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**[hed] Tales from the Fall Trade Show Season**

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The smell of fall in the air serves as a subtle reminder of the beginning of strategic planning and budgeting season. It also kicks off the busiest time of year for banking and financial technology conferences. Having attended several of these conferences this season, I wanted to share some key takeaways.

Finovate is probably one of the best conferences out there, offering a pulse on the intersection of fintech and banking. The highlight of the conference—the fall event was at the end of September in New York—is always the 80+ demos available from various global fintech companies.

The conference continues to evolve, and in the past three years, there’s been a significant shift in the priorities of fintech companies and banks in terms of their product strategies. In 2017, customer authentication, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning were all the rage. This year, most of the companies were already deploying these technologies and have moved on to other areas, including customer experience and engagement, financial literacy and personal digital assistants.

**Customer experience**

The strong movement toward customer experience has clearly been driven by forces outside of the financial industry. The big tech and social media giants (Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon) have made the customer interactive experience simple, efficient and frictionless to the point that they are now the envy of any other digitally focused company.

There is a variety of fintech companies also trying to help banks not just with the experience but also with engagement. It is not good enough to have a “cool” solution unless someone is actually using it. Tailored videos, AI-driven guidance and sophisticated digital marketing techniques have all been developed to assist banks with their customer solution journeys and improve adoption.

**Financial literacy**

Financial literacy appears to be gaining momentum. As banks continue to try to win over the unbanked or underbanked segment, along with Gen Z and millennial generations, the word is out that these consumers want step-by-step education and guidance with their financial decision-making. And they want this on their mobile-connected devices, including voice, in a simple, consistent, frictionless experience. This makes a lot of sense given the growing complexity of global finance today and the need for a faster process. There are some amazing solutions delivering this “advice-as-a-platform” that are using AI and other emerging technologies to help banks bring the goods to their customers.

**Personal digital assistants**

It also stands to reason, given the digital transformation and “everything mobile” world we live in, that we need to transform the way we serve and advise our customers as they move along their digital journey. Think of it as a digital concierge service: always on and delivered in real time, transforming the impersonal to personal. The fintech companies developing these solutions are trying to perfectly balance the high-tech, high-touch experience with these offerings.

**The time is now**

All these themes resonate well with community banks and will only deepen the strong relationships they presently enjoy with their customers and their communities. The time is now to start embracing these themes and further raise the bar on customer satisfaction.   
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