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**Roll out of Aadhar Enabled Payment System (AEPS)**

**Project Overview:**   
  
Introduction:

India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) launched its operations in 2018 to promote financial inclusion, particularly in the country's rural areas. In December 2020, IPPB introduced the Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AEPS) to further this mission. AEPS is a payment service that allows customers to use their Aadhaar card as identification to access their Aadhaar-enabled bank accounts and perform basic banking transactions such as balance inquiries, cash withdrawals, and remittances through biometric authentication, including fingerprint or retina scans. I had the opportunity to lead the launch of AEPS services in the district of Etah, overseeing the implementation and ensuring its success in the region.

Significance:

In March 2020, the Government of India imposed a nationwide lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This resulted in a mass exodus of daily migrant labourers returning to their villages from the cities where they worked, as the lockdown left them without employment. During this period, private and national banks in rural areas faced overwhelming demand due to restricted operating hours. To address this issue, India Post Payments Bank aimed to leverage the extensive network of Post Office branches to provide much-needed banking services and alleviate the burden on other financial institutions. By introducing AEPS services, IPPB sought to ensure that rural populations had continued access to essential banking services, thereby promoting financial stability and inclusion during a critical time. From a business perspective, this project was crucial for India Post Payments Bank as it marked the introduction of a key product in their service portfolio. Each AEPS transaction generated revenue for the bank, making it a significant driver of financial growth. Successfully launching AEPS not only enhanced the bank's service offerings but also established a new revenue stream, contributing to the bank's long-term sustainability and expansion goals.  
  
**Implementation:**  
Planning & Research:

At the beginning of the project, I conducted extensive research on AEPS services provided by other banks, focusing on their transaction fees and areas of availability. My findings revealed that 90% of these banks charged almost double the amount we planned to offer our customers. Additionally, I identified key areas within the district where AEPS services were scarcely available. This research enabled us to pinpoint strategic locations for focused marketing and advertising efforts.

Securing Deals for Creative Orders:

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, finding the right contractor for producing and placing marketing creatives for was challenging, as most contractors demanded higher prices. Despite these obstacles, I successfully negotiated a deal that provided reasonable monetary value while meeting our bank's requirements. This ensured we received quality marketing materials within our budget.

Developing a well-structured Training Program for Over 280 Post Office Staff:

Although we received training materials from the head office, the staff found them difficult to engage with. To address this, I created new training materials that explained AEPS services and their applications in a language the staff found easier to understand. This approach significantly improved the training's effectiveness and ensured better comprehension among the employees. Delivering both theoretical and practical training using hand-held devices was a learning curve for both myself and the staff. This training process continued throughout the project's duration and even beyond, ensuring that everyone was well-versed in using the devices effectively.  
  
Monitoring Branding Implementation:

Ensuring that the branding complied with the Reserve Bank of India's rules and guidelines was crucial. Coordinating the branding efforts across the entire district required significant effort, especially with limited mobility due to COVID-19 restrictions. Ultimately, our meticulous attention to detail paid off, and we received approval from the RBI to launch the AEPS services.

Roll-Out of AEPS services:   
  
In the month leading up to and following the launch, I spearheaded various advertising and promotional activities, including media interviews and press releases, to raise awareness about AEPS services. Additionally, I organized targeted awareness campaigns that included meetings with influential members of rural society, such as school teachers, village heads (Gram Pradhans), and healthcare workers. To further strengthen our outreach, I coordinated business networking events in the district, with key government officials as participants. These combined efforts played a vital role in driving awareness and ensuring the widespread acceptance of AEPS services within the local community.  
  
  
**Problems faced and strategic solutions:**

* The process of securing a deal for marketing creatives was protracted, taking several weeks. To address this, I sought and obtained permission from the District Headquarters to increase the budget, providing detailed reasons for the delay. With the revised budget, I was able to negotiate effectively with the contractors, resulting in a mutually satisfactory agreement for all parties involved.
* Providing training to over 280 employees during the COVID-19 pandemic required around-the-clock availability for several months. Training staff located in geographically distant areas posed a significant challenge, particularly through video calls, as many post office employees are over 50 years old and not particularly tech-savvy. To overcome this, I developed simplified training materials and provided additional support to ensure all employees could effectively learn to use the new AEPS services.
* Ensuring proper branding at 190 access points in Etah District was extremely challenging due to restricted mobility and the associated health risks. During one of my visits to oversee branding compliance at several locations, I contracted COVID-19, which incapacitated me for two weeks. Despite this setback, I implemented a remote monitoring system and delegated responsibilities to local teams to ensure branding guidelines were followed without compromising safety.
* One of the primary challenges we faced as a team was adhering to COVID-19 protocols and ensuring that the staff did the same. There was a significant disparity between the protocols mandated and the resources available to the public to prevent the spread of COVID-19, especially in the rural areas. Despite our best efforts, over ten post office staff members contracted the virus due to the unavoidable in-person nature of service delivery. To address this issue, I secured budget allocation for the purchase of N-95 masks, sanitizers, and medical kits, which were distributed to staff across the district. This measure was crucial in enhancing the safety and well-being of our employees while continuing to deliver essential services.

**Achievements and Impact of AEPS Services in Etah District**

* Approval and Launch**:** Etah District was among the select few districts granted approval by the Reserve Bank of India to launch AEPS services. This approval marked a significant milestone for the district and underscored the readiness and commitment of our team to deliver enhanced banking services.
* Staff Training and Deployment**:** Over 280 post office staff members were thoroughly trained to provide AEPS services to customers. This extensive training initiative not only equipped our employees with the necessary skills but also significantly improved the lives of millions of people by ensuring seamless access to essential banking services. Our staff continues to serve IPPB customers with dedication and efficiency.
* Financial Impact**:** Within the first four months of launching AEPS services, IPPB customers in Etah District deposited over ₹7 crore and withdrew over ₹12 crore amounting to total 2.5 Lakh AEPS transactions. These figures highlight the substantial adoption and utilization of AEPS services by our customers, reflecting the success of our implementation efforts.
* Revenue Achievement**:** In terms of revenue, the Etah District IPPB branch achieved nearly the target revenue through AEPS transactions, ranking among the top 10 district branches nationwide. This achievement underscores the effectiveness of our strategic planning and execution, as well as the hard work and commitment of our staff.