients.

At the time of the research, Bank N did not have a dedicated CRM solution. The application in use was designed for maintenance personnel to perform tasks such as opening accounts and renewing lending. However, it also provided customer information used by sales staff. The architecture consisted of a CRM module linked to product and workflow modules. The product module held information about customer accounts and balances and was updated by the payment module. Sales staff used the product module to investigate the current state of a customer's accounts and their transaction history. They used the workflow module for scheduling tasks such as follow up calls.

#### **4. Research Method**

The research uses a survey-based case study in which end-users are approached to determine their information requirements. This is a common method of eliciting information requirements in information systems research (Browne et al. 2001; Vessey et al. 1994; Watson et al. 1993). The time frame of the research was around three months but required data collection from many sales agents. Therefore, survey research using self-administered questionnaires was used.

##### ***4.1 Sample and population***

A major New Zealand bank, Bank N, participated in the study. Bank N provides both retail and wholesale banking services and has a strong presence in the rural, small business, and personal banking sectors. Within the retail banking sector, it has around 1.5 million customers, who are serviced through branches, call centres, Internet banking, ATMs, EFTPOS, and a mobile sales force. The Bank has around 4,500 employees, with 780 employed in its 160 branches and 430 employed in two call centres.

For the purpose of this study, the population of interest can be divided into two groups:

1. Bank Consultants who work in branches and have face-to-face contact with customer and
2. Sales and Services Representatives who work in the call centres and have customer contact via telephone.

##### ***4.2 Instrumentation and Procedure***

The research was conducted in two stages. The main objective of stage one was to generate a list of information required by Bank Consultants and Sales and Services Representatives. A secondary objective of stage one was to detect what analytical information currently available in marketing/management CRM applications would be used by sales agents if it were made available to them. The objective of stage two was to collect importance ratings for the information requirements identified in stage one.

###### ***4.2.1 Stage One: Eliciting Information Requirements***

A three-part questionnaire was designed for the first survey. In part one, respondents were asked to list the ten most common tasks they performed in their dealings with customers.



This section was designed to focus the respondents on their role as Bank Consultants or Sales and Services Representatives. In part two, they were asked to list the information they used in their dealings with customers. This section was designed to capture the information that first came to mind. Part three contained a list of information items compiled from Bank N's existing front-end system and proprietary applications used in analysing the customer base. This section served two objectives: first to probe for further information required in managing customer relationships, and second to test if respondents would select analytical information, such as customer contribution and profitability score and, if so, which they would select. Not all analytical information available in the bank is currently made available to front-end sales staff.

For stage one, seven Bank Consultants and seven Sales and Services Representatives were selected. Those selected were the highest sales performers in each job category in the previous three months as shown in bank performance reports. In selecting the 'best', it was assumed that higher sales performers would be better at selecting and using information to understand customers' needs. Questionnaires were mailed to selected staff with a covering letter explaining the purpose of the research. Two reminder e-mails were sent to all selected staff at the end of week one and week two to increase the response rate, and responses were cut off after three weeks when analysis began. Participation was voluntary and no incentives were used.

#### ***4.2.2 Stage Two: Rating Information Requirements***

A two-part questionnaire was designed for the second survey. Part one contained a cleaned list of information requirements from the first questionnaire. By 'cleaned' we mean that duplicated items were removed and, where necessary, standard bank terminology was substituted for some terms. Respondents were asked to rate the resulting 65 information items on a 7-point Likert scale anchored by polar adjectives of "not at all important" to "very important". In Part two of the survey we collected respondent data including, occupational role, sales experience, perceived computer skill level, qualifications, and demographic factors. This information was used for classifying respondents into like groups for the purpose of analysis.

For stage two, 30 Bank Consultants and 30 Sales and Services Representatives were selected. All respondents were based in the greater Wellington region. A stratified sample based on branch size was used for Bank Consultants with random sampling used for Sales and Services Representatives. Questionnaires were mailed to selected staff along with a covering letter explaining the research. As in stage one, two reminder emails were sent and a 3-week cut-off was applied. Participation was again voluntary and no incentives were used.

#### ***4.3 Data Analysis***

Given the exploratory nature of the study and the small sample size, only descriptive statistics were calculated pending future research. Stage one was an item identification task and no analysis was conducted beyond identification and clarification. In stage two, the average importance ratings of 65 identified items were calculated for the entire sample, for each respondent group (Bank Consultants and Sales and Services Representatives), and by selected demographic characteristics (e.g. experience level). The outcome was lists of information items ordered by importance ratings overall and for selected demographic groupings.

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Identification of Information Items (Stage One)

Eight of the 14 questionnaires in stage one were returned, giving a response rate of 57%. Management informed us that most of the non-responses were due to selected individuals being on leave close to Christmas. Respondents included four Bank Consultants and four Sales and Services Representatives, most of whom (5 respondents) had 1-2 years experience, with one having 3-5 years experience and two having over 5 years.

Seventy-eight information items were identified including 63 that were listed in the prompt sheet. Fifteen items not in the prompt sheet were included (Table 1). Most of these new items were identified by Bank Consultants with over five years experience, the exceptions being items 13-15 (bank policy, product information, and promotion information) which were identified by the less experienced Sales and Services Representatives and Bank Consultants (1-2 years experience).

1	Account conduct	9	Insurance Details
2	Account history	10	Reason for banking with current bank
3	Account number	11	Total amount of fees paid
4	Customer future finance plan/need	12	Type of fees paid
5	Customer status/type	13	Bank policy and procedural information
6	Customer's statement of position	14	Bank product information
7	Facilities with Other Bank	15	Bank promotion information
8	Family members		

Table 1: New Items

### 5.2 Importance Rating of Information Items (Stage two)

In stage two, 43 of the 60 questionnaires were returned within the three-week deadline giving a response rate of 72%. Twenty-two were from Bank Consultants and 21 from Sales and Services Representatives. The profile of respondents is summarized in Table 2. More females (70%) than males (30%) responded to the survey with ratios approximately equivalent across Bank Consultants and Sales and Services Representatives. Compared to Bank Consultants, SSR had a slightly younger age profile and were less experienced, with almost half being employed in their current role for less than 12 months. These statistics reflect the statistics of the target population.

### 5.3 Overall Ratings

In Stage 2, items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale. For the purposes of analyses, a rating of 1-3 was considered unimportant, 3.1-5.0 neutral, and 5.1-7 important.

Overall, 44 of the 65 items had an average rating of important. The 24 most important of these covered basic customer information (e.g. *first, last and preferred name*), contact information (e.g. *preferred contact method*), and customer account information (e.g., *type of accounts held, total balance of deposit accounts, total balance of current accounts, and maximum credit card limit*). The item with the highest rating was *first name*, followed by *account history, bank product information, preferred name, total amount of fees paid, account conduct, and last name*. Interestingly, *type of fees paid* and *total amount of fees paid* featured high on the list. This may reflect awareness on the part of sales agents of the bank's need for high-value customers. Alternately, it may reflect a common customer query following the recent introduction of the new, low fee, government sponsored bank.

		Total	Bank Consultants	Sales and Services Representatives
<b>Gender</b>	Female	29	15	14
	Male	13	7	6
<b>Age</b>	21-25	21	9	12
	26-35	11	5	6
	36-45	5	3	2
	>45	5	5	0
<b>Experience in current role</b>	< 1 year	15	5	10
	1-2 years	9	5	4
	3-5 years	10	5	5
	> 5 years	9	7	2
<b>Computer Skills</b>	Weak *	2	2	0
	Satisfactory	17	9	8
	Skilled **	23	11	12
Total = 42, one respondent failed to complete respondent data				
* includes 'weak' and 'somewhat weak'				
** includes 'skilled' and 'highly skilled'				

Table 2: Respondent Profile

Seven items had average ratings of unimportant. These items were: *percentile ranking of customer in terms of profit contribution, number of dependants, spouse occupation, marital status, education level, spouse age, and e-mail address*. The first item is generated by using analytical CRM and can be classified as customer profitability information.

One objective of the research was to find which analytical CRM information was considered important by sales staff. Results show that most analytical items such as *customer contribution by loan, customer contribution by deposits, and customer contribution by other services*, received only neutral ratings. Other analytical information such as *retention score, propensity to buy, and profitability score* received even lower ratings. A Bank N manager suggested that perhaps the terms were not familiar to most sales agent in the branches and call centre and, therefore, they were rated low.

Despite the efforts of Bank N in developing a product range for young children and senior citizens, items such as number of dependants, which could be helpful in extending the sales into a customer household, were not considered important.

Most of the information items listed in the survey are currently available to sales agents in Bank N's front-end application. The exceptions are shown in Table 3. Customer profitability information (items 5 to 13) are generated by analytical CRM applications within the bank and the remainder are collected by sales agents during customer interviews, for example, loan application interviews.

	Mean Rating		Mean Rating
1. Annual income	5.86	8. Customer contribution – other services	5.02
2. Customer's future finance needs	5.74	9. Prospective customer	5.02
3. Customer's Statement of position	5.49	10. Retention Score	4.45
4. Relationship with other bank	5.26	11. Propensity to buy	4.44
5. Customer contribution by loan	5.16	12. Profitability Score	4.00
6. Customer contribution by deposits	5.09	13. Percentile ranking of customer in terms of profit contribution	3.95
7. Customer gross contribution	5.05		

Table 3: Information Not Available in Bank N's Front End System

Items 1 to 8 are important in making lending decisions involving large dollar values, such as home loans. These are high profit-margin products, so we might expect this information to be given a high importance rating. However, they received neutral or marginally important ratings. This may be due to a number of factors such as the fact that each channel (branches and call centres) is used in promoting different product ranges, and different roles and responsibility may be affecting the rating. The independent analysis of Bank Consultant and Sales and Service Representative ratings might shed some light on this.

#### ***5.4 Differences between Bank Consultants and Service and Sales Representatives***

The top 20 information items of Bank Consultants and Sales and Services Representatives are shown in Table 4. In general, the Sales and Services Representatives rated items lower than Bank Consultants. For Sales and Services Representatives only two items were rated above six compared to 11 by Bank Consultants. Six of the top 10 items were common across both groups, but four differed. Common items are shown in italics in Table 4.

<b>Top 20 rated items</b>			
<b>Bank Consultants</b>		<b>Sales and Services Representatives'</b>	
<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean Rating</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean Rating</b>
<i>Account History</i>	6.41	<i>First name</i>	6.33
<i>First name</i>	6.41	<i>Bank Product information</i>	6.14
<i>Preferred name</i>	6.32	<i>Account History</i>	5.95
<i>Account Conduct</i>	6.27	<i>Total amount of fees paid</i>	5.95
<i>Last name</i>	6.27	<i>Type of Fees paid</i>	5.86
<i>Total amount of fees paid</i>	6.18	<i>Preferred name</i>	5.86
<i>Bank Product information</i>	6.09	<i>Credit Rating</i>	5.81
<i>Total amount borrowed</i>	6.05	<i>Total balance of deposits accounts</i>	5.80
<i>Total amount deposited</i>	6.00	<i>Type of account held</i>	5.76
<i>Prospective customer</i>	6.00	<i>Account Conduct</i>	5.76
<i>Customer's Statement of position</i>	6.00	<i>Last name</i>	5.71
<i>Overdraft Limit</i>	5.95	<i>Prospective customer</i>	5.71
<i>Bank Policy and Procedural information</i>	5.91	<i>Current customer</i>	5.71
<i>Customer's future finance plan/need</i>	5.91	<i>Maximum credit card limit</i>	5.67
<i>Preferred contact method</i>	5.86	<i>Preferred contact method</i>	5.62
<i>Current customer</i>	5.82	<i>Most frequently use services</i>	5.60
<i>Preferred Channel</i>	5.81	<i>Bank Policy and Procedural information</i>	5.57
<i>Credit Rating</i>	5.77	<i>Customer's future finance plan/need</i>	5.57
<i>Total balance of current accounts</i>	5.77	<i>Overdraft Limit</i>	5.52
<i>Total number of loan accounts</i>	5.77	<i>Home phone number</i>	5.48

*Table 4: Top 20 Items for Bank Consultants and Sales and Services Representatives*

The differences between the two groups may be attributable to differences in customer contact media and differences in responsibility between Bank Consultants and Sales and Services Representatives. For example, at branches, Bank Consultants usually interact with customers face-to-face and have a wide responsibility in selling lending products, especially home loans which involve higher dollar value and longer term. By contrast, call centres were created as a low-cost option to divert workload from the high-cost branches. Sales and Services Representatives provide more routine value-adding services such as bill payment, account query, and low-risk lending facilities. The differing roles and incentive schemes is a bank strategy decision.

#### ***5.5 Experience in the Current Role***

More experienced respondents rated more items as important compared to the less experienced (Table 5). This pattern was consistent across both the Bank Consultants and the Sales and Services Representatives.

Bank Consultants with less than two year's experience rated more items as important relative to Sales and Services Representatives of similar experience. This difference may be due to the fact that most Bank Consultants have several years of banking experience prior to becoming Bank Consultants, whereas for Sales and Services Representatives it is often their first banking role. The comparative inexperience of the Sales and Service Representatives is reflected in the higher rating they accord *Bank product information* relative to Bank Consultants (see Table 4 above)

	Bank Consultants		Sales and Services Representatives		Overall	
No. Item	Important	Neutral or unimportant	Important	Neutral or unimportant	Important	Neutral or unimportant
<1 year	44	21	30	35	31	34
1-2 year	38	27	26	39	35	30
2-5 year	39	26	56	9	48	17
> 5 year	50	15	42	23	48	17

Table 5: Number of Important vs. Neutral or Unimportant Items, by Experience Group

For Bank Consultants, no information item is found in the top 10 for all experience levels and each level has at least two items not included in the top 10 items of any other experience levels. Rating differences are probably due, in part, to the knowledge gained through experience. But they quite likely also reflect different responsibilities assigned to experienced and inexperienced sales agents. For Bank Consultants, it is common practice to assign less-experienced consultants to post-sales administrative services, whereas senior consultants are responsible for sales.

Among the Sales and Services Representatives, the least experienced agents (less than 12 months) had markedly different information requirements to those with more experience - six of their top 10 information requirements were not found among the top 10 of any other experience level. Differences for the most experienced agents (greater than five years) are explained by the fact that these two agents were both team leaders having different responsibilities compared to the others.

## 6. Conclusion

The objective of this research was to explore the information requirements of branch and call centre sales staff. Through surveys we generated a list of information used and gathered importance ratings for each item. Results showed that while most information considered important by sales agents is available to them through the system, some, such as customer statement of position and customer future finance plans and needs, are not available. This information is gathered by sales agents through customer contact. Because customers' financial circumstances and life-style change, maintaining customer data is a continuous exercise. The challenge for banks is to develop and proactively manage customer data capture procedures so that customer information is kept up-to-date.

Results show that there are differences in information requirements between branch and call centre staff. Differences may be due to differences in roles, responsibilities, and the media through which they interact with customers. In many instances, differences in roles and responsibilities are part of the bank's channel utilisation strategy. For example, branch sales agents may be responsible for the sale of high dollar value products because customers are seen to prefer a face-to-face channel in purchasing riskier or more complex financial products. Call centre sales staff deal with more day-to-day transactional or informational issues. These product role differences result in different information needs between branch and call centre

staff. Experience is another differentiator in sales agents' information requirements. Experienced sales agents use a wider range of information and focus on information important for sales of specified products. It is possible that the differing requirements of experienced staff are due to the different role assigned to them by the bank.

An aspect of the current research concerned the use of operational information needs of sales agents. It found that most experienced sales agents considered customer contribution (a customer profitability measure) to be important. How they use or would use this information and the potential impact on customer relationships needs to be understood before providing it to all sales agents. There is potential for it to be used as a discriminating factor, which could have adverse impacts on customer relationships. We found some analytic information that we expected to be important was not rated as such by sales agents, for example, *propensity score* and *retention score*. Since this information is not currently available to staff in Bank N, it may be that agents were not familiar with its meaning and potential use, suggesting a need for clearer explanations in research and more education in practice.

Due to the exploratory nature of this research, the small sample size, and time constraints there are several limitations to this study. Ongoing research will better profile the population of sales agents by using a larger sample size. A combination of interview and survey will be used to profile the role and responsibilities of each group of sales agents in order to establish a relationship between information requirement and task. Ongoing research will also aim to examine the differential roles of experienced vs. newer staff, comparing information importance ratings by successful vs. less successful agents. The findings should be useful both in training and in the design of information systems to focus sales agents on the most important information.

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