

**When Akber Jaffer took over as CEO of data solutions provider Smartstream in 2023, its reputation as a global financial technology giant among more than 2,000 clients – including the majority of Tier 1 institutions – was already firmly cemented.**

Understandable, therefore, that the new boss wouldn't rush to shake things up. Instead, he invested time listening to colleagues, clients, and the market, before starting to chart a bold new strategic course for delivering automation and operational excellence with AI at its core. And he is signalling that intent through a rebrand designed to reflect both Smartstream's evolution into a more agile, AI-driven partner to its existing financial services clients while raising its profile in other data-driven industries and markets.

There's a change to the Smartstream domain, refreshed messaging, a new website and a product naming strategy whereby each solution now carries the 'Smart' prefix.

We asked Jaffer to talk us through the rationale behind the new visual

identity, with its interlocking links representing an industry shift from the transactional provision of software-as-a-service (SaaS) bolt-ons to relationship-based interconnectivity, and his broader vision for Smartstream as he takes it into a new era.

**THE FINTECH MAGAZINE:** Tell us about the journey that's brought you to this rebrand, and what it means for Smartstream's strategic direction.

**AKBER JAFFER:** Smartstream is widely recognised as a mission-critical part of our clients' business operations, unlocking insights from very complex data for them. We wanted to reflect the value we were providing with the right narrative.

The rebrand has been about making sure there's a clear articulation and understanding of our business, what we stand for, the value we deliver, how we should be perceived and the kind of relationship we want to have with our clients and the relationship they want to have with us.



**Akber Jaffer,**  
Chief Executive  
Officer at  
Smartstream

I've been CEO for just under two years now, so this change isn't something that happened straightaway. It's been percolating in the background and resulted from having conversations internally and talking to customers about the core value of what Smartstream provides.

We consulted internally, too, to make sure all views were reflected, which is why it took a little time to complete – and our people feel really good about it. So, the end result you see is a reflection from multiple stakeholders, including our own folks.

It's also important to recognise we come from a place of having done some really great work with great brands – particularly in the capital markets, financial services and investment management space, both buy side and sell side – as well as

on a broader basis with insurance and other corporates.

**TFM:** So, you've obviously taken the time to really understand not just Smartstream but its stakeholders, too. How

## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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Rebranding is tricky for a company as established and respected as **Smartstream**. But with AI broadening the customer base and transforming its relationships with existing clients, CEO **Akber Jaffer** has decided it's time for change

**has that period of reflection impacted on your view of future priorities?**

**AJ:** There are shifts going on in the market, in terms of how insights are garnered from data, and we're seeing a marrying of human intelligence with artificial intelligence (AI). As consumers, we can see the real value of that and, increasingly, business is acknowledging it, too.

That's certainly the focus of the technology evolution as it stands today. There's real opportunity for connected, frictionless enterprises where data is connected, clean and capable of being used to not only improve operations, but also decrease costs, get more efficient, move people to higher-value activities and generate more revenue.

This is potentially empowering for Smartstream as we already have real credibility in this space, and we also see the next technology evolution that's coming as a massive opportunity for our clients and, therefore, for us.

So, we wanted to make sure we made the adjustments in our business strategy and investments to reflect that narrative and then work back from that.

We launched AI Reconciliations, our SaaS product, and major features of that in the middle of last year and it's really resonating in the market. That's not the only thing we do – we have a number of services and product offerings – but, ultimately, what ties it all together is fusing that human intelligence with our AI to maximise value for our customers.

**TFM: How would you summarise the message behind the new logo and how will you reflect that in tangible activities and in which regions?**

**AJ:** One of the messages we're trying to get across is how we're helping our enterprises connect the dots, part of which is taking disparate data, connecting it and providing insight and intelligence from that. We're investing a lot in research and development to support our proposition.

Another shift is anchoring everything in customer success and what I call post-customer success, because we're seeing our relationship with them evolve.

Where, historically, people used to have solution sets, and enterprises would procure them, now enterprises subscribe to them, which is a commercial model as well as a usage model.

Our very high customer retention rates show we're delivering for them, but we want to ensure that continues.

For example, North America is obviously a very large market, but I don't think we were set up perfectly to capture that, so we've really re-energised and reformatted the way we look at North America.

We're investing significantly to maintain the spirit of our business globally by ensuring the solutions customers take from us are continually delivering value for them.

Then, we continue to invest in our existing products – not just in things like Smartstream Air, but others, too, to make sure they're using the latest technologies, which ensures our clients are able to scale with their customers much more easily, with much more agility and ability to adapt and change.

**TFM: New logos can be really powerful in driving growth for companies when they're correctly aligned to business strategy, Amazon's 'smiley arrow' launch in 2000 being a great example. How does your new logo change or reflect your ambitions?**

**AJ:** It reflects that enormous opportunity I'm talking about. Historically, we've really focussed on capital markets and financial services, but we also see wider opportunity in other segments facing the same issues, and our solutions can be applied to those as well.

**■ The rebrand has been about making sure there's a clear articulation of what we stand for, the value we deliver, and the kind of relationship we want to have with our clients ■**

Our history means we are very referenceable with key brands in the market and the changes we're making to support the rebrand in terms of geography, technology, product and how we talk about ourselves – form the pillars which will ensure we can really capitalise on that opportunity going forward.

**TFM: Two years into the job, are there things you've discovered from the various consultations you've done that have blown your expectations out of the water?**

**AJ:** Before I joined as CEO, obviously I checked around to see how the business was perceived and, I have to say, Smartstream had a really good reputation in the market – customers would say things like 'these guys really

understand their business and are able to deliver value for us'.

What constantly amazes me is the deep subject matter expertise we have in the business, because, ultimately, good customer service, customer success and technology improvements come down to having people in the organisation that really understand – that's what shifts the needle. Also, my management team are deep thinkers and doers, in terms of how we can constantly enhance customer value.

We're not a new kid on the block, we've been serving customers for a long time, which is a testament to our investments in continuous improvement. Years ago, we established a data science, machine learning and innovation lab in Austria, and we're still making such investments today, which continue to pay dividends.

**TFM: AI is the buzz phrase of the moment, with a perception that you sprinkle a bit of AI on something and it turns to gold. Looking at some of your tangible improvements in product delivery, experience and execution, how is this embracing of AI, by individuals and businesses, impacting how you bring products to market?**

**AJ:** There are two aspects to this, and the first relates to how we operate the business. There are technologies and applications we use that provide what I call productivity boosts for our people, so that they can get more things done, to a higher quality, at a faster pace.

But maintaining our customer focus also ensures we focus this on providing a better service with much more specific responses, and we've seen good use cases for that.

For customers, we've been producing new capabilities within our technology and services that leverage machine learning and AI, and we continue to see customer take-up for these. Now, they do have challenges in terms of ensuring they have all the components to get maximum productivity from these tools, like making sure their data sets are centralised and clean, but they're gradually overcoming those and we really are seeing some good use cases and feedback.

We'll see what the next phase of evolution brings for these technologies, but we believe it's combining our exceptional human expertise with artificial intelligence in our tools, products and services that will ensure we continue to deliver for this and future generations of clients. 