2025

Best-In-Class Modern Card Issuer:

How Card Portfolio and Data Separate the Leaders from the Rest





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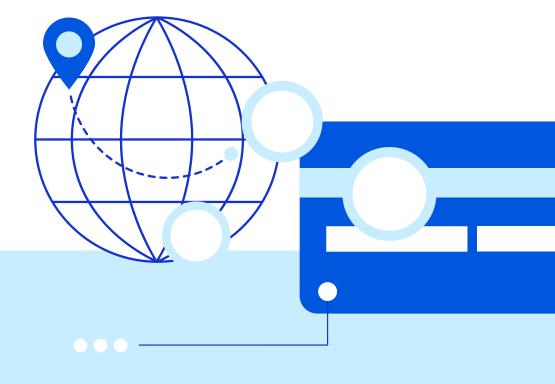
The Best-In-Class Modern Card Issuer:

How Card Portfolio and Data Separate the Leaders from the Rest



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The Best-In-Class Modern Card Issuer: How Card Portfolio and Data Separate the Leaders from the Rest was produced in collaboration with Visa DPS, and PYMNTS Intelligence is grateful for the company's support and insight. • PYMNTS Intelligence retains full editorial control over the following findings, methodology and data analysis.

What's at stake

As the competitive landscape of card issuing becomes more complex, issuers face rising pressure to maximize customer lifetime value (CLTV), streamline operations and deliver flexible, responsive service models. Recent economic uncertainty—seen in inflationary pressures, trade disruptions sparked by the Trump administration's tariffs and shifts in consumer spending—has underscored the importance of adaptable, data-informed financial strategies. To grow CLTV, issuers are increasingly pressed to increase how often today's digital-first consumers use their cards and to meet their expectations of accessible and personalized offerings. What sets leading issuers apart is a strong commitment to card portfolio diversification, analytics-first innovation and performance-oriented partnerships with card processors.

62%

of issuers offer two types of cards (credit, debit and/or prepaid).

The top-performing financial institutions don't just offer credit—they provide comprehensive solutions spanning debit, credit and prepaid products. In fact, nearly two-thirds of issuers offer two types of these cards, while fewer than one in 10 offer all three. Yet data shows that this minority of full-spectrum issuers is 3.5 times more likely to achieve high CLTV, creating long-term profitability and enhanced customer engagement. Moreover, nearly eight in 10 issuers in this group reported positive business performance in the past year.

Best-In-Class Modern Card Issuer



Average CLTV



Less than \$1,000



\$1,000 to \$2,500

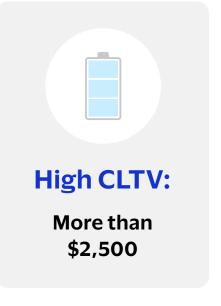
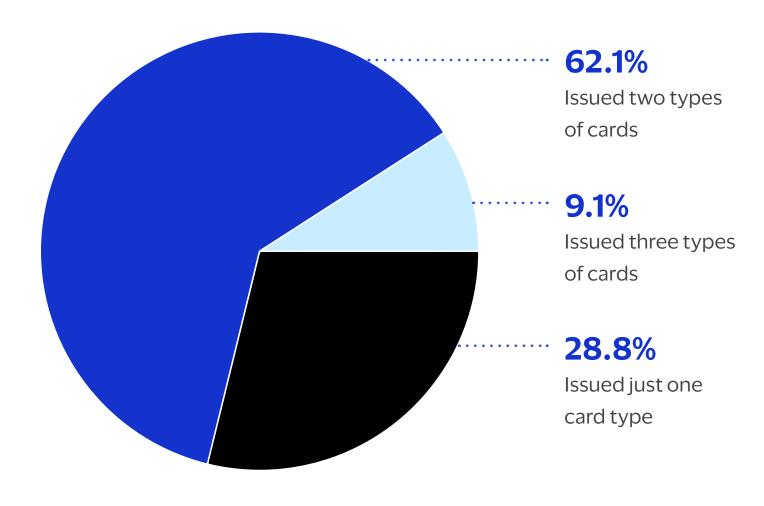


Figure 1:
The types of cards that issuers offer
Credit, debit and prepaid card offerings within the last 12 months



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence

The Best-In-Class Modern Card Issuer: How Card Portfolio and Data Separate the Leaders from the Rest, May 2025

N = 451: Complete responses from card issuers, fielded Dec. 13, 2024, to Jan. 17, 2025



Average CLTV is an indicator of best-in-class issuers

We use average CLTV as an indicator of best-in class issuing because it offers a comprehensive metric of the total revenue potential of a cardholder over their entire relationship with the issuer. We separated issuers into three groups—high, medium and low—based on the CLTV they reported to us.

What CLTV is: The total revenue a cardholder is expected to generate for an issuer over the entire duration of their relationship, including income from interest, fees and transactions, minus any associated costs such as rewards, marketing and servicing.

Why it matters: For card issuers, CLTV is a critical metric that reflects the profitability of a cardholder, allowing bank and non-bank issuers to segment their customer base and prioritize strategies to enhance retention, reduce churn and attract high-value customers.

What drives high CLTV: Higher CLTV is driven by a combination of strong customer engagement, profitable fee structures and effective retention strategies. Cardholders who spend frequently or on large-ticket purchases contribute to higher interchange fees, while annual fees provide consistent revenue. Customers who carry balances generate substantial interest income, further boosting issuer profitability.

What Drives Higher Customer Lifetime Value?

Better Data =

more personalized cardholder options



Better Options =

more card products and experiences to expand customer reach



Better Risk Management =

automated workflows, underwriting with real-time data



Better Go-To-Market =

offers, promotions and contextual experiences





What Drives Higher Customer Lifetime Value?

Best-in-class issuers distinguish themselves through an integrated model that connects more robust data, a wider array of credit products, smarter risk management and faster go-to-market execution. This holistic strategy is foundational to their performance, leading to 2.5 times higher customer lifetime value and two times the business performance compared to peers.

The journey starts with better data, which powers personalized cardholder experiences. These issuers use real-time insights to tailor offerings, adjust credit limits and automate fraud detection, turning raw information into decision-ready intelligence. This in turn supports better cardholder options, including a diverse set of products and experiences designed to expand reach and deepen engagement.

The risk management systems of best-in-class issuers are equally well developed, integrating real-time underwriting with automated workflows to streamline approvals while minimizing exposure to risk. This blending creates a frictionless onboarding experience for the cardholder, paired with robust backend control for the issuer.

Go-to-market agility rounds out the profile. Top issuers can rapidly deploy contextual promotions, location-based offers and tailored incentives across digital channels. This ability to activate products and campaigns quickly is not just a marketing win—it's a competitive necessity.

The underlying insight is simple: Performance isn't driven by any one capability, but by the synergies between them. Institutions that unify data, product, risk and speed can meet cardholders where they are—then move with them as their needs evolve.

In a world where customer expectations are rising and switching costs are falling, this model is not optional. It's the playbook for long-term issuer relevance.

These are just some of the findings detailed in The Best-In-Class Modern Card Issuer: How Card Portfolio and Data-Driven Strategy Separate the Leaders from the Rest, a PYMNTS Intelligence and Visa DPS collaboration. This report examines how offering the full spectrum of cards—credit, debit and prepaid—drives high customer lifetime value (CLTV). It draws on insights from a survey of 451 executives who fill heads of payments roles at U.S.-based bank and nonbank card issuers. Based on data collected from Dec. 13, 2024, to Jan. 17, 2025, the report provides a roadmap for card issuers looking to maximize their revenue, enhance customer relationships and achieve a competitive edge.

This is what we learned.

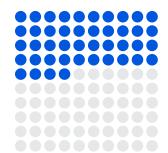


Key findings



The more, the merrier

Issuers offering all three types of cards (debit, credit and prepaid) are 3.5 times more likely to be in the high CLTV group than those issuing just one type of card.



44%

Share of financial institutions issuing all three types of cards that report high CLTV, compared to 12% of those issuing just one card



Winning combo

Around six in 10 issuers have two types of cards in their portfolio, with the credit-debit combination linked to better business performance.

37%

Share of issuers offering both debit and credit cards that had a great year in terms of business performance.



Data and speed

Full-spectrum card issuers offering all three types of cards (debit, credit and prepaid) prioritize fast transaction processing and access to purchasing analytics.

68%

Share of full-spectrum card issuers reporting that they choose issuer processors that provide fast processing



The Full Story

Issuers that diversify their product offerings significantly outperform those that do not.



The more, the merrier:

Issuers offering all three types of cards (debit, credit and prepaid) are 3.5 times more likely to be in the high CLTV group than those issuing one type of card.

Issuers diverge in the number of card options (debit, credit and prepaid) they offer, and this difference is a key driver of high CLTV. Notably, issuers offering the full spectrum of these three card types are more than three times as likely to report high CLTV compared to those with low CLTV. Moreover, single-product issuers face stark limitations. A striking 84% of those offering only debit cards fall into the low CLTV group, revealing a clear ceiling on profitability for those that don't diversity their credit products.



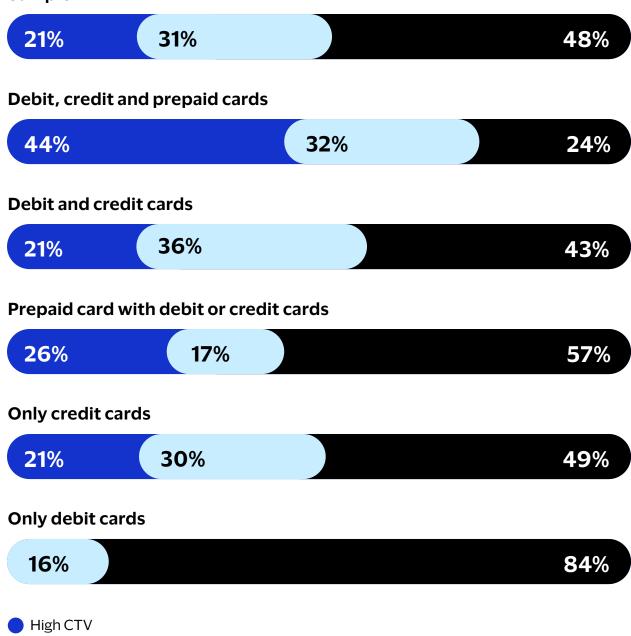
Best-In-Class Modern Card Issuer

Figure 2:

How many card options issuers offer

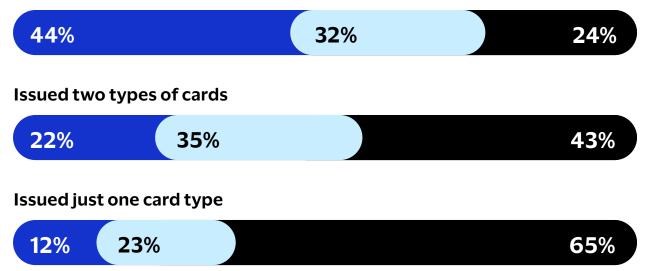
Card issuers reporting of number of card option they offer, by CLTV persona

Sample



These findings suggest that customers with access to a full suite of card types are more likely to use those products in complementary ways, increasing transaction volume and fee opportunities while deepening the customer-issuer relationship. A broader consumer credit product portfolio not only attracts a wider range of users but also boosts the opportunity to build higher-value relationships. This becomes especially critical when considering that interest income, annual fees and interchange fees from high-spending users are the core drivers of card profitability.

Issued three types of cards



Source: PYMNTS Intelligence

The Best-In-Class Modern Card Issuer: How Card Portfolio and Data Separate the Leaders from the Rest, May 2025 N = 451: Complete responses from card issuers, fielded Dec. 13, 2024, to Jan. 17, 2025



Medium CTV

Low CTV



Winning combination:

Nearly one in four issuers offering all three card types reported great business performance last year.

78%

of issuers offering debit, credit and prepaid cards reported a good or great year in terms of business performance.

Even as high CLTV offers one gauge of profitability, the broader indicator of business performance tells a similar story: Card portfolio diversity drives stronger financial outcomes. Issuers offering all three card types reported significantly better business performance than their less diversified peers. According to PYMNTS Intelligence data, 78% of issuers offering all three card types experienced either a good or great year in terms of business performance. Among them, a notable share (24%) indicated they had a great year, signaling not just stability but operational excellence. By contrast, only 13% of single-product issuers categorized their year as great.

Whether or not a year was financially strong becomes even more pronounced when examining issuers that offer just two types of cards. Of those with both debit and credit cards, 37% reported a great year, demonstrating that even partial diversification is strongly associated with success. By contrast, issuers offering only prepaid cards in addition to a debit or credit option had weaker financial outcomes, with only about 22% claiming a great year. Looking further at the bottom tier, 30% of single-product issuers expected to either break even or incur losses, highlighting the risks of an undiversified strategy. For issuers that don't offer all three types of cards, the winning combination is credit and debit cards (not prepaid and debit cards, or prepaid and credit cards).



In other words, maximum diversity in card offerings, and the right mix when offerings are limited, is not just a CLTV play—it's a business resilience strategy. Issuers that can meet consumers where they are, with the right product at the right time, outperform those with limited or siloed solutions.

Figure 3:
How cards issued impacts performance
Self-reported business performance, by different types of cards issued

| | Breaking even or will lose money | Expected loss to invest | Good year | Great year | |
|---|--|-------------------------------|--------------|---------------|--|
| Debit, credit and prepaid cards | 0% | 22.0% | 53.7% | 24.4% | |
| Debit and credit cards | 9.1% | 17.0% | 37.1% | 36.7% | |
| Prepaid card with debit or credit cards | 0% | 30.4% | 47.8% | 21.7% | |
| Only credit cards | 5.5% | 20.5% | 58.9% | 15.1% | |
| Only debit cards | 10% | 26.0% | 54.0% | 10% | |

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence

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Despite the link between higher CLTV and a greater number of card types, most issuers (62%) have only two types of cards, not three, in their portfolio. Only 9.1% of all issuers offer debit, credit and prepaid cards. This discrepancy suggests that financial institutions are missing an opportunity to grow their CLTV by not diversifying and providing a full-spectrum offering.

Data also shows that the majority of digital-only banks (59%) and financial technology (FinTech) issuers (68%) offer only a single type of card. This concentration may suggest that such issuers are in the early stages of their product lifecycle and are prioritizing simplicity, streamlined operations and rapid market entry over broader portfolio development. For FinTechs in particular, the high rate of single-product portfolios likely aligns with agile go-to-market strategies and tight resource allocation. Similarly, digital-only banks may be focusing on refining a core product before expanding into additional offerings.

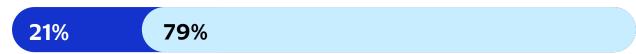
But for single-product issuers, this narrow approach could present longer-term limitations. As consumer expectations continue to evolve and competition intensifies across the payments landscape, issuers with a single-card strategy may find themselves at a disadvantage. Portfolio diversification is not only an indicator of a best-in-class issuer, but also supports greater customer retention, lifecycle engagement and increased revenue.

Figure 4A:

How many card types issuers offer

Number of card types that financial institutions issued to customers within the last 12 months, by type of financial institution

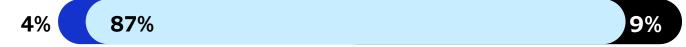
Large national bank



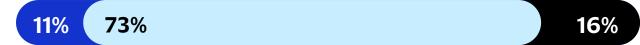
Digital-only bank



Credit union



Local or regional bank



FinTech



- Issued three types of cards
- Issued two types of cards
- Issued just one card type

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence

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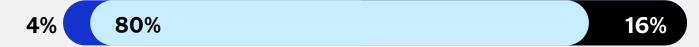


Figure 4B:

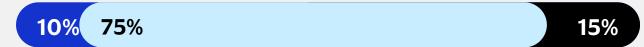
How many card types issuers offer

Number of card types that financial institutions issued to customers within the last 12 months, by asset size (banks)

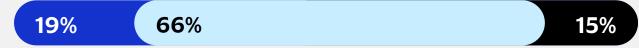
Less than \$1 billion



Between \$1 billion and \$50 billion



More than \$50 billion



- Issued three types of cards
- Issued two types of cards
- Issued just one card type

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence

The Best-In-Class Modern Card Issuer: How Card Portfolio and Data Separate the Leaders from the Rest, May 2025

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Figure 4C:

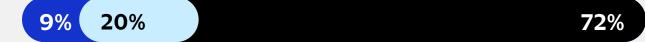
How many card types issuers offer

Number of card types that financial institutions issued to customers within the last 12 months, by annual revenue (FinTechs)

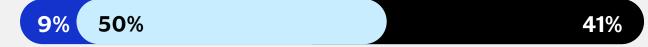
Less than \$50 million



Between \$50 million and \$500 million



More than \$500 million



- Issued three types of cards
- Issued two types of cards
- Issued just one card type

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence

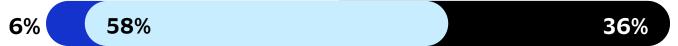
The Best-In-Class Modern Card Issuer: How Card Portfolio and Data Separate the Leaders from the Rest, May 2025 N = 451: Complete responses from card issuers, fielded Dec. 13, 2024, to Jan. 17, 2025

Figure 4D:

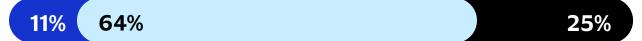
How many card types issuers offer

Number of card types that financial institutions issued to customers within the last 12 months, by time in business

Up to five years



Six to 10 years



More than 10 years



- Issued three types of cards
- Issued two types of cards
- Issued just one card type

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence

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Data and Speed:

Full-spectrum card issuers those offering all three types of cards—prioritize fast processing and access to analytics.

Technology serves as the engine behind every successful issuer's strategy, and analytics is at the center. In fact, this is the most important capability that all issuers want to add or improve in the next year, whether they are full-spectrum or single-product. Data shows that 12% and 16%, respectively, of full-spectrum and singlecard issuers plan to add or improve their data analytics capabilities. No matter how many cards issuers offer, advanced analytics enable more precise risk assessments, fraud detection and personalized product offerings, giving issuers a competitive edge before investing in portfolio expansion or new product launches.

While all issuers cite advanced data analytics as the most important capability to develop in the coming year, how they plan to translate that need into action varies sharply between full-spectrum and single-product issuers.

For the former, the priorities are clear. Nearly seven in 10 (68%) cite fast processing as a primary requirement for an issuer processor to possess, a testament to the importance of real-time decisioning and smooth user experiences. Meanwhile, 61% prioritize access to consumer analytics, recognizing that deep behavioral insights drive better product design, risk management and marketing efficiency. These issuers are also more likely to value advanced reporting, uptime reliability and security infrastructure—placing them several steps ahead in terms of operational sophistication.

61%

of full-spectrum card issuers report that they choose issuer processors that provide access to consumer analytics.



Figure 5:

Where issuers want to innovate

Issuers citing select capabilities offered by their card issuing platform as the most important to add or improve over the next 12 months, by card types issued

| | Issued three types of cards | Issued two types of cards | Issued just one card type | | Issued three types of cards | Issued two types of cards | Issued just one card type | |
|---|--------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| Operational features | | | | User experience | | | | |
| Advanced data analytics | 12.2% | 7.9% | 16.2% | Real-time notifications | 9.8% | 8.6% | 2.3% | |
| Flex credential | 7.3% | 4.3% | 3.1% | Multicurrency support | 9.8% | 1.4% | 2.3% | |
| Issuer card management | 7.3% | 5.4% | 4.6% | Loyalty and rewards programs | 9.8% | 7.5% | 10% | |
| Security | | | | Contactless payments | 7.3% | 3.6% | 2.3% | |
| Fraud detection and prevention | 9.8% | 12.5% | 15.4% | Wallet integration | 2.4% | 3.6% | 6.2% | |
| Europay, Mastercard and Visa (EMV) chip | 4.9% | 5.4% | 2.3% | Card customization | 2.4% | 13.6% | 6.2% | |
| Dynamic card verification value (CVV) | 4.9% | 5% | 3.1% | Virtual cards | 2.4% | 0.7% | 0% | |
| Spend controls | 2.4% | 1.8% | 3.8% | Credit card installments | 0% | 3.6% | 5.4% | |
| Tokenization | 2.4% | 6.1% | 5.4% | Physical cards | 0% | 0.4% | 0.8% | |
| Card freezing/unfreezing | 0% | 4.6% | 5.4% | | | | | |

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence

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By contrast, at 63%, single-product issuers are the most likely to place the greatest importance on user-friendly interfaces. While usability is undoubtedly important, this preference may point to a less mature technology strategy focused more on execution than on expansion. Such issuers tend to value simplicity over scalability, a posture that could limit their ability to grow into multiproduct portfolios. This divergence is critical, especially as the issuing ecosystem becomes more digitally complex. The best-inclass issuers are using technology not only to improve customer experience but also to shape it proactively—anticipating needs, adjusting offers and personalizing at scale.

63%

of single-product issuers are the most likely to place the greatest importance on user-friendly interfaces.

The choice of issuer processor plays a crucial role in this transformation. More than half of full-spectrum issuers seek partners capable of supporting both debit and credit products on a unified infrastructure, enabling them to move quickly, adapt to regulatory shifts and scale into new customer segments. Yet issuers with narrow product lines may lack the incentive—or capacity—to pursue more advanced technology strategies. They still view their processor as a tool to execute, not as a partner in strategic evolution.



Attributes issuers look for in an issuer processorIssuers citing the top attributes they look for in an issuer processor, by number of card types issued

Source: PYMNTS Intelligence The Best-In-Class Modern Card Issuer: How Card Portfolio and Data Separate the Leaders from the Rest, May 2025 N = 451: Complete responses from card issuers, fielded Dec. 13, 2024, to Jan. 17, 2025

| | Issued three types of cards | Issued two types of cards | Issued just one card type | | Issued three types of cards | Issued two types of cards | Issued just one card type | |
|--|--------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| Fast processing | 68.3% | 74.3% | 60.0% | Commitment to innovation and technology improvement | 51.2% | 26.8% | 32.3% | |
| Consumer analytics | 61.0% | 49.6% | 43.1% | Capability for combined credit and debit processing | 51.2% | 25% | 20.8% | |
| Reliable platform with no downtime | 58.5% | 41.1% | 35.4% | Smooth integration with value-added services | 48.8% | 35.4% | 41.5% | |
| Enhanced security and fraud prevention measures | 56.1% | 50.0% | 46.2% | Compliance with complex and shifting regulatory standards | 46.3% | 39.6% | 26.2% | |
| High scalability | 56.1% | 50.7% | 36.9% | Strong customer service and technical support | 43.9% | 45.7% | 39.2% | |
| User-friendly interface and seamless user experience | 53.7% | 51.8% | 63.1% | Performance improvements | 43.9% | 33.9% | 49.2% | |
| Competitive pricing and transparent fee structure | 53.7% | 37.1% | 37.7% | Trusted partner | 43.9% | 27.1% | 27.7% | |
| Innovative features | 51.2% | 57.5% | 54.6% | Advanced data analytics and reporting capabilities | 36.6% | 39.3% | 27.7% | |
| Customizable features | 51.2% | 46.8% | 35.4% | Open or modern API infrastructure | 31.7% | 23.2% | 22.3% | |
| Speed to market | 51.2% | 33.9% | 33.8% | Fewer third-party dependencies | 22% | 29.3% | 31.5% | |



What the Best-in-Class Issuers Prioritize (and Worry About)

PYMNTS Intelligence research reveals a contrast between what best-in-class issuers focus on—and what typically holds others back. The takeaway is striking: Top performers invest dollars and other resources in innovation and customer experience, while lower-performing institutions are bogged down by limitations and legacy barriers.

Best-in-class issuers prioritize advanced analytics, user-centric design and unified experiences. These are strategic imperatives. Advanced analytics enable real-time decision-making across credit risk, fraud detection and personalized offers. User-centric design ensures that experiences are intuitive, accessible and engaging across digital and physical channels. Meanwhile, unified experiences that integrate everything from onboarding to servicing create seamless journeys that foster loyalty.

Prioritize



Advanced Analytics



User-Centric Design



New Unified Experiences



Enhanced Fraud Detection

Worry about



Regulatory/ Compliance Issues



Limited Options



Integration Hassles



Downtime



This holistic mindset translates into action. High-performing issuers are 62% more likely to offer account upgrades for cardholders, 72% more likely to deliver pre-approved offers and 79% more likely to support co-branded card programs. These are the hallmarks of institutions that anticipate user needs and act decisively.

By contrast, institutions that lag are preoccupied with regulatory burdens, limited product options, integration snags and system downtime. These worries are not unfounded, but they often reflect a reactive mindset that stifles innovation. Instead of focusing on what's possible, these issuers concentrate on what's preventing their progress.

Importantly, these findings illustrate how what an issuer chooses to prioritize has cascading effects. Issuers focused on data, design and future-ready experiences create a virtuous cycle: Better products attract better customers, who in turn generate more actionable data and greater lifetime value.

Top performers
invest dollars and other
resources in innovation
and customer experience,
while lower-performing
institutions are consumed by
limitations and legacy barriers.

Ultimately, the best-in-class don't just have better technology—they have sharper strategic discipline. They focus on opportunities, not obstacles. They reduce internal friction so that they can remove it for their customers. And in doing so, they create not just better products, but better businesses.



Actionable insights

01

Expand card offerings to unlock CLTV growth:

For issuers still focused on a single product, the business case for diversification is stronger than ever. This requires evaluating gaps in one's current portfolio and assessing customer segments that could benefit from prepaid or credit solutions. Developing a roadmap for card expansion—supported by risk assessment, pricing models and a go-to-market strategy—can elevate both CLTV and brand loyalty.

02

Prioritize analytics as a core capability:

Every issuer acknowledges the value of analytics, but leading institutions build their operations around it. From fraud detection to credit scoring to personalized offers, analytics are now the foundation for scalable, profitable issuing. Issuers should prioritize platforms that offer robust data pipelines, real-time reporting and integrated analytics dashboards.

03

Choose processor partners based on strategic fit:

Ease of use is important—but it's no substitute for innovation, performance and scalability. Issuers aiming to join the high CLTV group must select processors that support rapid deployment, offer seamless integration and enable real-time customization. This matters because long-term value hinges not just on usability, but on an issuer processor's ability to scale, adapt in real time and power innovation—key drivers for issuers seeking to maximize customer lifetime value.



Methodology

The Best-In-Class Modern Card Issuer: How Card Portfolio and Data Separate the Leaders from the Rest, a PYMNTS Intelligence and Visa DPS collaboration, examines how offering the full spectrum of cards—credit, debit and prepaid—drives high customer lifetime value (CLTV). It draws on insights from a survey of 451 executives who fill heads of payments roles at U.S.-based bank and nonbank card issuers. Comprised of data collected from Dec. 13, 2024, to Jan. 17, 2025, the report provides a roadmap for card issuers looking to maximize revenue, enhance customer relationships and achieve a competitive edge.

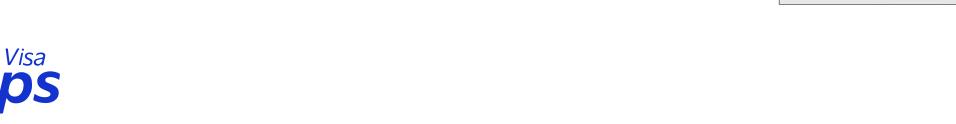
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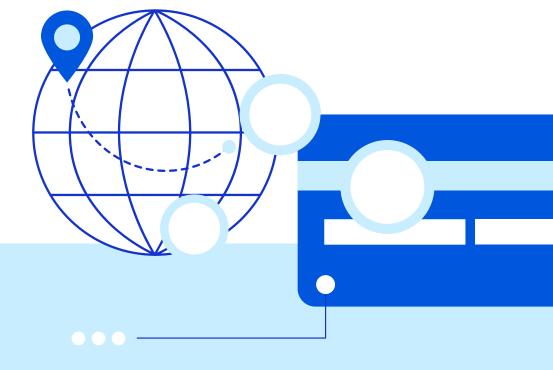
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How Card Portfolio and Data Separate the Leaders from the Rest



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The company's relentless focus on innovation is a catalyst for the rapid growth of digital commerce on any device, for everyone, everywhere. As the world moves from analog to digital, Visa is applying our brand, products, people, network and scale to reshape the future of commerce.

Visa DPS is part of Visa Issuing Solutions, the foundational technology and consumer engagement portfolio under Visa's Value Added Services Business.

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