

EPABX for banks: connecting branches efficiently and cost effectively

Financial inclusion through the spread of formal banking services to the unbanked sections of society is at the foundation of a new India. RBI norms mandate that banks open at least 25% of new outlets in unbanked rural centres and also allow banks to appoint agents titled 'Business Correspondents' to provide basic services in areas too remote for a branch.

The challenges of operating in villages and class B and C towns include the creation of physical infrastructure and the management of operations at a feasible cost-revenue ratio. Branches need to control expenses without compromising on customer support, back-office efficiency and employee engagement.

Take the simple case of installing a communications network for a bank that is in the process of setting up a rural branch. It needs reliable and secure connectivity with head office, to call extensions, employee and agent numbers. On the ground, there is no existing telecom infrastructure. Cables will have to be drawn for miles across the village, for which permissions and approval timeframes cannot be predicted.

The silver lining for the bank is that mobile connectivity is ubiquitous in India, which enables the implementation of solutions like wireless EPABX. A wireless EPABX is like a switchboard, but one that uses mobile network infrastructure for connectivity. The device has GSM SIM cards that connect wirelessly to the nearest base station. EPABX operates through regular fixed line desk-phones or cordless instruments that can be located in any part of the office. Wireless EPABX also comes with upscale features like call forwarding, call diverting, call waiting and IVR.

It takes very little time to install and also eliminates the need to wait for feasibility, or to add infrastructure. The system is easy to maintain, a huge advantage given that remote branches have limited access to specialist IT staff.

Banks that are venturing outside urban zones need not agonise over setting up communication channels. With wireless EPABX, they can overcome installation challenges, minimise capital expenditure and simply enjoy reliable and comprehensive connectivity with head office, customers and employees.