



AIB strikes a communications partnership for changing times in banking

Against a backdrop of major change in the financial services industry, banks like AIB are examining both how to operate on more cost-effective channels, and how to bring customer convenience to the next level. In Ireland, AIB is committed to becoming a technology-led bank by pursuing a far-reaching digitisation program, enabled by its strategic communications partner eir Business.

With more than 300 branches in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and mainland Great Britain, AIB has the largest reach of any Irish bank, and following a major network upgrade completed in 2013, it's now the country's most connected bank.

A major new next-generation network has now given every branch speeds of up to 300Mbps, and the bank's future requirements are also being met with bandwidth on demand of up to 1Gbps. The bank is also undertaking a major desktop technology refresh for its branches, following a successful upgrade of all its desktop telephony and contact centre technology. In addition, AIB are continuing with some of Ireland's most exciting customer-facing innovations in banking, from mobile apps to immersive "banking experience" shops more reminiscent of a multimedia store than a traditional branch.

Denis Burke, Head of Telecoms for AIB, says the bank conducted a competitive tender in 2012 for the right communications partner to deliver the enabling network for its digitisation strategy.

"We had a very clear business case objective of delivering a new network that would eliminate the bottlenecks that were affecting our branches, and after reviewing proposals from various providers we chose eir Business," Denis said. "eir Business provides our branch data

network, our ATM network and our in-branch customer Wi-Fi in the Republic, and they worked with us to upgrade our contact centre systems and put new IP phones on every desk."

Consolidated vendor relationships mean real business benefit

Denis' team serves more than 14,000 internal IT customers across the bank, and a principal benefit of having eir Business as a single communications partner is the simplicity the relationship has delivered.

Having consolidated multiple suppliers to just one, and having standardised throughout the bank on Cisco technology, Denis says he's seen significant benefits in terms of vendor management, staff training, and end-user support, as all IT support requests now come into one single location.

"It was important for me to be able to sit in front of the business and tell them we now have one network, one supplier and one support model," he said. "The supplier consolidation alone has been tremendously beneficial to me. I rationalised from four different suppliers in favour of one with eir Business, which means much simpler supplier relationship management, fewer meetings, and a consistent high level of quality that I know I'll get from eir Business, its SLAs and the standard of account management it provides."

Empowered for innovation with the next-generation network

AIB has stated its ambitions to be the country's most technology-led bank, and it's currently delivering some of the most exciting banking innovations, including mobile apps for home budgeting, and an immersive AIB Lab ("Learn about Banking") in Dundrum shopping centre in Dublin. This high-end AIB bank branch offers not only ATMs and deposit machines but also a stylish lounge-style environment where customers can relax, learn how to use new channels like AIB on mobiles, tablets, internet and phone.

eir Business also worked with AIB to equip the Dundrum centre with what AIB believe is a first in Europe: Remote Expert Booths that allow customers to meet "virtually" face-to-face with a live AIB expert. The booths incorporate high definition videoconferencing and scanning facilities that let the customer complete the whole process of opening an account or applying for a mortgage.

"The Remote Expert Booths are our pride and joy," says Denis. "We work on an ongoing basis with eir Business and with Cisco to examine and workshop a range of innovations that might take two years to bring to market. A lot of what you see in the market now are projects we've been working on for a couple of years."

"At AIB we very much want to take a jump into the future, into the mobile apps space, into the tablet space, and offer products and services across all of those channels. A lot of banks say they want to put the customer first, but we really mean it. Whether you want to do banking sitting at home on the sofa with your iPad, or on the train with your smartphone, or just using 'old-fashioned' online, we're trying to put in place the building blocks and the right products to let you do that. Our core network and our strategic communications partner eir Business are a very important part of that."

eir Business and AIB's ongoing work on innovation not only looks at new ways to service customers, but also examines new means of leveraging technologies in the enterprise. Potential initiatives include wider deployment of mobile IT infrastructure, integration of staff mobile devices with enterprise systems, and more.

"What we've delivered with eir Business as our partner is really a far-reaching telecommunications capability for data, voice, Wi-Fi, and mobility right across the enterprise, and we're looking at ways to exploit connectivity technologies to make it easier for our people to work on the move," Denis said. "It's really a continual drive to find how we can make the best use of technology and innovation. Good, strong working relationships like we have with eir Business make that easier."