

# The Branch of the Future

BUSINESSES ARE REACHING OUT TO CUSTOMERS around the world, and many have opened offices in major cities to gain a worldwide presence. As a corollary, branch offices enjoy unprecedented productivity, decision-making authority, and innovation, making them an integral part of achieving corporate success. This perception holds true especially in the banking sector, where branch offices are largely responsible for revenue generation and profit making.

In fact, with the heightened status of branch offices within the banking sector, it has become more important than ever for banks to equip distributed workers with the same productivity tools as their headquarters. Today's business environment requires banks to be more collaborative, virtually and globally. By using the network as a platform, every branch can have the same set of capabilities as its headquarters, making employees more productive and responsive. In meeting this goal, banks face two challenges: embracing technology in order to deliver collaborative applications, and delivering on the first challenge while minimizing total cost of ownership (TCO) and maximizing return on investment (ROI)

However, in order to achieve greater efficiencies, enhance productivity, and grow revenue, branch offices require an intelligent network infrastructure. The network should ideally provide consistency in applications and performance, as well as transparent integration of the branch and headquarters. Accordingly, many banks are reinvesting in their branch and headquarter offices and capitalizing on the benefits of a seamless network, a strategy that must be considered as they expand.

So, as banks of every size become more geographically distributed, it is their branch offices that depend on the network the most. In today's highly networked environments, nothing is more critical than availability—access to data, applications and content, anywhere, anytime. Hence, whenever networks fail, multi-site organizations lose both in terms of productivity as well as profitability. As a result, branches at the moment face a convergence of challenges. To begin with, as most customer-employee interactions occur within a branch, banks must realize that the technology infrastructure serving these customers cannot support additional functionalities such as the use of biometrics and RFID tags. Consequently as banks turn to IT infrastructure, it often requires them to invest in expensive upgrades to their network in order to support these new functionalities.

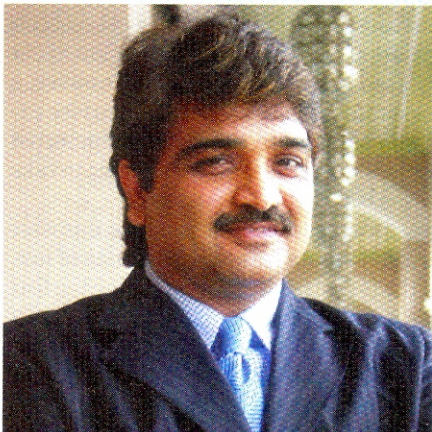
Moreover, the face and scale of the Indian

banking sector has undergone unprecedented transformation, demands of a technology driven market have led not only the private sector but also the public sector banks to constantly seek innovative solutions. For example, Bank of India upgraded its network in order to deliver on its promise of 'Anywhere you go, your bank travels with you' thereby providing high availability and usability to its customers.

Tomorrow's branches will demand even more from the network. Market dynamics are changing, and this transition is stimulating changes in customer requests and expectations. Voice and video are already being added to the branch's toolkit, enabling collaboration with remote specialists and enriching the customer experience. Automation is set to play a bigger role in the branch of the future, impacting both self service and aided-service devices. Meeter/greeter systems will enhance the customer experience maximizing sales opportunities. And with advances in security, authentication, and mobile payments, the bank branches need to be prepared to handle the demands of their customers.

Another hurdle that branches face is the cost of upgrading the network to handle more complexity. In addition, adding functionality through software creates even more cost and management challenges. Therefore for a bank to remain competitive, it must find a way to build an underlying communications and applications architecture that is flexible, extensible, reliable, and efficient. Presently, an expanding suite of intelligent application-enabling network services, including voice and video, security, web application acceleration, mobile Internet and connectivity services is enabling the network to make mission-critical applications more accessible to users in branch office environments. This is also inspiring a whole new category of horizontal business-critical applications, which will have a significant business impact in improving employee responsiveness and deepening customer involvement in the business while lowering operational expenses.

Technology is never deployed for its own sake; it is always a means to an end. Whether the aim is to reduce costs, increase productivity, or protect the network and corporate assets, the ultimate goal is to improve the business. Therefore banks should have the ability to extend the quality of service and network accessibility expected in a headquarter office setting to remote branches in a seamless, consistent way. If they can achieve this, they will enable a truly customer-centric business by improving both efficiencies and interactions.



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