

A customer-centric focus

Highlighting the region's "can do" approach to challenge, **Pritesh Kotecha**, SVP for Europe, Middle East, Africa, Turkey & Israel, describes how his career path in technology fits well with SmartStream's keen attention to the customer

What excites you and keeps you motivated as a regional leader in banking technology?

The continuous momentum. Every challenge, both professional and personal, is approached with a 'can do' attitude and achieved through innovation and a sense of community. People in the region are social and eager to share their experiences and advice. Ideas come to fruition sooner and you can see the tangible results faster. This forward-looking spirit is infectious and drives us all to do better. As a leader this energy motivates me and my team. I surround myself with people who share the same unrelenting drive to help our customers find new ways to excel. Within SmartStream we believe that "If you do not create the next thing that disrupts your business - someone else will".

Describe your journey in banking technology and how this has influenced the role you are in today?

I graduated in 1992, in the midst of one of the worst recessions the UK had ever faced. Determined to work, I took the first job I was offered which was in retail electronic sales. Though I didn't know it at the time this low-level job would be a blessing since it would teach me about people - how to listen, serve and build relationships. My first corporate role was

in support on the night shift, and from there I gradually worked my way up and eventually landed in banking technology sales. The UK is a tough, overcrowded and highly competitive market so you have to quickly learn the value of customer service and delivering on your commitments. I was fortunate to be given the chance to build a regional business when the DIFC acquired SmartStream in 2007. The experiences and lessons I had learned throughout my career have served me well. We proudly serve 100+ regional banks and have a stellar reputation for being customer centric in all we do. I personally train & mentor new sales recruits, which allows me to impart some of the things I have learned through my journey.

What does your company bring to the banking and financial sector that helps it advance levels of service and remain profitable?

Our clients' main objective is to offer their client's the most immersive and seamless digital experience and to enable that SmartStream takes care of all of the operational aspects that sit behind it. We tell our clients "You take care of the Experience; we'll take care of the Transactions". Our end-to-end Transaction Lifecycle Management (TLM™) suite can be deployed as a single module, across the enterprise or in the cloud as a managed service,

or as a full BPO. TLM lowers our client's cost to income ratio, reduces their operational risk and provides analytics and insights into all operational aspects. Additionally, it provides early warnings of transactions and processes that have failed or are about to fail. By SmartStream providing benchmark Service & Operational level outcomes to our clients, this allows them to provide a world class service to their clients.

In the light of the past turbulent year, what are your plans for 2021?

With business teams no longer centrally located we have seen stress points and risk in even the strongest of operations. These impact the business and client facing functions. The resources that businesses rely on have the knowledge needed by financial institutions but are hindered by traditional technologies limitations which is still IT centric and usually requires lengthy IT projects to implement change. While we often hear about business self-service, it is not yet prevalent across our industry. In 2018 SmartStream founded our Innovations Lab to create and embed Artificial Intelligence (AI) into our TLM solutions. Three years on these capabilities are providing our clients with real business self-service. For example, raw data can simply be dropped into our TLM Reconciliations solutions and the AI algorithms will immediately understand the formats, decipher the best matches and provide insight - all in seconds - with no IT or application knowledge required. At SmartStream, we understand the value and power of having clean data and a single version of the truth cross all of solutions and services. We pass that value on to our clients so they can accelerate their digital footprint and provide an agile and immersive experience to their clients. ♦