

PERSPECTIVES

A Case for Collaboration

August 2016

Extranets are modified Internet sites that provide a private and secure channel for a company to share and exchange confidential information with its customers. In the case of a credit union service organization like PSCU, it's a portal for sharing information with the CUSO's 800 Owner credit unions.

Originally launched in spring of 2002, PSCU's extranet, MemberConnect, was developed as a way to exchange confidential information with Owner credit unions in a secure, password-restricted environment. Once integrated into the PSCU service model, MemberConnect made day-to-day activities more efficient, streamlined and productive for both PSCU employees and its credit unions. In 2006, MemberConnect was refreshed with minor cosmetic modifications and new subject categories, and for nearly a decade it provided a reliable and useful platform for credit unions to access information crucial to their daily operations.



Lisa Townsend
PSCU Program Manager,
Strategic Initiatives

Specializes in leading PSCU's major corporate projects. She led the effort on PSCU's recent MemberConnect complete overhaul, implementing the usage of our first effort ever at inside out new product delivery. Lisa's success is built on leveraging her experience in sales, product management, product development, process improvement and pragmatic marketing to help meet internal and external client's needs. Prior to joining PSCU 15 years ago, Lisa worked in sales at Computer Sciences Corporation and the Federal Reserve Bank. Lisa holds a degree in Business Management from Minot State University and Pragmatic Certifications.

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With the emergence of the digital age and the increase in innovative products and services entering the financial services market, PSCU needed to improve MemberConnect's functionality to make it easier for credit unions to use. In PSCU's ongoing commitment to service excellence, the CUSO had the opportunity to revisit the tools its Member credit unions depend on most and improve the areas of highest importance. The first step was to look at the ways PSCU could make it easier for credit union employees to do their jobs by conducting on-site visits to better understand how credit unions were using MemberConnect.

During 2015, PSCU began asking for participants to help shape MemberConnect 2.0. Seven leading credit unions stepped up to be the voice for the CUSO's 800 Owner credit unions across the country. The credit unions were interviewed about what they liked or didn't like about MemberConnect, and were then given tasks so PSCU team members could observe their technique for navigating the beta version of MemberConnect 2.0.

Katie Bendyk, ATM and Card Services Manager for Vantage Credit Union (St. Louis, MO) said during a recent interview, "Cards are a big deal to us so our relationship with PSCU is very important. When asked to give feedback on the site that helps keep our cards top of wallet, we jumped at the chance."

Bendyk continued, "We were blown away by the demo of MemberConnect 2.0, and though our team comprises a wide range of generations and skill sets, everyone agrees that the ease of navigation and search functionality improvements are awesome. Most importantly, our feedback didn't stop at PSCU's on-site visits. We'd receive a link from PSCU every couple of weeks to test, and were asked to speak up regarding what works and doesn't work for us."

Another volunteer change-agent on behalf of the CUSO's Owners was American Airlines Federal Credit Union (Fort Worth, TX). Christy Haley, Manager of Payments Servicing and Risk said, "Change is scary, so it was nice being consulted for the redesign of MemberConnect. We've been with PSCU since 2009 so we felt good about the chance to give input." When asked about her favorite features of the new site she said, "The bookmarks are really helpful and we've noticed a tremendous decrease in the amount of clicks needed to get where we need to go. Though we're still trying to feel our way around, we think all credit unions will benefit from some of the changes we helped shape."

Though MemberConnect 2.0 houses many of the original elements that made 1.0 a solid source for information, new features like a customizable dashboard and bookmarks, are part of the flexibility strategy PSCU incorporated in the build.

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MemberConnect 2.0 needed to be easy to use because it competes with email, which is a core productivity application for nearly any modern knowledge worker. Extranets can't represent extra work, or they'll simply be supplanted by email, so PSCU aimed to make 2.0 the best it could be in that regard.

Perhaps some of the heaviest users of MemberConnect, and the ones most excited to participate in the rebuilding of the site, are staff members from VyStar Credit Union (Jacksonville, FL). Sarah Mills, Credit and Rewards Program Portfolio Manager for VyStar said, "We were eager to participate in this pilot and give feedback because our credit card operations are dependent on MemberConnect. Additionally, we run reports, manage our portfolios, and submit tickets for help through this site, so we definitely wanted to have a part in crafting the improvements."

As with every other participating credit union, the PSCU team visited VyStar where they asked users to reveal their ideal landscape for the new site. PSCU asked them what the new MemberConnect would look like if they could dream up anything without limitations. Mills was quick to respond, "We'd have the freedom to build our own dashboard and customize it as we see fit."

Today, Mills is pleased to see her team's recommendation was implemented and they now have the flexibility to see what they want and make modifications as necessary. "Throughout development, we'd click our way through certain assignments delivered by PSCU, and we had the opportunity to weigh in on whether or not the navigation met our expectations. One thing that was really great and innovative was PSCU's ability to remotely access our machines and watch us work. This gave them a first-hand glance at how we work, what we're struggling with, and which features we use most on a daily basis," said Mills. "I definitely feel they built the new MemberConnect 2.0 based directly on a lot of the feedback we gave them, and in terms of rollout, it was wonderful to have the chance to test the new site before it was introduced to all the PSCU Owners."

PSCU's rich tradition of service and delivering an unparalleled member experience is already driving the CUSO's plan for the next iteration of MemberConnect. In order to be a service-first CUSO, PSCU has to keep asking its Member credit unions about their vision for the future and continually mold its technology to be there and working for them in tomorrow's payments world.