WSI Digital and Forward Bank Recognized with Global People's Choice Award for AI Partnership

Two-year collaboration positions the Wisconsin community bank as a model for practical AI adoption in banking

PRUDENVILLE, MI, UNITED STATES, September 28, 2026 / EINPresswire.com/ -- WSI Digital, a digital strategy firm serving community banks nationwide, and Forward Bank, a community bank based in Marshfield, Wisconsin, were recognized with the Global People's Choice Award at WSI's 2026 Global Convention for their two-year partnership on AI adoption.

The recognition caps a collaboration that began when Forward Bank leadership heard Eric Cook speak at a Wisconsin bankers' event. Roughly a year later, Forward Bank engaged Cook to help identify where and how to begin adopting AI. The partnership has since grown to include on-site staff training, recurring internal training sessions, and joint appearances at industry programs including the Graduate School of Banking, Madison and the Financial Brand Forum in Las Vegas.

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>
> *Eric Cook, CEO and Chief Digital Strategist at WSI Digital*

Much of the early work centered on governance and policy, giving Forward Bank a framework to test and roll out new AI tools without stalling on compliance requirements in a heavily regulated industry. That foundation has since translated into measurable results: in one reporting period, Forward Bank recorded 4,677 Copilot actions across the organization, saving an estimated 276 hours of staff time.

"We are essentially a part of their organization as their AI department," said Eric Cook, CEO and Chief Digital Strategist at WSI Digital. "When an employee has an idea, we set up time, we brainstorm, we kick the tires, and figure out how it could work. There have been a number of

people who've taken the reins inside the organization and become AI experts in their own right."

Forward Bank leadership describes the partnership in similar terms.

"What we've built with Eric and the team at WSI is a true thought partnership," said Sheri Dick, Chief Operating Officer of Forward Bank. "They've helped us understand what's practical, not just what's new, inside a highly regulated environment."

Cook, who spent 15 years working inside community banking before moving to the agency side, built WSI Digital's AI practice, CommunityBanking.ai, around the idea that AI adoption works best when framed as a coworker or thought partner rather than a technology purchase.

About WSI Digital

WSI Digital helps community banks build trust and visibility, both with customers searching Google and with AI systems answering questions on their behalf. Founded by Eric Cook, a 15-year community banking veteran turned digital strategist, the agency works with banks across the country building custom bank websites, SEO, and digital advertising. WSI Digital operates as part of the global WSI network, the world's largest network of digital marketing consultants. Learn more at www.poweredbywsi.com.

About Forward Bank

Forward Bank is a customer-owned community bank built around relationships, not transactions. The bank provides personal, business, agricultural, insurance, and investment services, with a focus on local decision-making and long-term investment in the communities it serves. Learn more at www.forward.bank.

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