

BANK SOHAR

Insight Driven Banking Leader

Having completed 11 years of operations, Bank Sohar has established itself as a prominent financial institution in the market with a strong asset base of RO2.924bn (as on 31 March, 2018), and a digital focus for both its front and back offices, built around a customer centric model. OER looks at how Bank Sohar has emerged, in a short span, a successful insight driven banking leader in the Sultanate

In the second quarter of 2007, Bank Sohar commenced operations in a highly competitive banking market in Oman alongside banks that had several decades of operational experience and strong brand presence. From the start, the Bank's focus was on three main areas – People, Technology and Efficiency. The clear strategies and targeted positioning of products and attention to customer service and deliveries, enabled the bank to create a positive impression in the market from the beginning.

Bank Sohar has constantly endeavoured to create a platform that doesn't merely offer banking as a service, but focusses on personalizing experiences for each customer. To achieve its stated objective, Bank Sohar decided to leverage Infosys Finacle's expertise of powering some of the largest banks across its 100 countries of operation, and invited them to be their technology partners. Over time, Finacle helped set up Bank Sohar's banking systems, starting with the core banking platform which was brought up in just about two months, which was truly remarkable in those days. With their core platform in place, Bank Sohar opened operations in 2007, offering round-the-clock 'anywhere-anytime' premium banking facilities.

In a matter of 11 years, Bank Sohar, grew tremendously and built up an asset size of over RO2.924bn, extending services from retail to commercial,

investment, and Islamic banking sectors. The bank has since then, has ingeniously invested in technology to constantly upgrade its platforms and remain on par with world standards. Its widespread branch and ATM network, combined with their value-added products and premium features in internet and SMS banking has continued to define success for the bank, year on year, winning them accolades across segments.

A #TRULYDIGITAL TRANSFORMATION JOURNEY

It is said that technology, can either be the biggest enabler, or one's biggest barrier to innovation. Channel proliferations and integration of new systems to a bank's IT, creates duplication of processes across product lines, over time. In the late 2016, Bank Sohar decided to shift its focus from being a product-centric bank to that of a customer-centric banking service provider. This was the genesis of their digital transformation programme, remodelling their hardware and their entire IT applications.

Infosys Finacle was given the task of driving this modernization programme for the bank, adopting what they refer to as a 'Truly Digital approach', aimed at fundamentally changing the way systems were integrated and talked to each other. It started with a comprehensive core banking upgrade to the latest state-of-the-art Version 10x,



With Finacle Analytics Solution, Bank Sohar is enabled with the right analytics at the right time for delivering superior customer experience, enhanced risk management and efficient internal operations

– Ahmed Al Musalmi, CEO, Bank Sohar

to allows the bank to open up its API's to the external fintech ecosystem and also support open banking. Launching new products such as Syndicated Loans, Leasing, Securitization and Liquidity Management has now become much faster for Bank Sohar on their new platform. "Manual process are no longer a tussel" say some of the branch managers, describing how various processes of the bank have been automated on the new platform, making customer onboarding paper free and significantly improving their operational efficiency and productivity. Bank Sohar concluded its modernization programme by

upgrading their Finacle Online Banking, Alerts and Treasury solutions, a few months ago.

VISION 2020: INSIGHTS DRIVEN BANKING

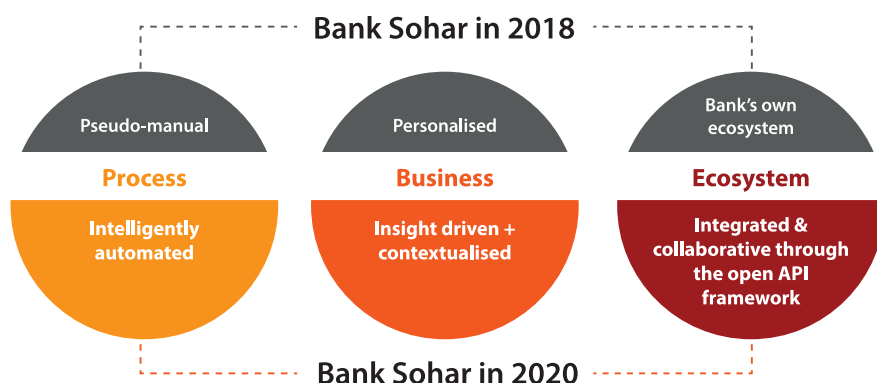
Bank Sohar believes that the fulcrum of their digital transformation project was the incorporation of the Finacle Analytics Platform, that leverages their existing data models to deliver real-time actionable insights. The tool, built using new-age, open-source technology, is said to gather data from unstructured sources like the social media, analyze customer behavior from various sources and throw up notifications to

the bank staff, through an interactive and role-specific dashboard, which they can then use to prompt customers and enhance cross-sell.

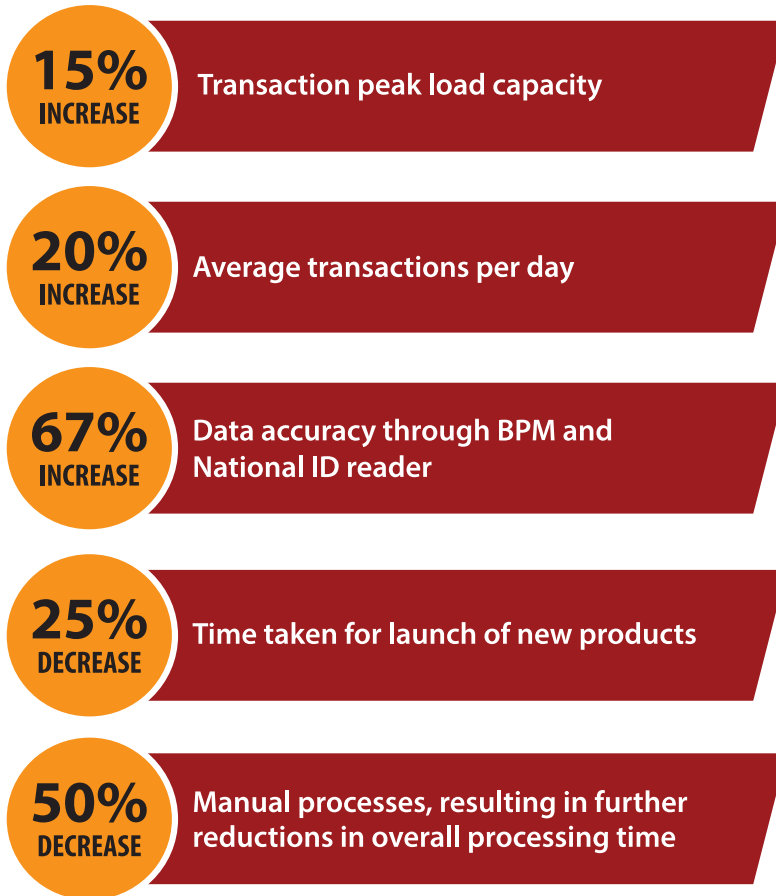
Bank Sohar is realizing ample benefits from the Analytics tool already. First and foremost, relationship managers are finding their engagements with clients more effective and fruitful, with the suggestions from the bank's swanky dashboard, providing a comprehensive 360 view of customer behavior based on their banking history and preferences. Bank Sohar has also observed a 60 per cent reduction in overall time taken across processes and over 67 per cent reduction in manual efforts, through insights from this platform.

Talking about the benefits, the newly appointed CEO of the bank, Ahmed Al Musalmi was quoted saying, "Data-driven insights are the lifeline of any digital business today. The new platform is empowering us with actionable insights and thereby fulfilling our vision of making Bank Sohar one of the best digital bank in the region. Powered with a real-time, powerful analytics engine, Bank Sohar is able to deliver superior customer experience, manage risk better and enhance efficiency of internal operations."

He further added, "Along the lines of our vision to be the most preferred bank



FIVE BIGGEST PAYBACKS FOR BANK SOHAR FROM THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME



in Oman, Bank Sohar has successfully met its twin objective through this transformation. Primarily, to update our banking systems for the digital banking era and secondly, to have systems that are able to deliver nothing less than the best banking experience to our customers. With the best technology to support us, we look forward to realizing sustainable growth in every sector of our business, and offer our customers what they need even before they ask. We want Bank Sohar to be known as the 'one-stop-financial-super-mall' catering to the diverse needs of our individual and corporate customer segments, across Oman."

Corroborating the CEO's views, Mujahid Said Daud Al Zadjaly, DGM IT & Alternate Channels, Bank Sohar said,

"Bank Sohar embarked on a journey to transform its technology in line with the bank's vision and strategy to be a digitalized bank. And one of the most valuable asset for a digital bank is analytics and insights. The ability to quickly capture and convert data into actionable insights will be key to success. We are now empowered with the right insights to have more contextual engagements with our customers."

Speaking on the bank's digital transformation programme Sriranga Neelathali Sampathkumar, Head of Business for Middle East and Africa, Infosys Finacle said, "In the face of increasing digital disruption and new customer demands, a digital banking transformation is inevitable. Banks

In the face of increasing digital disruption and new customer demands, a digital banking transformation is inevitable

– **Sriranga Neelathali Sampathkumar**
Head of Business for Middle East and Africa, Infosys Finacle

need to reimagine their businesses and find innovative ways to engage customers. Bank Sohar has been shown commendable foresight to leverage analytics for deeper customer insights and new business avenues. I believe this will give them a significant competitive advantage in the market."

BEYOND TECHNOLOGY – WHAT DRIVES BANK SOHAR

The Bank Sohar team collectively recognizes that it takes more than technology to create a sustainable organization. As much as they have invested in modern technology, the bank has also invested in their biggest asset - employees. Bank Sohar provides various platforms for their staff to be periodically trained to stay updated with the latest banking trends and changing business landscape. They aim to create a truly networked and learning organization, by combining the knowledge of their employees with the core values of the institution.

For Bank Sohar, their journey has only begun. Stepping into their second decade, the bank is looking at bringing in more zeal towards banking excellence. With an aim to be recognized as a banking service provider who anticipates and understands customers' needs, even before they ask, Bank Sohar is on its way to being an icon of customer delight in the Oman banking sector. **OFR**