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Publication in the Bulgarian edition of the technology magazine CIO after the launch of the iClarity powered Merci program for Societe Generale - Express Bank

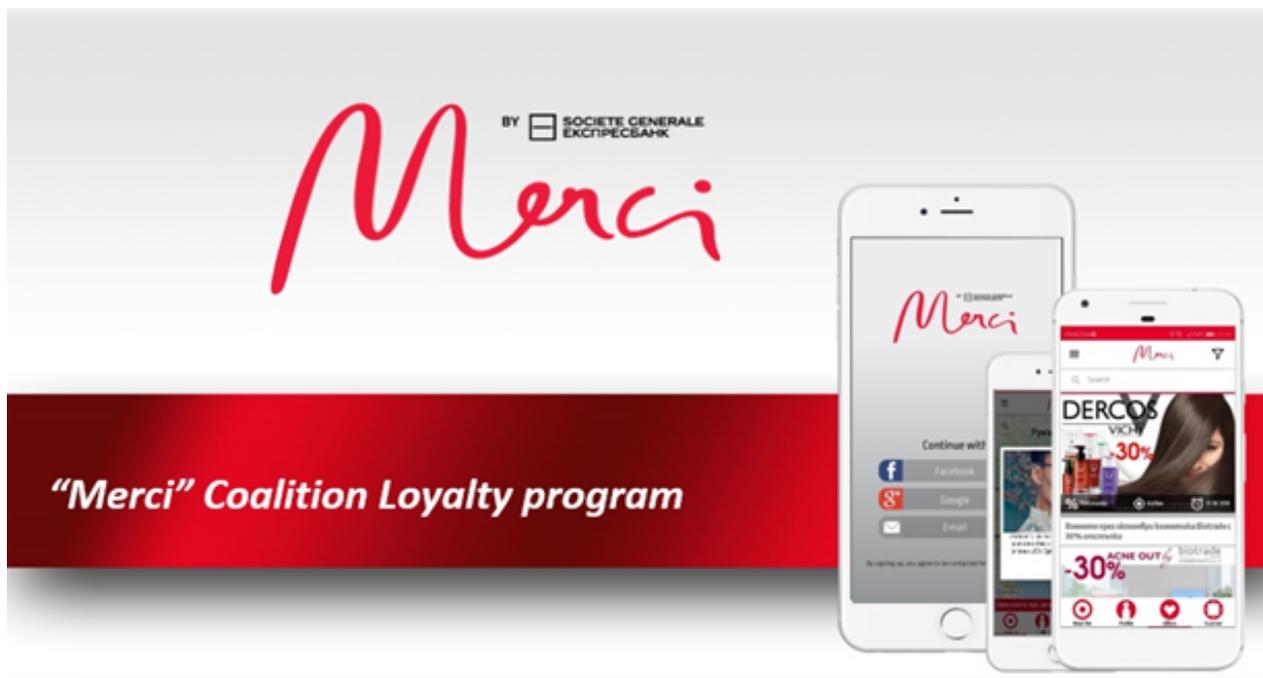


Merci loyalty program improves the Societe Generale Bank client experience

CIO Media 20 November 2018, Ivan Gaidarov (translated in English by HSS)

Thanks to the technological advance, the banking sector has new tools to optimise their internal processes. It has, however, created some obstacles, such as the inflow of the more-flexible fintech companies and the introduction of new requirements for customers' personal data protection.

The biggest obstacle for financial institutions is the growing competition in the sector and the restricted tools to impact it. This is why Societe Generale - Express Bank (SGEB) have invested in their customer experience in order to stand out from the other institutions in the Bulgarian market. They have developed two innovative solutions aiming to improve their customer satisfaction.



The loyalty program platform 'Merci'

After a successful test-pilot, the loyalty platform was launched in October 2018. The project is a tool for the realization of SGEB's two main goals – to increase their customer loyalty and the use of digital channels when using payment cards. The innovative concept of the program eliminates the need to issue plastic loyalty cards, which are often a part of other loyalty programs.

“The goal of our loyalty program is to reward our customers’ loyalty. This program connects our bank clients, the merchant retail partners and the bank itself. It’s a three-way program that allows us to thank our credit card holders for their loyalty by giving them discounts for specific businesses, regardless if they’re paying by debit or credit cards’, explained Boyan Damyanov, Manager of Societe Generale bank card business.

For this purpose the bank created a cloud based app for Android and iOS, integrated with Google, Facebook, Google Analytics and Viber, where the users can find the names of the participating retail partners, the discounts they offer and the location of the outlets across the country.

Currently there are 900 participating retailers grouped into categories like Cars, Home, Children, Restaurants, etc. There is also a geo-location functionality.

The three elements of the Merci platform

“The platform is a technical solution with three separate components. Firstly, the mobile app which is used by our customers and our retailer partners. Customers see information about which retailers are part of the program, what discounts they can receive, the locations of the relevant retailers and details on different campaigns the retail partners are running.”, Boyan Damyanov explains.

The second component of Merci is analytics which enable the mobile app to collect previously defined information in real time and to perform analysis which it uses to optimize the program.

The analytics completed using the second module of the platform is used by both SGEB’S marketing department and the retail partners in order to improve the offerings through the program.

“Many loyalty programs rely on mobile applications, but what is different with us is that our retail partners can directly access the app back-end. This way, they have the ability to make changes, to carry out campaigns, to add additional information that is useful for the clients by themselves directly”, outlined Boyan.

One of the key innovative tools that the platform offers the client loyalty program is the campaign management module. Conventionally loyalty programs are viewed as something that is long-term, but also rather static – the retail partners create offers and discounts that do not change with time.

We, however, decided to integrate a campaign management module within the mobile app. This enables the retail partners to use a significantly wider array of marketing activities like additional discounts for a fixed period of time, to target their specific retail outlets, or target a specific segment of the client base.”, adds Boyan Damyanov.

Geolocation and notifications

In regard to the geolocation imbedded in Merci, Boyan notes that when the customer wants to find the nearest retail partner locations, the app will show them in relation to the customer’s location.

“As a whole, the platform offers many possibilities. It has a number of ways for client identification and can even replace the different marketing platforms, which our retail partners have been using until now.

When a customer claims a discount through the program, they can be identified by their payment card or via the mobile app; through the use of a barcode, QR code, digital voucher and more.

Since the beginning, we have placed a high importance on offering the widest possible range of options to our partners.”, adds Boyan, as he highlights that the difference with other loyalty programs is that they rely on the collection of loyalty points, competitions or vouchers. Merci offers a more direct approach as the bank’s customers receive their discounts directly the moment they pay for the selected product or service.

Platform selection, challenges, roadmap

The key challenges that the new platform had to address were several – to be integrated in less than 6 months, to be easy to connect with the existing bank systems and to be sufficiently universal, so it can be used by the bank’s teams, as well as by the program’s retail partners.

After reviewing a number of alternative offers for the loyalty platform, SGEB selected iClarity and the international company Horizon Software Solutions as the integrator of the platform.

Even though the Merci platform meets all of the requirements, there were some hurdles during the realization of the project. “Prior to the official launch of the program and mobile app, we conducted a trial period during which we received some negative feedback which was very helpful for us. The feedback was in relation to the user experience of the app and certain menu navigation.”, recalls Boyan.

Thanks to the feedback, these aspects were improved and the program has been realized. It now offers big possibilities in the acquisition of new retail partners due to the fact that the integration with the platform is as seamless for those with one or two retail locations as for those with numerous locations.

In regard to the customers, the Merci app had 7000 downloads in just one month, which takes the bank closer to its first goal- to have 10,000 downloads.

“This is not surprising to us. We have shifted our attention to the digital solutions as it meets our customers’ profiles and their needs. This is why we are ranked so high in terms Facebook followers.”, reflected Boyan.