

CELENT

BECOMING A CELENT MODEL BANK

A Guide to Winning Celent's Premier Award for Financial
Institutions, 2025 Edition

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WHAT IS MODEL BANK, AND WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

Model Bank is the main award that a financial institution (FI) can win from Celent. It is bank-centered—available only to retail and commercial banks, credit unions, thrifts, and card issuers globally. Any FI can apply, irrespective of whether it has any prior relationship with Celent. Celent does not charge any fees to participate in the Model Bank program. 2025 will be the program’s 19th anniversary.

Celent started Model Bank research in 2008 and has continued annually since. The vision for Celent’s Model Bank research was to try to answer an apparently simple question:



What would it look like for a financial institution to do everything right with today’s technology?

Of course, the question is not nearly as simple as it appears. The terms “everything” and “right” will mean very different things to different banks, depending on their size, the complexity of their operations and product sets, and their technological starting points. Every bank does *some* things well, and others not as well when it comes to technology— “Model Bank” is the lens we provide the industry into real world examples of effective usage of technology.

Celent’s approach is to seek examples of success and best practices in technology usage in different areas critical to good banking. Every year we invite banks to nominate and describe their technology initiatives. We review all nominations and recognize just the few, most compelling with a Model Bank award. Every year we present around 10 to 20 awards. Since 2012, we have been recognizing one initiative every year as the overall **Model Bank of the Year**, our top honor.

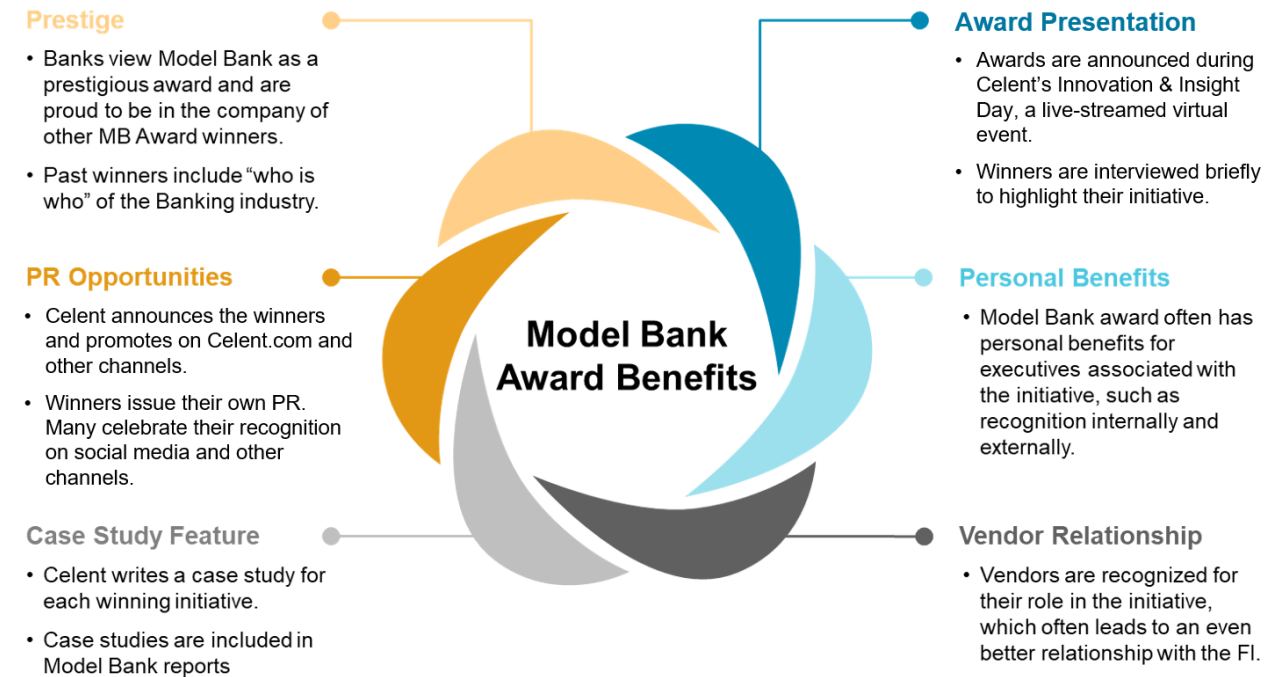
Why Should You Care?

Being recognized as a Model Bank has several benefits for a financial institution (see Figure 1).

First, financial institutions tell us they view Model Bank as a distinctly prestigious award. The awards are focused on banking yet span a full spectrum of technology initiatives. Competition is global and deep, and our selection process is rigorous. Award winners join a prestigious group. Past winners include banks and credit unions across the asset tier spectrum from all parts of the globe, such as Barclays, Citi, Commercial Bank of Africa, Credit Union Australia, Mashreq Bank, mBank,

Scotiabank, US Bank, USAA, Bank of Montreal, Teachers Federal Credit Union, and many others.

Figure 1: Benefits of Receiving a Model Bank Award



Source: Celent

As a result, a Model Bank award presents significant PR opportunities for the winning FIs. We announce the winners with short videos at our high-profile Innovation & Insight Day event (I&I Day) and issue a press release, publish a [summary report](#) to the public, and deploy social media content. Many winners also issue their own press release announcing their award and highlighting why they were recognized. Some even find other creative opportunities to celebrate. For example, Knab bank in the Netherlands celebrated getting a Model Bank award by sounding a gong at Euronext.¹ Numerous institutions have featured the recognition from Celent in their annual reports.

Furthermore, Celent analysts write detailed case studies of each winning initiative. These case studies are featured in our research library and available for download to Celent clients, generating further exposure for the winning FIs and their initiatives.


Awards are announced for the first time publicly during the I&I Day live-stream, our flagship annual event (Figure 2). Award winners are featured in short videos, giving them an audience during the event. The virtual program often features exciting keynote presentations from industry leaders, academics, and Celent analysts.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGWC8vOilUc>


Figure 2: Model Banks and Their Leaders Are Introduced Live During Our Innovation & Insight Day

BMO IS WORKING TO BUILD A DIGITALLY ENABLED, FUTURE-READY BANK


- Founded in 1817
- Headquarters in Toronto and Chicago (BMO Financial Corp)
- Presence in 32 states
- 1,890 branches
- 13 million customers
- USD \$971 billion in assets (CAD \$1.34 billion)



Celent recognizes **BMO** as our **2024 Model Bank for Integration Excellence** for the bank's technical achievement in the accelerated conversion of an acquired bank and for best practices in migration and onboarding of the new customer base.

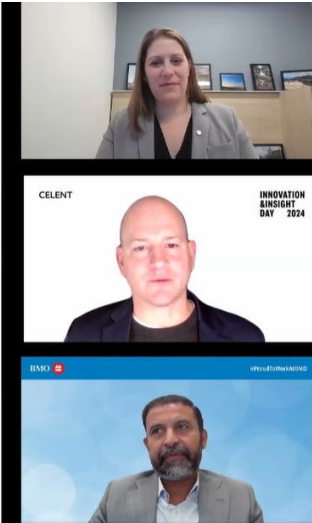


Conversion and Integration Excellence



Customer Experience: The largest conversion in Canadian banking history

★★★★★



© CELENT 4

Source: Celent

It isn't only the institution that benefits from an award. Executives associated with the winning initiatives often speak about the Model Bank award having personal and career benefits for them, such as recognition internally and externally.

For initiatives that rely on technology vendor solutions and expertise, the award often leads to an even stronger relationship between the winning FI and its vendors. While we don't explicitly award vendors, Celent recognizes their contribution to the initiative. In response, vendors often issue their own PR statements celebrating the achievements of their clients.²

² An example: <https://horizn.com/rbc-wins-celent-model-bank-award/>

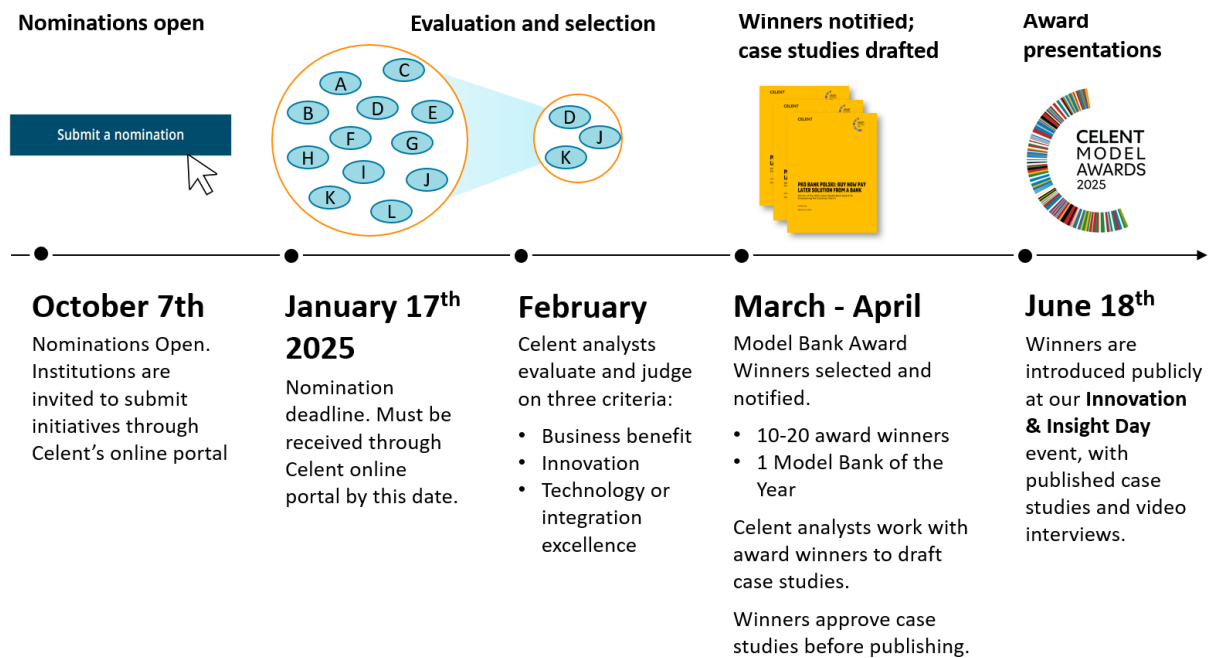
MODEL BANK 2025: APPROACH AND TIMELINE

The 2025 program opens in October 2024. Nominations can be submitted online and must be received by January 17th, 2025. Awards will be made public at our Innovation & Insight Day in June 2025.

While the overall approach to our 2025 awards is similar to previous years (Figure 3), there are some key differences to the timeline from past years. The program has shifted later in the year.

- **Deadline for Submissions:** January 17th, 2025.
- **Presentation of Awards:** will occur at our virtual Innovation & Insight Day event, on June 18, 2025.

Figure 3: Celent Model Bank 2025 Timeline



Source: Celent

In recent years we’ve loosened the importance of categories. Rather than awarding by pre-determined category, we select winning initiatives from among the entire pool of nominations. You can select whatever category fits best in your nomination. The category you select is not limiting. We’ll consider the initiative for all awards.

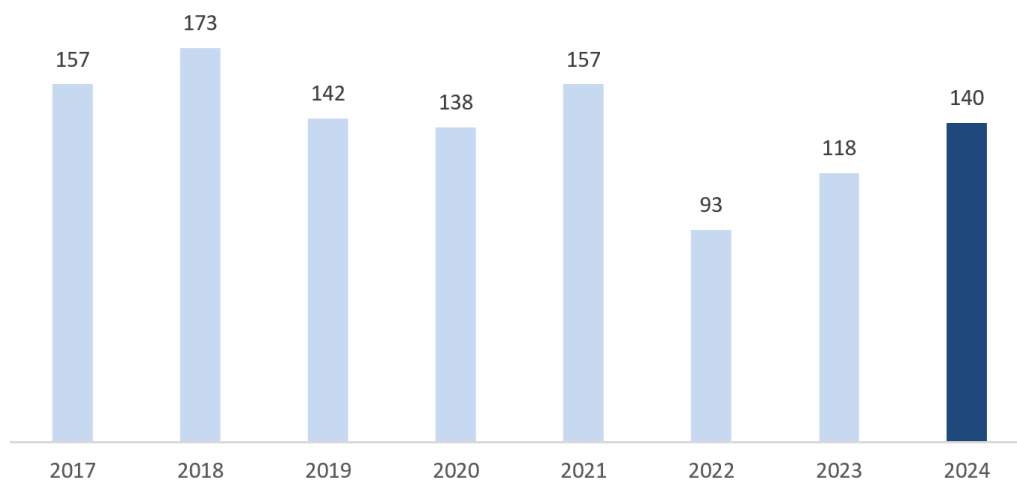
Nominations

The online nomination form is designed to capture key information needed for Celent analysts to effectively assess the initiative. [Nominations](#) are made online, although we offer a [Nomination Worksheet](#) in PDF format for you to use in drafting and reviewing your nomination before submitting it online. We also welcome supplemental materials to assist describing each initiative. Often banks have internal project documents that can be easily sanitized and attached to the nomination. This saves time for the bank and provides Celent analysts with useful project detail.

Celent acknowledges receipt of each nomination and may reach out with clarifying questions on the nomination via email. If applicable, we also communicate with a vendor partner, but our primary communications will be with the financial institution.

Since 2016, we’ve received well over 100 nominations in most years (except for 2022). The decline in number in 2022 reflects, in part, two new award programs that debuted last year, Model Risk Manager and Model Asset Manager (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Total Nominations Received in Recent Years



Source: Celent

Judging

We continue to judge the initiatives on three criteria.

- 1. Business Benefits.** Celent recognizes initiatives that have a clear and sustainable impact on the business—those that most clearly advance your bank’s business objectives. Therefore, this category is weighted most heavily. Project size and scope matter, and we pay particular attention to quantitative success measures.

2. **Degree of Innovation.** This measure draws attention to those initiatives deemed particularly innovative for their use of technology in improving sales or service results, reducing risks or costs, or improving CX or business processes.
3. **Technology or Implementation Excellence.** Some initiatives are noteworthy for their extreme difficulty, complexity of technology, or implementation excellence. Celent recognizes initiatives that stand apart in this area.

All Celent Banking analysts are involved in the judging process, although the exact approach should perhaps remain “a secret sauce.” Any given nomination is independently reviewed by at least three analysts to avoid confirmation bias. Shortlisted nominations are typically reviewed by four to five analysts.

In 2025, we expect to recognize as many as 20 Model Banks. Also, we expect to select one initiative as the Model Bank of the Year, the overall winner. We begin notifying the winners in February 2025.

Case Studies and Award Presentation

The Model Bank process culminates with Celent’s Innovation and Insight Day, during which we publicly announce the winners and celebrate their achievements. In 2025, we expect again to hold this as a virtual event. The registration link will be live about 3 months before the event.

In the meantime, you can check out the content from last year’s event at our [I&I Day 2024 hub page](#) (free registration required).

We will have a small number of I&I Day sponsorship opportunities available again this year. Vendors wishing to sponsor the event should contact their Celent account manager or write to info@celent.com.

Concurrently with the I&I Day, Celent publishes a series of Model Bank case studies, one for each winning initiative.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO WIN A MODEL BANK AWARD?

An innovation culture, measurable business benefits, and excellence in technology and implementation are all prerequisites to becoming a Celent Model Bank. These traits are rare, but we have been recognizing on average 17 initiatives each year since the Model Awards program's inception in 2008.

The quantity of awards made each year has grown alongside the number of nominations we receive. Most institutions win a single award, although an impressive number of banks have received multiple Celent Model Bank awards over the years, including Bank of America, BMO, Citi, JPMorgan Chase, India's ICICI Bank, RBC, and Taishin Bank. Without exception, these banks regularly nominate new initiatives each year.

Historically, an institution's size or geography do not correlate with likelihood of winning an award. While multiple award winners such as Citi, Chase, and ICICI are very large banks, other giants have received a more modest number of awards. As with any award, you must enter first to stand a chance of winning. At the other end of the spectrum, there are many small banks and credit unions among the Celent Model Bank winners. In 2021, Celent's Model Bank of the Year was not a bank at all but [Teachers Federal Credit Union](#).

Winning Tips: Key Success Factors

So, what does it take to win a Celent Model Bank award? Well, a key prerequisite is to enter the competition by completing a nomination form. If you downloaded this report from the nomination page, you already know where it is. Otherwise, please visit: <https://www.celent.com/awards/model-bank>.

Naturally, the main factor determining a nomination's success is the **strength of your own initiative** (see Figure 5). Remember, we will only award "live" initiatives, which are already delivering business benefits, although we also accept advanced stage pilots, as long as they have measurable results. Make sure to include quantifiable business benefits, because we will mark down any initiatives without them. We appreciate that some benefits are hard to quantify, but vague statements about expected benefits from the business case will not be sufficient. We also appreciate that you don't want to divulge potentially competitively sensitive information. If you are not comfortable sharing absolute figures with us, feel free to talk about relative performance (for example, percentage revenue increase or cost saving).

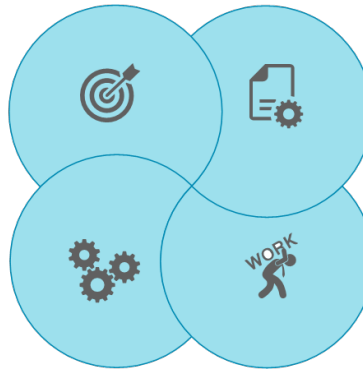
Figure 5: Key Success Factors Among Winning Initiatives

Strength of Your Initiative

- Focus on live initiatives and demonstrate business benefits, innovation, and technology or implementation excellence.

Strength of Competition

- Not much you can do about it, but as with all the awards, it's all relative...



Clarity of Submission

- It might be brilliant, but if we can't understand it, you won't win

Bank Ownership

- Be engaged throughout. Don't let the vendor do it without your involvement.

Source: Celent

We are also looking for genuine innovation. It doesn't have to be the "world's first," although that obviously helps. We are interested in how you experiment with emerging technologies to drive your business. However, innovation doesn't only mean "bleeding edge" technology; often it is about how you apply technology to enhance your customer experience or to transform the ways of working.

Our final assessment criterion is technology or implementation excellence. Have you just done a "heart transplant on a plane"? Was it an integration nightmare? Did you roll it out around the world? Did you find an interesting way to collaborate with a fintech player or another third party? Have you woven a complex ecosystem to deliver the solution? If so, we want to hear about it.

Get inspired by the stories of past winners!

Dive deeper into our [2024 Model Bank winners](#) to see how you can stand out in this year's program.

Start your nomination form today – submissions will close on January 17th, 2025.

[Go to the Nomination Page](#)

If you are considering entering your initiative, you must be proud of what you achieved. Make sure it comes across in your nomination. Clearly tell us what you did and why, and why you think what you did is unique and deserves recognition. Focus on essential points, but **don't skim on detail**. You would be surprised how many entries suffer from lack of clarity; it's as if some candidates think that if they bamboozle us with technology acronyms, we will be more impressed, or if they twist their arguments into a knot, we will award them just for sounding clever. Your initiative might be brilliant, but if we can't understand it, you won't win. **Clarity of your submission** is crucial!

Consider some examples in Table 1, which are real (but sanitized) data fields from submissions we received over the years. Submissions A and B barely tell us anything about the initiatives, while C and D are much clearer with specific data points.

Table 1: Comparing Clarity of Nominations

	Initiative Description	Comments
Submission A	Since its inception, the goal of the bank has been to serve commercial clients in a virtual setting with a highly experienced but small staff. The bank has no teller lines, no branch locations, and just six on-site staff members with a combined 160-plus years of experience in the banking industry.	Tells nothing about the initiative itself.
Submission B	VENDOR delivers SOLUTION as a comprehensive solution by adding new modules and upgrading or replacing the existing applications as appropriate, thereby continuing to get a return on BANK’s past investment in infrastructure, software solutions, and user training VENDOR has configured a solution that not only meets but also exceeds BANK.	Difficult to understand.
Submission C	<p>BANK had actively engaged VENDOR to partner in building the sales and marketing website, the application platform, online banking platform, and mobile banking platform.</p> <p>The vision was to create a state-of-the-art online service experience that provides consistent process, user experience, and a single application to support both the online and mobile platforms. This would lead to reduced servicing cost and enhanced customer experience, along with bringing consistency on the customer touch points across all servicing channels.</p> <p>This platform was designed to be the foundation for omnichannel servicing and provide advanced analytics for next best action for all the channels. The key guiding philosophy for the team was “Anticipate the customer needs and exceed the customer expectation throughout the customer interaction process across all channels.”</p>	Clear description, particularly of what the initiative is trying to achieve.
Submission D	<p>\$X million project replacing the bank’s core banking technology for all of its NN branches in M states across its footprint to boost efficiencies and give a new level of banking transparency and simplicity to customers.</p> <p>Creates one of the first real time processing systems in the U.S. banking industry, and marks one of the first successful core banking infrastructure replacements for a major U.S. bank in more than a decade.</p> <p>The new system powers BANK’s checking and savings, consumer and business lending, and mortgage capabilities and is fully integrated with its branch and ATM networks, call centers, and online and mobile banking services. It allows the bank to post many customer transactions in real time, which significantly lowers back office processing costs. Real time processing is a capability generally unavailable among U.S. banks.</p> <p>By centralizing all of the bank’s customer account information onto a single platform, bank employees can provide faster, more comprehensive service to its customers. The new system provides the bank’s customers with the same information available to the bank through all points of access: branches, online, phone, ATM, or mobile device. That transparency is expected to provide customers more timely information about their accounts, which offers greater control over their finances.</p>	Clear description. Has specific numbers to appreciate the scale of the project.

Source: Celent

Consider including internal documentation (for example, documents you may have used to socialize the initiative internally). Celent welcomes additional materials to supplement a well-written application. Videos are welcome also but must be hosted externally and included as a link.

If applicable, don't hesitate to involve the vendor when submitting your nomination form. Celent routinely interviews vendors as part of the case study process.

However, make sure that you (the bank) are actively engaged in and **own the Model Bank process**. Occasionally, we have a technology vendor that wants to share the work they did with an FI and submits the nomination form on a bank's behalf. We are okay with that approach, as long as it is done with the FI's involvement and consent, and the bank is aware of and committed to the overall process. In the extreme scenario, we select the initiative as a winner, and the bank shows no interest in it—does not engage when trying to write a case study or doesn't even respond to an email congratulating them on winning the award. Over the years, we've only had a couple of such instances, and we had to disqualify those initiatives. Remember, the winners are not publicly announced until I&I Day.

Don't despair if your entry does not win. If it is a genuinely interesting initiative, we might approach you about writing a separate case study about it anyway.

Celent Values

Whatever we do at Celent, we are guided by our values. You can expect us to apply the same values to the Model Bank program.

Insight and Passion. We are passionate about application of technology to drive success in financial services. We get excited when we see something genuinely impressive. And because of our personal and institutional experience, we recognize "good" when we see it.

Integrity and Independence. Some of the nominating firms, and many of the eventual winners, are or have been clients to Celent's retained advisory service. However, we never give preference to clients in the selection process and always ensure that Celent was not directly involved in the creation or deployment of any of the initiatives that have been recognized. To do otherwise would mean compromising our values and risking our reputation we have taken such great care to build.

In other words, you can be assured that if you win the award, you deserve it. We hope to be reading about your initiative(s) in the Model Bank 2025 program. Good luck!

LEVERAGING CELENT'S EXPERTISE

If you found this report valuable, you might consider engaging with Celent for custom analysis and research. Our collective experience and the knowledge we gained while working on this report can help you streamline the creation, refinement, or execution of your strategies.

Support for Financial Institutions

Typical projects we support include:

Vendor short listing and selection. We perform discovery specific to you and your business to better understand your unique needs. We then create and administer a custom RFI to selected vendors to assist you in making rapid and accurate vendor choices.

Business practice evaluations. We spend time evaluating your business processes and requirements. Based on our knowledge of the market, we identify potential process or technology constraints and provide clear insights that will help you implement industry best practices.

IT and business strategy creation. We collect perspectives from your executive team, your front line business and IT staff, and your customers. We then analyze your current position, institutional capabilities, and technology against your goals. If necessary, we help you reformulate your technology and business plans to address short-term and long-term needs.

Support for Vendors

We provide services that help you refine your product and service offerings.

Examples include:

Product and service strategy evaluation. We help you assess your market position in terms of functionality, technology, and services. Our strategy workshops will help you target the right customers and map your offerings to their needs.

Market messaging and collateral review. Based on our extensive experience with your potential clients, we assess your marketing and sales materials—including your website and any collateral.

HISTORIC MODEL BANK REPORTS

[Innovation in Banking and Payments 2024: A snapshot Through the Lens of Model Bank](#)

March 2024

[Innovation in Banking and Payments 2023: A snapshot Through the Lens of Model Bank](#)

March 2023

[Innovation in Banking 2022: A Snapshot Through the Lens of Model Bank](#)

March 2022

[Innovation in Banking 2021: A Snapshot Through the Lens of Model Bank](#)

March 2021

[Innovation in Banking and Payments 2020: A Snapshot Through the Lens of Model Bank](#)

April 2020

[Innovation in Banking and Payments 2019: A Snapshot Through the Lens of Model Bank](#)

April 2019

[Celent Model Bank 2017: Celebrating 10 Years of Model Bank](#)

April 2017

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