

Why we resist technology

While many office-bound employees have embraced technology and have come to love working from home during lockdown, technophobes certainly have not had it easy. On the face of it, the financial services industry is high-tech and its employees, seemingly, could transition from the office to the work-from-home scenario with relative ease, enabled by apps and digital platforms. Not so, says Sherwin Govender, Business Development Manager for Glacier by Sanlam. The technology to service clients from anywhere is available, for sure. However, for many financial intermediaries, the transition from in-person contact to advice and client service delivered in a Zoom or MS Teams meeting or in a webinar has not been smooth. Sherwin outlines the reasons why.

1. Adopting new technology seldom happens naturally.

Just because technology exists that can do something more efficiently does not mean people will use it. To understand full adoption of any technology, says Sherwin, is to understand the value that the technology can provide for its user. By way of example, years ago, I was convinced by my foodie friends to get a stick blender for my kitchen. For many months, it gathered dust. I almost forgot I'd bought it. It wasn't until winter arrived that I realised that all I needed to do was hold this piece of equipment in a pot of cooked, seasoned vegetables and within a few minutes I had velvety-smooth soup! I could pack away my hand-held potato masher that literally would take me an hour to do what this little machine did in an instant. The problem I didn't even know I had, was solved.

2. Technology's purpose is to solve problems.

Sometimes we don't even know that there's a problem that needs solving (remember the potato masher?). Zoom and MS Teams solved a problem we only realised we had in March 2020 in COVID-related lockdown. The technology had existed for many years, but full adoption across all industries didn't happen automatically. The main driver for us all adopting this technology was based upon the perceived value derived from our experiences, he says, or it was because we were tossed into a situation where we simply had no choice, as was the case in lockdown.

We are human and need affirmation.

Affirmation, says Sherwin, is a basic human need. It is an emotional connection with something or someone that gives you a feeling of comfort and trust. Affirmation is not easy to replicate in the digital world, *but* what if we make peace with this? What if we acknowledge our clients' need for affirmation and also let technology solve the problems we encounter in advising and servicing them?

This point is best illustrated by the countless virtual Zoom birthday parties that were held during lockdown. Families sang the birthday song, they wished the birthday subject, the virtual cake was cut – and this all happened on a screen.

- *The problem:* we couldn't visit our loved ones to celebrate their birthdays.
- *The solution:* We threw virtual parties using technology.

Of course, now we wonder if Zoom birthdays will replace in-person family get-togethers in future. This is unlikely, says Sherwin, but virtual celebrations are very likely to continue where family members live far away from each other.

Affirmation is especially important in matters of our personal finances. We want to be able to look the person in the eye when they talk to us about our dreams and future plans. It's the priceless stuff of being human that can't be replaced by a machine.

4. We treat digitisation and the human touch as mutually exclusive.

Sherwin points out that often our humanity is the barrier to using technology...and this isn't necessarily a bad thing. The barrier isn't related to the technology. It's not that there is a flaw in the design or that the technology can't do what it claims it can. The barrier to adoption lies in our personal acceptance of the technology – all too often as it is perceived as being at odds with the all-important human touch.

Sherwin mentions how communication technology has made it easier to connect with his brother who lives in Norway. A simple gesture like sharing a voice note containing his brother's favourite song, is priceless in bridging the 14 500 km distance between them.

5. Attitude towards technology determines whether it will become an enabler.

It is simply untrue that your age determines whether you will adopt new technology. Employing new methods of doing things has more to do with your level of comfort while doing them. The generational age gap becomes a factor to consider regarding the comfort level in using technology – whether new or old. For example, asking a teenager today to write and post a letter to someone is likely to be a much more uncomfortable experience for them than sending a WhatsApp. They are

probably going to be as resistant to that experience as their grandparent would to e-signing investment documents.

6. Change your mind.

We are all going to need conscious determination to overcome discomfort when we do established things in a new way. We know that changing attitude or mindset is not easy. He cautions, though, that if your attitude is negative, you run the risk of missing the key benefits of new technology, that literally could change your life for the better. And attitudes are infectious – whether we are adoptive or resistant, our clients probably will follow suit.

It's time to treat technology as an extension of our human touch. It complements, enables and strengthens our skills and expertise as professionals and could make us even better advisers to our clients. Ultimately it could save time, one of our scarcest resources. And with extra time we could get in touch with loved ones, help more people realise a happy future, and make soup!

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Glacier Financial Solutions (Pty) Ltd.

A member of the Sanlam Group
Private Bag X5 | Tyger Valley 7536 | Email client.services@glacier.co.za | Tel +27 21 917 9002 / 0860 452 364 | Fax +27 21 947 9210 |
Web www.glacier.co.za | Reg No 1999/025360/07
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Private Bag X8 | Tyger Valley 7536 | Tel +27 21 950 2600 | Fax +27 21 950 2126 | Web www.smmi.com | *Reg No 2002/030939/07
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Glacier International is a division of Sanlam Life Insurance Limited
Sanlam Life Insurance Ltd. | Email life@sanlam.co.za | Tel + 27 21 916 5000 / 0860 726 526 | Fax +27 21 947 9440
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