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BEING THE BEST DIGITAL BANK IS THEIR GOAL

Tiago Spritzer,
Technology Director of
Grupo Financiero
Banamex

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Citibanamex knows that today differentiation lies in digital platforms. With its new mobile banking, digital branches, and open APIs, Mexico's oldest financial group is looking to gain participation and improve the customer experience.

■ **By** *Mónica Mistretta*

Tiago Spritzer, Technology Director of Grupo Financiero Banamex, transmits energy and enthusiasm when he talks about all the initiatives he has led in the three years as head of the technological strategy of one of the three most important banks in Mexico. The young man of Brazilian origin is in a hurry to tell everything. It ensures that Citibanamex is a pioneer in CoDi, the QR code payment system that will operate from September 30. He also immediately comments that he was considered "Best digital bank" in Latin America, both in the category of corporate banking and consumer banking, according to the ranking of the Global Finance Magazine, as well as the best bank in open APIs, among many other subcategories in which it stands out.

Calm. It all started in 2016, when Citibanamex made an investment of $ 25,000 million pesos (About USD B$1.25) to modernize its technology. Instead of embarking on an exhausting project of eight or ten years, with probably disappointing results, Spritzer chose to focus on the customer experience and, without touching the mainframe systems, simplify the middleware layers. Thus, among other initiatives, he created an API factory in 2017. In parallel, the institution started its digital branches and opted to be "the best digital bank in Mexico".

REAL PROBLEMS

"Innovation has to look for a real problem. The APIs helped us internally to simplify, because we had 10 layers of middleware. With Cloud Foundry, we now have only one layer and gain in speed. The customer experience went from several seconds to microseconds to log in. We also improve code maintenance. We look for the problem to solve and there we put the innovation", Spritzer said emphatically.

Spritzer is responsible for day-to-day innovation. With 1,200 people on his team, the former IBM executive oversees application development tasks to improve the customer experience, for which his team is divided into five functions: Digital technology; Data and analytics; Development and maintenance of core applications; Payments and transformation; Architecture and production

[cover story]

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The largest bank in Mexico in the number of credit cards relies on the cloud to support transactions and spikes in charges that occur monthly, for example, with the preparation of financial statements. "We started by private cloud to experiment. We have also experimented with pubic cloud. Right now we have a large volume of tests and development in the internal cloud and we are experimenting with AWS and Google Cloud", said the interviewee, who said that the cloud helps him to scale and have better security.

With the values and principles of the way of working Agile, Spritzer and his group have managed to develop a significant part of their portfolio of applications, especially mobile.

NEW MINDSET

In addition to focusing on next-generation tools, Spritzer emphasized the importance of mentality change. As an example, he talked about opening accounts in branches, where there were different work teams to incorporate clients. "Now there is only one team to achieve the best customer experience on all channels and that was also thanks to an internal alignment. We make innovations in the process, in the system. Now it takes 12 minutes to open an account at the branch, because we have multidisciplinary teams that combine compliance, business, technology, customer knowledge, etc. executives", Spritzer said.

Regarding new technologies, at the beginning of the year they began using artificial intelligence (AI) to monitor data lakes and learn about the customer's experience in real time. For example, how long did the user open an app, if he called the contact center, if he gave up the call, and so on. "An improvement is launched to the app almost every day, but approximately every two weeks we implement new features."

APIs are available on a portal so developers can try and experiment. When someone thinks they have a use case that makes sense, Citibanamex is willing to establish alliances. "We were the first bank that opened the APIs," he said emphatically.

Like many of his colleagues, Spritzer is concerned with talent acquisition. "I created a very diversified and very strong team. I compete for talent with suppliers, with other banks, with large retailers. Fortunately, I still don't have great talent losses, because I still hire people", Spritzer concluded, just as quickly as he started the talk. A videoconference was already waiting for him and his day was just beginning. ■