



# Inside Talk II: ICICI Bank

In Conversation with  
Abhijit Singh

Head of Business Technology Group, ICICI Bank



## Tell us about the top three initiatives that were immensely successful for ICICI in 2016.

ICICI Bank has always been a pioneer in bringing technology-enabled products & services to customers. We continue to focus on leveraging the three key transformational trends in technology i.e. mobile first, digitization of payments and digitizing the core.

ICICI Bank was the first bank to launch an all-in-one payment collection app for merchants called **Eazypay** which is a **first-of-its kind mobile application** that enables merchants, retailers and professionals to accept instant cashless payments on mobile phones from their customers through multiple digital modes. Eazypay offers customers the improved convenience of paying by using their mobile phones through unified payment interface (UPI), any credit/debit card and internet banking, and 'Pockets', the digital wallet of ICICI Bank.

Beyond the above path breaking initiatives, the most remarkable innovations in the mobile space that we have invested in this year are **iMobile Smartkeys** and **Chatbot**.

Smartkeys is an industry first innovative new feature of iMobile that lets customers do mobile banking transactions using their smartphone's keyboard whereas Chatbots are computer programs that can have automated text conversations with users using artificial intelligence (AI) and natural language processing. This is an industry first feature and goes in step with the Bank's digital innovator mantra.

As an issuer, ICICI Bank wanted to move at a rapid pace towards cashless transaction. The Bank has always been aggressive in launching innovative products and channels on a regular basis and encourages the customers to adapt and use these channels for payments by giving them, offers and benefits. In 2016, ICICI bank paved way for **Contact-less payment** technologies by becoming the first bank in the world to launch mVISA. We have also introduced contact-less card payments using NFC technology in the form of Tap and Pay and became first financial institution in the country to leverage the Host Card Emulation (HCE) technology to bring forth Touch and Pay contact-less payment solution.

In line with the key technology trends, ICICI Bank was also the first in the country and among few, globally, to deploy 'Software Robotics' that emulates human actions to automate and perform repetitive, high volume and time consuming business tasks cutting across multiple applications.

ICICI Bank has deployed these software robots in 200+ business process functions across the organization including retail banking operations, agri-business, trade & forex, treasury, and human resources management among others. Software robots have reduced the response time to customers by up to 60 percent and increased accuracy to 100 percent thereby sharply improving the bank's productivity and efficiency.

## ICICI Bank has always been a pioneer in leveraging modern technology to reimagine banking. What is in store on the digital front for 2017?

Digital continues to swiftly impact every aspect of banking. ICICI Bank has been evolving by adopting a 360° Digitization approach to manage the disruption in financial industry. This initiative not only focuses on the customers but also within the organization so as to be digital ready.

Digital disruption and demonetization has transformed the mode of banking in India, and with influx of Fintech ecosystem, 2017 will witness sharp increase in digital adoption.

ICICI bank will continue to focus on its bimodal architecture by building systems with robust backend and intuitive, user friendly front end. In line with the Mobile First strategy, we intend to build intelligent AI based apps which will have the potential to transform the nature of work and structure of the workplace.

Beyond the pilot carried out in October, we are working on building an enterprise ready blockchain solution that we will open up to our corporate customers for Open Account Trade and Remittance. We will continue to leverage enhanced analytics capabilities that will offer them the ability to learn about its customer base and make personalized offers. Beyond creating innovative digital solutions for customers, the field of analytics will help banks in client identification and Anti Money Laundering (AML) measures, in order to prevent money laundering and terrorist financing risks.

Additionally, we are working on finding the right mix of service, deployment, and operating models to address security and compliance concerns and embark our cloud journey for increased cost saving, high availability of business applications, focused approach on critical activities and streamlining infrastructure operations.

## In your opinion, which are the top three technologies that will have a major impact on the business models for Indian banks in 2017?

Customers today are fundamentally different from what they were a decade ago and are harder to acquire, retain and delight

because of the adoption of digital technologies across the industry. Today, customers look for anytime, anywhere services from their banking partners. With the evolution of digital platforms and rapid change in demand of customers, banks are looking for opportunities to improve their performance and provide delightful customer experience and engage more efficiently.

Leading banks across the globe are realizing the need to stay connected with the evolving technologies and leverage them for developing and preserving business channels. Banks in India are dynamic and are looking out for opportunities to utilize technological advancement.

Digital will become mainstream wherein advancement in areas of Cloud Computing, Machine Learning/Artificial Intelligence and Blockchain will be on spotlight for enhancing customer engagement, improving internal processes, and adding value propositions for its customers by developing newer channels of engagement.

**Could you tell us more about the Emirates NBD-ICICI Bank-EdgeVerve partnership on the blockchain pilot network? What impact are you seeing post launching the pilot and how do you see this partnership shaping up in the future?**

After successful pilot in Oct. 2016, we are building an enterprise ready blockchain solution with Infosys that we will open up to our corporate customers for Open Account Trade and Remittance which will significantly cut down costs and time period for conducting business internationally through our banking partners. We are also exploring a micropayments and peer-to-peer payment product that offers instant settlements to merchants and requires minimal operational costs. We are also working on onboarding new partners to enhance the blockchain network.

Looking at the trends in the cryptocurrency and blockchain sector we realize that there is value that can be derived from this technology. Automating backend office operations, auditing, secure document sharing and transfer of assets across borders are good use cases for blockchain technology.

Regulatory bodies and financial institutions need to come onboard with benefits of blockchain. Regulatory bodies should be willing to explore and partner on blockchain networks as they offer visibility and transparency to them. Banks need to move on from or tweak existing technical infrastructure to accept blockchain solutions. Further, for blockchain to take off, the network needs to expand and entire ecosystem (both financial and non-financial entities like realty, auto, customs, taxation, logistics, etc.) should be part of blockchain network.

**ICICI Bank has been the first bank in the country and among few, globally, to roll-out 'Software Robotics' in over 200 business processes. Tell us about the vision behind this initiative and what are your bank's future plans?**

Robotic software allows configuration of a "software robot" to capture all the steps involved in an application process and simulate the same steps as robotic processes within applications, thereby reducing human intervention. We have envisioned to use Robotics Process Automation (RPA) technology as a productivity lever, in areas where people are performing high-volume repetitive tasks to improve the accuracy, cycle time and productivity, resulting in cost saving and manpower reduction.

While we continue to identify and automate business processes, we will be looking at building enhanced technology controls around this automation by-

- Setting a process for enhanced due diligence in identification of processes that are being automated, driven by the complexity and criticality of the process and the estimated business benefits
- Building security controls and audit trails to eliminate and manage any process discrepancies. Also have centralized dashboards for monitoring and controlling the automated processes
- Integration of Robotics Process Automation (RPA), Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Natural Language Processing (NLP) technologies to deliver maximum value to business
- Use of robotics for automated testing and defect management in critical applications

We will also be looking at building the core systems capability in order to eliminate some of the redundant automation done using RPA technologies.