

Mashreq Bank UAE and i-exceed deploy enterprise mobility apps



Enterprise mobility management, designed to secure corporate data and processes on employees' mobile devices, has enabled the creation of business apps which significantly improve staff productivity, process efficiency and reduce turn-around-time on responses, ultimately contributing to the wider enhanced customer service offered by organisations.

To this end, UAE-based Mashreq Bank has embraced enterprise mobility to enhance staff experience, by working with i-exceed Technology Solutions and its Appzillon Platform to first develop three apps that focus on the bank's corporate and investment banking group relationship managers (CIBG RMs), who are already realising significant benefits. Following the success, Mashreq aims to roll out an app every quarter to extend its enterprise mobility footprint to all relevant staff. Mashreq is already recognised as a pioneer in the region's digital innovation landscape with extraordinary external digital transformation through NEO, its internet bank; mobile banking app; adoption of future-focused AI and robotics technologies; and digitisation of the bank's branches.

The business drivers

"We have seen a rapid deployment of customer-facing capabilities," says Mashreq Bank's group head of operations and technology, Sandeep Chouhan. "But you could argue we missed a trick wherein customers could do a lot more on their mobile devices than our staff were able to. Customers had a much more evolved, frictionless experience, but our staff experience was, in comparison, neglected."

Mashreq embarked on an internal digitisation drive by providing staff with productive, highly intuitive apps with a clear mandate: improve the effectiveness of the CIBG RMs. The goal was to enhance direct customer engagement, and to help reduce the number of layers and minimise the bureaucracy of day-to-day transactions that require their physical presence in the office. Mashreq decided to initially focus on services that were digitally initiated but not digitally fulfilled. "We looked at certain customer journeys, such as funds transfers, remittances, loan bookings and approvals, the things that require second and third level approvals," says Chouhan.



Sandeep Chouhan: aiming to enhance customer engagement

Within the context of the competitive Middle East service market, time and accuracy are important parameters. Mashreq is reputed for its broad range of retail and commercial banking services in the region and abroad. Its partner, i-exceed, has provided services related to the bank's core banking system, Flexcube, and is developing an app that provides a 360-degree customer view. The company's digital platform, Appzillon, now forms the basis of Mashreq Bank's mobile framework.

CIBG RM apps

The apps developed by i-exceed were different from the traditional multi-year, high-risk and high-cost IT projects typically associated with the banking sector as it had a quicker, agile delivery and consequent rapid return on investment.

The apps support three key activities of a CIBG RM's daily routine: meeting clients, reviewing financial transactions and responding to client queries.

The Call Reporting app tracks the health of a client relationship by enabling efficient recording of client meetings and follow-ups. Relationship managers can capture business opportunities, set up deal teams and immediately notify colleagues of emerging opportunities, while providing senior management visibility of meeting performance metrics and pipeline health. Initial utilisation figures show a 16% uplift in the number of call reports and business opportunities generated, the equivalent of adding 12 relationship managers to the team.

The Case Management app offers an instant portfolio view of the bank's responses to client queries. Client requests can be serviced through many channels and teams, with the app providing senior executives, relationship managers and customer service staff a holistic, real-time view of service performance. This is critical to fulfilling service commitments. For the premium segment corporate customer, A'YAN, the TAT (turn-around-time) from the point at which a customer raises a request to the point of closure is not more than 120 minutes. With such promises to customers, the app enables visibility to service hotspots and real-time interventions.

i-exceed's executive director S. Sundararajan says: "A primary objective is that the CIBG RM is always in-sync with the customer service unit." The app is synced with the bank's Microsoft Dynamics CRM platform.

The Financial Referrals app is the most transformational of the three as it enables transparency, auditability and time-sensitive decision-making on financial exceptions. Already, 100% of financial exceptions to do with insufficient funds, limit expiries or unreachable customers are performed on the app, which previously was all over the email ecosystem, increasing the scope for error and oversight. With the app the process has been streamlined internally and has improved customer satisfaction significantly.

The Referrals app gathers relationship managers and credit risk managers, linked to the transaction, into a single environment and provides immediate clarity on where the action is pending, with a full audit trail of how a decision was reached. The app stewards communication flow and devolves ownership by engaging assistant relationship managers, freeing up time for the relationship managers to focus on more complex tasks.

It wasn't merely about replicating existing processes. "We went for the senior management cadre and began to develop mobile apps that really unlocked the speed of decision-making and highly simplified customer journeys," adds Chouhan.

“The RM apps have proved their potential and paved the way for a wider application of the technology to all areas of the bank

"Simplifying the approvals processes was a key part of the journey. Previously, a risk manager might have needed two screens and 12 or more pieces of information, which was now condensed to three or four core elements. It was something we hadn't done before. It forced us to simplify the decision-making parameters without compromising security. We have some very large transactions that get approved and we didn't want any exposure," he added.

The project

Integrating new technologies into existing systems was bound to present challenges. Technical development of the apps was not complex, however, integrating a new mobility platform into Mashreq's information security framework was a challenge. The apps can reside on multiple devices, hold sensitive customer data and are used to approve high-value transactions.

The bank's Information Security Group performed numerous vulnerability and penetration tests to determine and provide adequate protections with firewalls. The apps are hosted on an internal app store with only pre-defined user groups able to download and run the apps on their devices.

Mashreq decided on the i-exceed Appzillon platform and developed iteratively through prototypes. The original vision to promote self-service capabilities was driven by the central team rather than end-users but the final deliverables were shaped by cross-functional teams.

Aligned with the bank's overall IT strategy, i-exceed developed the apps with the bank providing project and service management. The development process was an agile transformation with the vendor on site with seconded teams from front-line, operations and technology departments. The programme's success depended on the developer's engagement with all stakeholders to create a product that was beneficial to the end-user, the bank and customers.

Benefits and future plans

Although it is too early to derive statistical data on the benefits, Mashreq acknowledges the apps are a huge game-changer for improvements in TAT to approve transactions and create the right services. Overall, error rates are down, customer service is up and staff have been freed up from middle-office activities to customer-facing roles.

Mashreq has seen enough positive progress to commit to further investment. "We are in the process of identifying areas to further leverage this technology; it's our CEO's objective that no frontline people should be tied to their desks. We intend to facilitate better customer service and enhance everyday activities using productive and intuitive apps. The RM apps have proved their potential and paved the way for a wider application of the technology to all areas of the bank," states Chouhan.