

Euro Exim Bank: Ahead of the curve in the trade finance industry

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Interview with Mr. Graham Bright JP, Head of Compliance and Operations

Amidst tightening regulations and increased compliance requirements in the financial sector, Euro Exim Bank maintains undisputed quality services for its clients. Graham Bright, JP, Euro Exim Bank's Head of Compliance and Operations, shares with us how EEB leverages the latest technologies to offer innovative

services in the global trade industry, gives us his view of the cashless society, talks about the significance of women working in EEB, and more.

Thank you so much, Mr Bright, for sharing your time with us. To start with, for a successful business leader like you, what are the best morning routines to jump-start a busy day, and your quick tips for improving productivity for a day's work?

Firstly, making sure the mind and body are prepared for work. Take on fuel for the day – no rushed coffee, eat a balanced breakfast. Secondly, use the first 30 minutes at work to focus, read, plan time effectively and set goals for the day, uninterrupted by calls or emails. And, listening to self-affirmation statements to stimulate the brain and enhance well-being, for better, informed decision-making.

We see that you have a very successful career journey in the financial industry. Would you tell us about the important highlights of your professional career so far?

Fortunately, I have experienced diversity of roles and industries encompassing pharmaceuticals, credit analysis, trading and banking systems, with each business sector adding focus, perspective and knowledge.

Highlights include achieving market penetration in African and Indian Ocean banks, making a real difference for the population and allowing organisations to compete more effectively in international markets with greater confidence and social benefit.

Also, becoming a UK Justice of the Peace, applying the sense of fair play, gravitas, trust, focus, logic, tolerance and process where the impact of decisions is potentially life-changing.

Other highlights? Working with like-minded professionals, speaking at events and being recognised as a thought leader, with every day different.

Euro Exim Bank is an international financial institution headquartered in St Lucia in the West Indies, holding a Class 'A' licence, with a representative office in London. Can you tell us more about the company's strategic role and ethos, in terms of your expertise and the clients that are most likely to benefit from your services?

We have built an impressive team with years of experience in trade, and this is showing benefits for our clients in our ability to rapidly generate instruments drafts, complete complex KYC processes and send instructions.

Corporates and SMEs all need simplified processes and payment corridors, and we are actively expanding our operational footprint to enable corporates to pay global suppliers both rapidly and seamlessly, without the need for complex payments infrastructures.

Euro Exim Bank is also developing trade services to small and mid-tier merchants in traditionally unbanked and challenging jurisdictions, allowing them access to funds and to compete effectively in world markets.

Last year, Euro Exim Bank received the 2018 Best Global Trade Services Bank Award. What are the outstanding features that set you apart from your competitors in the facilitation of trade finance?

Primarily, building long, lasting relationships with the clients. Finding and keeping clients is key to cash flow and ongoing business, supported by

our advanced technology platform, accessibility and participation with payments technology leader, Ripple.

Coupled with our competitive rates and market focus across Asia and Africa, we, along with our agents and partners in strategic locations, serve corporate clients in connecting the players in the trade ecosystem and doing things right.

With today's fast-expanding market and government initiatives such as One Belt One Road (OBOR) driving demand for global trade and infrastructure, how do you see the future of trade finance and the role of Euro Exim Bank in this challenging time?

Trade finance remains a paper-based and complex business, and services offered by banks are equally restrictive, costly and time-consuming for bank customers.

Time-honoured open account trade and supply chain financing continue to grow, and it is only recent innovation in technology that may modernise the trade finance business.

New markets are emerging along the new Silk Road, with major manufacturing centres in Asia importing raw materials from Africa, remanufacturing and repurposing goods to meet the demand from western Europe. China has a growing economic footprint in Africa, where they own airports, ports and infrastructure, with opportunities to build and supply local markets with greater ease than ever before.

The most effective long-term strategy for the industry will be to embrace document digitisation and promote standard interoperability and interconnectivity between all parties to the transactions.

We at the bank have designed and built in scalability, workflow and document digitalisation, not only for initial drafts and remittances, but

also handling real-time settlement through connectivity across a variety of payment channels.

Our development teams have incorporated blockchain capabilities built on Hyperledger, and we are ready to enrich blockchains with trade data where possible. With this advanced approach, we are positioned to go live with any counterparty, although, given current take-up, the industry as a whole will not be actively using this technology for some years yet.

Euro Exim Bank partnered with Ripple for cross-border payments. How do you see this partnership bringing globally competitive services to your clients and customers?

Firstly, it is important to remember that Ripple is not just about cryptocurrency. It is an innovative technology company with a financial network capability (RippleNet), handling real-time, frictionless transmission of payments across a secure, decentralised DLT infrastructure, covering both fiat and non-fiat currency.

We use two unique Ripple services, namely xCurrent, speeding up and securing real-time payments, and xRapid, enabling pay-outs in local currency without the need for exchange into dollars or for traditional correspondent banks, through use of the XRP digital asset, which is a game-changer in reducing capital liquidity requirements.

Whereas, in the past, client access to funds and foreign currency meant competition in world markets was impossibly expensive and restrictive, through service delivery with other RippleNet participants, customers can achieve high-volume, frictionless, low-cost, secure, fast, guaranteed payments and instrument movement across the globe.

Along with the rapid innovations and disruptions happening globally in the banking sector, what other new technologies has Euro Exim Bank adopted to upgrade their offerings and quality of services?

We have always seen the value and impact of technology and, as such, continue to automate and improve our internal Simplex trade finance platform capabilities and, importantly, extending real-time payments functionality with Ripple for an enhanced customer experience. Additionally, we are creating sophisticated mobile apps and, in light of recent cryptocurrency regulation and opportunities, building a crypto exchange.

Today, innovation is the answer to serving the world's three billion unbanked people, with better identity checking, faster remote account opening, access and control through mobile phones in developing markets, allowing more control to the end user. Ultimately, this will lower account maintenance costs and increase overall coverage, with immutable, blockchain-enabled technology making delivery, maintenance, security, trusted services and banking system participation easier.

With the tightening regulations and increased compliance requirements in the financial sector, how do you leverage the latest DLT/blockchain solutions for anti-fraud, AML and KYC among banking and financial industries?

With advanced mobile, smart connectivity, customer expectation is driving demand for more-efficient and ever-cheaper services from financial institutions. However, if new Open Banking is available, IoT is expanding, faster mobile networks are becoming common, why is it still taking weeks or months to open an account or complete a KYC process?

How will banks change legacy systems and deliver the services that connected people demand today, if they are to survive the next wave of growing competition from agile challenger institutions? Is compliance at fault?

The perception of compliance is that it is bureaucratic, burdensome, costly, slow, repetitive and frequently stifles entrepreneurial flair to the detriment of lasting business. And for many, this is no different in practice.

The use case for DLT in payments is strong, and even more so when assessing the issues and possible remedies in tackling fraud with KYC/AML and compliance.

Fortunately, DLT can provide the technology to improve the heavy, data-bound process. Addressing the fundamental issues of internal, intra- and interbank data sharing, DLT will assist submissions and oversight with regulators, and more rapidly identify foreign accounts used for illegal and fraudulent drug- and terrorist- financing transactions.

For KYC, AML and due diligence across an enterprise, proliferation of paper, identification of false positives, multiple submissions of data, identity assurance and manual reconciliation times can be drastically reduced.

Coupled with efficient verification of KYC data, through DLT technology, rapid cost-effective on-boarding, faster loan servicing and efficiency in creation, communication and one-touch handling of trade documents will enable banks to offer systems enabling long-lasting, cost-effective customer experience.

Whilst banks should not underestimate the investment and commitment in terms of budget and resource to implement such DLT/blockchain technologies, failure to plan, act and compete will have a serious impact on long-term institution viability.

About Euro Exim Bank



Euro Exim Bank Limited is an innovative global financial institution with head Office in St. Lucia and representative office in London.

They hold a "Class A" international banking license from Financial Services Regulatory Authority (FSRA) of St. Lucia. This license provides authorisation to conduct business with third parties across industries and geographies worldwide, exercising strong due diligence, full compliance and operational excellence in our processes.

Euro Exim Bank is an associate member of the Caribbean Association of Banks Inc (CAB). Being a member of CAB offers them opportunities and knowledge sharing with industry leaders that are applied to modernise their operations and customer service.

Customers nowadays demand more-secure, fast, mobile and customised financial services with more-transparent fee structures. What do you think are the important trends regarding customer expectations in trade finance, and how does Euro Exim Bank cater to their ever-changing needs?

Clients want simplicity, low risk cost-effective instruments, with guarantees of delivery and a borderless trading environment, regardless of jurisdiction.

As major banks re-risk, merge and close customer accounts, doing business has become more challenging. Smaller agile providers have emerged, able to handle trade instruments for clients previously disintermediated and left uncompetitive. Access to fiat currency and even sufficient local funds to trade on the international stage has prevented companies in emerging countries from being able to export. But trade does not have to stop.

Flexibility is the key in our approach to markets, fee structure and service level agreements and, with our eye on new technology, our systems deliver cost and time benefits internally and for end users.

Whilst our Simplex trade platform embeds DLT/blockchain technology, we continue to look at payment APIs and how they may be fully automated and integrated regarding individual identity, real-time company data access, PEP and sanction lists, and so on.

Leading all our activity is listening to and building relationships with clients. We are constantly analysing emerging market flows in terms of volume and value, the impact of the OBOR initiatives and ease of instrument delivery with advanced payment channels. We remain vigilant and mindful of the continual changes and innovations that dominate the trade space and strive to be recognised as one of the best trade services institutions in the industry.

In addition to having an international team of experts with years of trade finance and SWIFT experience supporting clients from around the globe, Euro Exim Bank also puts great value on diversity, having five females holding senior/executive positions. What would you say are the advantages of having more females on the senior/board levels in the firm?

We hire staff according to experience and suitability for the role and, as with all small companies, need to consider each role carefully. Our employees are from eight countries and different cultures, and we firmly believe that women have a key role in making and assisting better-considered decisions on strategy and tactics.

Women focus on detail, with empathy, intuition and creativity, in a non-patronising way. This has helped fashion our corporate culture, working with common goals in an atmosphere of collective responsibility, mirroring recent employment reports that diversity leads to more

profitability. In our experience and environment, women are truly valued for their contribution.

What is your opinion about the push for a cashless society?

We are some way off.

Imagine the future with no coins or bank notes, no banks or money-service companies, with all financial transactions activated and automatically exchanged via mobile, or through contactless cards, and all in real time. An interesting aspiration but, given current progress, perhaps the UK at least should eliminate cheques before the debate turns to cash.

There is no doubt that traceability, audit, mobile stores of wealth, contactless operations with credit cards, payment apps and even cryptocurrency (if and when global regulatory approval is achieved) can benefit large sectors of the economy and communities.

Mobile payment mechanisms and digital wallets are taking the place of traditional bank accounts, but there are still three billion unbanked people, mainly reliant on cash, especially in rural economies, and the age demographic remains important – often resisting the latest technology trends.

Cash remains quick, accepted universally, and above all anonymous. Psychologically, the elderly still like holding physical cash, and a wallet of £50 notes still speaks more as a tangible symbol of wealth than waving a mobile phone with a banking app balance.

But there are considerable, but not unsurmountable, issues.

Firstly, privacy, trust and confidence. With every transaction checked, recorded and available electronically, anonymity no longer exists. So, where is my data, who can see it, are they entitled to see it and will they

use this data for my benefit or detriment?

Secondly, bad customer experience. Banks have suffered network outages, causing denial of service, delays in wages, savings, pensions and other instrument credits, leaving clients financially disadvantaged for days at a time.

Thirdly, digital crime. The new criminals of our times now hack and launch cyber attacks, not only for cash but information, anonymously targeting bank systems and processes, where the spoils are far greater than stealing individual purses.

Ultimately, cashless societies will emerge, possibly within two generations, something that will take beyond my lifetime to fully realise.

Financial institutions are expected to play an important role in creating a sustainable and socially responsible future. What are Euro Exim Bank's strategies and practices to further this aim?

Our CSR policy is clear and fully in operation. From charity fundraising events, raising thousands of pounds supporting hospitals and the underprivileged, to local sponsorship of cultural events at home, in the Caribbean and in Africa, our organisation is pleased to provide regular support and awareness to those less fortunate than ourselves.

From a business perspective, before embarking on any agreements, we are careful to assess the environmental impact of trade and types of goods (responsibly sourced), working with buyers with whom fair trade prevails, and where sellers/manufacturers pay fairly and treat their workforce with consideration and respect.

On a lighter note, what does success mean to you? Can you also share with us your favourite life mantra?

For me, success is not about social-media likes, working all hours to

become a millionaire or blindly building wealth.

It is an accumulation of smaller experiences: meeting people and creating lasting, honest relationships, sharing love and laughs with family, being a grandparent, respecting and emulating the legacy of my father, looking forward to sharing new experiences, appointment as a magistrate, having a book published, acting on the London stage, on TV and in film, scoring under 85 at golf, and driving the car I always promised myself!

My favourite life mantra? Life is short. Wake each day with a new passion, staying balanced through highs and lows and, not being too proud to ask for help.

Thank you very much Mr. Bright. It was a pleasure speaking with you. We learned a lot.

About the Interviewee



Graham Bright is the Head of Compliance and Operations at Euro Exim Bank. He has more than 35 years of experience in the finance industry in a number of roles, working collaboratively with industry utilities, regulators and central banks, and in consulting and partner/channels management. He holds a BA (Hons) degree in Business Studies, and is also a serving UK Justice of the Peace in the magistrates' court, having sat on criminal and proceeds of crime trials, and he also sits on Crown Court appeals. Graham is a regular contributor to trade journals (GTR, TFR) , with published thought-leadership articles in the financial technology press, and a speaker at international trade industry conferences, such as SIBOS, GTR and Ripple Regional events.