BRAND SPOTLIGHT
State Employees' Credit Union

Meeting Members Where They Are and Where They Want to Be Met

An interview with Jared Benesh, Executive Vice President, Member Experience Transformation, Member Service Support & Branch Network Operations at State Employees' Credit Union (SECU).

SECU is a financial institution located in North Carolina that serves as a trusted partner for many residents of the state. Over the years, it has grown to become the second-largest credit union in the United States, with over 2.5 million members and 260 branches across the state of North Carolina. In a recent conversation with Jared, we discussed the key areas that have had the biggest impact on member and employee experience, the ways it seeks to "WOW" its customers, and the KPIs SECU is focused on to stay agile and ensure scalability now and into the future.

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JARED BENESH

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Execs In The Know (EITK): In what ways has the North Carolina State Employees' Credit Union bridged the gap between the digital and physical experience for guests? Explain how the brand is reigniting customer experience in a digital-first world.

Jared Benesh: As with most financial institutions, we have an online portal for access and a mobile app, and we've started down a path of modernization across the entire credit union to bring to life more experiences that our members want and need.

EITK: What are the key areas that have the biggest impact on member experience and employee efficiency?

Jared: We need to meet members where they are — and where they want to be met — so we're focused on creating experiences that accomplish that. In today's world, personalization and unified experiences are paramount. I say frequently that we need to make it easy for our employees to deliver the experiences to our members, which means we strive for efficiency by looking at the systems and processes our employees use and exploring opportunities that simplify their roles. On the member side, it's similar — but the greatest impact or improvement we can make is around the unification of the experience across their entire relationship with us and knowing what, when, and where they'll need us.

EITK: In what ways does the State Employees' Credit Union seek to WOW its customers?

Jared: Our philosophy is, "People Helping People®" – and our employees embrace and deliver on this every day. As a long-time veteran in the CX space, I've not encountered this level of focus and commitment before. Our "WOW" moments happen every single day on the phones and in our branches because of our commitment to the people we serve. Our team will spend time with members to balance their checkbooks, call to check on a sick member who hasn't been in for a while, or even go to their home if they need assistance. Our staff is not commission or quota-based in any way – we don't want to create an environment that conflicts with our philosophy and mission. We know our members, we know their families, we know what they need and want – that's our "WOW."

EITK: As a CX leader, what is one of the most important things you've learned over the past year?

Jared: The most important thing I have learned over the past year is that you must not forget about the empty chair – the chair of the customer/member – in all that you do. It's easy to get focused on the initiatives, technology, or transformation and lose focus on why those changes are even happening or were started in the first place. Remember the empty seat at the table.

EITK: Can you talk a bit about personalization, why you feel it's become such a focus, and what the State Employees' Credit Union is doing in this regard to tailor their experiences?

Jared: Personalization has always been important for our members, and we've been doing it in more of an analog way for 85 years. Digital personalization is a new expectation and slightly more complicated with technology, data, and the orchestration of those elements. We are now looking at the analog and heading down a modern and transformative path that creates digital experiences that by and large mirror our past analog success.

EITK: Rising member expectations are driving the need for more advanced self-service technologies. How is your virtual CX strategy fulfilling the current – and future – demands of your members to enhance member loyalty?

Jared: To date, our self-service through digital means has been fairly limited, but as mentioned previously, we're on a journey to modernize and bring more advanced options to our membership. We're starting in the contact center and are excited that a big shift is happening over the next few months as we move to a new Contact Center as a Service (CCaaS) platform. New capabilities like ASR and IVA will also give us more insights internally so we can continue to learn and improve our experiences.

EITK: What is the importance of refreshing your organization's KPIs?

Jared: We've not traditionally focused on the broader KPIs that most organizations would be familiar with – so with a refresh in today's world of rising expectations, a refresh was necessary to ensure we're successfully delivering on the expectations of our members and our employees.

EITK: What are those KPIs you're focused on to stay agile and ensure scalability?

Jared: In the contact center, we're focused on five KPIs going forward: AHT, sentiment, satisfaction, FCR, and transfers. On the branch side, we're focused on productivity, satisfaction, community outreach, and non-transactional member time.

EITK: What's your take on AI and the role it's playing in transforming the customer experience?

Jared: AI has had a bit of a controversial past – the overselling of programmatic response chatbots as AI set things back and left a lot of organizations scratching their heads after some quick wins. The idea of AI seven to ten years ago outpaced its capability but we're now converging. Everyone has heard of ChatGPT by now, and it's demonstrating a lot of true AI capability using transformers, large language models, and different learning models. In the future, AI will play a big role in solving some long-lingering issues with true omni CX, but it must be used thoughtfully and intentionally to avoid negative outcomes or disappointment.

EITK: What do you think will be the main focus for customer experience for the rest of 2023 and into the future, either for the industry in general or specifically for the State Employees' Credit Union?

Jared: For the future, I think the big focus that brands or companies need to have is journey orchestration. People have a lot of options and ways to connect and interact for service or to obtain/grow relationships with brands. Coordinating the channels, information, products, and people will become critical to the success of any experience.