



Banking, market and people

Article

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Published in Ergon magazine 2019

SMART insights

ergon

Rolf Olmesdahl, Head of IT Department and Services (COO) at Raiffeisen Switzerland, welcomes us into his office in the company's headquarters in St. Gallen for a chat – an uncluttered space with no flash or ostentation. There's a laptop on the desk but precious little else. His office is known within the firm as "the clean room" but this description could equally be applied to his approach to work, which is efficient, electronic and no-nonsense: clean, precise but always with a human touch.

“Meetings in person and the human touch are as important as ever.”

How does one of the big players hold its own in Switzerland's banking sector? How important is IT to its mission and what role does IT play for Raiffeisen?

Here, as everywhere, banks must constantly adapt and evolve to remain competitive. What matters is that throughout all the change clients continue to feel that they are being looked after. Services must be delivered quickly and access must be uncomplicated and secure. New, more efficient and reliable IT solutions are playing a crucial role here.

Core banking system

“Until recently, each of our 243 Raiffeisen banks, which are organised as a cooperative, still had its own small banking IT system. As of the end of last year, all the banks have been migrated to the new system and are now using a single, shared core system”, says Olmesdahl, adding: “We set ourselves quite a task but we managed it. I know of no other firm that has migrated almost 250 separate companies onto a single platform.”



Dynamic digitalisation

Everything is in flux. Countless processes are being disrupted and digitised, others are being transformed altogether. “There are areas, ideas, opportunities that we want to be anticipating right now – in a time of constant change. It's important for us to be able to evaluate and observe new market conditions and trends independently”, observes Olmesdahl. “That's why, a good while ago now, we founded our RAILab innovation lab, which explores trends, technologies, new perspectives and opportunities as a separate organisational unit. We have investigated a blockchain topic in the RAILab, for example, and we have evaluated the significance and consequences of new regulatory legislations (PSD2).”

“We want to be able to react quickly and independently to new market conditions.”

ROLF OLMESDAHL,
HEAD OF IT DEPARTMENT AND SERVICES (COO)
AT RAIFFEISEN SWITZERLAND

Improving process efficiency

“We also have to configure existing processes more efficiently and organise them more consistently – the eBanking applications for customers are a perfect example. We’re well on course there, now. With more than 1.3 million clients in Switzerland, we probably have the biggest eBanking system for domestic customers – bigger than that of the Swiss ‘big banks’. We’re acquiring 300 new customers every day. We were recently delighted to break a record of 550,000 logins on a single day”, says Olmesdahl before adding that, despite these successes, there is still much more potential to exploit. Raiffeisen’s goal continues to be to attract even more eBanking customers, and the eBanking strategy is certainly paying off. The company’s specialists are currently engaged in digitising and optimising its advisory processes.

Digital proximity

“Raiffeisen has a key competitive advantage: with more than 880 branches, we are three-times better represented and are closer to people than the two ‘big banks’ – and the last thing we want is to put this advantage at risk through digitalisation.” Olmesdahl does not believe in digitalisation to the exclusion of all else; meetings in person and the human touch are as important as ever to him. This is why he is at pains to highlight the key challenge that Raiffeisen’s digitisation experts will have to face: customers are all for digital services and the convenience of handling their finances via eBanking but they also value having a personal link with their local bank. Squaring this circle will, he says, be decisive.

Consistently good customer experience

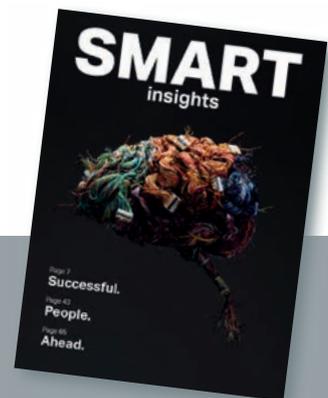
As an independent, reliable and local bank, which criteria have Raiffeisen carried over into the digital realm? “Proximity is linked to trust and trust, in turn, to security. You can’t put either of these at risk frivolously, especially not nowadays, and this is why we go to such lengths to ensure security and a good customer experience – including online.” Are there any other considerations? “Security is critical. Our security structure operates on a range of different levels: eBanking login protocols, infrastructure, firewalls and so on. We’ve made massive investments at every stage over the last three years.”

A word about Ergon

“We want to be easily accessible to our customers, digitally. Security and ease of use are important and that’s why we were looking for a login procedure whereby clients would sign in once and have immediate access to all the services they needed. We had chosen Ergon because, in Airlock, the company provides an intelligent identity hub with single sign-on. This system is well thought through, easily expandable and fulfils the most stringent security criteria. This will help create a consistent Raiffeisen identity and give our banking customers secure, seamless access.”

Questions about the article?

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