Stellar Bank used Smartsheet to accelerate a merger. It gained agility and cost savings too.

The original banks behind Stellar Bank wanted to accelerate their merger so they could hit the ground running on delivering a "white glove" customer experience in a community bank setting. Smartsheet helped them integrate their businesses while automating processes throughout the bank, boosting Stellar's brand and turning workers into collaboration enthusiasts.

> "We give our customers a 'white glove' experience in a community bank that's big enough to meet all of their needs. Smartsheet got us there faster than we could have on our own.

Jason Trevino, Senior VP and Director of Enterprise Technology Solutions at Stellar Bank

stellar ™ **BANK**

Customer:
Stellar Bank

Industry:
Financial services

Organization Size:
Medium (1,000 employees)

Region:
North America

Website:
stellar.bank

Stellar Bank is the largest Texas-based community bank. Formed by the merger of Allegiance Bank and CommunityBank of Texas, Stellar provides a diversified range of commercial banking services primarily to small- to medium-sized businesses and individual customers with locations throughout the Southeast region including Houston, The Woodlands, Sugar Land, Beaumont and Port Arthur as well as Dallas.

Background

Many companies know the pain of having to deal with inconsistent, error-prone data sets spread across manually updated spreadsheets. Of tough-to-find information squirreled away in someone's email box, the impact of slow-as-snails processes that depend on phone calls, emails, and the transfer of paper documents across the hall or around the region.

Now, double that for two companies in the midst of merging their separate, inconsistent IT environments, and you have an idea of the challenge facing Stellar Bank in integrating the business applications, processes, and communications systems of its predecessor companies, Allegiance Bank and CommunityBank of Texas, to form Stellar.

Time was not on their side.

"We wanted to integrate the two systems as soon as possible, so the combined organization would be able to fully serve customers with a consistent customer experience once the merger was finalized," says Jason Trevino, Senior Vice President and Director of Enterprise Technology Solutions at Stellar Bank. *"Typically, there's a delay of months after an agreement is implemented before that IT integration takes place, because that's when the work is allowed to begin. We didn't want that delay here."*

Solution

One of Stellar's predecessor banks used Smartsheet as a project management solution, and Trevino and his colleagues began to use it to organize and manage the merger of Allegiance and CommunityBank of Texas. Trevino established the entire project plan with Smartsheet dashboards and reports for the more than 200 stakeholders

Customer:

Building the collaboration infrastructure quickly expedited the merger and enhanced customer service.

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engaged in the merger. However, Stellar needed more than a project management solution, and Trevino knew that Smartsheet could deliver.

He led the organization in expanding Smartsheet's footprint to automate processes for forms, sheets, and events. Allegiance and CommunityBank of Texas used Smartsheet as a common platform to bridge the gap between their systems. They collaborated via Smartsheet, without altering audit structures or making other changes to either IT system that would have run afoul of regulatory requirements.

To speed the implementation of the merger, Stellar used a range of Smartsheet capabilities, including WorkApps, Bridge, Data Mesh and Data Shuttle.

WorkApps is a no-code platform for building easy-to-navigate apps that can include sheets, forms, reports, and dashboards in a single, intuitive experience. While it can be used to manage simple projects and meetings, it also scales to support needs like Stellar's, to enable collaboration with hundreds of stakeholders around a complex portfolio of projects.

The bank used WorkApps to identify current processes of Allegiance and CommunityBank of Texas and the gaps between them, and to segment out the data that could be viewed and worked with by both banks without exposing data that had to remain confidential for regulatory reasons until the merger was final. It gave the units a way to transfer and retain documents, attachments, notes, meeting minutes and more, all via a common portal. They built dashboards for transparency around work requests, and used WorkApps to communicate and collaborate without having to resort to the disparate email systems.

To integrate the bank's service applications into Smartsheet, Stellar used Smartsheet's Bridge capability, which connects data across systems and automates routine tasks. Stellar first used Bridge to integrate its loan origination process into Smartsheet, which enabled the bank to quickly offer Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans during the pandemic. Stellar used Data Shuttle to automatically move data across platforms and create a centralized source of truth for real-

In a Nutshell:
Stellar didn't expect its use of Smartsheet would lead it to greater agility and cost savings – but it did.

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time decisions. It used Data Mesh to map data between large sheets and reports, to eliminate data duplication, accelerate collaboration, and automate processes for faster work execution.

Stellar continues to use Smartsheet to automate and integrate business processes and applications, such as its credit exception monitoring process.

Active use of Smartsheet increased by

60% over a weekend

"Immediate" collaboration speeds merger, enhances customer experience

Banks in a pending merger typically wait weeks until they can begin to share information and collaborate. By choosing Smartsheet, Stellar eliminated the delay and began collaboration between Allegiance and CommunityBank of Texas immediately.

"Smartsheet enabled us to collaborate across the two banks from the moment the merger documentation was signed," says Trevino. "I've never seen nor heard of that before. We didn't have to wait to build secure email systems or portals. We met the regulatory requirements for data security and privacy, and we did it with Smartsheet."

Enacting the technology side of the merger quickly wasn't just a "nice to have" feature. It directly reinforced Stellar's brand and customer experience. *"We give our customers a 'white glove' experience in a community bank that's big enough to meet all of their needs,"* says Trevino. *"Smartsheet got us there faster than we could have on our own."*

> **Our staff constantly asks us to put data and processes into Smartsheet so they can collaborate.**

PPP success is "a real reputation maker"

The bank's biggest, most surprising success with Smartsheet, according to Trevino, was its implementation of the PPP. "Our ability to quickly roll out and administer a fast, accurate, reliable end-to-end PPP process became a real reputation-maker for us," he says. "We were listed alongside some of the biggest banks in the country for the

numbers of customers served, loans closed, and jobs saved – lists we'd never been on before. If we hadn't used Smartsheet, we couldn't have created the app so quickly and couldn't have helped so many people."

Trevino credits Smartsheet's flexibility and agility. *"With Smartsheet, we tweaked workflows and processes even after the app went live,"* he says. *"We refined our processes successfully without missing a beat."*

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Bank gains faster processes, agility, cost savings

Stellar uses Smartsheet to power and transform a continually growing share of its business processes, enabling the bank to be more agile in responding to unexpected needs, to enhance the customer experience, and to boost productivity.

- Quarterly closings that formerly took 120 days per year are now accomplished in 7 days
- End-to-end processes, such as application approvals, that formerly took at least 10 days are now completed in 1 day
- Proofs of concept that formerly took days to build are now built in 2 hours
- Smartsheet replaces a range of third-party apps the bank formerly used, reducing licensing and maintenance costs

"The most dramatic turn of events is that people are no longer satisfied seeing data in spreadsheets, word-processing docs, and anything that's not natively shareable," says Trevino. *"Our staff constantly asks us to put data and processes into Smartsheet so they can collaborate. Typically, it takes our bank a long time to adopt technology. Once our people saw what Smartsheet could do, its adoption went from 25% to 85% over one weekend."*