



How Financial Services Can Thrive After COVID-19

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It seems that COVID-19 will, unfortunately, be with us for a while longer, but that doesn't mean that retail banks, wealth management firms, credit card companies, and other financial brands shouldn't look to the future. The post-pandemic world will be an altogether different place than the world preceding it, which means that brands across all industries need to be prepared for what comes next, especially when it comes to customer experience (CX).

Today's discussion focuses on what the world of financial services will look like after the Coronavirus pandemic and how it must adapt from a CX perspective. These predictions are informed by the many years I've spent advising and working with finserv brands and will hone in on three types of organizations:

- Retail Banks
- Wealth Management Firms
- Credit Card Companies

Retail Banks

There are several things that retail banks can do today to help ensure that they remain viable and attractive financial service providers. First, banks should pay close attention to how their clients behaved during the pandemic—what transactions or account activities occurred more or less

during this crisis? What surprises cropped up, and was your brand able to meet the challenge? Additionally, did your bank adopt safety standards to give customers a reassured experience?

While on the subject of customer behavior, it's also worth pointing out that the pandemic has significantly increased bank clients' reliance on digital media. As such, retail banks should revisit digital channels and ensure that they've adapted to new expectations and behavior. This pandemic hasn't spelled the end of bank branches, but physical bank locations are being repurposed to focus strictly on consultative interactions like providing advice and supporting financial wellness. Meanwhile, these brands should expect digital transaction methods like online banking, ATMs, mobile apps, and other self-sufficient channels to accelerate even more.

Finally, as we already learned from the economic downturn in 2008, banks will have to develop new products that meet customers' post-pandemic needs. Given the crisis's toll on the economy, products and services having to do with debt consolidation, financial wellness, savings, and retirement will likely be customers' new favorite interest areas. Banks that focus on innovation, differentiation, and a greater focus on customer and market intelligence will make or break banks' hegemony after the pandemic.



Wealth Management Firms

COVID-19 has left no customer group untouched—affluent audiences are also suffering financial setbacks from this pandemic. These setbacks will have a direct impact on what they come to expect of wealth management brands post-Coronavirus.

The data and trends that I've seen indicate that, perhaps more than anything, wealth management clients will come to these firms hungry for advice. The pandemic has created colossal uncertainty, especially when it comes to savings and investments, and so these clients will crave financial guidance. Wealth management firms should provide proactive advice to soothe client concerns and fears.

Relatedly, wealth management clients will also begin expecting higher interactivity from their firms, including more active account management, more frequent business reviews, and other proactive moves. Clients will also be more interested in aggressively protecting their assets, as well as in increased digital access to resources and heightened self-reliance. The bottom line here is that, if you're a wealth management advisor, brush up on your technique and invest in that extra coffee maker, because your clients will need more of your time and focus than ever before.

Credit Card Companies

The pandemic has made finances very tough for many people and companies, and this fact has already had a massive impact on credit card providers. These providers are facing and will continue to face three COVID-era challenges: a greater need for credit, more payment options, and the need to adopt a focus that extends beyond credit cards.

Credit isn't always the best option for closing the financial gap when times get tough, but with unemployment rising and the economy remaining sluggish, many customers and companies will rely on it to stay afloat. Because of these woes, providers should expect an increase in potential credit issues, as well as an uptick in desires for perks like deferred payments and rewards tied to daily essentials (gas, groceries, etc.) instead of travel or vacationing.

Credit card companies can also expect changes in how customers will want to pay. Contactless payments have surged during the pandemic and will likely remain at that high water mark after the crisis, which means that providers must prepare to address the challenges that come with issuing additional new cards and facilitating payments digitally.

Finally, while credit card providers will continue to resemble banks in many ways, they will need to keep a laser focus on factors like future deferments, payment difficulties, and debt consolidation. All told, credit card providers can get ahead after the Coronavirus by crafting their experiences around flexibility, which can both reassure customers and keep post-COVID challenges from adversely affecting the bottom line.



The Future of Finserv

There's a common thread that unites all of the changes coming our way, and it's human action. Whether customers are opening an account with a new bank, reassessing their wealth management, or applying for a credit card, it is imperative that all of these brands create an experience based on both flexibility and proactivity.

Financial services brands must be able to quickly learn the new realities of the post-COVID landscape, then infuse those learnings into the experiences and products they provide. This strategy will leave customers feeling both more satisfied about any financial uncertainty and truly empathized with. The finserv brands that undertake this work will emerge from this crisis with the most meaningful experience and strongest bottom line, ensuring continued success for themselves and their customers.

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