

nexus

Thriving in the Digital Age

A Playbook for Incumbent Banks and Financial Institutions to Outperform.

A Two-Part Research.

Part 1 – Decoding Digital Banking: Challenges, Failures, and Key Lessons for Incumbents.



C-INNOVATION
EMPOWERING STRATEGY

This research is brought to you by

nexus

a joint venture between



Nexus helps traditional financial institutions launch digital bank spin-offs to enhance competitiveness and drive growth.

Research delivered by



C-INNOVATION
EMPOWERING STRATEGY

Thriving in the Digital Age : A Two-Part Research Collaboration.

Part 1

Decoding Digital Banking: Challenges, Failures, and Key Lessons for Incumbents.

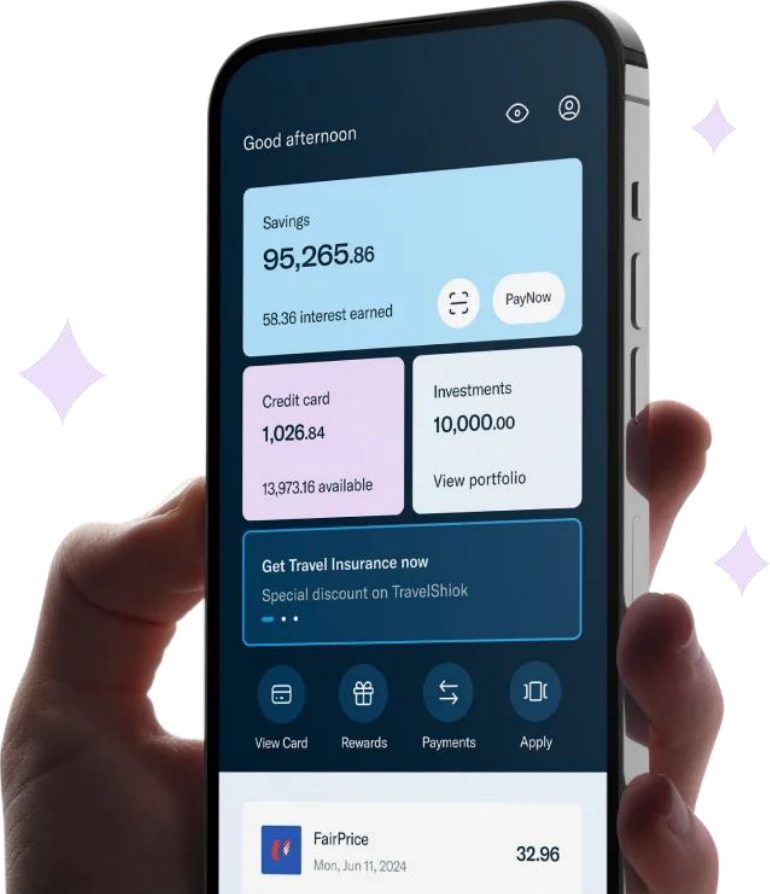
Explores the evolving digital banking landscape, key challenges for incumbents, **and lessons from past successes and failures.**

Part 2

Blueprint for Digital Success: Strategies, Execution, and Future Trends.

It will delve into the critical components of building digital banks, including **strategy, execution, and future trends.**

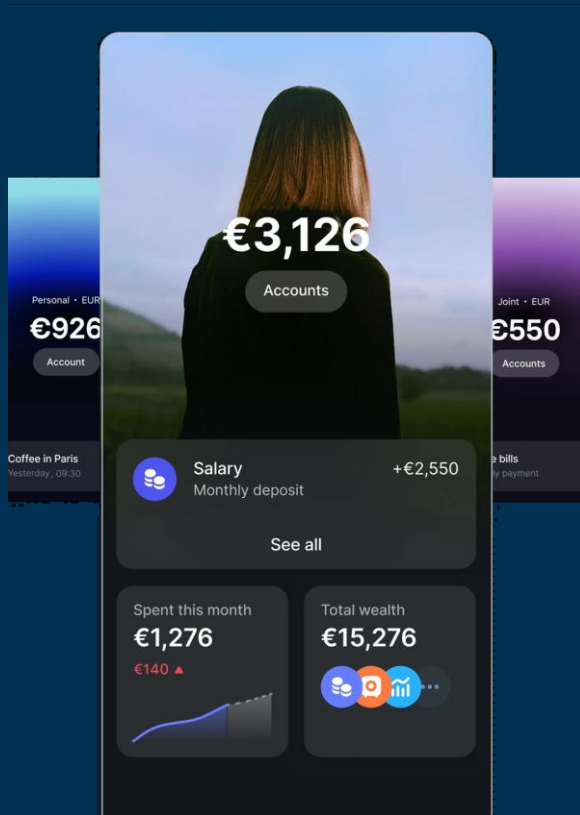
Sign in for part 2 of this report here.





Thriving in the Digital Age – Part 1

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Decoding Digital Banking: Challenges, Failures, and Key Lessons for Incumbents.

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Executive Outline



Richard Bostock
C-Strategy4Banking
Co-founder and
Managing Director



Gazi Yar Mohammed
Kube Innovation
Co-founder and CEO



Zia Hassan Siddique
Kube Innovation
Co-founder and COO

In a hyper-connected world and a strongly competitive industry such as FinTech, it's easy to fall behind. Remaining relevant in today's marketplace requires constant vigilance and adaptation to the changing landscape. One universal truth is that those companies with legacy products, systems, and processes are the slowest to move.

Whilst C-Strategy4Banking helps executives formulate their FinTech banking strategy, Nexus goes one step further to seamlessly define and execute your technical change roadmap. We help you make the quantum leap in stages whilst the market is moving, providing you with an unrivalled combination of agility, banking, and technical expertise.

The financial industry is at a critical juncture where traditional banks must either adapt or risk falling behind in an increasingly digital-first world. At Kube Innovation, we believe that success lies in strategic execution, leveraging the right technology, and embracing customer-centric models.

This research, in collaboration with C-Innovation and C-Strategy4Banking, is a vital resource for financial institutions seeking to navigate the digital banking landscape. By dissecting past failures and showcasing success stories, we provide a blueprint for digital transformation, helping banks future-proof their operations and remain competitive.

Digital banking is no longer an experiment—it is the foundation of modern financial services. Yet, many incumbents struggle with outdated models, regulatory challenges, and the pace of innovation.

Through this collaboration with C-Innovation and C-Strategy4Banking, we aim to bridge the gap between strategy and execution, providing financial institutions with actionable insights to build sustainable digital banking models. Our goal is to empower banks to move beyond short-term digital initiatives and create long-term, scalable solutions that drive real impact in today's financial ecosystem.

C-Innovation's Research Perspective



Javier Guevara

C-Innovation
Co-founder and CEO

At C-Innovation, we are committed to empowering financial institutions to navigate the digital transformation with confidence. This latest research offers deep insights into the rapidly evolving digital banking landscape. It highlights the key drivers shaping the future of banking. By understanding these dynamics, institutions can strategically position themselves to outperform in this competitive market.

We are proud to support this research for Nexus, showcasing our dedication to providing actionable insights that drive innovation. This research is not only an essential tool for staying ahead but also a clear example of how C-Innovation continually contributes to innovation in the financial ecosystem. Our approach helps bridge the gap between traditional banking models and the agile, customer-centric approaches of digital challengers. Together, we are shaping the future of banking!



1. Introduction.

The transformation of banking: the digital revolution

The financial industry is undergoing a seismic shift with the rapid rise of digital banking. New entrants, known as neobanks or digital-only banks, are leveraging technology to offer streamlined, customer-centric services.

Key drivers:



Technological advancements

Mobile technology, cloud computing, and AI have enabled new business models.



Customer expectations

Today's consumers demand convenience, transparency, and personalization, which digital banks excel in providing.

Regulatory support

In many regions, regulatory frameworks have evolved to accommodate and encourage the growth of digital banking.

The post-pandemic landscape amplified and evolved the challenges banks were already facing

	Old world (<2000)	 Digital world (2000-2019)	 Post-pandemic world (>2020)
Distribution	Branch and telephone service	Digital touchpoints; branch and ATM use slowly falls	Digital dominance continues, with hybrid models emerging as branches see slight resurgence
Net interest margins	Healthy spread between deposit and lending interest rates	Increased transparency, tightening margins	Margins begin to widen again as interest rates rise post-pandemic
Fee income	Strong fees from cards, ATMs, and sales of other financial products	Customers shop around for lower fees; regulators cap interchange fees	Stabilization of interchange fees; new structures emerge with FinTech innovations like BNPL
Loan portfolio	Large loan books give big incumbents a pricing advantage	Improved credit scoring enables digital banks to price risk more accurately	Loan loss provisions shoot up as entire sector hits trouble; defaults rise as businesses fold

"Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth"

Mike Tyson

Former world heavyweight boxing champion

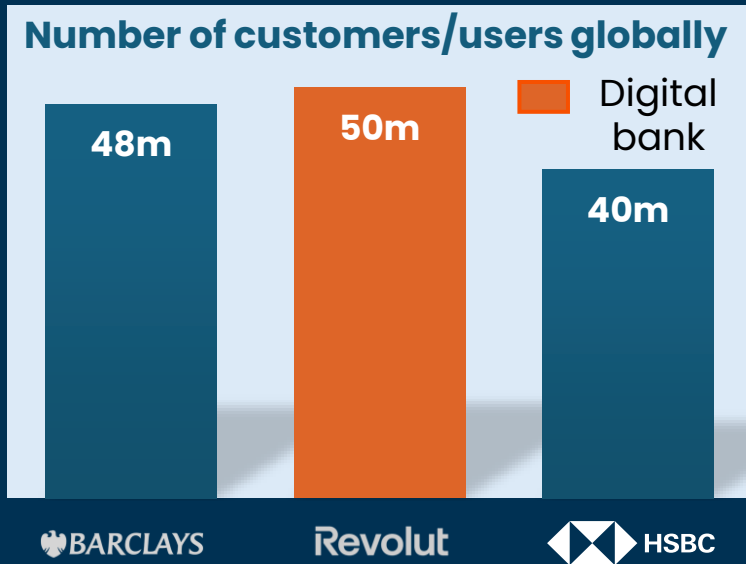


Navigating the challenge: incumbents facing disruption



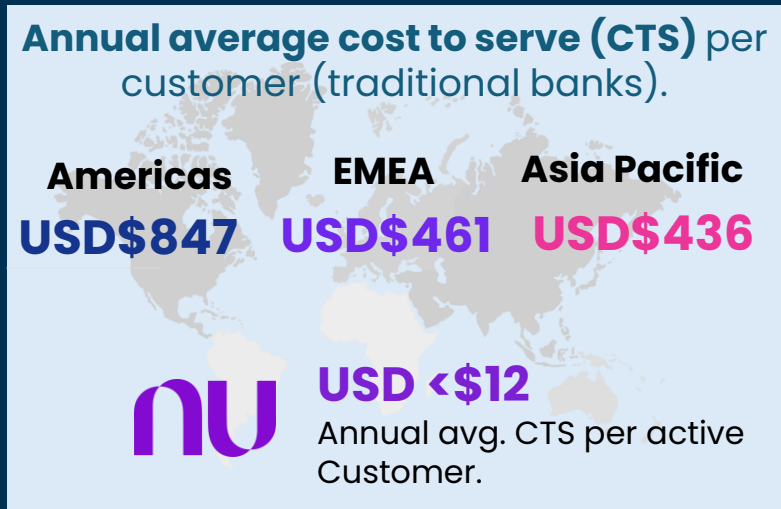
The threat to incumbents:

Market share erosion



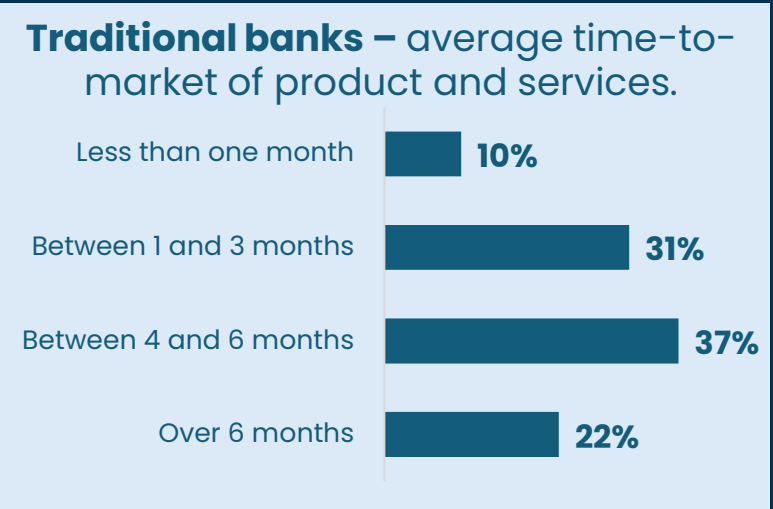
Digital banks are rapidly gaining market share, especially among younger, tech-savvy customers.

Pressure on margins



The low-cost structures of digital banks are putting pressure on the profitability of traditional banks.

Innovation gap



Many incumbent banks struggle to innovate at the pace of their digital counterparts, leading to a widening gap in customer satisfaction and service offerings.

Why adaptation is imperative for incumbent banks: meeting customer expectations and securing future growth.

- **Customer retention:** customers today expect seamless, personalized, and digital-first experiences like those provided by FinTech companies. Failure to meet these expectations can lead to customer churn.



- **Competitive advantage:** by embracing digital transformation, incumbent banks can leverage their established customer base and trust to offer new, innovative products and services.



- **Future-proofing:** adaptation is crucial for long-term survival in an increasingly digital-first financial landscape. Innovation in customer experience, FinTech partnerships, and agile operations will be key.





2. Landscape Analysis.

Challenger banks compete with traditional banks largely based on mobile-centric technology along with more consumer-friendly solutions.

Typical traits that characterize digital challenger banks

Core Attributes

Mobile focus



Niche specific



Address undeserved segments



Customer-centric



Free / low fees



Key Advantages vs Traditional Players

Simple and easy to use



Faster to innovate



Leverage customer data with AI



Transparent



Integrated financial management (PFM) tools



The global digital banking landscape is now a diverse ecosystem of neo-banks with banking license or strategic partnerships across regions.



Note: Non-exhaustive list. 'Xinja' exited the banking business returning its ADI licence and '86 400' FinTech bank was acquired by National Australia Bank Limited (NAB) in May 2021.

This diverse ecosystem includes FinTech start-ups with full banking licenses, corporate-backed digital brands, and firms leveraging partnerships or other than full banking license to deliver comprehensive financial services.

Challenger banks (with full banking license)



FinTech banks

Start-ups that have acquired a full banking license



Backed by corporates

Financial or non-financial corporate brands that have launched a digital brand



Neobanks (bank-like services without full banking licenses)



Partnership

Firms that partner with a bank license holder, to provide banking products and services



Independent

Firms that have acquired other than a full banking license and provide "bank-like" services

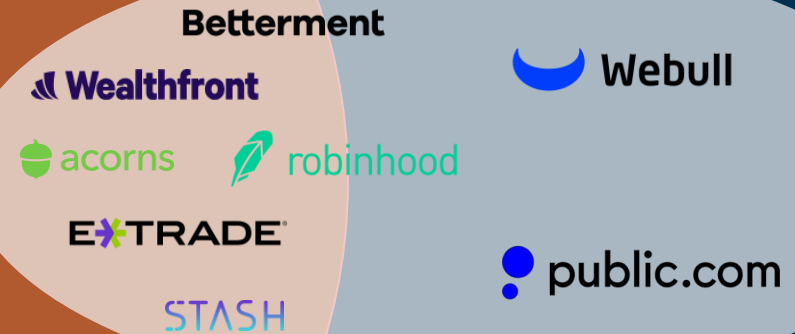


The emerging neo-banking ecosystem sees diverse FinTech players converging into digital banking services.

Digital payment platforms



Investment platforms



Lending solutions



Next-Generation Banks



Established FinTech players are now broadening their product offerings to secure a larger foothold in the digital banking market.

Foundation



Diversification in product offerings

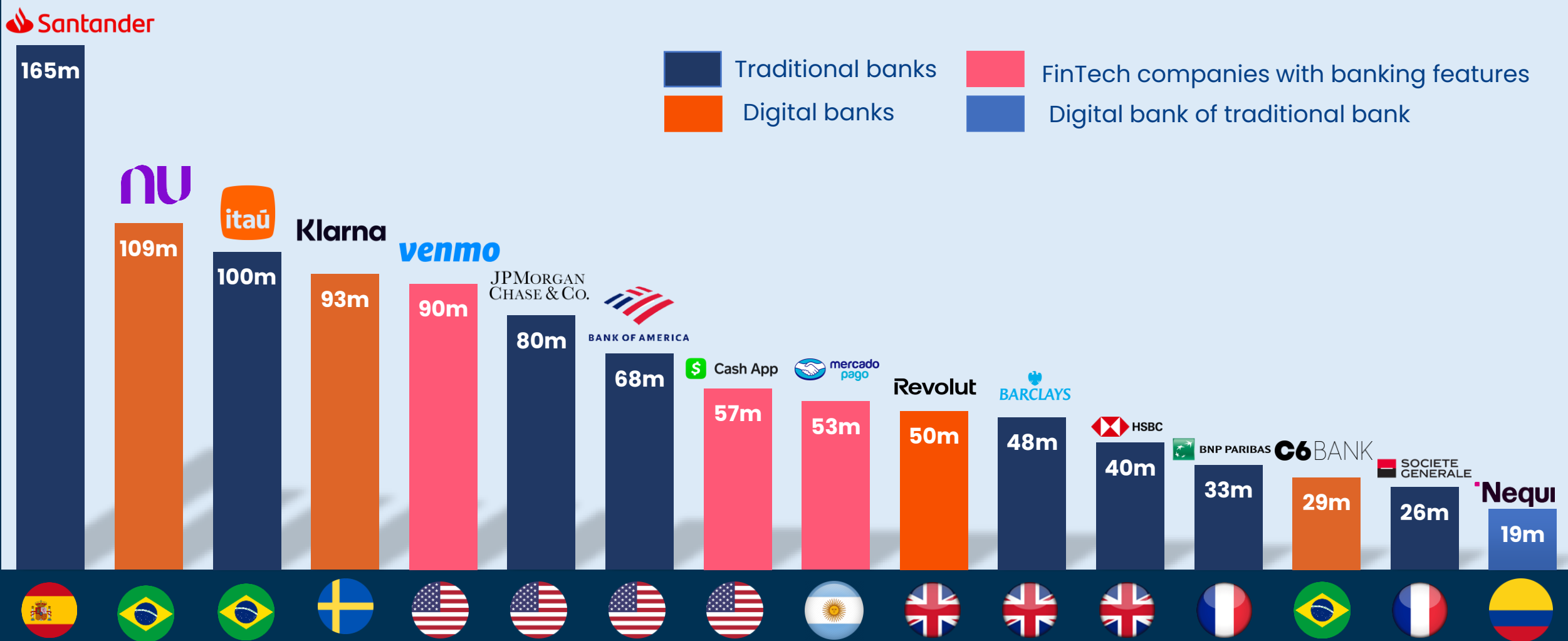


Peer-to-peer payment platform	Debit card 	Crypto 	Credit cards 	Business accounts
Student loans (refinancing)	Personal loans 	Savings accounts 	Mortgage refinance 	Stock investment
Robo advisory	Personal loans 	Savings accounts 	Debit card Check deposit 	Crypto
Peer-to-peer payment platform	Debit card 	Crypto 	Business accounts 	Stock investment



















Now, after leading in innovation, start-ups have surpassed traditional banks in scale.

Number of customers/users globally by banking brand



Europe's digital banks continue to experience unprecedented revenue growth compared to established players.



Digital bank	Revenue growth	Revenue 2022/FY2023	Revenue 2023/FY2024	Digital bank	Revenue growth	Revenue 2022/FY2023	Revenue 2023/FY2024
 kompassbank	442%	DKK 22.2m	DKK 120.4m	 Revolut	95%	£923m	£1,800m
 bunq	181%	€ 90.8m	€ 255.8m	 LUNAR°	74%	DKK 360.9m	DKK 626.2m
 monzo	147%	£355.6m	£880m	 OakNorth 	73%	£269m	£466m
 Allica Bank	141%	£79.3m	£191m	 Aprila Bank	68%	NOK 9m	NOK 161m
 Atom bank	112%	£209.1m	£443m	  Starling Bank	51%	£453m	£682.2m
				  ZOPA	48%	£150m	£222m
				 7WISE	31%	£892m	£1172.7m
				 N26	27%	€236m	€ 300m(E)

After leading in innovation and outpacing traditional banks in scale, some brands have seen dramatic profitability surges, while others show promise but still lag competitors.

Yearly profit/loss after tax by independent banking player

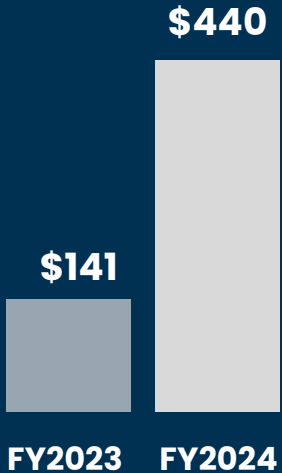
(USD\$, m) latest available annual financial report



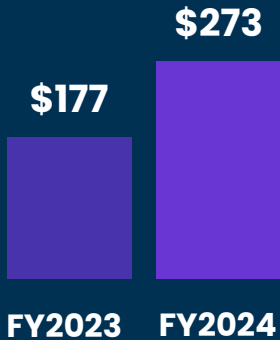
Revolut



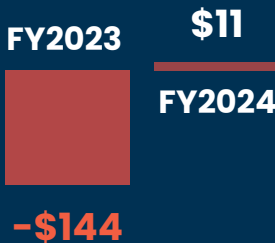
Wise



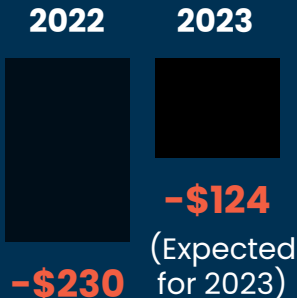
Starling Bank



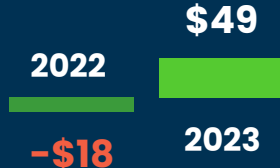
monzo



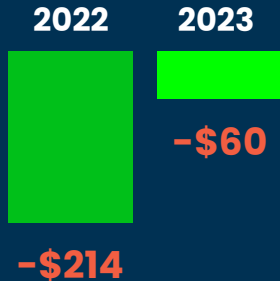
N26



bunq













LUNAR













Note: Financial results for Wise, Starling Bank, and Monzo are reported for the fiscal year ending in March 2023 and 2024 in the UK. For all other competitors, results are as of the end of 2022 and 2023.

While some digital banks solidify their dominance with strong and consistent profitability, others are climbing the ranks rapidly, reshaping the competitive landscape.

Top Digital Banks by 2023 Profits

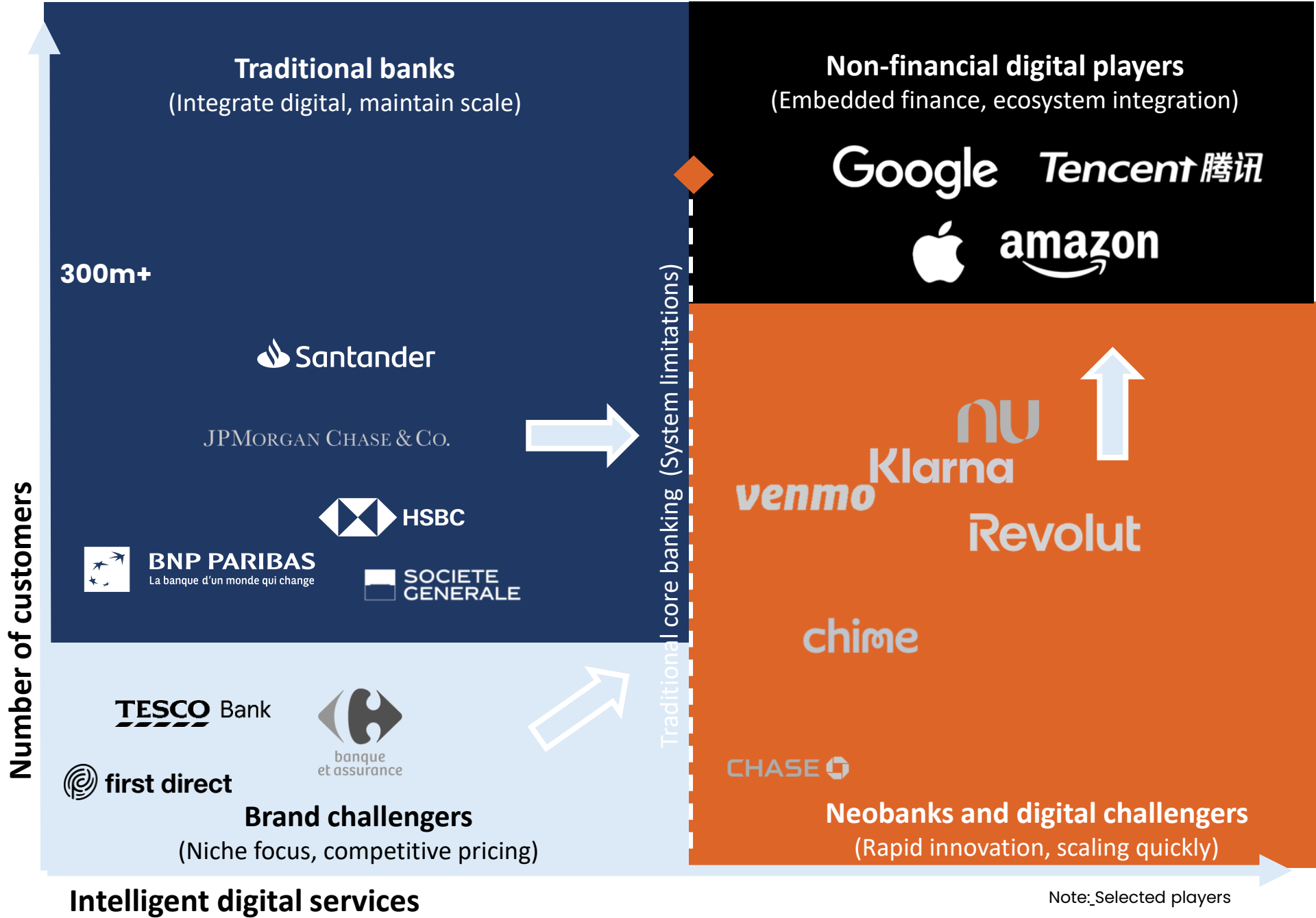
Ranking	Company	Profit/Loss US\$ (2023)
1	 ally	\$1,539.0m
2	 ally	\$1,083.0m
3	 TINKOFF	\$965.9m
4	 Revolut	\$430.6m
5	 7Wise	\$183.4m
6	 Starling Bank	\$178.8m
7	 OakNorth	\$173.3m
8	 Openbank	\$130.3m
9	 bunq	\$55.1m
10	 LendingClub	\$55.0m

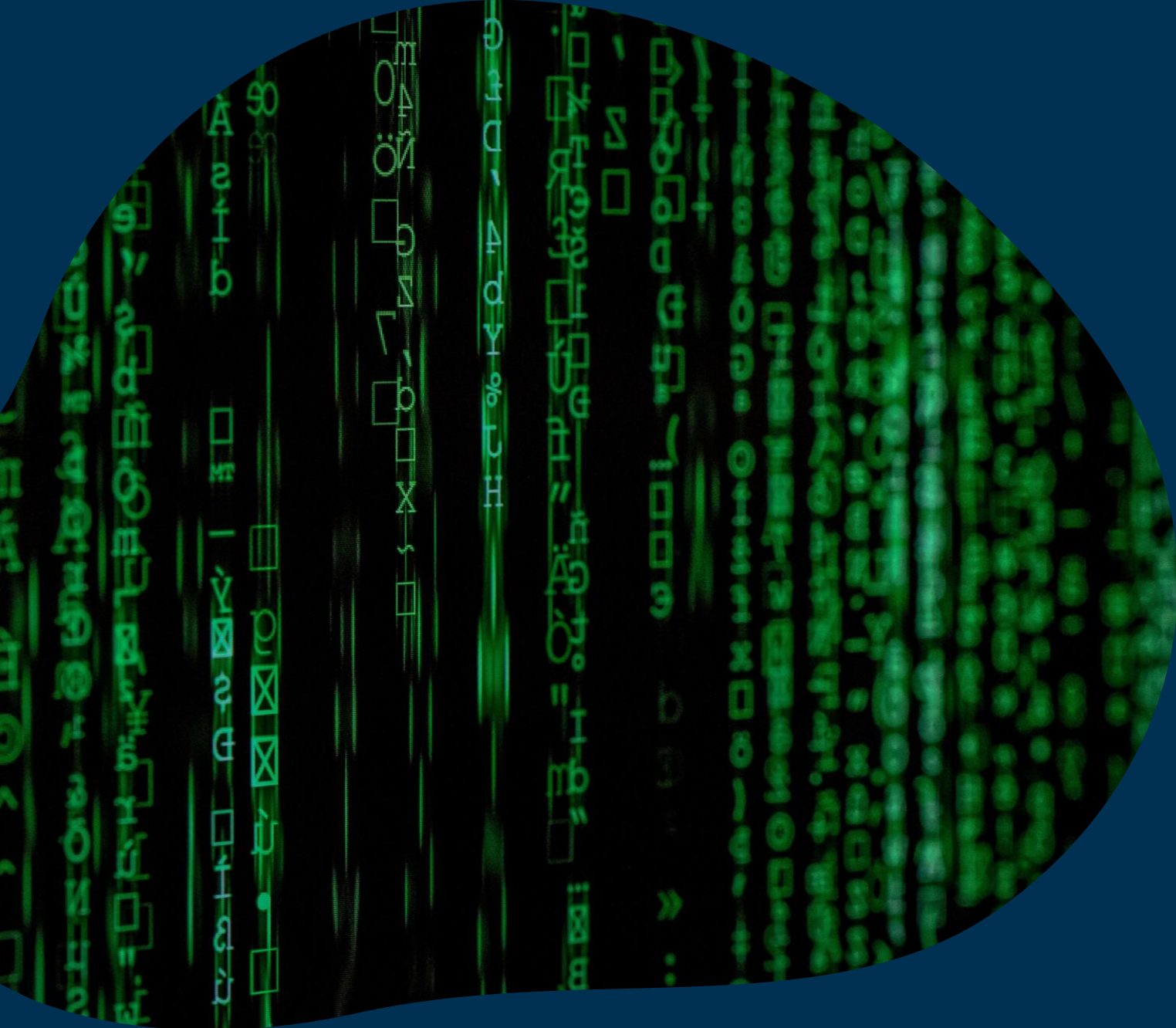
Ranking so far for 2024 ...

Ranking (2024)	Ranking (2023)	Company	Profit/Loss US\$ (2024)
1 =	1	 ally	\$2,027.7m
2 =	2	 ally	\$811.0m
3 ▲	5	 7Wise	\$602.6m
4 ▼	3	 TINKOFF	\$541.4m
5 ▲	6	 Starling Bank	\$275.4m
6 ▲	27	 SoFi	\$173.4m
7 ▲	28	 Klarna	\$60.8m
8 ▲	10	 LendingClub	\$53.9m
9 ▲	26	 monzo	\$19.4m
10 ▲	13	 greendot	\$15.2m

Shift in focus: Traditional Banks' Strategic Evolution to Compete.

Traditional banks are proactively embracing digital transformation to secure their position in the evolving financial ecosystem.





3. The Incumbent Challenge: Why Good Banks Fail in the Digital Bank Initiative.

The incumbent challenge: why good banks fail in the digital bank initiative.



Common pitfalls and mistakes



Legacy systems and infrastructure hurdles



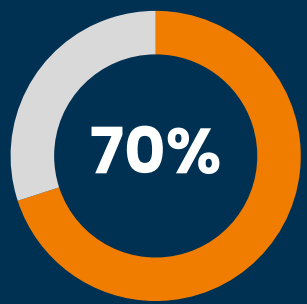
Lack of agility and innovation culture



Common pitfalls and mistakes.



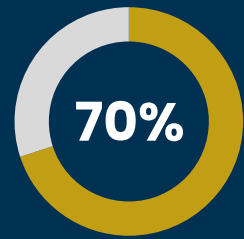
1 Cultural resistance: top barrier to digital transformation



of banking executives identified cultural resistance to change as the biggest barrier to digital transformation

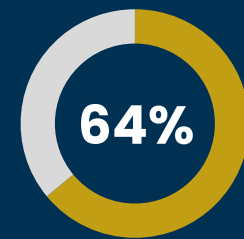
Many established banks have ingrained processes and **are slow to adapt to new technologies.** The hesitation to change legacy practices hinders innovation.

2 Compliance demands drain management's focus



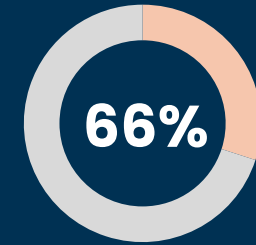
of respondents believe that the increasing regulatory burden has significantly hindered their organization's ability to innovate

indicated that compliance efforts consume most of management's time, limiting strategic and creative initiatives



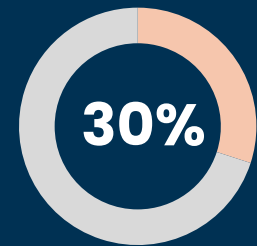
While compliance is crucial, an **excessive focus on regulatory adherence often stifles creativity and agility.**

3 Misaligned strategies lead to high failure rate



of banks allocate less than 25% of their IT budgets to transformative projects that can lead to sustainable competitive advantage

of digital banking initiatives fail due to a lack of strategic alignment, as they don't integrate well with the bank's overall strategy



Incumbent banks frequently launch **digital initiatives without a cohesive strategy, leading to fragmented efforts** and a lack of coherent digital transformation.



Legacy systems and infrastructure hurdles



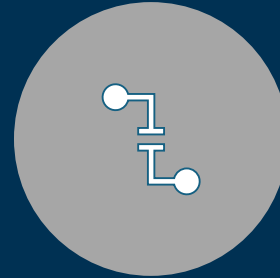
Complex and outdated IT systems



Many traditional banks are burdened with **legacy IT systems that are costly and difficult to update**, slowing down innovation.

64% of banking IT leaders report **legacy infrastructure hampers delivering new digital products.**

Data silos



Legacy infrastructure often leads to fragmented data across different systems, making it difficult to gain a holistic view of customers and innovate effectively.

59% mentioned that **data silos created by outdated systems pose a substantial obstacle to innovation.**



High maintenance costs



Maintaining **outdated systems consumes a significant portion of IT budgets**, leaving little room for investment in new digital solutions.

75% of banks' IT budgets is spent maintaining existing systems, leaving **only 25% for innovation and new initiatives.**



Lack of agility and innovation culture



Hierarchical structures: traditional banks often have rigid, hierarchical organizational structures that slow down decision-making and innovation.

67% of financial services executives believe their **organization's hierarchical structures slow down decision-making** and hinder innovation.



Risk-averse mindset: a culture focused on minimizing risks often leads to missed opportunities for innovation and digital transformation.

58% indicated that their **risk-averse culture is a significant barrier** to pursuing innovative opportunities.



Lack of innovation talent: banks may struggle to attract and retain talent skilled in digital technologies and innovation, as their environments may not appeal to innovators.

25% **faster time-to-market** for new digital products is achieved **by firms with agile methods and an innovation culture.**





4. Learning from Success and Failure: Case Studies.

“If you are afraid to fail, then you should go and become a banker.”

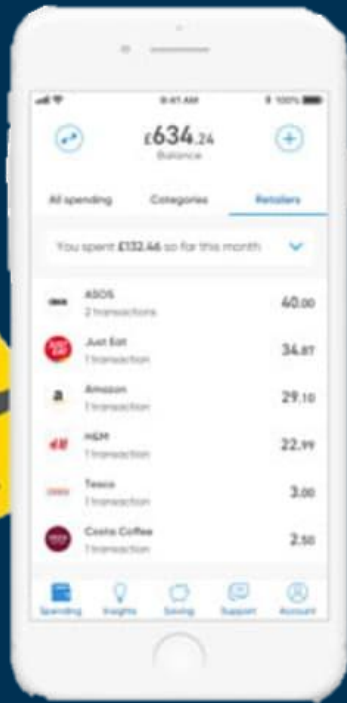
Yossi Vardi

Israeli entrepreneur and investor.

Case Study 1. When giants stumble: RBS Bó and the pitfalls of legacy banks in the digital era.



Royal Bank
of Scotland



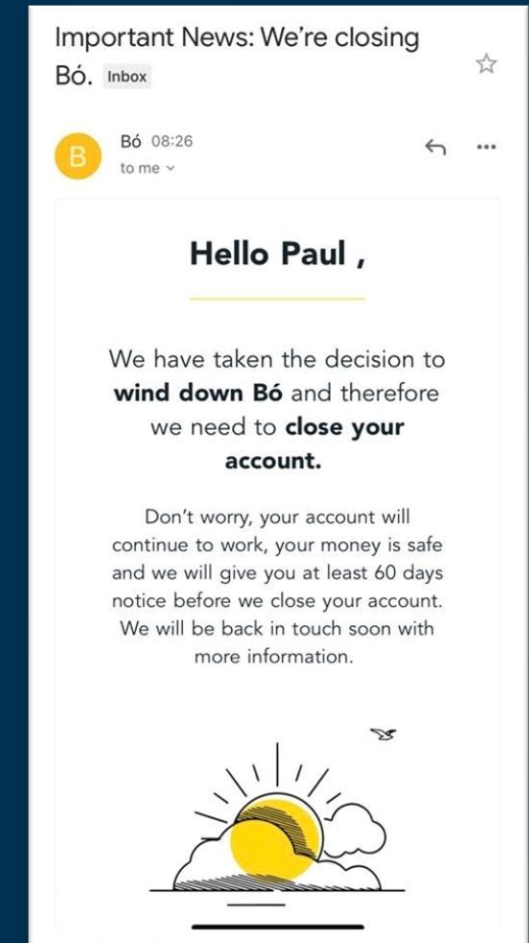
A cautionary tale – the failure of RBS Bó

- Bó banking app was **an ambitious attempt** to enter the competitive digital banking market.
- Launched in November 2019, **Bó aimed to challenge FinTech disruptors** by offering a mobile-first, digital-only banking experience.
- However, it faced significant challenges. **Less than six months after its launch, Bó was discontinued** in May 2020, highlighting the difficulties traditional banks face in adapting to the rapidly evolving FinTech landscape.

Case Study 1. Dissecting the fall: key factors behind Bó's failure as RBS's digital banking experiment



Critical failures that led to Bó's demise



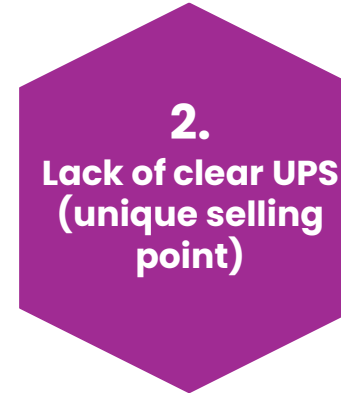
Case Study 1.

Unpacking Bó's downfall: key strategic, technical, and market failure



Weak value proposition

- **No differentiation:** Offered similar services to existing RBS products.
 - **Basic functionality:** Lacked innovative tools like budgeting, financial management, or rewards.



- **Blended identity:** Failed to establish a distinct brand separate from RBS.
- **Weak appeal:** Could not clearly communicate why customers should choose Bó over competitors.

Strategic misalignment

- **Internal resistance:** The broader RBS organization may not have fully embraced the Bó initiative.
- **Conflicting priorities:** RBS's legacy systems and traditional banking priorities conflicted with the agile, innovative approach required for digital success.



- **Insufficient investment:** RBS did not allocate enough resources for Bó's sustained growth.
- **Internal competition:** Focus shifted back to NatWest's digital offerings, leaving Bó under-supported.

Tech and market failures

- **Technical issues:** Frequent bugs and glitches negatively impacted user trust and engagement.
 - **Unrefined interface:** The app lacked the polished, intuitive design seen in successful digital banking apps, leading to user dissatisfaction.



- **Limited reach:** Failed to effectively market the app to its target audience, resulting in low user adoption.
- **Confusing messaging:** The marketing efforts didn't clearly differentiate Bó from RBS or other digital competitors.

Case Study 2. Turning setbacks into success: how J.P. Morgan Chase leveraged Finn's lessons to launch Chase UK.



Transformation triumph



- **Learning from Finn:** J.P. Morgan Chase turned the lessons from its U.S. digital bank, Finn, into a successful UK launch with Chase.
- **Strategic pivot:** the transformation from Finn's short-lived operation to Chase UK's success underscores the importance of adaptability and innovation in financial services.
- **Global expansion:** Chase UK marks J.P. Morgan's entry into Europe's digital banking, leveraging past experiences to drive growth and enhance customer offerings on a global scale.



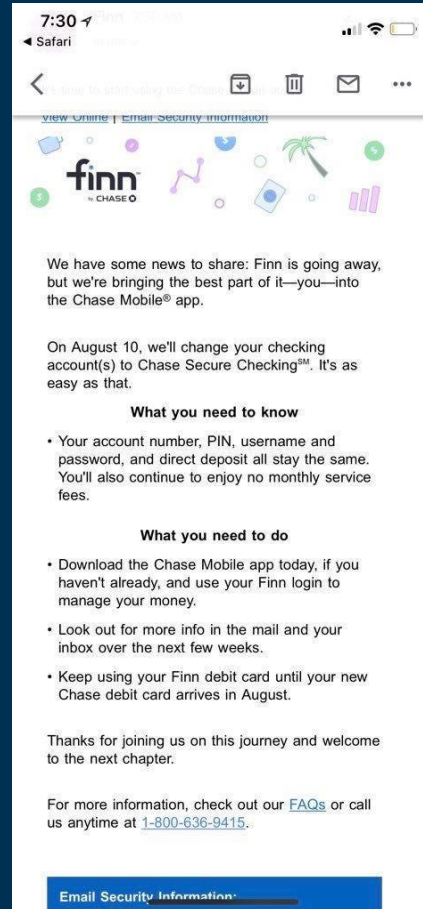
C-INNOVATION
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Case Study 2. Two paths, one lesson: how strategic shifts led to Finn's closure and Chase UK's success.



Timeline:

- **October 2017:** Finn launched, aiming at digital-savvy users.
- **2017–2019:** Only 47,000 customers signed up, far below expectations.
- **June 2019:** Finn was shut down due to minimal traction.
- All funds were transferred to traditional Chase accounts and some of Finn's most popular features were rolled into Chase's main mobile banking app.



Timeline:

- **September 2021:** Chase UK launched, focusing on high-interest savings.
- **2021–2022:** Gained over 1m users and £10 billion in deposits.
- **January 2024:** Surpassed 2 million users with £15 billion in deposits.
- **2025 (expected):** Aims for profitability and plans expansion into Europe.

Rewarding banking with Chase, now live in the UK!

- Receive 1% cashback on all eligible debit card spending for one year
- Receive 5% AER on small change round ups
- Receive a numberless debit card
- Take advantage of no fees from Chase when spending at home or abroad

Case Study 2. Key changes for success: Chase improved market understanding, branding, and tech from Finn's experience



Critical failure points of Finn

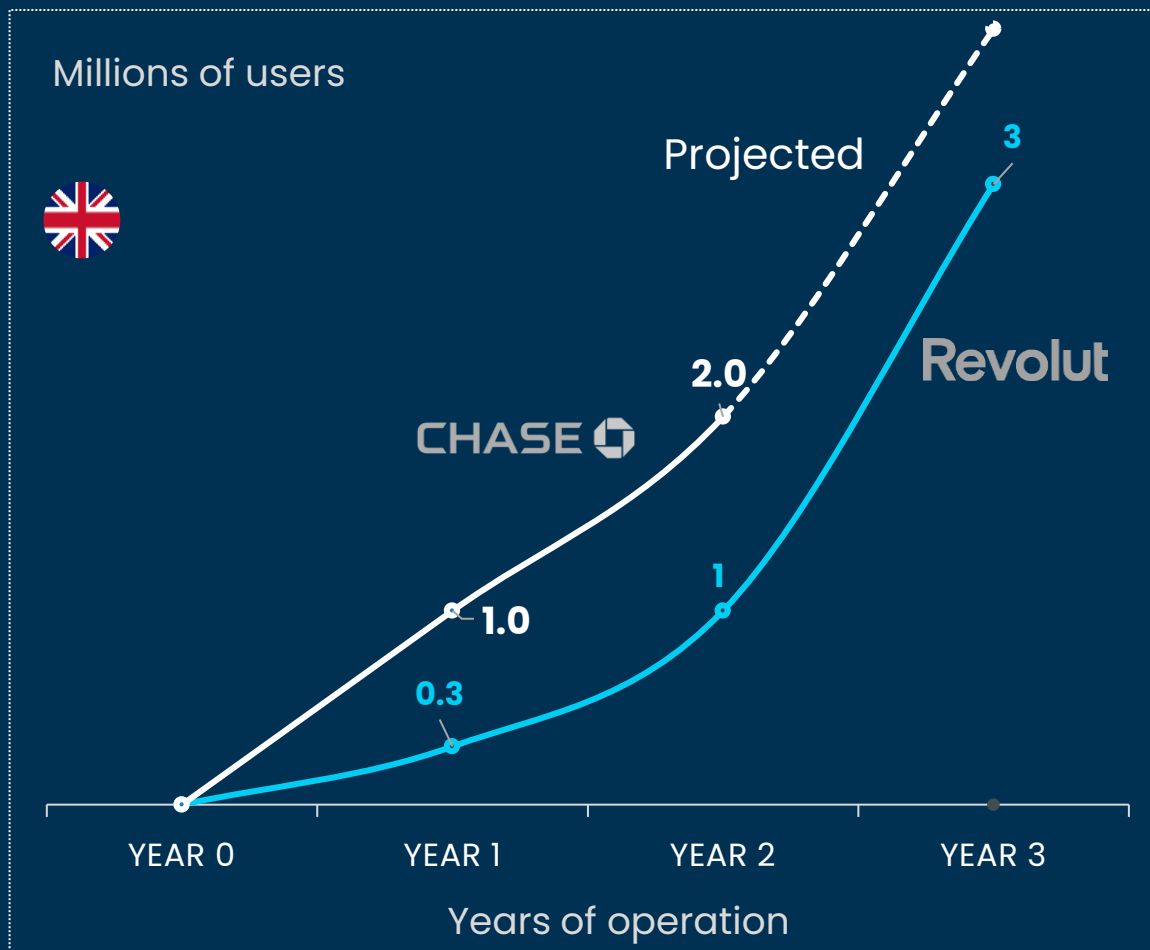
- **Limited market understanding:** Finn didn't fully grasp its target market, leading to a mismatch between products and customer needs.
- **Inconsistent branding and messaging:** Finn lacked a clear brand identity, causing confusion among users about its purpose.
- **Inadequate tech infrastructure:** Finn's tech setup was weak, resulting in frequent app issues and a frustrating user experience.
- **Overly simplified product offering:** Finn's features were too basic, failing to stand out from other digital banking options.
- **Limited integration with main bank operations:** Finn was too independent from J.P. Morgan Chase, missing chances to leverage the parent company's strengths.

Key success factors of Chase UK

- **Market research and adaptation:** Chase UK's launch was backed by extensive research, aligning products with UK market needs.
- **Consistent branding:** Chase UK maintained a strong, cohesive brand identity, building trust and interest among customers.
- **Scalable tech platform:** Chase UK's tech infrastructure ensured a reliable and secure user experience with minimal issues.
- **Focused product offering:** Chase UK attracted customers with a high-interest savings account and a few well-designed features, prioritizing quality and simplicity over a broad range of products.
- **Strategic integration:** Chase UK seamlessly integrated with J.P. Morgan Chase, leveraging global support for strong growth.

Case Study 2. Chase's swift market entrance quickly made it one of the UK's most popular digital banks.

Customer growth Revolut vs Chase in the UK

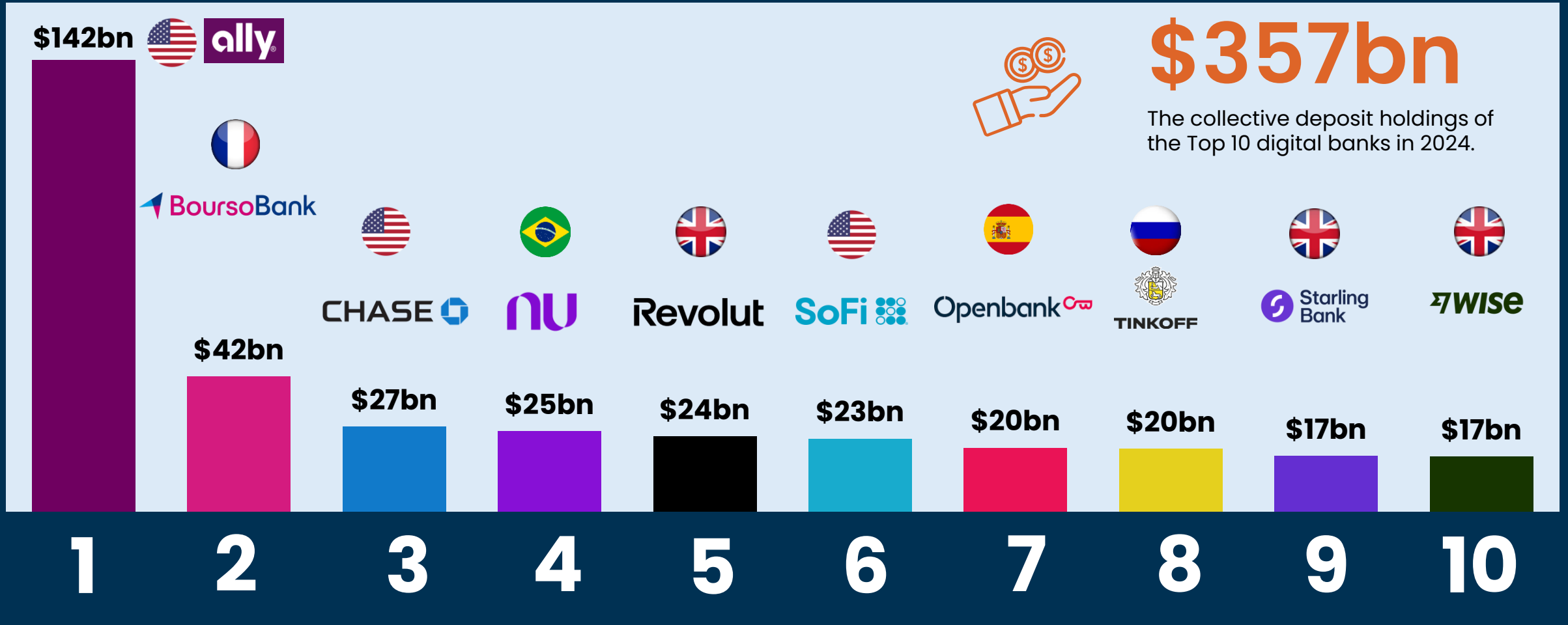


Chase approach to deposits

- **Strategy:** Chase's UK strategy **leverages competitive rates** (1%-5%) and features like cashback and round-ups.
- **Customer Growth:** **Over 2M users and \$27B in deposits** within two years.
- **Product Expansion:** Preparing to launch **credit cards and expand into Europe** (starting with Germany).
- **Market Performance:** Ranked **#1 in UK customer satisfaction in 2024**, ahead of Monzo and Starling.
- **Competitive Edge:** Strong financial backing, high savings rates, and cashback rewards **attracting wealthier customers.**
- **Future Plans:** Leveraging UK **success to scale operations across Europe.**

Case Study 2. Chase's strong performance secured the #3 spot in customer deposits with \$27B in holdings.

Customer Deposits by Digital Bank (US Dollars).



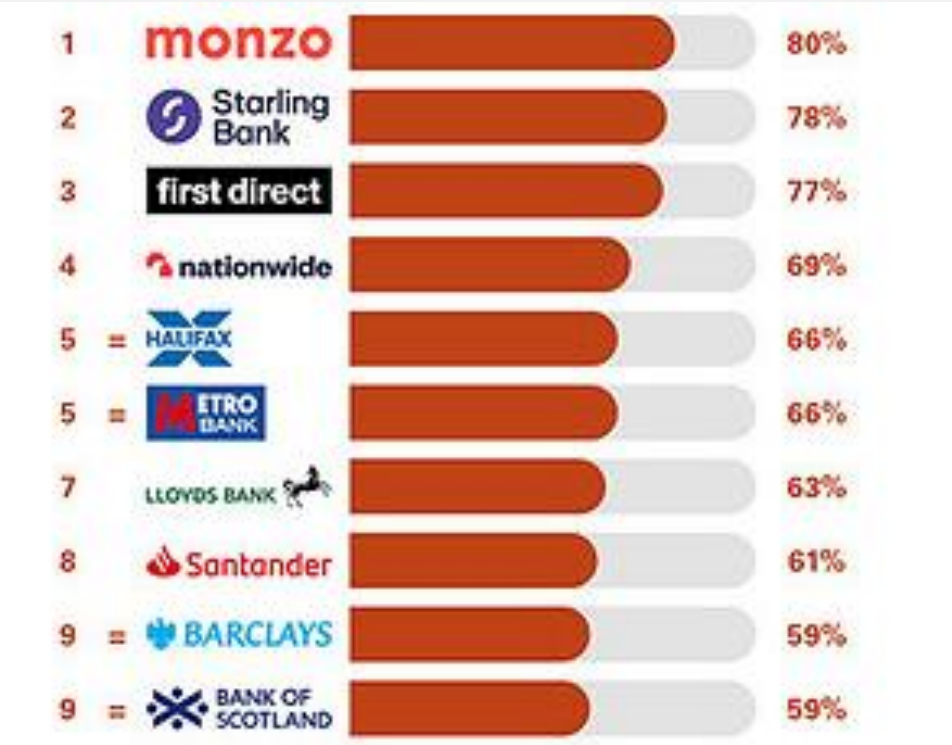
Ranking

Case Study 2. Chase soared to lead the UK service rankings in 2025, signaling strong trust and growth potential.

Overall Personal Service Quality in the UK

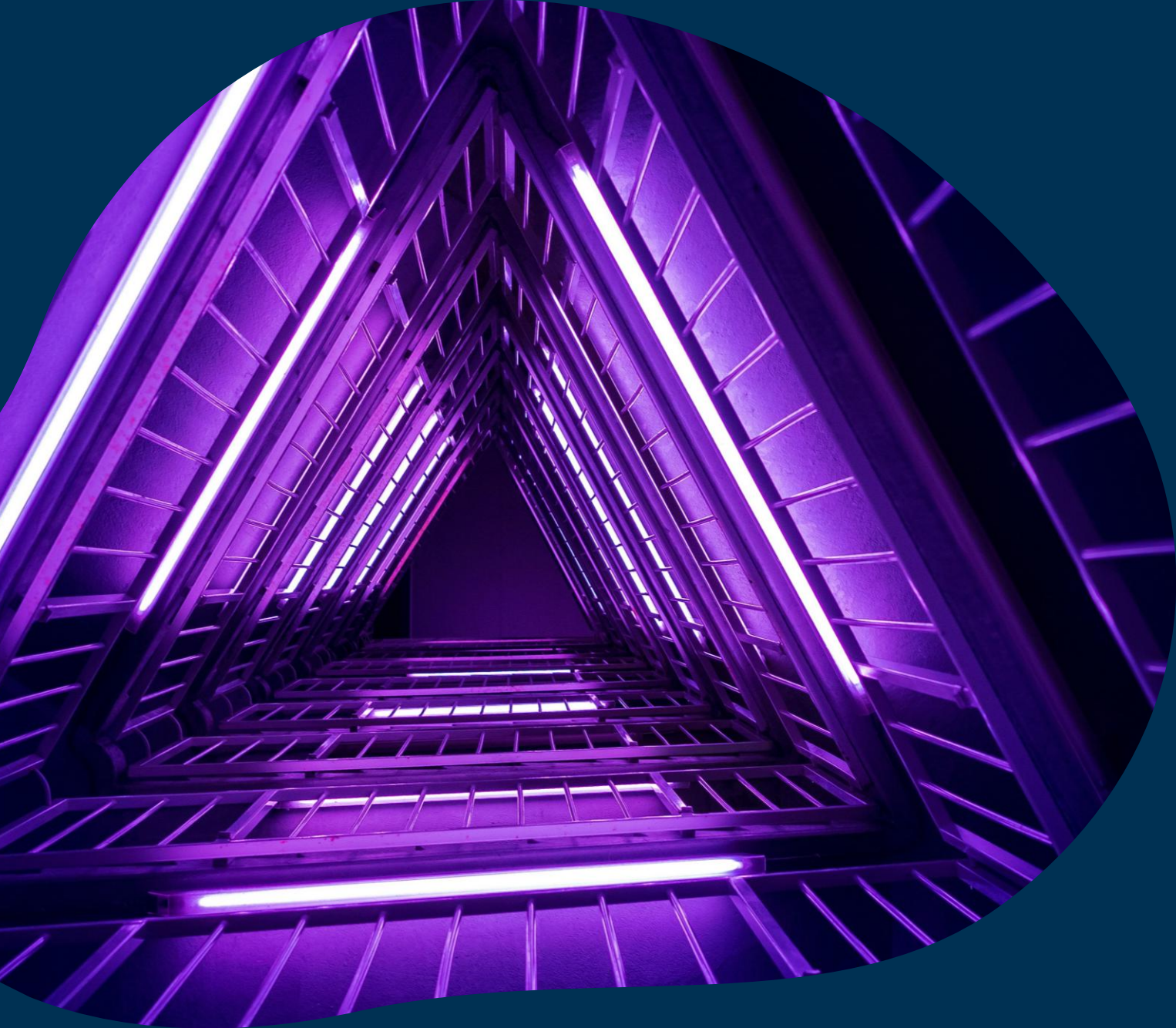
Customer were asked how likely would be to recommend their personal current account provider to Friends and family.

Feb 2024



Feb 2025





5. Key Take-Aways.



Gazi Yar Mohammed

Co-Founder & CEO
Kube Money, UK

“Launching a digital bank spin-off is like building a speedboat: an agile, independent, and cost-effective entity that navigates the fast-moving waters of digital banking with the mindset and speed of a FinTech.”

Traditional banks must move fast, stay customer-focused, leverage partnerships, and execute with precision to succeed in digital banking.

Takeaways for Traditional Banks in Digital Banking

01

Agility is Key – Legacy banks must adopt a faster go-to-market approach, leveraging modular technology and iterative innovation to stay competitive.

02

Customer-Centricity Wins – Personalization, seamless experiences, and data-driven engagement are non-negotiable in attracting and retaining digital-first customers.

03

Partnerships Accelerate Growth – Collaborating with FinTechs, technology providers, and digital-first platforms can fast-track transformation while mitigating internal constraints.

04

Execution Defines Success – A clear digital banking strategy must align with operational capabilities, ensuring scalability, compliance, and long-term profitability.

This research is brought to you by

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Empowering traditional financial institutions to launch digital bank spin-offs, enhance competitiveness, and drive sustainable growth.



Talk to us:

Hello@nexusbanking.eu

A strategic joint venture between



Thriving in the Digital Age : A Two-Part Research Collaboration.

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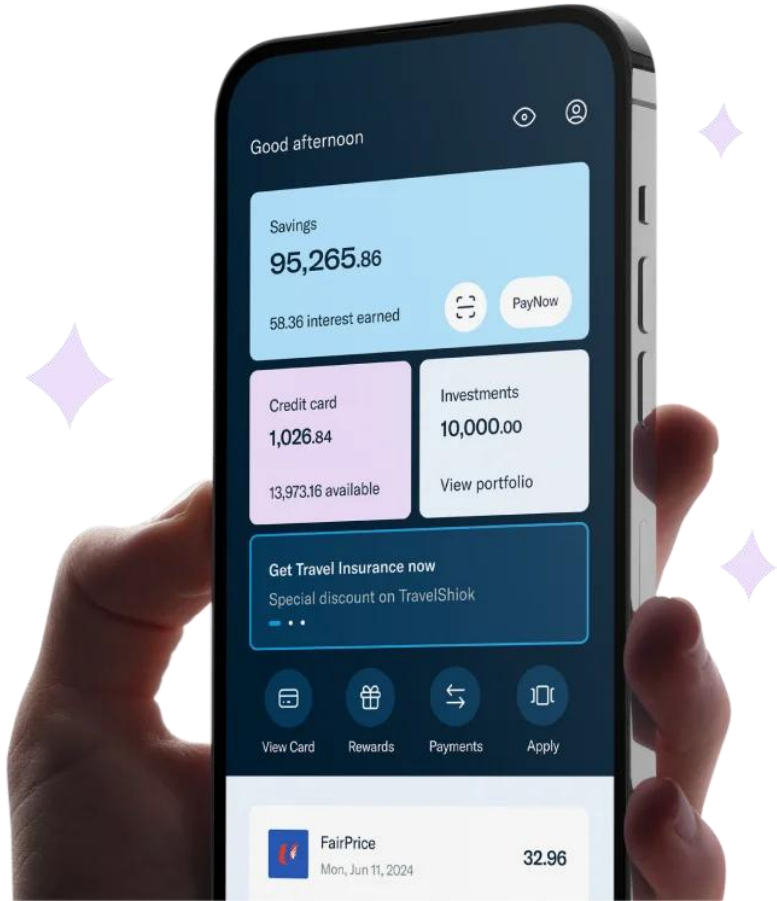


Part 2 **Blueprint for Digital Success: Strategies, Execution, and Future Trends.**

It will delve into the critical components of building digital banks, including **strategy, execution, and future trends.**

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