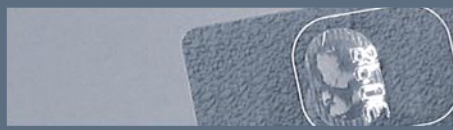
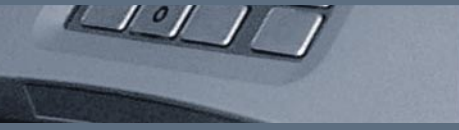


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Countervailing pressures create complex TAU market dynamics

The teller assist unit (TAU) and ATM markets have a lot in common. The technology is similar, and use of the terminals is driven by a desire to increase efficiency.

Despite these similarities the markets are, for one simple reason, very different: ATMs are customer facing while TAUs are teller operated. This difference may seem obvious, but it is critical because banks feel they *must* deploy ATMs, and as a result, almost all retail banks do. In contrast, they have much more of a choice as to whether, when, where and how to deploy TAUs – and it is this choice which has led to more varied adoption.

For many years TAUs did not radically change the retail banking model – they simply made existing teller-based branches more efficient. Regulations in some countries gave a further boost. In Europe and North America, countries including Canada, Germany, Italy, Spain and the USA adopted TAUs in large numbers. In other countries, especially less developed economies, TAUs made barely any impact – not so much because of a strategic decision not to deploy, but because banks had a choice and other activities and investments tended to take priority.

Bank branch evolution has given TAUs a second lease of life, and to some extent banks have less choice than previously. There has been a global push towards more open-plan layouts, and tellers are today far less likely to be shielded behind security glass; as a result, banks need ways of securely storing cash, and TAUs are the obvious solution for banks that do not wish to drive all their customers to self-service. More recently 'branch transformation' takes this a step further by integrating face-to-face customer service into an increasingly automated branch layout.

RBR has been regularly analysing the TAU market for many years, and the results of its latest global TAU survey (see page 2) paint a complex picture. On the one hand, more countries have a need for TAUs than ever, but at the same time, the number of TAUs per branch is often falling, and in more developed economies the number of branches is also decreasing.

RBR reports that the growth factors are winning out, but only just, with the total number of TAUs worldwide increasing 1% compared to two years ago. Going forward, continued downward pressure in more developed economies means that global growth will come from newer markets picking up the TAU mantle.

Dominic Hirsch, Editor

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Editor Dominic Hirsch

Managing Editor Morten Jorgensen

Assistant Editor Tomomi Kimura

Contributors Emily Beeby, Beatriz Benito, Sam Blackwell, Antonella Comes, Daniel Dawson, Alison Ebbage, Chris Herbert, Tom Ikonen, Thomas Madden, Andrew Martin

Subscriptions Manager Abigail Milne

Advertising Managers Amanda Hardy, Felix Kronabetter

For all editorial and advertising enquiries:

Telephone: +44 20 8831 7300 Fax: +44 20 8831 7301

Email: bulletin@rbrlondon.com

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