

Core Systems: Getting Upgrades and Conversions Right

The financial services landscape has changed dramatically over the past few years and the consequences of outdated technology are more evident all the time. Credit unions with inefficient core systems suffer from slow product launches and an inability to easily integrate third party applications or access information for compliance with new regulations. Often the solution to these situations requires a change in the data processing systems — a step that few financial institutions accept eagerly!

While choosing a core system vendor requires a lot of due diligence and hard work, the conversion process requires an equal effort to achieve the expected results of streamlined credit union operations, increased efficiency, and improved member services. The list of new requirements has grown much longer in recent years, and often includes integrated offerings such as customer relationship management, anti-money laundering, loan origination, data warehousing, Internet banking, branch capture, payroll interfaces, and e-statements. These capabilities have a direct benefit to members and help the credit union attract more.

At COCC, we have built a well organized, highly disciplined conversion process that is designed to minimize the conversion pain factor. It is characterized by frequent, open and complete communication between our conversion team and the team at the credit union. We have ongoing planning sessions and weekly conference calls to make sure that everything flows smoothly and the conversion stays on schedule. After every conversion, we debrief and make changes. On an on-going basis, we re-examine the entire conversion process with an eye towards improvement.

While it is certainly important to analyze, scrub and organize the data, our experience shows that the conversion process isn't so much about the technical infrastructure, but about people and training issues. We educate the entire credit union team from the beginning so they know what to expect and can see the big picture. Training is a critical factor, so we train the staff in a "train the trainer" program on site. Employees have access to the new system in a test environment right from their desktop as well as a training lab. Our goal is for the credit union staff to feel comfortable with the new system months ahead of conversion. This eliminates surprises.

Conversion day, conversion week, and conversion month-end present opportunities for hand-holding and additional training where needed. Then it's time to implement the many new capabilities that strengthen competitive advantages and achieve a more efficient operating environment.

Core system selection and the subsequent conversion are often the "road not taken" in today's deadline-driven, busy-busy world. But the rewards are substantial when the technology vendor becomes a partner in supporting credit union strategies.



Marco Bernasconi
Director of Customer Services

Marco Bernasconi is Director of Customer Services at COCC. Mr. Bernasconi manages the bulk of COCC's customer support activities. He was a key player in COCC's nationally recognized initiative to convert its entire client base to an open architecture, core processing environment. That experience and more have given Mr. Bernasconi a thorough appreciation of communication as the foundation for all customer services. He utilizes a continuous improvement process to reexamine every aspect of COCC's service delivery mechanisms with an eye to improvement.

