

One Bank One Customer

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In the beginning ...

In the beginning, there were bank branches. And **life was good**. Banking transactions were done in the comfort of such branches with tellers in attendance. This was the world until the 80's. Then along came ATMs. Sprouting up like wildflowers at every street corner, ATMs took the bulk of cash transactions and set a new standard for banking convenience. **Life was even better**. 10 years on, the internet revolution took the world by storm. Banking can then be done anywhere as long as a PC and an internet connection were available - another milestone in delivering banking convenience. **Life was great**. We are now on the verge of another revolution. Mobile Banking. **Will life be best?**

Perhaps not.

The new challenge ...

For a long time, banks have recognized that they can strengthen their relationship with their customers by offering a more consistent customer experience via a more dynamic and efficient suite of banking channels. With an increasingly demanding, sophisticated and connected customer base, not excluding stronger local and global competition, banks and not just in Singapore alone, are looking for ways to introduce innovative ways to achieve this goal.

Customers today no longer view banks independently by their silo channels, but rather integrally as an interconnected whole; presenting a unified view of their financial situation. A financial view interconnected by time, space and access.

Take for example,

Bill uses his office and home PC to conduct his financial transactions via the Internet. When he is on the move (in transit in a train, airport lounge or a foreign country), he uses his mobile phone to roam to his bank's mobile banking website. When he does his weekend grocery shopping at the local supermarket, he performs simple transactions and enquiries at the bank branch or even at the counter in the supermarket.

The above examples illustrate the many times, locations and modes of access a typical customer would be accessing his financial affairs in a given period of time. There are many similar scenarios happening every minute as you read this. Progressive banks are quick to recognize such demands that arise from the new lifestyle requirements of their customers and are taking proactive steps to meet these new challenges.

The next migration is on.

A interdependent multi-channel response ...

Banks knew they would need to create cross-channel consistency for customers, and differentiate themselves in the marketplace. There are choices indeed today; ranging from Branches, roving sales staff, ATMs, to the Internet and now Mobile Banking.

The litmus test to successful multi-channel excellence lies not in the number of channels offered, but the ability to offer multiple-channels that match the customer's lifestyle requirements. Customers demand hassle-free and convenient banking facilities. Give me what I want, when I want and however I want access via. In order to deliver on this promise, banks will need connectivity to their customers; understand their needs and wants better. This is much easier said than done as many banks have struggled on this integrated multi-channel delivery for a long time.

But good data and a good CRM system is a start.

Whilst banks strive to view their customers as a Customer of ONE, offering highly personalized product offerings customized to that ONE customer; customers also view their bank as a Bank of ONE; not a loose congregation of disparate channels and touch points. Customers are demanding consistency in both transaction services offered as well as their banking experience; regardless of channel used. Hence One Bank, One Customer.

What can customers expect ...

Customers can expect to have a choice of personal banking through face-to-face interaction at the branch, location banking through ATMs or remote banking through the internet or mobile devices. All this gives customers a comprehensive range of channels to choose from according to their lifestyle needs and preferences.

Due to cross-channel implementation, customer interactions via one channel become instantly accessible via other channels. This allows for a seamless customer experience. For example, setting up and editing personal profiles and preferences or registering account details can be done once then retain consistency across Branch, ATM, Internet and mobile banking channels.

Every channel capability built needs to be designed to provide benefits to its customers, including:

- Innovation – customers benefit from innovative application of technology
- Security – end-to-end encryption capabilities ensures best-of-class security
- Empowerment – customers have greater control when managing their finances
- Immediacy – customers can retrieve information online or mobile 24/7
- Ubiquity – customers can retrieve identical banking details from anywhere (home, office, train, gym, car and more)
- Mobility – customers can manage their finances on the go
- Relevance – customers receive personalized and relevant messages instead of mass marketing information

Conclusion

As banks seek to offer true customer centric multi-channel capabilities, it might be worthwhile to consider the following 6 guiding steps:

- VISION. Start with a multi-channel vision.
- BUILD. Lego-style. 1 piece at a time.
- BUFFER. Protect legacy investment through the use of middlewares.
- INVEST. Ensure costs are incremental and managed judiciously.
- PERSEVERE. As fulfilling a multi-channel strategy takes time and investment.
- REMEMBER. Start every investment with the ONE Customer in mind.

A truly interdependent multi-channel approach towards managing customer experience is elusive. There are many permutations of inter-dependencies, different technologies and platforms to content with and more importantly delivering a consistent and deliberate service and experience at a cost that the bank is able to absorb.

This is an evolution and evolutions take time and patience. However, progressive banks are already off the starting block.

The writer heads the Channel Delivery division at a Singapore bank and has extensive experience developing strategies, managing and implementing solutions for a wide ranging of banking channels including the latest mobile banking offering. The article is contributed in his personal capacity.