The Analytical Advantage

The future of UK debt collection & recovery in the Digital Age

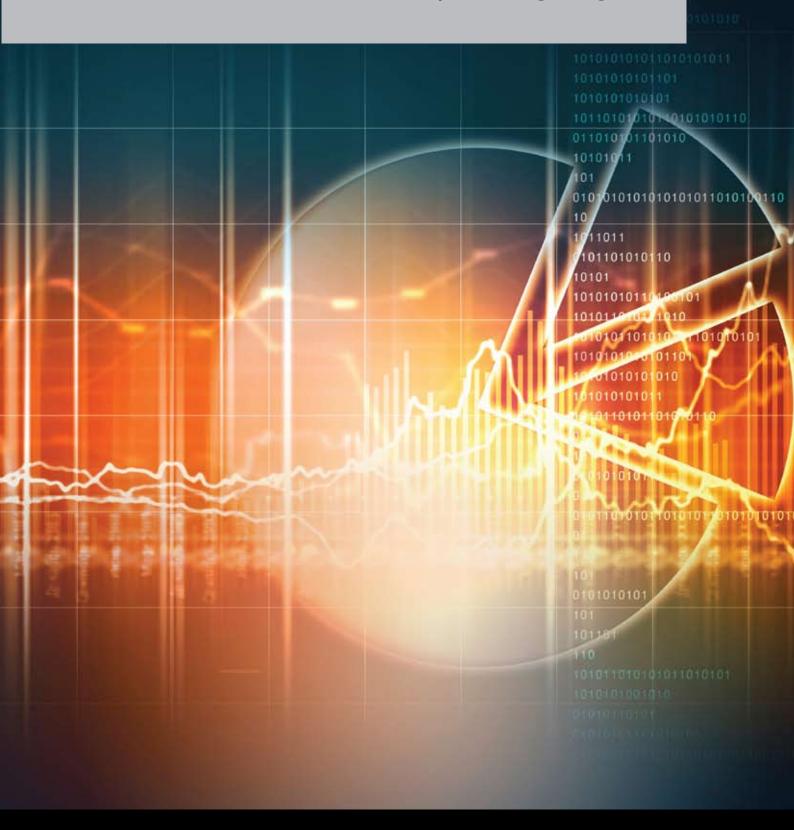






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Foreword

Debt collection and recovery departments maintain a low profile in most organisations. Yet this corporate near anonymity belies the importance of a function that can have a dramatic impact on an organisation's bottom line. An effective C&R strategy can not only stem losses from bad debts but also minimise the cost per pound recovered and even strengthen customer loyalty.

This matters at a time when organisations from all sectors face reduced customer spend, tighter budgets and increased regulatory scrutiny.

Given this backdrop, there is a real commercial imperative to optimise the collection and recovery strategy, whether it is delivered by an in-house team or a specialist debt collection agency.

We wanted to find out how C&R teams are handling these commercial and operational pressures – and to what extent predictive analytics is being used to help C&R professionals make smarter decisions about how to engage and rehabilitate debtors.

We hope you agree that the results make interesting reading and signpost a new direction for the future of debt collection and recovery in the Digital Age.

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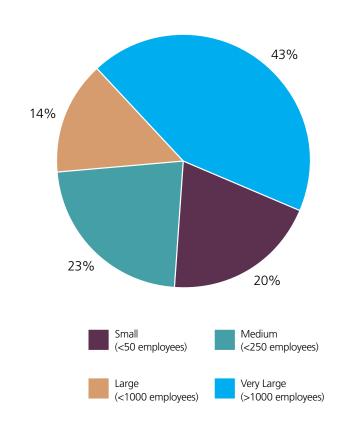
Methodology

In August 2013, FICO and Marketforce surveyed over 180 executives with responsibility for debt collection and recovery. The respondents worked across a wide range of organisations and sectors, including financial services, utility companies, telecoms providers, public sector organisations and debt collection agencies.

In which of the following types of organisation do you work?

21% 6% 25% 5% 43% Utility Financial Telecoms provider services provider Debt collection Public sector agency orgranisation

What size of organisation do you work in?



1. Executive summary and key findings

Debt may be the accelerant that stoked the engine of growth in recent decades but it left a toxic legacy that, five years post crash, has yet to be addressed. The economy may have edged out of recession but squeezed households have failed to deleverage, with some studies suggesting the recovery is being fuelled by another debt binge¹. Indeed, economists worry that our debt habit presents a clear and present danger to a rebound in the nation's economic fortunes. The colossal £1.4 trillion of outstanding personal debt, of which £159 billion is unsecured², represents not only financial misery for millions of households but also a systemic risk in the balance sheets of private and public sector organisations should rising interest rates tip debtors into default.

With customer spending still anaemic and the public sector feeling the pinch of austerity, organisations can ill afford increased rates of delinquency and default. Worryingly, with many households now experiencing delinquency for the first time, collection and recovery teams face a new and unknown category of debtor.

An effective collections and recovery strategy is fundamental to not only limiting losses but also retaining indebted customers at a time when customer acquisition rates remain below average. And to be truly effective that strategy must reflect the transformation in how today's digitally-sawy customers interact with the world: that means service must be personalised, real-time and mobile.

Yet our findings show that too many organisations have a collections and recovery strategy that is stuck in the pre-digital age. This could prove costly as a better customer experience can lead to higher recoveries and, as personal circumstances improve, win repeat business.

Key findings

The weak economic recovery continues to weigh on highly leveraged households:

- Six out of ten respondents report rising levels of non-payment in the last 12 months, rising to eight out of ten in public sector organisations
- A third (37 per cent) report decreased propensity to pay
- Almost two-thirds (65 per cent) have seen an increase in the number of debtors experiencing delinguency for the first time.

The rise in first-time delinquents presents a particular challenge to collection and recovery teams:

 87 per cent agree that a lack of historical data on the behaviour of debtors experiencing delinquency for the first time means it is important to analyse other types of information to predict behaviour

Yet too many C&R teams are failing to exploit external sources of data that could yield insights into a debtor's propensity to pay...

- 81 per cent are not analysing data from payday lenders, an early warning system of financial distress
- Three-quarters (75 per cent) are not using the potentially valuable data held in social network profiles and social media sites, and have no plans to do so in the next 12 months

...and a significant minority don't even analyse internal data sources to predict propensity to pay

 44 per cent are not currently analysing telephone conversation recordings, 28 per cent are not analysing call centre notes and 22 per cent are not analysing correspondence from the debtor



Respondents recognise the power of predictive analytics to fine-tune their collection and recovery strategy and deliver a customised approach to recovery and rehabilitation:

- Almost 60 per cent (59 per cent) are using analytics, or plan to do so in the next 12 months, to segment debtors and tailor their collection approaches
- 44 per cent are using analytics to assess whether debt should be outsourced with another 14 per cent planning to do so in the future

Yet despite this encouraging uptake of analytics, a significant minority have not yet woken up to the potential:

- Four out of ten are not using analytics to assess which types of debt should be outsourced to a collection agency, and have no plans to do so
- 41 per cent don't use analytics to segment debtors and tailor their approach, and have no plans to invest in it

Against a backdrop of rising and more complex levels of delinquency, respondents are worried about the impact of FCA regulation:

- 67 per cent agreed that the introduction of FCA regulation would add significant costs to the debt collection process
- 64 per cent agreed that the increasing burden of regulation will negatively affect collection rates

Yet there is little urgency to invest in online and mobile payment systems despite their potential to improve repayment rates and lower costs at a time when a significant majority agree the new regulatory regime could impede business-as-usual:

- 10 per cent don't enable repayment online and have no plans to do so
- Almost one in three (28 per cent) felt that improvements could be made to their online repayment facility
- More than half (57 per cent) don't have systems that enable mobile payments
- Of these, an encouraging 26 per cent plan to invest in mobile over the next 12 months but that still leaves 31 per cent with no plans to enable mobile payments

2. Easy credit, hard life: non-payment on the rise

Despite evidence of economic recovery, UK households remain highly leveraged as inflation and weak nominal income growth leave little scope to pay down debt. There has been some retrenchment, with the debt-to-income ratio down from the 2008 peak of 170 per cent to 146 per cent at the end of 2012³, but this still suggests many households have little room for manoeuvre should their circumstances change.

Indeed, according to annual research from Aviva, which tracks family finances, some households are already adding to their unsecured debt load in order to fill an income gap, with typical household debt increasing 38 per cent since May 2012 to £12,834 through a combination of loans from friends and family, credit cards and personal loans, with five per cent of families tapping payday lenders and three per cent pawnbrokers to make ends meet⁴.

Research suggests there were 3.6 million "debt loaded" households in 2012, in which more than one quarter of disposable income was spent on debt repayments. With interest rates widely expected to rise in the coming years, the next four years could see as many as 1.2 million households tip into "debt peril", spending more than half of their disposable income on debt repayments, a key indicator of over indebtedness⁵.

The introduction of Universal Credit from October 2013, which has changed the way around 8 million households in the UK receive benefits, requiring many to cope for the first time with budgeting one monthly sum, may increase the financial pressures in some vulnerable cases⁶.

Six out of ten report rising levels of non-payment and nearly four out of ten report decreased propensity to pay

Our survey shows many people are already failing to service their debts, with six out of ten C&R professionals reporting rising levels of non-payment in the last 12 months, rising to eight out of ten in public sector organisations. Case books are also growing more challenging, with more debtors showing an unwillingness to pay (37 per cent report decreased propensity to pay) while almost two-thirds have seen an increase in the number of debtors experiencing delinquency for the first time.

³Office for National Statistics, April 2013

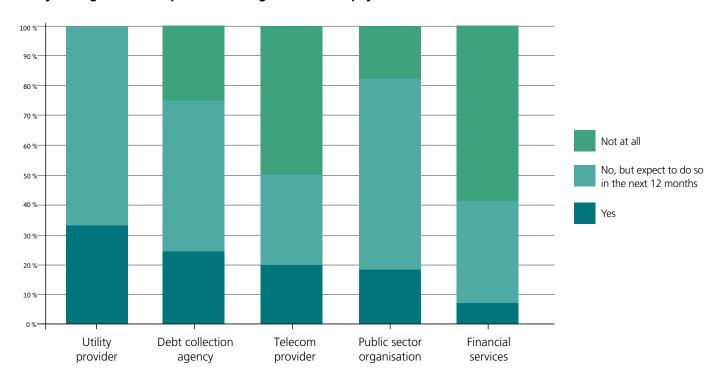
⁴Family Finances Report, Aviva, July 2013

⁵Closer to the edge: prospects for household debt repayments as interest rates rise, Resolution Foundation, July 2013

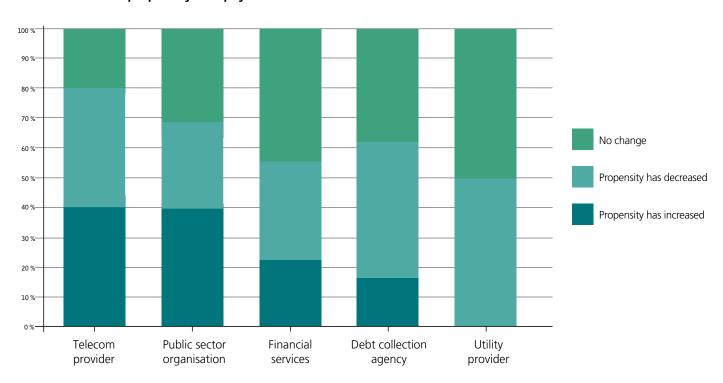
⁶Nine out of ten clients of Citizens Advice Bureaux feel unprepared for the challenges of budgeting and getting online to deal with UC payments, *The Citizens Advice Managing Migration Pilot*, July 2013



Has your organisation experienced rising levels of non-payment over the last 12 months?



How has debtors' propensity to repay their debt altered over the last 12 months?

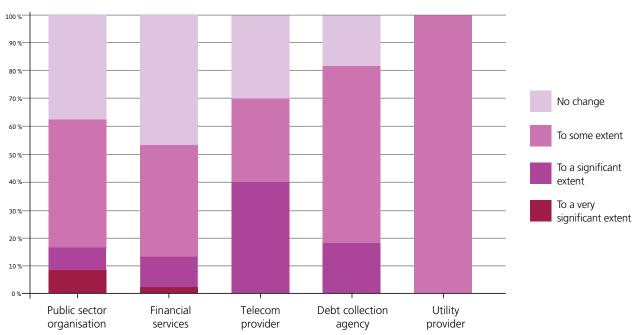


3. A new breed of defaulter: the first-time delinquent

The protracted economic downturn means many previously diligent debt servicers are carrying delinquent balances for the first time. Indeed, our survey found 65 per cent of respondents have seen an increase in the number of debtors experiencing delinquency for the first time.

65 per cent have experienced an increase in first-time debtors

To what extent has your organisation seen an increase in the last year in the number of debtors who are experiencing delinquency for the first time?



Many are previously attractive customers with a financial history of higher than average credit scores and paying bills on time but who now, perhaps finding their previous financial buffers eroded by a period of un- or under-employment, are increasingly reliant on credit cards and payday lenders to last the month.

First-time debtor "data gap" makes new sources of data more important

These first-time delinquents are something of an enigma, with little historical data to inform C&R professionals as to their propensity to pay or their potential responsiveness to the traditional "call and collect" strategy. Indeed, 87 per cent of respondents agree that the "data gap" on the behaviour of debtors experiencing delinquency for the first time means it is important to analyse other types of information to predict behaviour.

Only a quarter use data from social media site or payday lenders

Yet our survey found too many collection and recovery (C&R) teams are failing to exploit potentially valuable external sources of data that could yield insights into a debtor's propensity to pay. Three-quarters (75 per cent) are not using the wealth of data held in social network profiles and social media sites, and have no plans to do so in the next 12 months. More astonishing is the failure to mine data from payday lenders given that resort to high-cost, short-term credit is a key indicator of financial distress: 73 per cent of respondents are not making use of data from payday lenders.

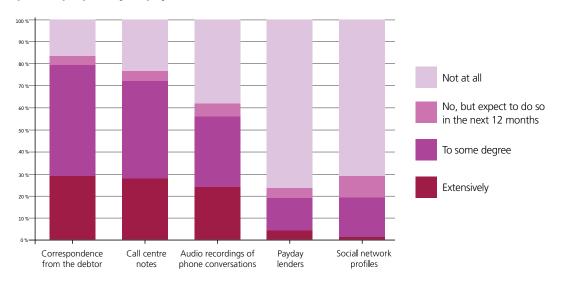


It is not just data from outside sources that is being ignored. Our survey found 44 per cent are not currently analysing telephone conversation recordings, 28 per cent are not analysing call centre notes and 22 per cent are not analysing correspondence from the debtor. In fact, even simple profiles are being ignored, with a surprising number of respondents showing little appetite to understand their debtors and predict their behaviour:

- 44 per cent don't routinely analyse a debtor's number of dependants
- 35 per cent don't look at age
- 61 per cent don't analyse gender
- 37 per cent don't analyse post code

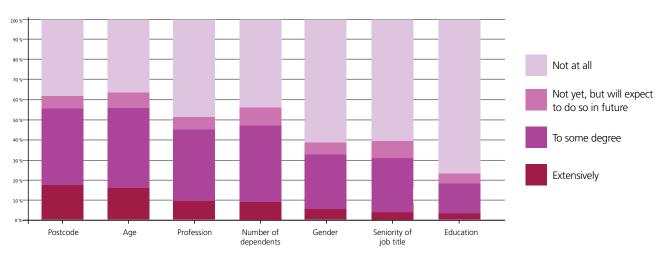
Easily accessible demographic data is routinely ignored

Does your organisation undertake analysis of data from the following sources to better predict propensity to pay?



Even information that might feed into calculations about a debtor's current and potential future earnings is left unanalysed, such as education (ignored by 76 per cent of respondents), profession (46 per cent), and seniority of job title (60 per cent). This suggests a massive untapped opportunity to mine existing, easy-to-access data sources to build a more sophisticated model of a debtor's circumstances and propensity to pay.

Does your organisation undertake analysis of the following types of data to better predict propensity to pay?



4. Understanding the case load: the role of Big Data and predictive analytics

As C&R teams face increased case loads of growing complexity, with more debtors falling into delinquency for the first time, the traditional "call and collect" approach may no longer be appropriate. Indeed, it may well be counter-productive, creating an adversarial relationship with debtors who, when approached in a manner that reflects their previous payment history, is sensitive to their current predicament and matches their contact and payment preferences, would otherwise be willing to engage in the rehabilitation of their account.

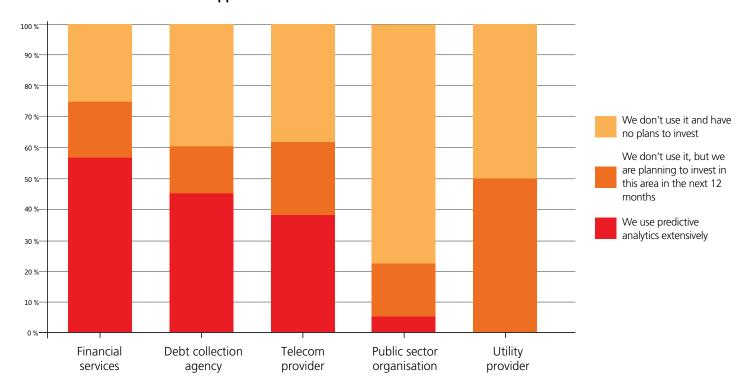
Understanding these debtors, many of whom don't fit typical risk profiles, can help tailor a collection strategy that not only yields higher recovery rates but also optimises the cost per pound recovered and retains the customer's loyalty on their return to financial health.

This granularity of understanding requires the deployment of Big Data and predictive analytics, which are much discussed but remain little understood in the vast majority of organisations. Research suggests that while most corporations anticipate predictive analytics will transform business performance in the coming years, as yet much data remains unused for decision-making and many organisations have only rudimentary analytical tools⁷.

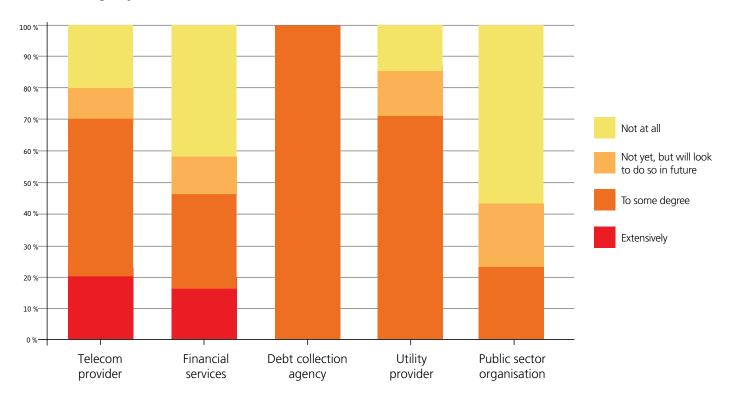
58 percent either use predictive analytics to segment debtors or plan to do so within 12 months

That said, encouragingly our survey found that a majority (58 per cent) of C&R teams appear not only to recognise the potential of predictive analytics to segment debtors but have also made at least some investments, or plan to make them in the next 12 months, to realise that potential. Almost half (47 per cent) are using analytics to fine-tune their outsourcing of debt to an outside collection agency. This still leaves a significant minority, however, making key decisions without the benefit of predictive analytics, with four out of ten not using them to inform their outsourcing strategy or tailor their collection approach.

Which of the following best describes your organisation's use of predictive analytics to segment debtors and tailor its collection approach?



Does your organisation use analytics to assess which types of debt should be outsourced to a collection agency?



Data from social media or payday lenders is being spurned in favour of internally-held unstructured data

Worryingly, even those that have invested in analytics are only using limited data sets to populate their models, inhibiting the potential of this powerful tool. Not only are respondents ignoring demographic data like age and postcode but they are reticent about using more nuanced yet potentially very insightful data sets, such as payday lender contacts or social media postings. While this may reflect a combination of reputational and data protection concerns in a field where the regulatory and legal frameworks are still emerging, it does suggest that predictive analytics outcomes will be blinkered by the limited amount of data being analysed.

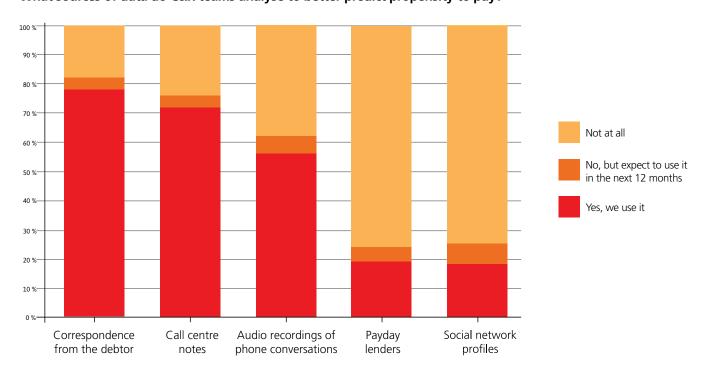
It is evident that C&R teams are more comfortable with internal data sources. There is a 68 per cent chance that C&R teams will use internal sources of unstructured data compared with an 18 per cent chance of using data from social media and a 19 per cent chance of using data from payday lenders. Yet,

even within their data comfort zone, a significant minority don't analyse internal data sources, such as telephone conversation recordings (44 per cent), call centre notes (27 per cent) and correspondence from the debtor (21 per cent).

Our survey also found respondents are unaware of the limitations of their current data analysis and have a misplaced confidence in their organisation's existing systems. Almost two-thirds of respondents (64 per cent) disagreed with the statement "my organisation struggles to fully utilise disparate sources of data". Yet this result is belied by their earlier responses, in which, as we have seen above, significant numbers are not even using call centre notes or correspondence from the debtor to predict propensity to pay.

Given that most organisations struggle with a legacy of data silos⁸, which make it difficult to integrate and analyse data held on different systems, this result suggests respondents have failed to appreciate the vast amounts of data that could feed into their models of debtor behaviour and propensity to pay.

What sources of data do C&R teams analyse to better predict propensity to pay?





The analytics divide: financial services organisations lead the way

Financial services organisations are consistently ahead when it comes to managing delinquent debtors. While 63 per cent of respondents reported rising levels of non-payment in the last year, in financial services organisations just 41 per cent had seen some increase in non-payment, with 58 per cent reporting no change. By contrast, 100 per cent of gas and electricity suppliers and 82 per cent of public sector organisations reported rising levels of non-payment.

And while public sector and telecoms companies were the most pessimistic about the outlook for the next 12 months, with only 35 per cent and 20 per cent respectively expecting collection and recovery success rates to improve, in financial services a confident 70 per cent were looking forward to improved performance.

There is a strong correlation between these results and the use of predictive analytics, suggesting the existence of a gap between the analytics "haves" and the "have nots". Six out of ten respondents in financial services are making extensive use of predictive analytics to segment debtors and tailor their approach, compared to just six per cent of telecoms providers and two per cent in the public sector and nil in utility companies. And this analytics gap is widening, with FS respondents widely forecasting improved success rates in the year ahead.

Financial services organisations also show the most appetite to analyse external data sources to compile a picture of a debtor's propensity to pay, with 28 per cent using data from payday lenders, a key indicator of financial distress. FS respondents lagged, however, in the use of social media, a reticence possibly born of the stringent regulatory framework governing their activities.

This early adoption of predictive analytics has, of course, been driven by the commercial imperative to manage and mitigate the losses arising from the massive loan books compiled in the run up to the 2008 crash. By investing in predictive analytics, C&R teams in financial services organisations have been able to prioritise different stages of their collections work, segregating accounts by risk level so that low-risk accounts can be routed towards low-cost self-cure channels, thereby freeing up more resources to handle the high risk delinquencies that need hands-on attention early in the process.

This segmentation of the debt book, informed by improved modelling of customer profiles and predicted behaviours, means financial services organisations can limit the impact of debt-fail on their portfolios at a time when balance sheets are under unprecedented pressure and scrutiny. Our survey shows this approach pays off – and that those organisations and sectors that have yet to embrace analytics should act now to prevent their C&R rates lagging further behind.

⁸According to the FIMA *Data Management Benchmark Survey 2013*, 50 per cent of respondents cited the continued existence of data silos as their most severe reference data management challenge and 51 per cent of financial institutions claimed data sharing between different parts of the organisation is hard and requires manual effort. Data silos also impede effective analytics: in the Deloitte *Analytics Advantage Survey* of June 2013, 31 per cent of organisations said the data they have is usable, but available only in functional or process silos.

5. A new regulatory regime: the costs of compliance

As C&R teams handle rising and more complex levels of delinquency, they must also ensure compliance with a new regulatory regime. The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), the successor body to the Financial Services Authority, will from April 2014 take over regulation of consumer credit from the Office of Fair Trading. The new regime is expected to be more rigorous, with debt collection and administration falling into the FCA's higher risk lending category.

67 per cent believe new FCA regulation will add significantly to costs; 64 per expect a negative impact on collection rates

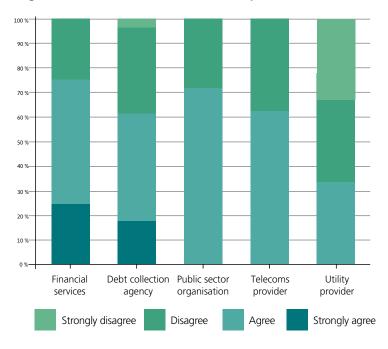
This prospect is seen as a clear threat to operations, with 67 per cent of our respondents worried the new regime will add significant costs and 64 per cent expecting a negative impact on collection rates. Financial services organisations, already used to a high degree of regulatory compliance, are the least worried, with just 51 per cent worried about the impact of new FCA regulation on collection rates. By contrast, debt collection agencies, as yet with little experience of this degree of regulatory scrutiny, are the most concerned, with 75 per cent worried about rising costs and 79 per cent about impaired collection rates.

Given compliance is non-negotiable, debt collection agencies, often on the front line of the most difficult-to-collect debt, should seriously consider investing to upgrade their processes and systems to handle the new regulatory regime without compromising operational performance.

Speech analytics, for example, can identify compliance failings in near real time and enable swift action, via alerts on supervisor dashboards, to ensure call centre conversations are fully compliant. Complete audit data is also produced to show regulators.

When one leading debt management agency in the US applied speech analytics to a sample of calls, it identified over US\$200,000 in potential regulatory violations, suggesting the company was exposed to an unsustainable amount of regulatory risk. Within six months of implementing the technology the company substantially reduced its compliance risk and also delivered considerable business wins, including a 30 per cent increase in cash collected per agent per hour and a 50 per cent increase in agent coaching time. This kind of uplift in compliance and performance could prove hard to ignore as business and regulatory pressures mount.

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? 'The introduction of FCA regulation will add significant costs to the debt collection process.'



6. New channels for the digital debtor

A perfect storm of rising case loads and regulatory compliance may be brewing on the horizon but our survey reveals little urgency to invest in online and mobile payment and social media channels that could improve repayment rates, lower costs and enable C&R teams to engage debtors on their own terms.

Consumers have already embraced online shopping and banking, and the enthusiastic take-up of mobile devices means they increasingly expect to transact their business on the go, 24/7, across multiple channels (more than half of UK adults owns a smartphone while tablet ownership has more than doubled in the past year, from 11 per cent of homes to 24 per cent?). Online and mobile banking are increasingly commonplace activities for British consumers¹⁰ for whom it would be natural to make a missed debt payment via a desktop or mobile device.

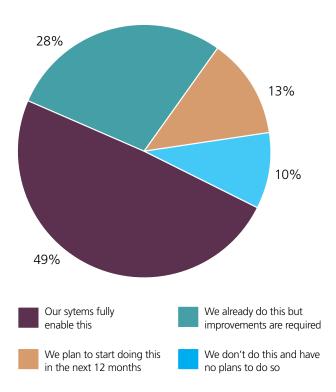
These new technologies can also help tackle more challenging delinquencies. Online and mobile facilities mean that customers with a higher propensity to pay can "self-cure" by quickly remedying forgotten or overdue payments. This means C&R teams can target resources at more difficult to collect debt while customers can avoid a possibly awkward or distressing conversation with a collector, the prospect of which leads so many debtors to avoid all contact from their creditors¹¹.

10 per cent don't provide an online payment facility; 57 per don't enable mobile payments

Yet while online and mobile payments offer a highly effective but low-cost route of improving recovery rates, our survey found little appetite to invest in new digital channels. A hardline ten per cent don't enable repayment online and have no plans to do so and, of those that have introduced an online repayment facility, almost one in three admit improvements could be made. More than half (57 per cent) don't have systems that enable mobile payments and although an encouraging 26 per cent plan to invest in mobile over the next 12 months that still leaves a stubborn 31 per cent with no plans to enable mobile payments.

Twitter

Which of the following best describes the extent to which your organisation enables repayment via online channels?



⁹The Communications Market Report 2013, Ofcom, August 2013

¹⁰Online banking has reached 87 per cent penetration in the UK while some 26 per cent of UK consumers use their smartphones or tablets for some type of banking interaction. *Customer Loyalty in Retail Banking Report*, Bain & Company, December 2012

¹¹Non contacts can take up 80 per cent of a collector's time, according to *Using digital communications to competitive advantage*, Experian, September 2009

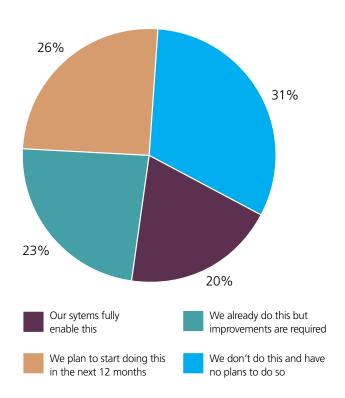
¹²Office of National Statistics, June 2013

¹³Research by the IAB in July found four out of five consumers would be more inclined to buy a brand in the future after being exposed to its social media presence. All the brands included in the IAB study saw an uplift in affinity and loyalty, with the research showing that for every £1 spent on social media a potential value of £3.34 could be generated

¹⁴Household Debt and Credit Report, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, May 2013



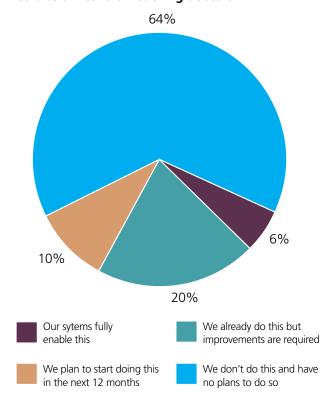
Which of the following best describes the extent to which your organisation enables repayment via mobile channels?



We also found a reticence to embrace social media as a tool to engage debtors. While one in four respondents uses social media to reach debtors, of these 20 per cent admitted improvements are required. Ten per cent plan to start using social media in the next 12 months. The vast majority, however, have yet to be convinced of the benefits of using social media as a means of reaching debtors, with 64 per cent saying they have no plans in this area. Given the popularity of social media, with almost half of all adults in the UK using social media networking sites like Facebook and Twitter¹², C&R teams are missing an important tool to not only contact but also positively engage with debtors¹³.

Yet a multi-channel digital offering will be particularly important as the tech-fluent, always connected Generation Z reach maturity and become consumers of debt. The introduction of university fees in the UK mean these digital natives, growing up in a world

Which of the following best describes the extent to which your organisation uses social media as a means of reaching debtors?



of smartphones, tablets and high-speed wireless Internet, will be indebted from a young age. With student debts and delinquencies reaching crisis proportions in the US, with delinquency rates higher than credit cards¹⁴, lenders in the UK need to make sure they have a C&R strategy that will engage this demographic.

Only three out of ten plan to update their systems in the next twelve months

Our survey suggests many organisations have C&R strategies stuck in the pre-digital age. Despite being aware of the rising pressures on their C&R teams, only three out of ten organisations plan to update their systems in the next 12 months, with telecoms and debt collection agencies most willing to invest, suggesting overall worrying levels of complacency about the challenges ahead.

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Five years after the financial crisis, the comedown from the UK consumer's debt binge of the previous decade is only just beginning. Our survey already finds evidence that the rising cost of living, public sector austerity and tepid economic growth risks tipping many debtors into first-time delinquency. With most economic pundits predicting interest rate rises in the coming years, many more highly-leveraged households could find themselves in "debt peril".

As a result, companies and public sector organisations not only face rising costs in managing increased arrears case loads but also massive losses from wide-scale charge-offs that could choke the weak pulse of recovery. An effective collections and recovery strategy is imperative to minimise these risks.

Yet, as we have seen, too many C&R teams are failing to harness the power of Big Data, predictive analytics and the surge in smartphone uptake to drive through operational efficiencies, implement sophisticated segmenting of the case load and design a tailored contact and collections approach to boost recovery rates.

As case loads grow in volume and complexity, and compliance starts to cannibalise internal resources, organisations must make sure their systems are fit for purpose in the Digital Age.

With C&R teams required to do more with less, those labouring with pre-digital systems will increasingly lag behind on cost-to-recovery ratios as they exhaust internal resources on ill-judged contact strategies. Predictive analytics, however, enable better targeting of resources and more tailored debtor contact strategies while investment in full multi-channel, low-cost payment options can boost recovery rates. The right systems solution should also allow rapid scale-up to handle spikes in demand as well as ensuring collectors have all debtor data and predictive analytics outcomes at their fingertips to design bespoke rehabilitation programmes.

The good news is that investment in a digital-ready system could pay dividends once the economic upturn begins to restore customer finances. Those debtors who feel their delinquency was handled sensitively, with their personal preferences for contact and payment taken into account, may well convert into the loyal and profitable customers of the future.

Fit-for-purpose systems check list

- ✓ Enables sophisticated customer-specific approaches and better decision-making, driven by predictive analytics
- ✓ Provides end-to-end collections system that streamlines processes and increases ROI
- ✓ Allows fine-tuned customer segmentation to ensure a highly effective outsourcing strategy
- ✓ Increases "self-cure" customer treatments, including online and mobile payments

- ✓ Gives the flexibility to upscale/downscale according to case load
- ✓ Accommodates regulatory change
- ✓ Enables seamless multichannel interactions and real-time decision making
- ✓ Enhances the collector experience with a fully integrated system of records, configurable user interfaces and workflows and more "fingertip" data to create customised rehabilitation plans

About FICO

FICO (NYSE: FICO), formerly known as Fair Isaac, is a leading analytics software company, helping businesses in 80+ countries make better decisions that drive higher levels of growth, profitability and customer satisfaction. The company's ground-breaking use of Big Data and mathematical algorithms to predict consumer behaviour has transformed entire industries. FICO provides analytics software and tools used across multiple industries to manage risk, fight fraud, build more profitable customer relationships, optimize operations and meet strict government regulations. Many of our products reach industry-wide adoption - such as the FICO(r) Score, the standard measure of consumer credit risk in the United States. FICO solutions leverage open-source standards and cloud computing to maximize flexibility, speed deployment and reduce costs. The company also helps millions of people manage their personal credit health. FICO: Make every decision count^[tm].

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