

## Case Study

# First Reliance Bank strengthens its mortgage lending operations with *Mortgagebot*

Reimagining mortgage lending through a mobile-first  
experience and integrated origination workflows





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*Mortgagebot is a platform built by those in the industry for the industry. Those tools that were once reserved for the largest institutions are now helping community banks like ours compete—and win.*

**Chuck Stuart**  
President, First Reliance Bank  
Mortgage Division

## About First Reliance Bank



founded in 1999



Florence,  
South Carolina



Approximately \$1.1B



Employees: 150+



10 offices



Annual Mortgage Volume:  
\$460M

<https://firstreliance.com/>



First Reliance Bank is a South Carolina-based community bank headquartered in Florence, serving individuals and businesses across South Carolina with mortgage lending activity extending into North Carolina and Virginia, focused on delivering personalized banking, mortgage, and commercial lending solutions while combining relationship-driven service with modern technology to support sustainable growth, operational efficiency, and long-term community engagement.



## The challenge

# Streamlining workflows to better support teams, borrowers, and growth

## Balancing borrower convenience, operational efficiency, and profitability in a volatile mortgage market



Founded with a strong community-banking philosophy, First Reliance Bank has built its mortgage operation around relationships, accessibility, and trust. Over time, the bank expanded to support multiple lending channels—including retail, correspondent, and wholesale—while holding firm to its belief that community banks can compete effectively when supported by the right partnerships and technology. As Chuck Stuart, President of First Reliance Mortgage, explains, “A lot of people worry technology will hurt community banks, but it’s precisely the opposite. When you have a good partner, technology helps close the gap.” That mindset has shaped the bank’s long-term approach to mortgage lending and technology investment.

In recent years, however, the mortgage market experienced a significant shift. After a prolonged period of historically low interest rates, the rapid rise in rates placed pressure on volumes, margins, and overall profitability. For First Reliance Bank, this environment demanded a renewed focus on cost-to-originate and execution efficiency. The bank identified that understanding the true cost of doing a loan—across staffing, technology, and operational partners—was essential to remaining competitive regardless of market conditions.

At the same time, borrower expectations were evolving. More consumers wanted to manage financial transactions the same way they ordered groceries or conducted everyday digital tasks—on their own time, through mobile and web based experiences. Convenience, responsiveness, and speed

became critical differentiators, particularly for first time homebuyers and younger generations. Meeting these expectations placed increasing pressure on traditional mortgage workflows that relied on manual processes, repeated documentation requests, and fragmented systems.

As the bank continued to grow, manual processes made it more difficult to efficiently manage files across multiple states and maintain consistent execution. With geographic expansion top of mind, the team saw an opportunity to streamline operations and adopt a more scalable model—one better suited to supporting growth in a dynamic and evolving mortgage market.

Yet First Reliance Bank was equally committed to preserving its people first culture. They viewed technology not as a replacement for human expertise, but as a way to supplement strong teams and allow them to focus on higher value work. “This is a system built by mortgage people for the industry,” says Stuart. “It’s about upskilling our team so they can deliver a better experience and do more loans—not replacing them.”

Ultimately, the challenge was to modernize the mortgage journey end to end—removing friction, reducing costs, and improving speed—while strengthening borrower relationships and staying true to its values. Doing so would require a tightly integrated approach that connected front end convenience with back office efficiency and positioned the bank to compete confidently through changing market cycles.



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*When you look at what it really costs to do a mortgage, it's the minutes that matter. Five minutes here, ten minutes there—they add up quickly. With the right integrations, those efficiencies allow us to lower our cost, stay competitive in any market, and keep reinvesting in technology and our team."*

**Chuck Stuart**

President, First Reliance Bank  
Mortgage Division

## The solution

# Connecting borrower experience with origination efficiency through integrated workflows

**Redesigning the mortgage origination approach by connecting front-end borrower engagement with back-office workflows, creating a more cohesive, efficient lending experience.**

As borrower expectations continue to evolve, First Reliance Bank took a forward-looking approach to enhancing its mortgage origination journey—bringing greater continuity, flexibility, and efficiency to every stage of the process. The bank focused on creating a more connected experience, from initial engagement through fulfilment, by expanding its use of Originate Mortgagebot and strengthening integration across MortgagebotLOS.

At the center of this strategy was the adoption of a responsive, mobile-first point-of-sale experience. With Originate Mortgagebot, First Reliance Bank enabled borrowers to engage on their preferred devices while supporting multiple application paths, whether guided by a loan officer or completed independently.

Loan officers leveraged the platform as a conversational tool, supporting real-time discussions with borrowers, while clean, structured data flowed seamlessly into MortgagebotLOS—helping maintain consistency throughout the origination process.

Beyond the borrower experience, the bank focused on optimizing workflows across the origination lifecycle. Integrated income, employment, and asset verifications allowed loans to progress efficiently, reducing the need for follow-up documentation later in the process. Appraisal ordering, product eligibility, pricing, and best-execution decisioning were tightly connected, bringing valuable insight closer to the point of sale and supporting faster, more informed decisions for sales teams and third-party partners.

MortgagebotLOS also played a key role in automating document handling and workflow orchestration. Service documents—including credit, flood, and automated underwriting findings—were returned to the system already saved and indexed, minimizing repetitive manual steps. These incremental efficiencies, measured in minutes across multiple stages, added up to meaningful operational improvements that supported higher volumes without additional staffing.

Throughout this transformation, First Reliance Bank viewed technology as an enabler of its people. By pairing experienced mortgage professionals with purpose-built industry technology, teams were better positioned to focus on high-value work—engaging with borrowers, navigating complex scenarios, and delivering a consistent, trusted lending experience.

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***We've added meaningful loan volume without adding staff, and that's a direct result of reducing friction across the process. When workflows are integrated and information flows cleanly, it gives us the efficiency to scale and the flexibility to stay competitive no matter where the market goes."***

**Chuck Stuart**

President, First Reliance Bank

Mortgage Division

## The Results

### Driving scalable growth, lower costs, and stronger borrower engagement

#### Translating operational improvements into tangible business outcomes

First Reliance Bank's investment in a connected, mobile-first mortgage experience delivered measurable improvements across origination performance, operational efficiency, and organizational resilience.

By aligning Originate Mortgagebot with MortgagebotLOS and streamlining workflows end-to-end, the bank was able to do more with existing resources while maintaining its commitment to high-touch, relationship-driven service.

One of the most significant outcomes came from improvements at the front of the mortgage journey. With borrowers engaging through a responsive, mobile-friendly point of sale, applications arrived cleaner and further along in the process.

This shift contributed to a five-fold increase in pre-approvals and applications over a two-year period and supported the bank's strongest first-time homebuyer performance in more than five years.

Operationally, automation and integrations across MortgagebotLOS helped eliminate time-consuming manual tasks that had traditionally slowed processing and underwriting. Service documents returned automatically saved and indexed, reducing repetitive work and allowing teams to focus on higher-value activities. These efficiencies translated directly into cost savings, enabling First Reliance Bank to maintain a cost to originate well below industry averages and remain competitive across changing rate environments.

The bank reported increased loan volume year over year while operating with fewer staff—demonstrating how technology enabled scalability without compromising service quality. The modernized workflow also supported geographic diversification, with a growing portion of business originating from states the bank had not served just a few years earlier.

Together, these results positioned First Reliance Bank to compete confidently through market cycles, reinvest in innovation, and continue delivering the convenience and responsiveness borrowers increasingly expect.

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