

Bank to the future...

They closed my branch to protect their profits – typical!” It’s a common complaint - but high street banks face a dilemma. The cost of staffing a network of branches with trained personnel is increasingly prohibitive, especially when more and more customers rely on Internet, telephone or even postal banking to manage their finances.

At the same time, however, the ‘personal touch’ is an absolutely vital part of the service a bank offers. There are always certain situations, or certain types of customer, that require a face-to-face meeting.

The answer lies in the use of emerging technologies to meet these contradictory needs – in particular, converged voice, video and data technologies that enable new ways of communicating and collaborating with your bank. Convergence will shape the bank branches of the future - so what will those branches look like?

Real-time data streams

BT’s Broadband Experience Centre, at Adastral Park in the UK, is already demonstrating many of the banking concepts we’ll all become familiar with in just a few year’s time.

The biggest change in the next few years will be an increasing dependence on real-time data streams moving information over an ‘always on’ network. Banks won’t need to rely on people making phone calls and simply talking: data will be passed though the network intelligently, and people will only be included when necessary.

This will make unstaffed branches a real possibility – automated premises that you can access using your bankcard for security. As you enter, the branch will identify you and present information and service offers on screens, tailored to your individual preferences and needs. There will be ATMs, of course - some connected to the Internet for customers that don’t have access from home. Other ATMs will receive deposits, and even count and collect foreign currency after your holiday.

Face-to-face, eye-to-eye

Self-service isn’t the only way forward, however. BT’s global IP network will provide the quality of service and performance required to connect customers with experts working from a remote location – face-to-face, in real time. Having trouble with the ATM? Need some mortgage advice? A press of a button will bring not just a disembodied voice, but full video and audio assistance. This will include the ability to co-author documents and highlight areas of interest.

There will also be meeting rooms for more formal or more sensitive discussions. The emphasis will be on the customer experience, with life-size experts providing help and advice using camera techniques that enable true ‘eye-to-eye’ interactions. Customers will be able to

use tablet computers to complete applications, sign forms and work with an advisor to complete digital documents.

Freedom to serve

Best of all, these technologies will also be used in branches with staff. Low power wireless networks will connect handheld devices with the back office, so that staff can conveniently demonstrate products and services on a simple screen as part of a discussion. Gone will be the old days of talking to the back of computer monitor while someone hidden behind it is typing furiously.

BT's investment in global IP networking and converged voice, video and data technologies is designed to enable just this kind of innovative new approach to doing business. From automated branches to video advisors at home, the bank of the future will be about choice, service and the customer experience.

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