An economic crisis of unprecedented levels – coupled with an ongoing technological revolution – catalysed a transition in the banking industry worldwide. A repositioned approach is particularly evident in Canada, one of the world’s strongest financial markets. Accordingly, comprehensive and more robust regulations, together with greater customer engagement, have propelled forward a system that is more transparent and can meet changing customer needs far more efficiently.

Technology has a pivotal role to play in the latter, through the provision of tools and services that can promptly respond to client requests – whether at any time, anywhere. Consequently, a new era of innovation and technology dictates that the future banking industry will be those banks that challenge their own business models to be dramatically more efficient, and deliver ever-increasing value to the customer. Driven by customer demands and competition, Canada’s banks continue to invest in technology – not only to enhance existing web and mobile platforms, but to also build the capability to allow customers to carry out a variety of banking transactions through their mobile devices.

Productivity is changing as well. As top-line growth slows, a renewed emphasis on transformational efficiency gains is becoming apparent.

Unusual cost-cutting, this preoccupation with productivity focuses on both sides of the equation: revenues and costs – to drive both growth and shareholder value. Improving productivity has become a major focus for Canadian banks and productivity gains are now recognised as a key lever to protect and increase profitability.

What challenges are commercial banks in Canada facing at the moment? At the top of the list is market disruption from non-traditional entrants. Non-traditional and unregulated competitors such as Apple, Google and PayPal – along with smaller and more nimble disruptors – are entering the market at an increasing rate. For us, competing with these firms isn’t about launching apps and adding convenient features, but about building online relationships. “We’re ready to meet you where you are,” said Scott Furey, BMO’s Chief Executive Officer. “You want the convenience of your own device. We are now making important strides in this area, including the dynamic relaunch of the BMO mobile app. The results are clear: more customers are using our digital payments capabilities.

Looking at our customer base, we think the small business sector is alive and well. We are particularly happy to see the growing strength of female entrepreneurs – it’s one of the fastest-growing small business segments – with women now holding ownership stakes in 47 percent of Canadian SMEs. At BMO, we’ve been focused on being their bank of choice – in fact, in May we sponsored a Carleton University study that provided great insight on how female entrepreneurs make risk decisions, and how they expect to be served by financial institutions.

How is it that BMO’s commercial banking services differ to others in Canada? BMO’s commercial bank differentiates itself with a sincere focus on enhancing the customer experience. Our vision is to be the bank that defines great customer experience. Across the country, we’ve realigned the structure of our divisions to ensure we are providing the best customer experience possible. Local autonomy, particularly as it relates to commercial banking, where relationships are extremely important, is key to maintaining our strong position in the Canadian marketplace.

We continue to use our knowledge strategically, to be more proactive and adaptive, while leveraging our technology and expertise to understand our clients and their businesses better. It’s about making their banking experience more personal, intuitive and, ultimately, growing with them.

What is its digital strategy? Excelling in digital technology is about performing well in three key areas, starting with channel leadership. We intend to accelerate our digital channels to lead in digital originations and self-service. We are now making important strides in this area, including the dynamic relaunch of the company’s website, remote deposit capture and the rollout of our integrated retail and tablet application – all while reworking back-end systems and customer-facing channels to ensure we are more nimble.

Secondly, payments innovation is crucial. We are tapping into commercial banking with a strong platform, partnerships and premium products. Going forward, we will focus on continuing to improve our customer experience, improving fraud management and automation, as well as developing other digital products and services.

Thirdly, simple, intuitive processes will improve our productivity, in addition to our service and customer experience. We’ve already started by ‘building the rails’ and process infrastructure for macro changes, while introducing new processes, such as cheaper imaging and enabling like the option to bring your own device.

What are your plans for the future? Across BMO, we are enhancing productivity to driving performance and shareholder value, while enhancing the use of digital technology to transform our business, leveraging our consolidated North American platform and expanding our presence in global markets to deliver growth.

To conclude, I want to reiterate the importance of the technological revolution underway in our industry – a revolution that we are fully embracing. We are accelerating the use of something that’s happening to our bank, we’re initiating our own transformation and driving it forward. Where customer experience and efficiency converge, we’re meeting the customer’s changing needs in ways that will sustain and reinforce our brand in the digital marketplace.