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TOP CORE BANKING CONSULTANTS 2026

ICI CONSULTING

BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN CORE BANKING TRANSFORMATION

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ICI Consulting

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BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN CORE BANKING TRANSFORMATION

Core, digital, payment, and ancillary solution decisions have traditionally been viewed as technology projects. Financial institutions often begin the process by comparing platforms, reviewing demonstrations, examining features, and negotiating with vendors. However, as banking continues to evolve through artificial intelligence, fintech innovation, open architectures, regulatory expectations, and changing customer demands, technology decisions have become much more than IT initiatives.

Technology now influences nearly every aspect of an institution's future, from customer experience and operational efficiency to product innovation, risk management, and long-term competitiveness. This shift has created a need for a more strategic approach, one that begins with understanding an institution's goals before considering any technology solution.

This perspective defines ICI Consulting.

Rather than positioning core, digital, payment, and ancillary banking evaluations as a search for the newest platform or the most recognized vendor, the company approaches each engagement as a structured decision-making process designed to help banks and credit unions make informed choices aligned with their unique objectives.

For ICI Consulting CEO Tracy Brewster, the foundation of effective technology advisory begins with an independent, trusted expert. Because ICI does not sell software or maintain financial relationships that influence its recommendations, the company is able to focus entirely on each institution's business requirements, needs, and priorities.

"We come to the table without a preset agenda or a product to promote. Our focus is on staying fully vendor-neutral so we can deliver meaningful, unbiased results for our banks and credit unions," says Brewster.

That vendor-neutral approach allows ICI to serve as an objective advisor during the most consequential decisions financial institutions make. Rather than guiding organizations toward a preset conclusion, the company equips executives to explore their options, understand the trade-offs, align decisions with organizational goals, and move forward with confidence in the direction they choose.

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Creating Clarity Before Choosing Technology

Every financial institution operates differently. A solution that works well for one organization may not address the strategic requirements, operational realities, or growth objectives of another. Recognizing this, ICI begins each engagement with an assessment designed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the institution's goals, growth objectives, brand identity, and market differentiators.

The process starts with an evaluation of strategy, objectives, business drivers, organizational needs, technology adoption preferences, innovation goals, and existing challenges. By establishing this foundation, ICI ensures that technology recommendations are connected to measurable business outcomes rather than driven solely by industry trends.

The company examines how institutions serve their customers, how they differentiate themselves in their markets, and how future technology investments support their broader vision. This creates a more complete picture of what the organization needs today while also considering where it wants to go tomorrow.

ICI uses a comprehensive toolkit that includes AI•IQ™, a proprietary AI-powered platform designed to support the data-driven intelligence provided to financial institutions. Rather than simply presenting a list of available systems, ICI develops recommendations based on each institution's priorities. Its team evaluates solutions across multiple dimensions, identifying strengths, limitations, potential risks, and opportunities. The result is a balanced assessment and substantiated set of recommendations that gives executives the information they need to make informed decisions with confidence.

Tracy Brewster,
CEO

Brewster believes the role of consulting is not to replace an institution's decision-making process but to strengthen it by providing specialized industry expertise, market intelligence, and an independent perspective.

Building Objective Vendor Evaluations

Core banking evaluations can become complicated quickly. Financial institutions must consider functionality, integration capabilities, pricing structures, implementation requirements, contract terms, and long-term vendor relationships. Without a structured process, organizations may struggle to compare options accurately and effectively.

ICI addresses this challenge by leveraging its proprietary repository of structured data and institutional knowledge, built from thousands of customer engagements and consulting projects, to create objective, data-driven comparisons among vendors and solutions. Combined with industry knowledge, analytical tools, and decades of experience, this enables ICI to help institutions understand the true value and implications of each option. ICI's AI•IQ™ further supports consultants by enabling them to quickly access, analyze, and synthesize this exclusive knowledge base, enhancing the speed, depth, and consistency of their recommendations.

One vital component of ICI's approach is its ability to evaluate financial proposals and identify inconsistencies. Through its total cost of ownership model and extensive market knowledge, the company helps institutions understand pricing structures and expense escalators while using data-driven intelligence to negotiate from a position of strength.

Having worked with approximately 900 financial institutions across thousands of industry engagements, ICI has developed a broad understanding of pricing expectations, contract structures, and market conditions. This knowledge allows the company to provide benchmarking insights that many institutions would not have access to internally.

The goal is not simply to secure the best contract economics. Instead, ICI helps institutions negotiate agreements that support long-term success by balancing cost, functionality, favorable contract terms, solution flexibility, and strategic value.

Reducing Risk in Complex Technology Decisions

Technology transformations involve significant risk. Core, digital, payment, and ancillary system conversions, integrations, modernization initiatives, and platform changes require careful planning, organizational alignment, and effective execution. Even experienced internal teams may find these projects challenging because they occur infrequently.

Financial institutions evaluate their core, digital, payment, and ancillary systems only once every several years, while technology markets continue to evolve rapidly. Vendors change, innovative solutions emerge, and customer expectations continue to rise. This creates a difficult environment for institutions attempting to evaluate their options without current market intelligence.

> **"We present optionality in the technical considerations and solution choices. We identify and quantify risk. We simplify the complexity of any decisions, and then we work to strengthen decision confidence based on the benefits to the financial institution.**

ICI supports organizations throughout the decision-making process by helping them define requirements, evaluate alternatives, prepare negotiation strategies, and plan implementation approaches. The company's structured methodology helps institutions identify potential challenges before they become costly problems.

Brewster emphasizes that successful evaluations are not always defined by selecting a new provider. In many cases, remaining with an existing vendor may be the best strategic decision if contract terms, product roadmaps, and service expectations can be better aligned.

The company approaches each engagement without a predetermined expectation that an institution should change providers. The objective is to identify the solution that best supports the institution's strategy, whether that involves maintaining an existing relationship, enhancing current capabilities, or moving to a different platform.

Translating Complexity into Executive Decisions

One of the biggest challenges facing financial institutions is translating technical information into meaningful executive-level recommendations. Technology evaluations often involve complex details that can make it difficult for leadership teams to understand the broader implications.

ICI focuses on translating those technical considerations into business outcomes. Rather than presenting technology choices as isolated features or capabilities, the company connects its recommendations to operational efficiency, customer experience, strategic objectives, and risk management.

"We present optionality in the technical considerations and solution choices. We identify and quantify risk. We simplify the complexity of any decisions, and then we work to strengthen decision confidence based on the benefits to the financial institution," says Brewster.

This approach reflects a broader transformation in the banking industry. As technology becomes increasingly integrated into every aspect of financial services, executives require more than technical analysis. They need strategic guidance that helps them understand how technology decisions affect the organization as a whole.

ICI's role is to bridge that gap by providing leadership teams with a clear framework for evaluating their options and determining the path that best supports their future.

Preparing Institutions for the Future of Banking

The financial services landscape continues to evolve at an unprecedented pace. Artificial intelligence, open APIs, digital banking expectations, and fintech ecosystems are reshaping how institutions operate and compete. For financial institutions, the challenge is not simply adopting modern technology. It is determining which innovations create meaningful value and how those investments align with organizational priorities.

ICI continues to help institutions navigate this changing environment through independent advisory services, market and institutional intelligence, and specialized expertise. The company's position as a privately held organization allows it to maintain its commitment to objectivity while remaining focused on the specific needs of banks and credit unions.

Brewster believes successful technology decisions require a combination of preparation, insight, and strategic alignment. "Our role at ICI is to advocate for the financial institution and maintain a vendor-neutral bias outcome. We keep our finger on the pulse of the industry, and our role is to help financial institutions create clarity, leverage, and confidence so that they can make the decision that is right for their organization," she explains.

As institutions continue to face increasingly complex technology choices, the importance of independent guidance will only grow. The future of core, digital, payment, and ancillary banking consulting will not be shaped by whichever vendor offers the newest platform. Instead, it will be defined by organizations that help financial institutions create disciplined evaluation processes centered on strategy, outcomes, and long-term success.

ICI Consulting represents this next generation of advisory services. By replacing vendor-driven decisions with institution-driven strategy, the company helps banks and credit unions approach technology investments with greater confidence, reduced uncertainty, and a clearer understanding of what success looks like. BC