

# MASTERING M&A

## THE ULTIMATE INTEGRATION CHECKLIST



### A Step-by-Step Guide to Merging Brands, Branches, and Teams with Confidence

#### DESIGN

- ☐ Complete a full audit of the exterior of all buildings to identify re-branding needs. Consider looking beyond the signage to include landscaping, building colors, and specific materials that create brand cohesion. Consider colored lighting as an easy and cost-effective way to introduce the new brand to the acquired institution.
- ☐ Ensure a consistent and welcoming customer experience by evaluating the branch's layout, including its open vs. closed design, transaction area placement, and overall flow.
- ☐ Help the customer of the acquired institution feel a positive change has happened by introducing refreshed furniture and improved/brighter lighting.
- ☐ Implement the new brand throughout the branch interior through strategic color placement such as accent walls, door colors, carpet, etc. Sometimes a small splash of color goes a long way.
- ☐ The strongest brands always share at least one design feature in common from location to location. Identify a signature element that can connect the entire enterprise such as wood trim, digital "Wow Walls," help desks, etc.

#### CONSTRUCTION

- ☐ Consider the anticipated date of "legal day one" and the flipping of brands following the acquisition. This helps identify how aggressive your team needs to schedule and can minimize lead times and the unexpected cost of overtime from vendors.
- ☐ Find the low-hanging fruit of acquired branches that require the most amount of work to bring up to current brand standards to help prioritize work through a phased approach. An organized priority list speeds up construction and often drives down overall cost through construction efficiency.
- ☐ Be realistic with your goals for each location and have a clear understanding of the desired end-result when it comes to the level of fit and finish. It's okay to have "champagne taste on a beer budget" but important for those wishes to be identified and agreed upon by all internal decision makers up front. Nobody likes a change order!
- ☐ Leverage data and strategic thinking to consider the future of the branch location being updated. Help "future proof" the location by considering future use to help prepare the location to flex into future needs without requiring a crew to revisit down the road.
- ☐ Work with your landlord(s) and municipalities as far in advance as possible to identify potential roadblocks in your transformation goals. A great design-build partner should help you through this journey to avoid pitfalls, delays, and reduce reputational risk in your new community.

## DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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- ☐ Perform a thorough digital signage asset audit including interactive screens, video walls, LED walls, etc. Review what media players may already be in place, ensure CMS compatibility, and consolidate vendor contracts. Budget for expansion and upgrades, identify a plan and ownership to digitize brochures and promotional posters.
- ☐ On legal day one, update all screens to drive excitement through welcome messages, introduction of new team members, and FAQs on that the merger means to them. Prioritize high-traffic branches for immediate testing, provide staff with talking points, and review compliance (ex: verify rates and promotions) to ensure accuracy.
- ☐ Optimize content & technology within 30-60 days of M&A, assigning content ownership for updates and regular refreshes. Ensure all CMS training has been completed.
- ☐ Evaluate current CMS for scalability, and content customization. Decommission outdated media players and redundant systems while consolidating vendor contracts wherever possible.
- ☐ Optimize long-term support and scalability by reviewing on-site/remote support, ensuring remote troubleshooting access, and establishing a clear plan for hardware failures. Conduct cybersecurity audits and ensure role-based access is in place.

## BANKING EQUIPMENT

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- ☐ List all banking equipment assets, identifying their locations, brands, software, and usage. Confirm obsolescence throughout both organizations while avoiding assumptions that the acquiring/prevaling brand has the best possible equipment in-place.
- ☐ Review all service providers and agreements in place and seek redundancies in service geography and offering. Take this as an opportunity to grow relationships with top service providers and renegotiate pricing based on increased scope. Conduct extensive testing to ensure all integrations will work within the newly combined tech stack.
- ☐ Consider selling existing hardware to other financial institutions to make way for new tools while increasing available capital.
- ☐ Clearly identify both core and/or ATM processors, current agreements in place, software providers, corresponding subscriptions, and pending renewals that may require immediate action in the midst of transition.
- ☐ Review what changes will have the most impact on Customers/Members from both a hardware and software perspective. Proactively communicate changes, dates of adjustments, and how those changes will improve their day-to-day banking experience. Train Employees on the tools to enable them to offer expert assistance and answer FAQ's with confidence.

## PEOPLE OPERATIONS

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- ☐ Ensure staffing compliments, roles, and responsibilities are appropriately mapped from one organization to the other... refine and align job descriptions from one organization to the next.
- ☐ Identify which organization's sales and service strategy will survive, performing a gap analysis on the organization that will need to adapt to a new way of doing things to expose potential blind spots.
- ☐ Find the top performers from the acquired organization and ensure you know they're amazing, helping to retain talent.
- ☐ Launch training on how to deliver prescriptive language to Customers/Members who may be feeling uneasy about the change, ensuring team members know how to display empathy and de-escalate difficult situations... ensure Employees are empowered above and beyond that of "business as usual".
- ☐ Set clear and attainable KPIs for success while doubling down on reward and recognition for Employees who carry forward the mission and flawlessly deliver a great transition experience.