

Local banks roll out smartphone apps

By: Nathan Halverson, The Press Democrat

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SANTA ROSA – Want to deposit a check without leaving home?

Well, now there is an app for that.

Summit State Bank launched a free iPhone application that lets customers of the Santa Rosa bank make deposits from anywhere they have a web connection.

They just snap a couple photos of the front and back of the check, hit send, and technology takes care of the rest.

The money can be in a user's account the same day.

“This seems to be the wave of the future,” said Tom Duryea, president and chief executive of Summit State Bank. “People can bank remotely.”

Summit State is one of several local institutions offering new mobile technology in response to the changing habits of customers, who are increasingly banking online.

Exchange Bank plans to offer a similar service by the end of the year, said Bill Schrader, president and chief executive.

“We recognize the appeal it has to our customers,” he said. “So we made the investment.”

In fact, more people now prefer online banking to any of the long-standing options such as ATMs and bank branches, according to a recent survey by the American Bankers Association.

In 2007, old-fashioned branches were the most popular place to bank, with about 35 percent of people saying they preferred to conduct their financial affairs at a bank branch, according to the survey.

But last year, branches took a back seat to online banking, which was the option preferred by about 35 percent of customers.

The newest trend appears to be mobile banking, which wasn't an option for customers only a few years ago. Today, it is the preferred choice of about 3 percent of clients.

Community First Credit Union in Santa Rosa has invested heavily in mobile banking technology.

In March, it launched banking applications for the iPhone, Android and BlackBerry phones. The credit union's application lets users check account balances, transfer money, pay loans, and even graph their spending habits.

Summit State Bank plans to launch a similar application next month. Its check depositing application is expected to be available soon for Blackberry and Android phones, too.

"We are proud to be the first Sonoma County community bank to offer mobile deposit to our customers," Duryea said. "It's just another way to service our customer."

To use the deposit application, customers must have a minimum balance of \$1,500 and register at a bank branch. Bank customers do not have a minimum balance requirement.

Bank customers can download the application by going to the Apple App Store and searching for ezDeposit.