The banking sales force: Now what?
Selling better, and more, through a digitally empowered sales force
As banks turn to digital, people become more critical

Digital is transforming most, if not all aspects of the banking business. In order to gain a better understanding of its impact on the banking sales force, and how the human resources and sales & marketing functions should collaborate to address the challenges, Accenture and Efma conducted a series of think tank webinars with senior executives whose organizations are members of Efma.

The sessions reinforced the paradox that in a world disrupted and transformed by digital innovation, people are more important than ever to business success. New technologies present numerous threats and opportunities to traditional banks, and their people are key to dealing with both.

To support the business in this new environment, the human resources function has to develop new skills and review its approach to managing a workforce that has evolved and become more demanding. In particular, it needs to help shape a sales force that can respond effectively to changing customer expectations and behavior by taking advantage of advanced technologies and new digital processes.

To explore this theme, Efma and Accenture organized three meetings on the following topics:

• How digital is changing the talent model and improving customer interactions;
• How digital can improve the performance of branch teams and sales force engagement;
• How banks can use digital to evolve campaign management and improve learning agility.

This report summarizes the outcomes of the think tank webinars. They should contribute to a better understanding of the challenges facing the human resources function, and to enhancing management of the banking sales force.
Executive summary

There is no dispute that digitization will cause most jobs to change or disappear. How it will affect the banking sales force is a matter of fervent debate.

What is certain is that the platform is burning. Banks urgently need to transform their sales forces, but are unsure about the changes that are required. Customers are migrating in ever-growing numbers from branches to digital channels, and can access any banking product online, from payments to investment funds. As a result of digital cost pressure, the profitability of branch transactions continues to decline.

The question facing banks is: is the sales force still core to the banking business model, or a legacy component that is impeding digital transformation? Put differently, should they transform their sales force by empowering it with digital, or should they disinvest it and concentrate their investment on their digital channels?

A number of surveys show that while branch transactions are declining, customers remain reliant on the human touch. Our research¹ found that only 20 percent of complex transactions are entirely digital. More than half of banking customers would be willing to pay for advisory services (both basic and premium), and more than a third regard poor service as the primary factor that would cause them to switch banks. When it comes to complex financial products that shape their financial futures, customers demand a high level of human involvement to complement their digital interactions.

In this context, we believe, banks require a highly skilled sales force empowered by digital.

Salespeople should play the role of trusted financial consultants, creating new customer experiences that bring together the best of personal and online banking. To achieve this, the sales network and HR functions need to develop a markedly different talent strategy that results in a digitally equipped sales force with new digital and social traits. To succeed in the face of a severe skills shortage in their branches, they need to commit to three key actions:

• Empower the sales force with the tools and talent that enable it to provide seamless, personalized customer interactions;
• Educate the sales force using new training content and redesigned digital learning;
• Engage the sales force with a cultural transformation program and non-monetary reward systems, to develop a team that is committed to their digital revolution and to the digital transformation of their organization.

Many banks have already made progress in one or more of these areas. However, most can improve the orchestration of their initiatives; this would accelerate their momentum toward transformation.

In the meantime, emerging technologies such as robotics, the Internet of Things and service atomization seem likely to revolutionize banking sales and the sales force yet again. Such is the pace of change that the next burning platform is almost upon us.
The burning platform: are people becoming redundant?

While digital is still at the early stages of transforming banking, four of the five most valuable global brands are digital to the core: Apple, Google, Microsoft, and Facebook². The operating methods of digital giants and start-ups alike highlight the marginalization of certain types of worker and the fact that a large workforce is not necessarily an asset. For example, Facebook’s revenue per employee is six times that of HSBC and its capitalization per employee is 46 times greater³.

Are people still essential to business?

b. Banks at a crossroads

Banks must make a crucial decision: disinvest from their sales force and focus on their digital channels, or empower their sales force with digital.

While customers are transacting less through branches, their reliance on people for advice will continue. We believe what will make the difference for them is having access to a highly skilled sales force that is empowered by digital.

The in-person "my cash" business is declining, but the banking sales force can be a strong player in the so-called "my life" market by helping customers manage their wealth over time to achieve long-term goals such as home ownership and retirement security. Thirty-four percent of them would be willing to pay for basic advisory services and 19 percent for premium services⁸.

Branch transactions are 11 times more costly than mobile transactions.
Only 20 percent of complex banking transactions are exclusively digital. Many customers visit branches when they need complex financial products, such as mortgages and pension services, despite the emergence of online tools such as mortgage calculators and investment trackers. Most of the digital tools available today provide information rather than the insights customers need to turn financial information into meaningful action.

When it comes to making decisions that shape their financial futures, customers expect intensely personal services that complement their digital interactions. They demand access to financial experts who can help them understand their options and fine-tune the deals they may have initiated online. They want trusted and highly skilled advisors who can guide them in developing sound financial strategies.

Not only are they willing to pay for this; they will move if they don’t get it. The Accenture Strategy 2014 Global Consumer Pulse Survey showed that 34 percent of customers who switched financial providers in the previous year did so because of a poor service experience. This supports the view that the human touch is still a key factor in the success of banks.

In the complex transactions where people play a critical role, the sales force should not be alone. Digital should provide the information and administration to support the advice and negotiation for which the salespeople are responsible.

53% of customers are willing to pay more for financial advisory services.
c. The roles and profile of the digital sales force

In the digital world, sales force employees will no longer be transaction specialists. They will be professionals focused on helping customers manage their wealth and long-term goals by interacting with digital tools.

As trusted financial consultants, the bank’s salespeople will be charged with delivering strategic advisory services, communicating the intricacies of complex financial products, and identifying the solutions that best match the needs of each customer. Moreover, they will offer a new kind of customer experience that brings together the best attributes of personal interaction and online banking.

To achieve the transition to this kind of experience, banks need to fundamentally review their sales force talent strategy. They also need to overcome the severe shortage of appropriate skills. They acknowledge the fact: Accenture’s survey of 450 financial services executives in 15 countries found that the top two attributes required of banking employees are proficiency with digital technologies (40 percent) and an ability to quickly learn new work requirements (39 percent)\(^\text{10}\). Many banks have not yet defined the new skill sets they will need, leading one to think the skills gap will be even greater than the research indicates. The banking sales force of the future will have to move beyond product and sales mastery, and develop newfound digital and social capabilities.

Bank executives believe the top two attributes required of banking employees are proficiency with digital technologies and an ability to quickly learn new requirements.
The challenge facing the banking industry is to transform its sales forces – to empower, educate and engage its people to succeed in their new role:

- Empower them with the tools and talent that enable them to provide seamless, personalized customer interactions;
- Educate the sales force using new training content and redesigned digital learning;
- Engage the sales force with a cultural transformation program and non-monetary reward systems, to develop a team that is committed to their digital revolution and to the digital transformation of their organization.

In the following sections we explore each of the three measures, and present case studies that show the progress achieved by some of the leading banks. What is needed, though, is an orchestrated approach that effectively drives the transformation with pace and momentum, and treats salespeople as the strategic assets they are.

a. Empower with the right tools and the right people

If the sales force is to succeed in its new role, banks will have to ensure it has the digital tools and digital talents it needs to satisfy a demanding customer base.

The right tools

Advanced digital tools that support in-person sales processes are key to creating seamless, personalized interactions with customers who may have begun the process in a different channel.

Home on the Spot: Buying a home in one click

BNP Paribas launched a new app for house-hunters called “Home on the Spot”. It tells customers which properties are affordable by calculating how much they can borrow based on their incomes and monthly expenses. While it is possible for customers to complete the loan application on the app, its compelling design encourages them to book a meeting at the nearest branch to receive a personalized proposal¹¹.
Digital technologies can play a critical role in extending the human touch that customers demand by allowing salespeople to connect with them in new ways.

38% of companies are expected to stop supplying employees with their work devices by 2016.

One example is accessing comprehensive customer information before meeting in person to complete an interaction started on a digital channel.

Mobile-first and bring-your-own-device (BYOD) approaches would accelerate the adoption of digital tools by the sales force. With easy and affordable access to digital devices and platforms, employees are increasingly acting as digital players, embracing transformation and contributing to the digital evolution of customers. Despite organizational and IT concerns, companies are increasingly willing to embrace BYOD. Many even support its adoption with specific programs that reward employees while proactively managing the security risks.

The right people

The acquisition of digital talent is the second key enabler of the banking sales force of the future. This is a clear call to action for HR leaders, especially in Western Europe where 60 percent of bank employees are older than 40 and very few are millennials or generation Y. Digitally talented recruits consider financial services to be one of the least attractive industries to work in.

To turn this around, banks must do no less than reposition themselves and their industry as employers of choice for young talent with digital skills. By enhancing the attractiveness of their brands, they will face the challenge of today's "talent war" and gain access to candidates with the requisite digital experience and abilities.

Digital talent acquisition: a new candidate experience

UniCredit adopted a new digital talent acquisition process replacing its traditional approach to recruiting. In addition to attracting suitably skilled employees, the program improved the bank's employer brand appeal, candidate engagement and diversity. UniCredit’s digital employer campaign promotes a mobile career site that enables candidates to view open positions according to their preferences. The process encourages spontaneous applications, and the entire recruiting process is quick and easy. A digital assessment matches the profile of the candidate to the skills needed for an innovative bank.
b. Educate to digital in a digital way

It is essential to use digital means to endow the sales force with digital skills. Accenture's Business Agility Survey found that 22 percent of bank executives believe that, in future years, they will not have the branch skills they need.

Many have started to offer courses on digital for employees or customers. Fewer have realized that for this digital training to be successful, the learning experience too needs to be digital. Employees benchmark their work experience against the exceptional digital experiences they enjoy as consumers. Most are eager to learn, when the training is offered in the same way as it is by TED or Coursera, or can be accessed as video entertainment from Netflix. Especially when the topic is digital, it makes little sense to use traditional delivery methods.

The way to train needs to be fundamentally rethought, and the two dimensions that are most directly impacted are design and format.

Digital learning design

Completely new guidelines can drive the learning design for digital education of the sales force. These are inspired more by digital asset management techniques than traditional instructional design.

### Learning experience

- Design experiences that optimize learning and performance, rather than create products or offer services
- Introduce social learning within the digital workplace and embed learning in the workflow

### Time and form drive the screen

- Adopt bite-size and break larger experiences: time and attention are more and more valuable
- Allow learning anywhere and anytime, focusing on multi-device accessibility in a multi-screen world

### Ecosystem

- Consider training multiple audiences within the liquid workforce
- Orchestrate an ecosystem of sources considering that learning happens everywhere, not only in structured company training
Digital learning formats

Designing and engaging digital learning experiences requires the introduction of new digital formats. These are inspired more by digital media interactions than by traditional training formats.

Content, as always, is crucial. A good idea is to leverage the abundant, world-class digital training content from web sources (YouTube, Vimeo, SlideShare and TED have much to offer) as well as the champions of digital learning such as Coursera and edX.

Learning anytime, anywhere

The Italian bank Intesa Sanpaolo has developed its Learning App for Managers as its primary training channel. The system uses a recommendations engine, informed by the user’s role and past actions, to offer relevant, mainly video programs to the bank’s more than 6,500 managers.

c. Engaging in the digital revolution

In order to unlock the power of digital, the banking sales force has to be truly committed to its digital revolution, and the bank to its digital transformation.

Digital is, first of all, a cultural transformation. Banks must deliberately plan their cultural transformation to support their becoming a digital organization. They must also engage their sales force as it takes this demanding leap. The sales force has to be committed to digital, not only to ensure its own transition but also to educate and engage the customer. A high-value customer experience cannot happen unless the customer is educated and encouraged to exploit the advantages of digital channels and processes.

The recommended approach is a disciplined initiative that aligns the tangible and intangible elements of the sales force culture. This will enable the salespeople to understand, accept, adopt and sustain the new mindsets and behavior. In recent years we have found that cultural transformation is smoother and more successful when the organization adopts a disciplined approach. In the past, such initiatives were typically slow, based on theoretical values, and “owned” only by leaders and nominated change agents. Today they can be rapid, focused on habit-forming behavior that is embedded in employee touch-points (HR processes, business goals), and “owned” by everyone on a voluntary basis. In fact, ambassadors emerge naturally from the gamification and social environments.

While large corporations (including banks) are abandoning traditional performance management in favor of instant and continuous feedback¹⁷, an effective practice that supports the adoption of digital habits is the introduction of non-monetary reward systems that utilize points, badges and public acknowledgements.

Games

Take the essence of what makes games so alluring (a shared sense of purpose, challenge and reward)

Decode the mechanics that make them work (personalization, rankings and leaderboards)

Apply these mechanics in imaginative learning initiatives

Boards

Make them highly graphical, intuitive and multi-device

Provide curated internal or external content, in meaningful collections

Enable learner ratings and conversations

Community

Sustain employees’ conversations

Make them “instant”, following current mantra on social media

Measure and reward contributions
Until now, every wave of technology innovation has added more jobs than it has eliminated. Even if this holds true for today’s digital revolution, it is scant consolation for the businesses that become extinct due to their inability to adapt, or for the workforces that become unemployable due to their failure to acquire the skills that are demanded. For banks, the platform has already started to burn. Yet there is no doubt it presents a great opportunity for banking sales and for the sales force itself.

The pace of change is so rapid that we expect each wave to follow its predecessor in ever-shortening cycles. Three trends in particular will accelerate the arrival of the next burning platform.

### The next burning platform: threat or opportunity?

1. **Using robots to co-sell**
   
   Intelligent automation (IA) allows companies to achieve much more productive relationships between people and machines. Robots interact with bank customers and draw on the bank’s database and the web to analyze information about products, services, customers and competitors. This enables them to provide personalized customer interactions and advice. In the process it allows employees to shift their focus toward more social and judgment-driven tasks. The real value is not the efficiency of IA, but the fact that it enables people to do things differently and to do different things.

   In order to capitalize on IA, banks must not only recognize its value but start working now to transition their sales forces, customers and ecosystem partners. Incorporating automation and artificial intelligence technology into the sales process will have a profound effect on how their sales forces work.

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**Barclays’ digital workforce transformation**

Barclays aims to have the most digital-savvy workforce in the world. To achieve this goal it has launched a number of transformation initiatives impacting enablement, education and engagement.

MyZone is an employee mobile app offering a wide range of useful workplace tools and information such as VoIP calls, tailored news, training and HR services. It has significantly improved colleague engagement, and realized cost savings and other business and environmental benefits.

Barclays Digital Driving License is a learning solution which allows employees and customers alike to improve their digital skills – anywhere and anytime, and with fun. It offers best-in-class content, and allows users to manage their own training paths.

Barclays Digital Eagles are a team of more than 13,000 employees who have volunteered to share their digital expertise and enthusiasm with colleagues and customers. Their Tea & Teach branch sessions have transformed many of the group’s employees into digital and social media advocates, and have helped customers overcome their trepidation regarding computers in general and online banking in particular.
b. Instant selling with the Internet of Things

The Internet of Things has already started to change the world, and it is certainly changing banking sales. Pioneers are introducing the IoT in their retail business. Its impact is starting to be felt in automatic payments, instant loans and insurance services. It is taking banks closer and closer to the customer, and enabling them to profile their needs without human intervention.

Amazon created the “Dash Button”, a wi-fi-connected device that, at the push of a button, re-orders a favorite product. By 2020, it is forecast that the IoT will comprise 13.5 billion connected objects. The impact will be universal; for banking, not least of all, it could be tremendous.

13.5 billion connected devices by 2020.

c. Integrated selling with atomized services

Although many banks are developing their first apps, the market for these programs seems to be already maturing. One sign that the demand is diminishing is the fact that the top 15 app publishers in the US experienced an average 20 percent drop in downloads in May 2016. The digital world is already looking for the app’s successor, and a favored candidate is the atomization and integration of services.

Atomization refers to the breaking down of services into multiple “micro-events”. Atomized brands take a less rigid approach to their products and services, allowing them to be super-distributed across various platforms and third-party services, while still retaining their brand identity. Services are becoming more intelligent and integrated as they are atomized.

Apps have reached a tipping point. Once user-controlled, they are, to an increasing degree, proactively powering the user’s life. Apps atomization and integration has the potential to transform the selling of banking products in a multitude of ways that are difficult to predict with confidence today.

20% drop in downloads of the top 15 app publishers in May 2016.

Letting go of the status quo

It is clear that the status quo is the greatest threat facing banks. While the future of banking sales, and the roles and attributes of the banking sales force of tomorrow may be uncertain, we know without a doubt that it will be very different from those of today. Clinging to traditional models is likely to be the least successful strategy.

Much has been written about the changing bank customer. However, we believe that some things are immutable. People – even digital natives – are social creatures who value human interaction. And for the time being, people are better able than intelligent robots to provide personal advice in ways that customers value.

But to do that effectively, they need to be empowered with every useful tool that digital innovation offers. That will not only be the salvation of the banking sales force; it will also be traditional banks’ most effective bulwark against the encroachment of the new breed of online competitors.
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About Accenture

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About Efma

A global non-profit organisation, established in 1971 by banks and insurance companies, Efma facilitates networking between decision-makers. It provides quality insights to help banks and insurance companies make the right decisions to foster innovation and drive their transformation. Over 3,300 brands in 130 countries are Efma members.


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