ICT Strategies for Development: Implementing Multichannel Banking in Romania

Călin Gurău

Groupe Sup. de Co. Montpellier, 2300 Avenue des Moulins, 34185 Montpellier, France. E-mail: cgurau@supco-montpellier.fr

ABSTRACT

The application of information and communication technologies in developing countries represents an important tool that can determine economic development and prosperity. One of the main areas in which technology can have a powerful impact on the economic activity is the introduction of Internet banking and multichannel banking services. Although the implementation and the functioning of these multichannel systems are well documented in the developed economies, the situation may be different in countries with developing economies. The present article investigates and analyzes the present situation of multichannel banking in Romania, and the appropriate strategies for the successful implementation and development of multichannel banking services in the Romanian context. © 2005 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Keywords: developing economies; multichannel banking; strategy; Romania

1. INTRODUCTION: ICT AND DEVELOPMENT

There is an intense debate in the economic literature regarding the effect of developing the information and the communication technology (ICT) infrastructure on the pace of economic development of a country (Baliamoune, 2004). A report of the World Bank (McNamara, 2003) outlines that ICT development is not an end in itself, but rather a tool that can be used to increase the capacity of poor and underdeveloped countries to accelerate economic development, to connect to the world, and to increase the opportunities offered to their citizens (Hadidi, 2003).

On the other hand, the development of ICT has to be directed toward areas where it can create the maximum economic and social effect; therefore, the ICT policy has to use a strategic approach, identifying the main priorities at national and regional levels. ICT strategies are only effective and sustainable if they are integrally linked to broader, more comprehensive development and poverty-reduction strategies (Steinberg, 2003). An article published by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD; 2003) identifies the following areas as being essential for allowing a rapid progress of ICTs and e-business in developing countries:

Sherif Kamel was the accepting Associate Editor for this article.

Information Technology for Development, Vol. 11 (4) 343–362 (2005)
Published online in Wiley InterScience (www.interscience.wiley.com).
DOI: 10.1002/itdj.20024

- Legal and regulatory reform to accommodate e-business
- Institutional reform to facilitate access and connectivity
- Reform of banking systems to enable e-payments
- Awareness raising

Finance and banking are information-intensive industries, which can be positively transformed by the development of ICT. However, a 1999 World Bank (Purcell & Toland, 2003) survey reported the average on-line banking penetration for developing countries to be only 5%. The main challenges encountered by developing countries in implementing multichannel banking activities are (Hadidi, 2003)

- The ability to adopt global technology to the local requirements
- The ability to strengthen the public support for e-finance
- The ability to create the necessary level of regulatory and institutional frameworks
- The ability to mainstream SMEs toward e-finance.

The change of the political regime in Romania, in December 1989, oriented the national policy toward the development of a free-market economy. The creation of a complex financial and banking sector has represented an important priority in this context. Before 1990, the Romanian banking system was limited to a handful of banks that managed the financial operations of state enterprises, and by the national savings banks that were servicing the needs of the population. After the fall of the communist regime, the country attempted to open its structures toward the world and to adopt the models used in industrialized countries.

A number of circumstantial elements have also increased the pressure for a quick introduction of ICT systems in the Romanian banking sector.

1. The development of Internet banking applications after 1995 in most developed countries—this new transaction channel has revolutionized the distribution strategy of commercial banks and transformed the needs and wants of customers (Mols, 1999).
2. The development of the Romanian banking sector has attracted a number of international banks that wanted to penetrate this new, promising market. These banks have brought not only new organizational and marketing models, but also modern information systems and technological know-how.
3. The development of the Romanian economy required an important volume of foreign trade and investment. The foreign entrepreneurs investing in Romania or making transactions with Romanian firms, required from the local banking system high-quality services and a quick responsiveness to their specific needs.
4. The political objective of becoming a member of the European Union has determined successive Romanian governments to encourage the development of ICT infrastructure and the adoption by the Romanian banks of modern multichannel strategies.

Despite the growing interest in the introduction of multichannel financial marketing, there is little research regarding the development and implementation of multichannel banking strategies in developing economies. Most of the articles dealing with this subject present only general information, without attempting to analyze primary and secondary data in a systematic way (Baliamoune, 2004; Efinance, 2001, 2002a; Hadidi, 2003; Idowu, Alu, & Adagunodo, 2002; Mocanu, 2002). The developing countries, many with a fairly developed financial and technological infrastructure, experience specific market conditions in terms of knowledge, technological abilities, business ethics, IT market, e-payment regulations, and consumer behavior. Some of these countries are presently attempting to transform a cash-only based economy, gradually introducing virtual money and e-payments. Because of this, the implementation of multichannel banking might be different and more difficult in a developing country, requiring specific strategies and additional costs. On the other hand, technology transfers between banking organizations from developed and developing countries, may determine a development shortcut, some banks being able to directly implement a multichannel strategy, without experiencing the problems of the multiple channels approach.

This study investigates the changes determined in the Romanian economy in general, and in the Romanian banking system in particular, by the introduction of advanced ICT systems, and analyzes the progress of the Romanian banking system in implementing and managing a multichannel banking strategy.

2. MULTICHANNEL STRATEGIES IN THE BANKING SECTOR

In the last 5 years, many financial institutions have implemented advanced technological platforms, introducing a number of interactive marketing channels: e-banking, Internet banking, mobile banking and interactive TV applications. The research has shown that sustainable profitability in the banking sector depends on mastering the skills of managing and integrating customer relationships across multichannels, by using advanced data and communication technologies (Kirkby, 2001; Yulinsky, 2000).

From a strategic perspective, it is important to distinguish between multiple-channel marketing and a multichannel strategy. There are substantial differences between diversification strategies that simply provide additional channels for customers and those that offer cross-channel benefits based on an integrated multichannel approach. These two different strategies—multiple-channel and multichannel marketing—can also be considered as evolutionary stages in company development. Driven by the competitive pressures within the market and the desire to reduce costs and improve the company's offerings, banks have moved from a unichannel approach to a multiple-channel delivery of financial services. This gradual process and the factors determining its evolutionary are graphically represented in Figure 1.

An important factor in the introduction of additional banking channels was the progress of information technology applications, especially Internet and mobile communication (Hadidi, 2003; Isarescu, 2001). The increased informatization of society has determined a transition toward an e-payments economy, in which money is perceived as information stored or transmitted through various communication channels (Pastore, 2001). The organization segments the market in terms of priority channels, promoting distinctive offers for each type of customer.

In time, the search for greater convenience makes customers access various channels, depending on personal needs and circumstances. These multichannel customers expect and request a similar level of service from every delivery channel. On the other hand, the necessity to improve customer loyalty through personalized customer relationship management determines the financial institutions to introduce a unique platform technology, integrating the information flows from all existing channels (Martz, 2003). The banks are

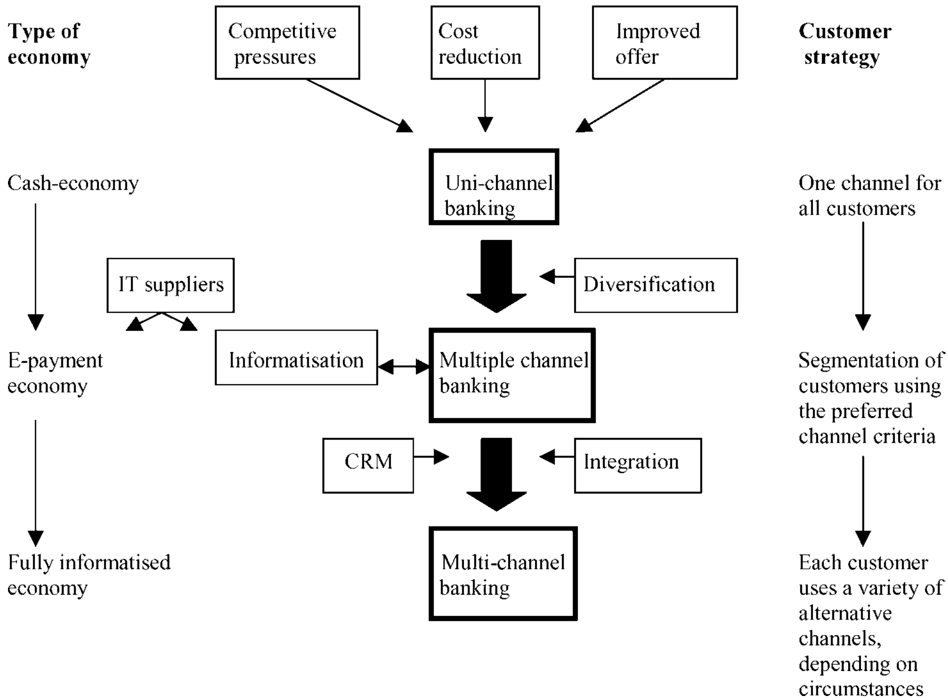

Figure 1 The evolution of banking services toward a multichannel approach.

therefore adopting a multichannel approach, which is characteristic for a fully-informatized economy in which information has become the primary strategic asset for building and maintaining competitive advantage.

This multichannel strategy has already become the prevalent business model in Europe (Mocanu, 2002). It is estimated that by 2005, 65% of the bank clients will use a multichannel banking procedure (see Figure 2).

Despite the sound theoretical basis of the multichannel banking strategy, the banks implementing it have encountered unexpected problems and challenges (Martz, 2003). First of all, the customers did not adopt the new interactive channels, such as internet banking or mobile banking, with overwhelming enthusiasm. Many customers have continued to rely on bank branches as their main channel of banking services, occasionally using alternative channels, when convenient. Second, by introducing new banking channels, some banks have lost the direct contact with the customer. This problem was created mainly by the incapacity of these banks to properly integrate the interaction with clients across all the banking channels available. The use of different IT systems has created important barriers against the sharing of customer data by various operational departments, which is specific for multiple-channel organizational configurations. These difficulties highlighted once more the necessity of a clear, focused strategy for multichannel banking operations, and the need for a unique IT platform for integrating information flows and customer databases.

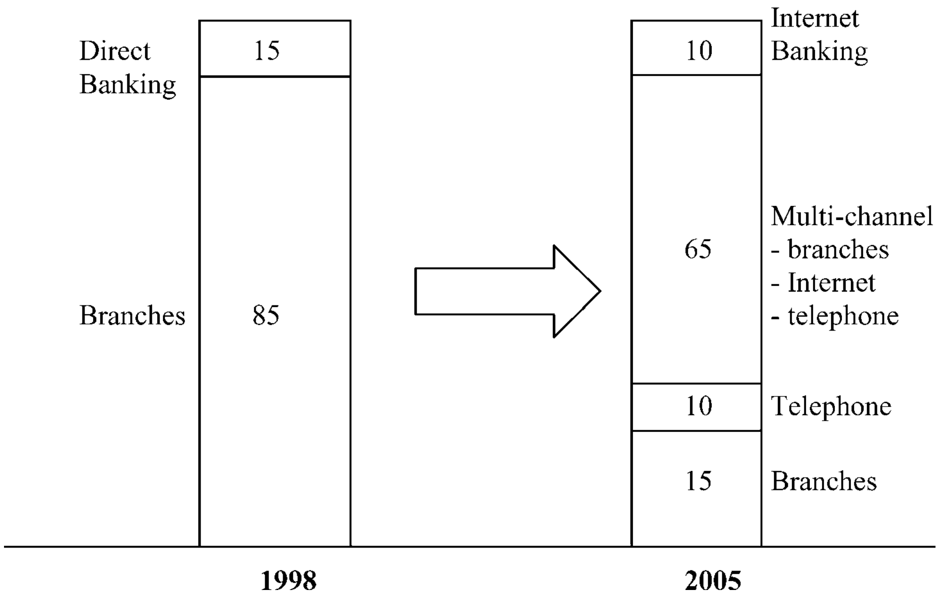

Figure 2 The evolution of customers' structure considering the distribution channels used by the banks. Adapted from Mocanu and Filip (2001).

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The implementation of successful multichannel banking strategies has been mainly studied in the environment of developed economies. This research has focused on both the methods used by banks and financial institutions to implement and develop multichannel systems (Bansal, 2002, 2003; Idowu et al., 2002; Kirkby, 2001; Simons, Steinfield, & Bouwman, 2002) and on the challenges raised by the implementation of a centralized CRM (Corner & Hinton, 2002; Tyler & Stanley, 2001). On the other hand, previous studies about the Romanian banking system have focused exclusively on the development of on-line banking services (Gurău, 2002a, 2002b).

Despite the importance of multichannel banking in developing economies, both for academics and practitioners, previous studies on this subject have been limited to general presentations, without a thorough analysis of the success factors and the most appropriate strategic models (Bansal, 2002). Based on a thorough analysis of the Romanian market environment and banking sector, the study explores the following research areas: (a) the necessary market and organizational conditions for a successful implementation and development of multichannel banking services; (b) the channel portfolio of Romanian commercial banks, and the stage reached in the implementation of multichannel banking services; and (c) the competitive objectives of banks and the strategies used for the introduction and development of multichannel banking in Romania.

In order to obtain relevant information about these research objectives, both secondary and primary sources have been used. A number of secondary data sources were first accessed and consulted in order to evaluate the general situation of the central and eastern European region and of the Romanian economy, the Romanian banking system, the telecommunication infrastructure in Romania, and the delivery channels introduced by banks.

Following this, during Spring 2003, the 38 banks operating in Romania were contacted personally or by telephone, in order to organize interviews with bank representatives. Eighteen semistructured interviews were then conducted with bank managers and other bank personnel from 12 banks, located in the cities of Oradea and Cluj-Napoca, either directly or through telephone (see Table 1). All respondents required anonymity, which is why any direct reference to names or functions was removed from the presentation and discussion of interview data.

The interview was considered the best research method to assess the multichannel strategy of various banks. The direct interaction with respondents (face-to-face or by telephone) increased the flexibility of the investigation and the relevance of the information provided. On the other hand, the complexity and the qualitative nature of the research objectives (a) and (c) indicated the interview as the most appropriate method of data collection.

The questions asked during the interview were divided into three main categories: (a) the importance and feasibility of the multichannel strategy in the Romanian context, (b) the implementation strategy of multichannel banking services, and the challenges encountered by banks in this process, and (c) the multichannel offer of the bank and its positioning in the Romanian banking services market.

TABLE 1. The Interviews Conducted With the Representatives of Romanian Banks

The Romanian Bank for Development	1 telephone 1 face-to-face	Cluj Oradea
Raifeissen Bank	1 telephone	Oradea
The Romanian Commercial Bank	2 face-to-face	Oradea Cluj
'Ion Tiriac' Commercial Bank	1 telephone 1 face-to-face	Oradea Cluj
Romexterra	1 telephone	Oradea
Libra Bank	1 face-to-face	Oradea
UniCredit Romania	1 telephone	Cluj
Transilvania Bank	2 face-to-face	Oradea
Banc Post	1 telephone	Oradea
Alpha Bank Romania	1 face-to-face	Oradea
Eurom Bank	1 telephone	Oradea
HVB Bank Romania	1 telephone	Oradea

TABLE 2. Main Macroeconomic Indicators (National Bank of Romania, 1999)

Indicators	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
GDP at constant prices (% change)	−12.9	−8.8	1.5	3.9	7.1	3.9	−6.1	−5.4	−3.2
GDP per capita (U.S. dollars)	1,187	857	1,159	1,324	1,573	1,437	1,521	1,843	1,515
Inflation (change in year-end retail/consumer price level in %)	223	199	296	62	28	57	152	41	55
Exchange rate (lei/U.S. dollar—end year)	189	460	1,276	1,767	2,578	4,035	8,023	10,950	18,250

These interviews were complemented with information published in the specialized financial journal *Efinance Romania*. The analysis of a series of articles and interviews published by this journal has also provided relevant information about the competitive objectives of Romanian banks and about their strategic models.

The main limitations of the research methodology are the limited sample of bank representatives that agreed to provide primary information about multichannel banking services (31.57% of the commercial banks functioning in Romania at the time of the survey), and the concentration of the respondent banks in only two major Romanian cities. However, the sample can be considered to be representative because

- all the banks providing primary information were offering multichannel banking services; that is, the information provided was based on direct experience
- the bank customers from these two large cities are highly representative of the urban Romanian population; that is, the rural Romanian population seldom has access to Internet connections and e-banking services.

The research findings are presented in direct relation to the formulated research objectives. First, a general perspective on Romania is presented in order to outline the market conditions of the country. A short analysis of the Romanian banking system and data technology infrastructure provides the necessary context for a good understanding of the requirements for implementing multichannel banking systems in Romania. Second, the actual channel portfolio of each Romanian commercial bank is presented. Third, the elements involved in the implementation and development of multichannel banking systems are discussed from the perspective of bank representatives. Fourth, the market objectives and the multichannel strategies used by Romanian banks are specifically analyzed for three main categories of banking institutions: (a) foreign banks with a Romanian branch, (b) Romanian banks with an extensive territorial coverage, and (c) Romanian banks with a local or regional presence.

4. THE ECONOMIES IN TRANSITION—ROMANIA

At the end of 1980s and the beginning of 1990s, the central and eastern European countries started their transition process toward a market economy and political democracy (Cateora & Ghauri, 2000). The economic reforms have been hindered by high levels of inflation, unemployment, and economic instability resulting from the restructuring of national economic systems. As expected, the pace and the success of reforms were not similar in all these countries (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2000).

Although Romania is often portrayed as a poor country, this image does not do justice to its large development potential. With over 22 million inhabitants, Romania has the second largest population (after Poland) in central and eastern Europe, a large stock of skilled labor, and a generous endowment of natural resources (Cateora & Ghauri, 2000; European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2000). Romania has also known some periods of rapid growth and economic prosperity in the past (Buckley & Ghauri, 1994; Miller, 1998), such as the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s.

Romania remained excluded from the economic reform debate that characterized the 1980s in other socialist countries. The transition shock was, therefore, particularly large. In 2 years, the GDP fell by around 20% and industrial output by more than 50% (OECD, 1998). In the immediate outset of transition, Romania not only lost most of its former COMECON market, but was also affected by the U.N. sanctions against other traditional export markets such as Iraq and the former Yugoslavia. A gradualist approach to structural reforms was adopted by successive Romanian governments. This strategy was intended to minimize the social costs of transformation of the previous economic and institutional structures. However, the results of the transition process revealed that this was not a successful approach to reform in Romania (Odobescu, 2001).

The country has experienced high levels of inflation, a slight increase in the GDP per capita, and a continuous devaluation of the national currency (lei; see Table 2). This had a negative effect on the internal financial stability and substantially reduced the purchasing power of Romanians. Despite these negative trends, foreign direct investments have increased constantly (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 1998).

In 2000, the GDP growth rate once again registered a positive figure (1.6%), after a 3-year period of economic decline (1996–1999). Growth rates were higher in the export-oriented industrial sectors (the growth rate of industrial production was 8.2% and that of the exports was 22%). At the same time currency reserves of the National Bank have grown by USD 950 million, and those of other commercial banks by USD 290 million (Isarescu, 2001). These trends have continued in 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004; some industrial sectors (Efinance, 2003c; Vuici, 2002a, 2002b) even accelerated their rate of growth (e.g., software, information technology, telecommunications).

4.1 The Romanian Banking System

Since 1990 the Romanian banking system has undergone a major restructuring in accordance with the European Union banking directives and based on western European banking models. This process resulted in the organization of a two-tier banking system, which consists of the National Bank of Romania on the one hand, and commercial banks on the other.

The restructuring process of the Romanian banking system included opening the banking system to private and foreign banks and starting the privatization of Romanian state-owned banks (the legislative framework for the privatization of state-owned banks started to be built up in 1998). As a result of these measures, some large state-owned banks became private commercial banks with both Romanian and foreign capital.

In March 2004, the date taken as a reference point for this study, the Romanian banking system comprised the National Bank of Romania and 38 commercial banks (National Bank of Romania, 2004). After an extremely difficult period experienced by the Romanian banking system between 1998 and 1999 (seven commercial banks have been erased from the bank register during this period, and several others have experienced serious financial problems), the situation substantially improved in 2000 and 2001. This change came through the introduction at the end of 1999 of a complex set of strict regulations concerning the supervisory role of the National Bank of Romania over the activities of commercial banks. This has reduced the risk of the Romanian financial system, allowing a quick recovery and development of the private commercial banks (Isarescu, 2001).

The majority of Romanian commercial banks are now private (from 38 banks, only 3 are controlled by the state), as a result of a series of important privatization initiatives. Private capital represents 60.5% of the entire capital invested in the Romanian banking sector (of which 35.9% represents foreign private capital), and 57.9% of the Romanian banks' assets (Isarescu, 2001).

4.2 The Romanian Data Technology Infrastructure

Both the IT and the telecommunication industries have experienced consistently high rates of growth in the last 4 years (Efinance, 2003c; ESIS, 2002; Vuici, 2001, 2002b). A number of IT and telecom companies have recently introduced new devices that can be used in the banking sector: Zapp Mobile, a mobile telecommunication company and IP Devel have developed the application Mobile Point of Sale 2002, which uses the CDMA technology (code division multiple access) in order to allow the payment to a mobile POS, using credit or debit cards (Efinance, 2002h). The 3G mobile telecommunication system is already functioning in Romania, providing the necessary technology for complex mobile banking services (Efinance, 2002c).

Local software companies have also introduced advanced systems for financial services management. A good example is the local firm JVM Technologies, which has already implemented its financial data management system in Libra Bank and in the Commercial Bank of Greece (Vamvu, 2002).

At present, in Romania, banks are the main consumers of data communications services. Depending on their monthly spending on these services, Romanian banks can be divided into three categories (Grecescu, 2002): (a) large national banks, with a high volume of data transfer, spending around USD 40,000/month for data communication services; (b) international banks, using data communications services for their Romanian and international operations, with a value of USD 25,000/month; and (c) other banks (more than 90% of the banks providing services in Romania), with a relatively low data communication usage, spending around USD 5,000 monthly on these services.

Despite the rapid development of the Romanian IT and telecommunications sectors, the necessary legislative environment is still incomplete. In order to accelerate the introduction of alternative banking channels, the National Bank of Romania has supported the use of on-line banking and electronic payments even before the Law of Electronic Signature came into force in July 2001 (Bulboaca, 2001; Hristu, 2001c).

Unfortunately, an electronic system of clearing and interbanking payments, which would increase the efficiency of the overall financial system, has yet to be introduced (Efinance, 2001a, 2002a).

5. THE CHANNEL PORTFOLIO OF ROMANIAN BANKS

Although not fully developed, the Romanian IT and telecommunication infrastructure already allows the implementation of multiple banking channels. The present and the potential channels for banking services in Romania are as follows.

1. Branches are the classical channel of banking services. During the communist regime, they represented the unique interface between banks and clients. In the emerging market economy most of the Romanian banks have gradually expanded their network of branches. Some banks have opened hundreds of branches and agencies, achieving national coverage, whereas other banks have concentrated on specific regions or major cities. The Romanian Savings Bank (with a network of branches developed

during the communist period) and Banc Post (using the network of post offices to provide financial services) have the largest number of branches in the Romanian banking system. Bank branches still represent the main distribution channel for financial services for all categories of customers, as well as the main supporting center for alternative banking channels: "As long as the Romanian economy will be based on cash payments, the bank branches will continue to represent the main centres of activity. The national coverage achieved through branches and agencies is especially important for the rural areas—where clients are not familiarised with e-banking applications." (Banc Post representative).

2. Home banking allows customers to access their bank accounts and conduct simple transactions from a distant location. Some Romanian banks have implemented this version of direct banking in order to reduce the risks and costs associated with Internet banking both for the banks and for its customers. The classical home-banking system is based on a software application installed on the client's computer, which permits to the customer to communicate through a modem/telephone line with the bank in order to access information about the account balance, a list of previous transactions, or to transmit instructions for simple transactions to the bank system (Efinance, 2001a, 2002a; Mocanu, 2002). One of the main advantages of this system is that the client has the possibility to work off-line, which reduces the cost of information exchange. Some of these home-banking systems also incorporate cash-management software applications to increase their appeal for organizational customers. The connection between the bank and the client can also be made by telephone, although in this case the information exchange is more basic.
3. Internet banking offers the customer Internet access to the bank 24 hours a day, from anywhere in the world (McNamara, 2003). These transactions are conducted in real time and the portfolio of services available on-line can be very extensive, including a general presentation of the bank, information about personal/corporate accounts and transactions, and advertising of additional services and channels (Apostu & Hristu, 2001; Constantin, 2001; Hristu, 2001a). The security risks are higher for this channel. Usually the implementation of Internet banking requires substantial investment from a bank, as well as a major restructuring of its internal information flows and procedures (Efinance, 2001b, 2003b; Purcell & Toland, 2003). A simpler version of Internet banking services has been introduced by a few banks: Using only the e-mail facility, the client can obtain information or request simple transactions from its bank (e.g., Piraeus Bank). Internet banking is targeted toward corporate clients, or rich, technology-savvy individuals: "Most clients still perceive Internet banking as expensive and risky . . . we need a larger penetration of the Internet in the Romanian business environment, in order to change this traditional mentality." (The Romanian Commercial Bank representative).
4. The automatic teller machine (ATM) is traditionally the channel that allows the customer to use its bank cards to withdraw money or to check account balances. However, the modern generations of ATMs can be used to pay bills (e.g., The Romanian Bank of Development, The Romanian Commercial Bank, and Bank Post), to obtain financial information, or to present advertisements (Efinance, 2002b). In May 2002, only 10 Romanian banks had an ATMs network and 16 banks distributed bank cards (see Table 3). The number of Points of Sale (POSs) installed by banks in commercial units was 4.500 in January 2003 (Efinance, 2003a). Although the number of both ATMs and POSs is constantly growing in Romania, this channel of financial

TABLE 3. The Channel Portfolio of the Romanian Commercial Banks in March 2004

Bank	Branches	Cards and ATMs	Home banking	Internet banking	Mobile banking
Frankfurt Bukarest Bank AG, Bucharest Branch	<5	No	No	No	No
MISR Romanian Bank, Bucharest Branch	<5	Cards and ATMs	No	No	No
MINDBANK S.A.	No data	No data	No data	No	No
Banque Franco-Roumaine, Paris—Bucharest Branch	<5	No	Yes	No	No
The Romanian Bank for Development	177	Cards and ATMs	Yes	No	No
Raifeissen Bank	225	Cards and ATMs	Yes	No	Yes
The Romanian Commercial Bank	285	Cards and ATMs	Yes	Yes	Yes
'Ion Tiriac' Commercial Bank	49	Cards and ATMs	Yes	Yes	No
EUROM Bank	5<	No	No	No	No
BANC POST	More than 2000	Cards and ATMs	No	Yes	Yes
EXIMBANK	No data	No	Yes	No	No
The Romanian Bank	No data	Cards and ATMs	No	No	No
FINANSBANK Romania	15	No	No	No	No
Transilvania Bank	51	Cards and ATMs	Yes	Yes	No
ROMEXTERRA	24	ATMs	Yes	No	Yes
ALPHA BANK Romania	15	Cards and ATMs	Yes	No	No
ING Bank N.V., Amsterdam—Bucharest Branch	13	Cards	Yes	No	Yes
PIRAEUS BANK Romania	6	Cards and ATMs	Yes	No	Yes
ABN AMRO Bank	No data	Cards	Yes	Yes	No
ROBANK	14	No	Yes	Yes	No
National Bank of Greece—Bucharest Branch	<5	No	No	No	No
Citibank Romania	<5	Cards	Yes	Yes	No
The Commercial Bank San Paolo IMI Romania	17	No	Yes	No	No
Emporiki Bank, Romania	<5	Cards	No	Yes	No
The Italian-Romanian Bank, Roma—Bucharest Branch	<5	No	Yes	No	No
NOVA Bank	No data	No	No	No	No
LIBRA BANK	8	No	No	Yes	No
Daewoo Bank	<5	No	No	No	No
UniCredit Romania	15	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
HVB Bank Romania	5	Cards	Yes	Yes	Yes
Garanti Bank International Amsterdam—Bucharest Branch	<5	No	No	No	No
Romanian International Bank	No data	Cards	No	No	No
EGNATIA BANK (Romania)	No data	No	Yes	No	No
CARPATICA Commercial Bank	29	Cards	Yes	Yes	No

(*Continued*)

TABLE 3. *Continued*

Bank	Branches	Cards and ATMs	Home banking	Internet banking	Mobile banking
The Romanian Savings Bank	More than 500	No	No	No	No
VOLKSBANK Romania	8	Cards	Yes	No	No
Banca di Roma, Italia—Bucharest Branch	<5	No	No	No	No
MIRO Bank	6	No	No	No	No

services is still undeveloped: "The cards system is under-used in Romania . . . the customer must perceive clear benefits in order to adopt this banking channel." (Transilvania Bank representative). The main reason for this situation is the slow transition from a cash-only economy to a market using predominantly electronic payments. Most individual customers do not yet perceive any benefits in the use of cards, and many retailers are still reluctant to install POSs in their shops (Efinance, 2002f). However, recent governmental regulations regarding the payment of salaries by state enterprises directly into card accounts (since August 2002), and the introduction of electronic payment for all public services (since July 2003), will most probably encourage the extensive use of bank cards in the Romanian economy (Efinance, 2003d).

At present, there are two main categories of cards users (Dragomirescu, 2002): (a) voluntary users, usually young professionals (30–40 years old), characterized by high salaries and a high level of education; and (b) circumstantial users—these include people who have obtained cards following the government regulation regarding the payment of salaries directly into card bank accounts. They are usually young, between 20 and 30 years old, with a medium level of education, and a low to medium level of monthly salaries.

5. Mobile banking uses the mobile phone to access financial services. In the Romanian banking system there are presently two versions of this channel (Stefan, 2000): mobile banking based on SMS technology, and mobile banking based on WAP technology. The SMS platform allows the client to send messages to the bank, obtaining information about accounts or requesting simple transactions. Sometimes this mobile banking application is paired (Hristu, 2001b) with another banking channel (e.g., card accounts at The Romanian Commercial Bank), using the services of the Connex network of mobile communications: "We tried to take advantage of the popularity of mobile communication in Romania, but there is still much to do to develop mobile banking. We had a good start . . . now we must capitalise on this success by diversifying our offer of mobile banking services." (The Romanian Commercial Bank representative).

   On the other hand, WAP technology represents a successful development of Internet banking applications in Romania, offering real-time transaction facilities (e.g., UniCredit Bank), or financial information (e.g., ING Bank Financial News). The targeted market segment are young adults, between 25 and 45 years old, rich, successful and dynamic, working in business, who need to access financial information with greater convenience (Efinance, 2002d).
6. iTV Banking allows the subscribers to digital televisions services to use interactive television as an interface for accessing financial services ("Nationwide Launches,"

2001). This channel is not used at present in Romania to provide financial services; however, the large number of cable television subscribers (more than 3 million) in Romania indicates a possible area of future potential (Stefan, 2000).

6. MAIN CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING MULTICHANNEL BANKING SERVICES

The main objective of the interviews conducted with banks' representatives was to identify the main challenges in implementing and managing multichannel banking services in the Romanian context. The respondents have identified three main categories of challenges: (a) organizational factors related to the capacity of banks to restructure their internal operational system and the interfaces with customers effectively, (b) external factors, covering the general economic situation and the development of the telecommunication infrastructure, and (c) competitive factors determined by the level of competition and the specific strategies implemented by the main competitors.

Table 4 presents a synthesis of the answers.

The respondents emphasized the structural and technological changes that have to be implemented by banks for a successful implementation of multichannel banking in Romania. The respondents considered that a multichannel strategy is based on a dynamic interaction between the IT platform and advanced customer relationship management (CRM applications): "The level of customer–bank interaction is nowadays defined by IT systems and infrastructure . . . If IT applications are well implemented and reliable, the customer will be willing to experiment and adopt new channels." (The Romanian Commercial Bank representative).

Indeed, more and more banks are changing their product-oriented strategy with a customer-focused approach (Efinance, 2002g). This IT-CRM integration needs to be

TABLE 4. The Main Challenges Influencing the Successful Implementation of Multichannel Banking Strategies Identified by Banks' Representatives

Categories	Main challenges
Organizational factors	• Implementation of effective IT systems to manage the flux of information and customer databases
	• Implementation of powerful CRM applications and procedures
	• Integration of the IT platform with CRM application
	• Restructuring of internal procedures to ensure consistency of approach
	• Changing the organizational culture from product orientation to customer orientation
	• Human resource management and training
External factors	• Economic development and dynamism
	• The widespread adoption of e-money and e-payments
	• A well developed and reliable telecommunication network
	• Clear and favorable legislation
	• Customers' knowledge in accessing and using multichannel banking
Competitive factors	• Structure of the market and of the banking sector
	• The tangible and intangible assets of competitors
	• The multi-channel strategies of competitors
	• The strategic positioning of competitors

successfully implemented in all banking channels, providing consistency and efficiency: "The interface with clients cannot function properly without the integration of all banking functions and departments, and IT applications can greatly facilitate this integration. . ." (Transilvania Bank representative). This operation requires a major strategic restructuring of the internal organizational systems and processes: information systems, personnel, customer relationship management, marketing mix, and knowledge management. Finally, the multichannel banking strategy needs to be flexible in order to adapt to changing environmental factors such as market demand, market structure, competitive pressures, governmental regulations, telecommunication infrastructure, and IT suppliers: "The main problem with technology is to choose the right system—not only for the present, but also on a long-term basis. The evolution of IT banking applications is still complex and unpredictable." ('Ion Tiriac' Commercial Bank representative).

The successful introduction and functioning of multichannel banking systems proves to be a complex operation, which requires a transition from a product-oriented approach to a truly customer-focused organization, in which all the organizational elements collaborate to provide increased value to clients: "There are probably three main elements involved in the implementation of a customer-oriented, multi-channel system: IT systems, business procedures, and people—if any of these factors is neglected there will be problems . . . " (Transilvania Bank representative).

The economic power of individual and institutional customers is paramount for the long-term success of multichannel banking in Romania: "If people have no money, why should they open accounts or use bank cards? A multichannel banking market can flourish only in a dynamic, successful economy." (The Romanian Bank for Development representative). The professional segment was identified as the most attractive for the multi-channel banking offer: "Most business customers are nowadays using Internet banking and cards—because of their increased convenience. Only the further development of the business class in Romania can provide the critical mass for an attractive market" ('Ion Tiriac' Commercial Bank representative). But also: "Multichannel necessarily means electronic payments and electronic banking—today most card holders are using this facility only to withdraw cash from the ATMs—this is not multichannel, it is just changing the traditional savings notebook of the Romanian Savings Bank with a plastic equivalent. In an e-payments economy money is information, which is managed and transmitted through IT systems and communication devices . . . " (Banc Post representative).

However, the development of an e-payments economy is not entirely dependent on the attitude and perceptions of the population. The development of the IT infrastructure is equally important: "The Internet connection is slow and expensive—it acts as a deterrent of e-banking usage." (Libra Bank representative).

The government can significantly facilitate the development of a multichannel banking market: "The government should adopt a more pragmatic approach. Everybody knows what is required for a dynamic market economy: clear, favorable legislation; freedom to compete; and economic stability—the critical thing is to implement and sustain these conditions." ('Ion Tiriac' Commercial Bank representative).

The respondents felt that the level of knowledge of the population is directly influencing the success of multichannel banking in Romania—therefore the banks should act as educators in order to develop the potential market of banking services: "There is no use to launch sophisticated services if the customers cannot find about them, or worse, do not have the knowledge to use them. Any development of the product portfolio should be accompanied by communication with targeted customers, and if necessary, by detailed training and explanation of the benefits of the new products, and the best way of accessing them. Unless this effort is properly made, the customers will feel threatened and will refuse new products, basing their decision on a distorted risk/benefit analysis." (The Romanian Commercial Bank representative).

Finally, the assets, the market positioning, and the strategies implemented by competitors have been identified as major factors influencing multichannel banking success: "The demand for multi-channel services is still limited . . . The main reason for implementing this complex strategy are the competitive pressures of other banks. The future competitiveness of a bank in this market is developed today and no bank can risk to be left behind" ('Ion Tiriac' Commercial Bank representative).

The strategic objectives and the multichannel strategies implemented by various categories of banks are presented in detail in the following section.

7. MULTICHANNEL STRATEGIES IN THE ROMANIAN BANKING SYSTEM

In the Romanian banking environment, major competitive pressures are created by the presence and the activities of foreign banks. Their extensive resources and experience in both financial services and technology platforms allowed them to quickly implement multichannel services (Constantin, 2001). Although their physical presence is quite limited, they attempt to increase their competitive advantage by implementing and promoting banking channels based on interactive technology such as Internet banking or mobile banking. Their brand name and international image provides additional competitive advantages for a successful positioning on the Romanian market: "Citibank is recognised in the whole world and automatically attracts the majority of foreign investors . . . the only possibility to compete with this reputation is to provide customized services that answer the specific business challenges in the Romanian context." (The Romanian Commercial Bank representative).

The foreign banks introducing direct banking services have mainly targeted corporate clients, which have a high volume of daily financial transactions and are willing to use the Internet or mobile banking to save time and costs (Hristu, 2002). These banking services are offered free of additional costs, and the registration procedure is highly simplified (Donoaica, 2000). On the other hand, their Web sites provide extensive support and facilities for Internet users (Hristu, 2002) and implement a high level of security (Donoaica, 2000). Although highly standardized, most of them have adapted their offering to the Romanian market (Efinance, 2002e), designing Romanian interfaces (Web sites and WAP portals).

Recent studies (Andersen Consulting, 2001; Pastore, 2001) have outlined the necessity to complement digital banking services with face-to-face customer support. In light of these findings, foreign banks will need to gradually expand their network of branches, in order to maintain and develop their initial competitive advantage in the Romanian market.

The local banks can be divided into two subcategories:

1. Commercial banks have an extensive territorial coverage (tens or hundreds of branches), some of them under the control of reputable foreign banks. They service both individual and organizational customers, quickly developing their ATM networks. Under the competitive pressure created by foreign banks, and with the help and expertise of foreign specialists, these banks have implemented on-line and mobile banking services, combining them with personalized support, offered through their branches. Their

multi-channel strategy can be described as adding clicks to bricks: "The national coverage of our branch network is an important competitive advantage in an economy that is still largely cash-based. However, electronic banking is the future and we cannot afford to neglect it . . ." (Banc Post representative).

2. Regional banks have a low territorial coverage (small number of branches), and are highly specialized in financial services for business. They have adopted a niche leadership strategy, taking advantage of the market gaps left by the previous two categories of banks. In order to maintain and develop their market position, some of these banks are simultaneously introducing additional banking channels, and increasing the number of branches: "Our strength is to provide reliable services to the local business communities . . . Our growth is organic . . . we try to combine our financial expertise with knowledge about the specific conditions of various regional economies." (Libra Bank representative).

Given the low penetration of PCs and the Internet within the Romanian population and business organizations, the high cost of PCs and Internet connections, and a very basic system of electronic payments, the introduction of digital banking services seems to be very unprofitable and difficult (Odobescu, 2001). This reality is confirmed by the small number of on-line banking customers (most banks have less than 10,000 on-line customers; Efinance, 2001a, 2002a). The mobile phone penetration is higher, but many people do not use additional banking services and are not willing to pay for them. The number of ATMs is increasing, but they are mainly used for cash withdrawal services (Mocanu, 2002), and many retailers are still reluctant to install POSs in their stores, either because this will introduce an additional control mechanism over their financial transactions, or because of the high costs of implementation (Efinance, 2003d).

However, the introduction of multichannel banking services in Romania can be explained by the competitive pressure of foreign banks offering direct banking services, and by the desire to create and promote an innovative image as a competitive advantage (Pascariu, 2001; Sandu, 2001). According to a report produced by Reuters Business Insight (Datamonitor, 1999), the early diversification into innovative financial channels and services secures a number of key advantages for providers, such as

- Attracting young customers
- Allowing the business model to be developed in stages
- Establishing a brand associated with service and innovation

These corporate objectives explain the somewhat disproportionate importance given to on-line and mobile banking in Romania and the intense publicity surrounding the introduction of multichannel services by every major bank (Odobescu, 2001). "Our effort to develop multichannel banking services is not justified by the present level of profitability, but is necessary considering the future potential of the market . . ." (Transilvania Bank representative).

8. CONCLUSIONS

The present study revealed the complexity and the challenges of introducing a multichannel banking strategy in transition economies. The analysis of primary and secondary data about the implementation and development of multi-channel banking services in Romania led to the following conclusions.

1. The successful implementation and development of multichannel banking is influenced by many interrelated factors, institutions, and processes, including the development of the national telecommunication infrastructure, the financial expertise and the revenues of the population, government support for the development of e-banking channels, as well as the strategic objectives of the bank and the quality/reliability of its banking services.
2. Many banks active in the Romanian market have adopted or moved toward a multichannel distribution strategy of their services (Bank Austria, 2001).
3. Digital banking was a major penetration strategy for the foreign banks that opened branches in the Romanian capital; this approach has created competitive pressures and has forced local banks to implement various forms of interactive banking.
4. The local banks used a gradual strategy of diversifying their banking channels and integrating them at company level, using advanced technology platforms; however, they had to accelerate this process under the competitive pressure from foreign banks with a Romanian presence.
5. Despite the unprofitable market and the small number of clients adopting multichannel banking, the banks are using this strategy to develop a reputation for being innovators and high-technology adopters (Odobescu, 2001; Pascariu, 2001).

In comparison with the introduction of on-line banking services in a developed country, the implementation of this facility in a transition economy is limited by a number of additional problems, which have been identified in this study:

- The legislation (especially the e-payment and financial regulations) may be unstable, vague, and incomplete.
- The financial system has high levels of risk, the banks' reputation may be weak, and service offering is limited to basic financial instruments.
- The small number of consumers using the multichannel facilities reduce profitability and increase competition.

In Romania, the banks have adapted their multichannel offer to the specific conditions of the economy (low or no fees, customer support, services mainly targeted to institutional clients) and some of them are starting to customize and integrate these services with powerful IT applications. The interviews conducted with representatives of the Romanian banks outlined the distinction between the present market conditions in Romania and the future potential. All respondents emphasized that although the implementation of multichannel banking is not justified by the present level of profitability, its introduction is necessary to create the basis of future competitiveness. The predicted growth of the Romanian economy will gradually create more favorable conditions for the further development of multichannel banking services: a stable economic and financial environment, a larger consumer segment and a more advanced IT infrastructure.

REFERENCES

Andersen Consulting. (2001). Customers find greatest satisfaction with multichannel operations. Retrieved April 2003 from http://retailinindustry.abou...SKD&terms=multichannel+banking+strategy

Apostu, M., & Hristu, V. (2001). Stadiul Internet banking in Romania (II). E-Finance Romania. Retrieved March 2002 from http://www.efinance.ri/articul.php?rev=062001&sct=050&art=1

Bank Austria. (2001). On-line banking: Pasul necesar pentru intrarea în mileniul III. E-Finance Romania. Retrieved March 2002 from http://www.efinance.ri/articul.php?rev=022001&sct=050&art=2

Baliamoune, M.N. (2002). The new economy and developing countries: Assessing the role of ICT diffusion (Discussion Paper No. 2002/77). Helsinki: World Institute for Development Economics Research. Retrieved December 2004 from http://www.wider.unu.edu/publications/dps/dps2002/dp2002–77.pdf

Bansal, P. (2002). Herculean tasks will reap huge rewards: Modernising banks in the emerging markets. The Banker, 152(920), 34–38.

Bansal, P. (2003). The pros and cons of converting core systems. The Banker, 153(923), 122–124.

Buckley, P.J., & Ghauri, P.N. (1994). Statement of the issues. In P.J. Buckley, N. Pervez, & N. Ghauri (Eds.), The economics of change in east and central Europe. London: Academic Press.

Bulboaca, A. (2001). Legea semnăturii electronice în varianta românească. E-finance Romania. Retrieved March 2002 from http://www.efinance.ri/articul.php?rev=092001&sct=040&art=1

Cateora, P.R., & Ghauri, P.N. (2000). International marketing (European ed.). Maidenhead, United Kingdom: McGraw-Hill.

Constantin, A. (2001). Banca Comerciala Romania lanseaza internet-banking. Efinance Romania. Retrieved June 2002 from http://www.efinance.ro/rev/012001/sf/0.html

Corner, I., & Hinton, M. (2002). Customer relationship management systems: Implementation risks and relationship dynamics. Qualitative Market Research, 5(4), 239–251.

Datamonitor. (1999). By 2004, in the UK, 3.5 million customers will use Internet services in retail banking. News and Reports, European Business Review, 99(6), 10.

Donoaica, C. (2000). Commercial Bank of Greece (Romania) oferă internet banking. Efinance Romania. Retrieved March 2002 from http://www.efinance.ro/rev/122000/sf/0.html

Dragomirescu, D. (2002). Un nou comportament economic—Profilul utilizatorului de card. Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2003 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=052002&sct=0907art=3

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). (1998). Transition report update. London: Author.

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). (2000). Executive summary. In Transition report. London: Author. Retrieved April 2002 from http://www.ebrd.org/english/region/index.htm

Efinance. (2001a). Băncile vor trebui să reacţioneze la schimbările din IT. Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2002 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=122001&sct=050&art=1

Efinance. (2001b). Mai mult decât o opţiune, o necesitate—Informatizarea băncilor. Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2002 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=122001&sct=080&art=1

Efinance. (2002a). Băncile vor trebui să reacţioneze la schimbările din IT (II). Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2002 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=012002&sct=050&art=1

Efinance. (2002b). Internetul a revoluţionat CRM-ul, deci care e viitorul ATM-urilor? WEB—ATM-ul Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2002 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=032002&sct=050&art=1

Efinance. (2002c). Serviciile 3G au devenit realitate in Romania. Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2003 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=052002&sct=120art=2

Efinance. (2002d). M-banking—viitorul tranzactiilor financiare. Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2003 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=052002&sct=050art=1

Efinance. (2002e). Portal financiar romanesc in versiune WAP. Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2003 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=072002&sct=120art=1

Efinance. (2002f). Cardul la comercianti—o modalitate de plata inca in asteptare? Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2003 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=072002&sct=050art=1

Efinance. (2002g). Technologia, in spijinul strategiilor de retail banking. Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2003 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=072002&sct=050art=2

Efinance. (2002h). Technologia CDMA—solutii avansate de comunicatii. Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2003 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=112002&sct=120art=0

Efinance. (2003a). Anul 2002 pe piata bancara din Romania—recorduri si premiere. Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2003 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=012003&sct=050 art=1

Efinance. (2003b). La cumparaturi prin internet. Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2003 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=042003&sct=050art=5

Efinance. (2003c). Industria echipamentelor de comunicatii ramane pe fir. Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2003 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=042003&sct=080 art=1

Efinance. (2003d). Utilitati platite la un card distanta. Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2003 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=042003&sct=120&art=1

European Survey of Information Society Projects and Actions (ESIS). (2002). Basic facts and indicators. Retrieved June 2002 from http://www.eu-esis.org

Grecescu, T. (2002). Sisteme de comunicatii de date in bancile romanesti. Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2003 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=112002&sct=120&art=1

Gurău, C. (2002a). E-banking in transition economies: The case of Romania. Journal of Financial Services Marketing, 6(4), 362–378.

Gurău, C. (2002b). Online banking in transition economies: The implementation and development of online banking systems in Romania. International Journal of Bank Marketing, 20(6), 285–296.

Hadidi, R. (2003). The status of e-finance in developing countries. The Electronic Journal on Information Systems in Developing Countries, 11(5), 1–5.

Hristu, V. (2001a). Stadiul internet banking în Romania. Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2002 from http://www.efinance.ri/articul.php?rev=052001&sct=050&art=2

Hristu, V. (2001b). Doi lideri de piaţă fac parteneriat. BCR şi Connex lansează mobile banking. Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2002 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=092001&sct=050&art=3

Hristu, V. (2001c). eBank versiunea 4.0—Sistem bancar de plăţi electronice şi informaţii la distanţă. Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2002 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=102001&sct=050&art=1

Hristu, V. (2002). Servicii de internet banking în pielea clientului. Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2002 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=022002&sct=050&art=4

Idowu, P.A., Alu, A.O., & Adagunodo, E.R. (2002). The effect of information technology on the growth of the banking industry in Nigeria, the status of E-finance in developing countries. The Electronic Journal on Information Systems in Developing Countries, 10(2), 1–8.

Isarescu, M. (2001). Dezvoltarea activităţii de e-banking este, fără îndoială, un element important în evoluţia sistemului financiar românesc. Efinance Romania. Retrieved June 2003 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=052001&sct=050&art=1

Kirkby, J. (2001). The future of multi channel banking, the enterprise Java™ banking briefings. Retrieved April 2003 from http://www.eontec.com/events/pdf/fsmultichanneldelivery.pdf

Martz, H. (2003). Success factors for an effective multichannel strategy. Report: retail and banking solutions. Wincor-Nixdorf. Retrieved March 2003 from http://www.wincor-nixdorf.com/static/onlinereport_eng/report01_03/banking.html

McNamara, K.S. (2003). Information and communication technologies, poverty and development: Learning from experience, a background paper for the infoDev annual symposium, Geneva, Switzerland. Retrieved December 2003 from http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/ict/resources.nsf/d045b0dd4551da0885256b29005fce67/1e51786cd26a825585256e750063a3e7/$FILE/Learning%20From%20Experience.pdf

Miller, R.R. (1998). Selling to newly emerging markets. Westport, CT: Quorum Books.

Mocanu, M. (2002). e-Business in Romania—evolutii si tendinte. Efinance Romania. Retrieved June 2002 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=042002&sct=020&art=1

Mocanu, M., & Filip, A. (2001). Una dintre cele mai de succes inovaţii aduse sistemului bancar—direct banking. Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2002 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol/php?rev=122001&sct=020&art=1

Mols, P.N. (1999). The Internet and the banks' strategic distribution channel decisions. International Journal of Bank Marketing, 17(6), 295–300.

National Bank of Romania. (1999). Main macroeconomic indicators: Annual report 1999. Retrieved March 2002 from http://www.bnro.ro

National Bank of Romania. (2004). Bank register, March 3, 2004. Retrieved April 2004 from http://www.bnro.ro

Nationwide launches digital TV banking service. (2001, September). Computer Weekly, 27, 4.

Odobescu, E. (2001). Internet banking—ul este chiar o prioritate? Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2003 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=022001&sct=010&art=1

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (1998). Economic surveys—Romania. Paris: Author.

Pascariu, D. (2001). Băncile vor trebui să reacţioneze la schimbările din IT. HVB România. Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2002 from http:/www.efinance.ro/articol/php?rev=122001&sct=050&art=1

Pastore, M. (2001). Offline banks exhibiting online dominance. CyberAtlas, 29 August. Retrieved May 2003 from http://cyberatlas.inter...ance/print/0%2C52C5961_875131%2C00.html

Purcell, F., & Toland, J. (2003). E-finance for development: Global trends, national experiences and SMEs. The Electronic Journal on Information Systems in Developing Countries, 11(6), 1–4.

Sandu, T. (2001). E-banking, modă sau necesitate? Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2002 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=072001&sct=010&art=1

Simons, L.P.A., Steinfield, C., & Bouwman, H. (2002). Strategic positioning of the Web in a multi-channel market approach. Internet Research, 12(4), 339–347.

Stefan, V. (2000). M-banking and iTV-banking—alternative pentru internet banking? Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2003 from http://www.efinance.ro/rev/122000/pg/3.html

Steinberg, J. (2003). Information technology and development beyond "either/or." The Brookings Review, 21(2), 45–48.

Tyler, K., & Stanley, E. (2001). Corporate banking: The strategic impact of boundary spanner effectiveness. The International Journal of Bank Marketing, 19(6), 246–261.

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). (2003). ICT and e-commerce—An opportunity for developing countries. Issues in Brief, No. 1, 1–2.

Vamvu, G. (2002). De la management financiar la Internet-banking: Intre moda si necesitate. Efinance Romania. Retrieved March 2002 from http://www.efinance.ro/articol.php?rev=012002&sct=050&art=3

Vuici, M. (2002a). Evolutia industriei de software si servicii in Romania, 2001—al doilea an de crestere continua. Efinance Romania. Retrieved May 2003 from http://www.efinance.ro?rev=092002&sct=060&art=2

Vuici, M. (2002b). Evolutia industriei hardware in Romania in 2001. Efinance Romania. Retrieved April 2002 from http://www.efinance.ro?rev=112002&sct=060&art=1

Yulinsky, C. (2000). Multichannel marketing. New York: McKinsey Marketing Practice. Retrieved May 2003 from http://marketing.mckinsey.com/solutions/McK-Multi-Channel.pdf

---

Călin Gurău *is Professor of Marketing at Groupe Sup. De Co., Montpellier, France. He is a Junior Fellow of the World Academy of Art and Science, Minneapolis. He worked as Marketing Manager in two Romanian companies and he has received degrees and distinctions for studies and research from University of Triest, Italy, University of Vienna, Austria, Duke University, University of Angers, France, and Oxford University. His present research interest focuses on the marketing strategy of biotechnology firms and marketing strategies on the Internet.*