

BACKING THE BANKS

Technology may be helping big banks flee regional areas, but it is also helping community-conscious players such as Bendigo Bank pick up the slack.

As escalating bandwidth draws the country together and makes the outsourcing of data warehousing more accessible, space is increasingly appearing for companies to overhaul the way they do business. New technology is allowing companies to update their workflow practices to increase productivity, compliance, and even outsource critical functions that would have been unthinkable in the past.

Strangely however, as technology makes it easier for banks, traditionally document-heavy institutions, to do business, the more branches seem to close in regional centres.

The rising popularity and effectiveness of Internet banking and the post office evolving into the new nucleus of everyday services, are excuses that bigger players rolled out when closing up shop. However, they are no substitute for the face-to-face

customer service a branch offers.

Internet banking does make managing finances easier for some regional customers, however, the permeation of technology in these areas can be quite patchy, and certainly isn't on the same level as it is in metropolitan areas.

Regional Revival

Community orientated players such as Bendigo Bank are left to fill the void when the big banks bail out, and because their IT budgets pale in comparison, they have to work smarter. Typically, regional branches are small affairs that are half owned by the community, and half owned by the bank. Because of this, they don't always have access to the latest technology. For example: a small office in a small town doesn't necessarily have the need

- or even the capacity in many circumstances - for a broadband connection to the head office.

Because of this, DataComIT tailor made a solution for Bendigo Bank that would provide consistent document management capabilities across all branches, regardless of equipment. The result was doXgate.

The aim of the doXgate loans project was to reduce costs, streamline processing of loans and minimise the multitude of problems associated with manual document handling. To achieve this, all of Bendigo Bank's back office processes were outsourced to DataComIT. It runs the servers, handles the data storage and serves up all the information via an online portal accessible by any Bendigo Bank computer with a web browser. In this sense, doXgate is a management solution rather than an out-of-the-box software package. It provides the means to capture documents directly into the system (by fax, direct scan or scan-to-email), thereafter managing the data storage, workflow and enabling web-based retrieval of this information.

Once a document is captured by the system, it is available within one minute - A far cry from the previous solution.

"Bendigo Bank previously mailed the loan documentation to Ipswich, where it would be processed and scanned. This could take a few days," said Eamonn Donohoe, Business Development Manager at DataComIT. "With our service, the documents can be faxed directly, scanned and uploaded, or scanned to email into the server and they are almost immediately available. There's also virtually no chance of documents going missing."

And when it wasn't receiving documents by snail mail, it was coping with convoluted communication lines and mountains of paper streaming in via fax.

"We had thousands of faxes coming in each day and a lot of interaction between the front and back offices processing and filing. This meant sometimes paper would go missing, causing angst between the front and back office," said John Stumer, Project Manager at Bendigo Bank. "Now there are no disputes as the images are available straight away and cannot go missing as they are captured directly into the system."

The old system also only allowed viewing of one image at a time, slowing down processing time for multi-page documents. doXgate allows multi pages in one session as well as indexing for faster searching. This has dramatically improved turnaround times on all loans.

Opening The Gate For Compliance

The project was started in November 2003 with the first trial roll out occurring in October 2004. Bendigo Bank has since rolled the system out company wide, dramatically reducing the amount of physical document handling, and more importantly, reducing paper documentation requiring storage.

"It has improved our compliance capabilities as we previously had a lot of interaction between our front and back offices, it is clearer now which documents are active and which are archived," said Stumer. "It certainly has reduced the amount of paper that has been coming into our back office."

doXgate's immediate strength is its ability to use existing office equipment. No additional infrastructure was required as every branch had at least a fax machine to input document data with. Bendigo Bank did have a few issues with Jurassic fax machines,

however switching a fax machine doesn't require an IT degree.

"Some of the branch fax machines were a bit older than others so we had some issues when sending data to the system," said Stumer. "But we had no real show stoppers."

And because the solution is tailor made for Bendigo Bank, software issues can be quashed just as easily. "We're in a position to make changes to the software on the fly if a new feature is needed," said Donohoe. "doXgate has been specifically developed for Bendigo Bank, however there are parts to it that we are hoping can be used by other financial institutions."

DataComIT's doXgate is assisting smaller players like Bendigo Bank cut costs, achieve compliance and improve service to not only keep branches open, but to provide services that don't degrade as the distance from big cities increases. **IDM**

Loan data is now immediately accessible from any Bendigo Bank PC



The Players

DataComIT

DataComIT is an Australian owned company with over twenty years experience in storage and retrieval of electronic records, data protection, and records management.

It specialises in ISO 9002 standard compliant document management systems and procedures, and customises image capture and retrieval solutions, including hosted applications, and provides immediate access to business records through any PC.

Bendigo Bank

Bendigo Bank has come a long way since it started on the Bendigo goldfields in 1858, but it has never lost the community spirit fostered in that pioneering tent city.

Sticking to its philosophy of financing the average person into buying a house for his own family's occupation, in 1998 Bendigo Bank launched a new program to return banking branches to communities hamstrung by the feverish branch closures of the 1990s. Its Community Bank initiative helps

regional communities open and run Bendigo Bank franchises which are half owned by the community and half by the bank. As of August 2005, 159 of these branches were operating.