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GUEST OPINION

Conversion Ambition: Combining Core, Mobile and Debit

Editor's note: Direct Federal Credit Union is a one-branch, \$750 million credit union located in Needham, Mass. It is undergoing its first core conversion since 1984 and has partnered with CU Times to document its journey until the new core is anticipated go live in 2021. Contributing authors will be members of the project team and each article will tell a story from a different point of view. Read previous articles and continue to follow along at cutimes.com/instantinsights.

Direct Federal is ambitious. We put an incredible amount of time and effort into all areas of our business, from member service to vendor selection to strategic planning. You might have read one of our past articles in this publication regarding Direct's core and digital conversion journey. Converting online and mobile banking and a core system at the same time is a daunting task for any financial institution. To make it truly ambitious, we added a debit card conversion to our list of 2020 conversions.

This is the story of Direct's successful debit card conversion,



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which took place directly at the halfway point of our core conversion and amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Pulling the PIN Early

Direct chose PSCU as our new debit card partner in the spring of 2019. Direct has had an existing credit card relationship with PSCU for several years and we've always been impressed with their service and the breadth of options they offer. We felt that with PSCU as a partner for our entire card portfolio, our members would receive the benefit of an expanded offering of services. At the same time, our operations folks would see increased efficiencies in managing the day-to-day portfolio.

With Keystone from Corelation as our new core provider, we will be able to leverage the best

features of PSCU without sacrificing any functionality. Direct did get lucky in that our choice to go with PSCU did not present any problems related to the selection of our core solution. The features and functionally that both PSCU and Keystone offer complement each other wonderfully and will delight our members.

The Project and Design

We began our debit card conversion with PSCU in January with a go-live date of June 24, 2020. The tight six-month timeframe was created to ensure Direct and PSCU were able to convert Direct's entire debit and ATM portfolio before our contract with our previous debit and ATM supplier ended. Also, we had to reissue all our cards, update the card design, set new limits with enhanced fraud and reporting strategies – and get all of this to work on our current 37-year-old core system. Now, if you are reading this and thinking, why wouldn't Direct just have waited and scheduled its debit card conversion to take effect when its new core system is live on Feb. 1, 2021? I would

say that is an excellent question, and one we asked in our very first meeting with PSCU.

The reason we decided not to reissue our debit and ATM portfolio as part of our core conversion was twofold:

1. We wanted to ensure we had enough time to adequately test the records on the new core system before the core conversion.
2. With our digital and core conversion, we are changing several ways our members interact with us, and we felt adding a card reissue at the same time would not have been prudent or made for a great member experience.

To meet our aggressive six-month timeframe, Direct and PSCU formed a weekly meeting for a group of team members from both sides to fill out technical documentation, discuss security parameters, test files and complete paperwork. In conjunction with the technical side of the house, our marketing team redesigned both our debit and ATM cards. The marketing team wanted to create a card design that members would be proud to have, and it is the first thing their eyes go to when they open their wallets. They designed the new cards to reflect a modern, clean palette; the design includes a matte finish and silver foil accent, resulting in a bold



and trustworthy, yet still familiar, final card design.

Going Live

The morning of June 24, 2020 was an early one, as the conversion went live at 4:00 a.m. Our members' new cards were now ready to be used. Several Direct staff members got up early to test transactions at gas stations and online to ensure features and functionality were in good working order. As expected, our member services team saw an increase in call volume starting at 8:00 a.m. Certain members needed assistance with card activation or adding their new card to the digital wallet of their choice. We did encounter a small snag with our digital wallet solution provided by PSCU, but we were able to overcome this obstacle in a short amount of time thanks to great teamwork between PSCU and Direct.

All in all, Direct had a very successful card conversion. As an added benefit of completing our card conversion early, we were able to clean up a lot of legacy data files, which will reduce the overall clutter on our new core system. The process was not easy, but with the right amount of planning and teamwork, we have been resilient in meeting our conversion deliverables. Our members now have a better product in their wallets today than when 2020 began. At Direct, our core mission is to be our members' lifelong trusted financial partner, and with our successful debit card conversion, we took another step down that path.

Have questions about Direct's conversion journey or debit card conversion? Devon Lyon can be reached at 781-855-7489 or dlyon@direct.com. ■