

Innovating to empower customers

The ways in which Mauritius Commercial Bank leverages new technologies to deliver an effective banking infrastructure

Special Correspondent

The diminutive island nation of Mauritius, in recent times, has managed a coup of an altogether different kind.

Known for its sandy white beaches and balmy weather, Mauritius has now created a niche for itself as one of the most business friendly destinations in the world.

Its ranking as one of the highest in the region on the World Bank's *Ease of Doing Business* index, has reinforced this fact. Sustained economic reforms, initiated in 2005, have boosted this transformation.

Recent years have seen a huge surge in foreign direct investments to the country, particularly in financial services, hospitality, education and health-care.

Against this backdrop, the country's business sector has witnessed substantial growth with many adapting operations to meet the changing economic landscape.

The Mauritius Commercial Bank (MCB) is one of the principal banks in the country, with modest beginnings nearly 170 years ago under a royal charter.

It has since then consolidated its operations with a network of branches and ATMS across Mauritius and a majority share in the domestic deposits and cards market.

MCB has expanded to Seychelles, Madagascar, Mozambique, Tanzania, Maldives and Paris with plans for further diversification.

Leveraging technology

Before entering the next growth phase, MCB wanted to take stock, streamline



The new core banking system at MCB brings significant improvements to efficiency and customer service

processes and optimise functioning by leveraging on technology.

It partnered with a leading banking solutions vendor to implement an enterprise wide core banking solution to scale up operations and enhance deliveries.

Says Jean-Michel Felix, Project Director for core banking implementation at MCB; "This was not just another project but a paradigm changing program that would impact MCB at every level. It called for proactive and superior change management strategies."

He adds that total clarity in project requirements and focused, skilled Project Management helped to keep the core banking implementation on course and within timeline.

After spending considerable time and money in implementation, the bank

recognised that system transformation was not their real challenge.

Getting employees to use the new technology was proving to be the far more daunting task.

Besides a natural tendency to resist change, there may have been some concerns among employees on how the new system may impact their job roles.

Sweeping organisational changes are difficult to implement, especially when they involve adoption of new technology or re-alignment of processes.

MCB set out to make the entire project more people driven and to demystify the technology angle as much as possible. They had a two-pronged strategy to do this. They ensured that there was greater transparency and sustained communication among all employees.

The bank introduced a revolutionary technology adoption aid GIEOM, to help employees adopt the new platform with ease.

Project governance and transparency

A core steering committee headed by Felix, held regular communication forums where employees were updated on project status.

Their concerns and queries were addressed. These not only helped to mobilise change agents from within the bank, it also made the entire program more participative.

The committee worked at building a strong partnership between all stakeholders - the technology vendor, the GIEOM team and the bank. These measures brought in a collaborative approach and an enhanced final solution.

Technology adoption aid

MCB was very clear that it wanted employees to pick up only those aspects of the system essential to their function.

They wanted to achieve this in as simple a manner as possible. This led to a bold partnership with GIEOM which offered training on selective modules on a remarkably easy-to-use visual interface.

GIEOM (Graphical Interface Electronic Operations Manual) proved to be a great technology enabler, helping speedy user adoption of the new core banking system.

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Characterised by a graphical interface, GIEOM helped end users grasp the fundamentals with screen shots, simulated settings and detailed business paths of banking activities.

A unique built in scorecard mechanism helped to assess user understanding and incentivise the entire adoption mechanism.

The platform drastically shortened the learning curve of employees with as many as 1,600 MCB employees transitioning to the new system in record time.

Successful implementation

All core banking implementations are viewed by banks with some trepidation, not only because of the time and funds invested, but because of the fundamental changes it brings to a bank's functioning.

Not surprisingly, these large scale projects require strong project governance at all stages as done at MCB.

However, within this framework one has to strike a balance between standardisation and flexibility, thoroughness and speed, at all times.

An excellent rapport with external vendors and strong employee support help to ease some of the roadblocks likely to be encountered.

MCB attributes a great deal of its success to a thorough implementation process and rigorous testing with attention to minute details before the final go-live.

Today, the new core banking system is fully functional in all MCB branches across Mauritius, bringing significant improvements to the bank's efficiency and customer service.

The winds of change

There are plans to roll out the model in other centers and the second

phase is already underway in Seychelles. Fresh from their learning, MCB is better equipped to handle key challenges ahead.

Post the recent financial meltdown, strong winds of regulatory change are blowing across Africa and economies in other parts of the world.

Banks and financial institutions recognise the need to integrate new technologies with legacy systems and to adopt state of the art tools such as mobile banking and internet applications to thrive in a culture of competition and compliance, while continuing to offer their customers superior service. ■

MCB Prescription: Checklist for Effective Technology Transformation

We asked Jean Michel-Felix what his advice to fellow bankers is when going in for enterprise wide technology transformation. These are the top priorities according to him.

Clarity in Requirement Specification

Detailed, clear and unambiguous Requirements Specifications is critical for Project success.

Excellent Project Governance Framework

The success of the project depends on a well-defined governance mechanism that includes a project steering committee and decision making bodies, structured project reviews and reports, audit trails and complete transparency in operations.

Focused Project Management

A skilled Project Manager will ensure contingency plans and agile responses to sudden changes. Inspired leadership is a great asset during project uncertainties.

Rigorous Testing

The software has to go through in-depth System Integration and User Acceptance testing. Closer to go-live the software is tested for operational readiness before final roll out.

Jean-Michel Felix, Project Director for core banking implementation at MCB

