



8 reasons why banks should go bananas

By Neal Reynolds, President, BankMarketingCenter.com

And no, not the kind you'll find in the grocery store. The kind you'll see on a baseball diamond!

*"Imagine what the best possible fan experience is and do that. Don't settle for the way things have been done before."*¹

- Jesse Cole, Owner, Savannah Bananas

Have you tried to catch a Savannah Bananas ballgame recently? I have, and that experience is what prompted me — in part, anyway — to write about them.



Let's face it, Jesse Cole hasn't just built a baseball team. He has created a cultural phenomenon. His approach in doing so, from what I've seen and read, was driven by a singular thought, one that reimagined everything about the traditional baseball experience. After all, when we think of baseball and baseball teams, we rarely think of masterful marketing or any kind of breakthrough experience. But Cole's Savannah Bananas have flipped that script using bold-and-creative-totally-non-risk-averse thinking, a fan-first philosophy, and community-focus that any business can learn from, including community banks.

1. Put Customers (and Employees) First

The Bananas' winning formula starts with prioritizing people. They tossed out ticket fees, bundled food and drink into one flat ticket price, and rejected sponsorships to keep the experience pure and affordable. Cole asked himself: "What's wrong with this thing? How can it be improved?" The answer? "We are not trying to sell anything ... Our goal is to entertain and create attention. We believe attention beats marketing 1,000% of the time."¹

Bank takeaway: Community banks can take a page from this playbook by simplifying service and fees, and focusing on creating enjoyable, memorable interactions. Whether it's offering bundled checking services or simpler, transparent, less costly fee structures, reducing friction wins trust and loyalty.

2. Build a Culture of Engagement and Emotion

From choreographed dances and "Banana Nanas" on-field entertainment to personalized thank-you videos when customers buy tickets, the Bananas create emotional connections at every fan touchpoint.

Bank takeaway: Community banks can and should — if not doing so already! — cultivate genuine engagement by delighting customers in unexpected ways. After all, a customer is a kind of "fan." Once again taking a page from Cole's playbook, this could take the form of a personalized video

“thank you card” when someone opens a new account, or hosting financial education events that feature local experts and snacks. Doing so goes a long way in building brand loyalty.

3. Share Stories and People Behind the Brand

The Bananas introduced viewers to their staff through their popular, 30-episode podcast series “Bananas Unpeeled,” making every team member part of the brand story, and covering topics such as “Every team needs characters,” and “What’s wrong with baseball?” Suddenly, fans didn’t just come for baseball; they knew the backstory, got to know the players, and came to cheer for personalities they knew and loved.

Bank takeaway: Community banks can further personalize services by showcasing the real people who customers encounter with a branch visit. Whether through staff spotlights or employee profiles on social media, bringing humanity to their products and services builds genuine connections and trust.

4. Experiment Boldly and Learn Fast

The Bananas refuse to stick with “what’s always worked.” They try something new every game, such as new skits, promotions, and fan interactions; anything to stay fresh and fun. And, as their success has proven, the experimentation has been well worth the risk.

Bank takeaway: Banks can borrow this mindset by piloting small-scale initiatives — like fintech partnership kiosks, financial podcasts, or under-the-radar community events — and scale what works. An iterative approach encourages innovation, enhances customer experience, and allows flexibility.

5. Create Shareable Moments

With over 8.8 million TikTok followers and ingenious short-form videos featuring dancing players, unexpected moments, and heartfelt surprises, the Bananas focused on shareable content rather than direct selling. These viral hits boost awareness, trust, and brand equity in ways traditional ads never can.

Bank takeaway: Banks can embrace shareable storytelling, perhaps with a video series introducing long-time customers or funny, friendly deep dives into financial advice. The goal? Foster the goodwill and social engagement that attract and retain new customers.

6. Create Seamless, Frictionless Experiences

The Bananas eliminated hidden fees, simplified pricing, and acknowledged every fan from ticket-buying to post-game celebrations. They cover taxes, convenience fees, and parking, all of which are part of a seamless, friction-free experience

Bank takeaway: Community banks can follow suit by auditing their customer journey and removing any pain points they encounter along the path by simplifying account opening, refining their online and mobile banking processes, and eliminating any stumbling blocks or barriers. From intuitive online banking to clear fee disclosures, minimizing friction keeps customers happy and loyal.

7. Invest in Employee Happiness to Serve Better

The Bananas invest in their staff, sending them to Ireland, to concerts, and giving them VIP perks. Needless to say, they're highly motivated to do their jobs with passion!

Bank takeaway: Community banks should view employees as internal customers. As Richard Branson, British entrepreneur and founder of the Virgin Group once said, and Cole obviously took to heart: "Clients do not come first. Employees come first. If you take care of your employees, they will take care of the clients." Offer professional development, healthy work environments, flexible policies, and opportunities for staff to thrive. Happy employees equal better service and higher customer satisfaction.

8. Lead with a Vision and Authentic Culture

Savannah Bananas isn't about wins and losses. It's about joy, belonging, and entertainment pursued joyfully and unapologetically. They've built a fan-first culture that transcends baseball and now draws an audience that can fill Clemson's Memorial Stadium, which has a capacity of 81,000.

Bank takeaway: Banks should articulate a people-first mission, whether it's empowering families, boosting local businesses, participating in local events (see our blog on hyperlocal marketing) or improving financial wellness. A genuine mission — one built on a customer-first culture — attracts loyal customers and guides every service decision.

A Home Run for Banks

The Savannah Bananas may play baseball, but their real game is people. They've built a brand rooted in fun, empathy, and a customer-oriented experience. And that formula can work off the field and in the bank branch.

For community banks, this means shifting mindset: use marketing to create more meaningful moments. Address customer pain points (if and when they arise) swiftly, personalize relationships, foster staff pride, and dare to step outside the (batter's?) box with innovative thinking. By "going Bananas" — with entertainment and empathy — community banks can stand out, build deeper connections, and grow not just their assets, but a fan-worthy brand.

Bank Marketing Center

We're Bank Marketing Center, the leading, subscription-based provider of automated marketing services to community banks. Our goal is to help bank marketers with topical, compelling communication with customers that builds trust, relationships, and revenue. And we do this through automating critical bank marketing functions, such as content creation, social media management and digital asset management, as well as regulatory and brand compliance.

We also want to share what we know – and learn along the way – with all our community banking friends. Whether it's the latest on AI technology, suggestions on how to attract and retain top talent, or the importance of data protection, we're here to make bank marketing the best that it can be.

Want to learn more about what we can do for your community bank and your marketing efforts? You can start by visiting bankmarketingcenter.com. Then, feel free to contact me directly by phone at 678-528-6688 or via email at nreynolds@bankmarketingcenter.com. As always, I welcome your thoughts.

¹ThrivePoint. *The Power of Questions: How the Savannah Bananas Revolutionized the Fan Experience*. August 20, 2024.

*Savannah Bananas is a registered trademark of Fans First Entertainment.