



Swipe right for retirement: Can pension apps match modern expectations?

➤ **As consumer technology races ahead, pensions are still struggling to deliver digital experiences that feel intuitive, responsive and engaging. Callum Conway explores whether pension apps are finally closing the gap**

Apps are hardly a revolutionary concept these days. For most of us, they're woven into the fabric of daily life – from setting alarms and checking the weather to navigating on maps or scrolling through social media. Dozens of apps are opened hundreds of times a day, often without a second thought.

In recent years, the rise of financial apps has been particularly striking. Online-only banks such as Monzo and Chase have become mainstream,

investment platforms offering stocks, shares and ISAs are widespread, and digital savings tools have become essential for budgeting and planning.

However, the *Master Trust Pension Experience Benchmark 2025*, published by BehindLogin, found that pension apps were struggling to keep pace with evolving consumer expectations.

The report warned of a 'stark' contrast between the member experience in pensions and the seamless digital services delivered by global tech giants.

➤ Summary

- Despite rapid advances in consumer tech, many pension apps still fall short of user expectations.
- Some providers are investing to make apps more intuitive.
- Regulatory change, including the FCA's targeted support proposals and Value for Money framework, could accelerate innovation and turn pension apps into engagement tools.

While many pension apps compare reasonably well against other pension providers, this is not the benchmark members are using.

Instead, they measure their digital experience against the likes of Apple, Amazon and Netflix – brands that have redefined standards for accessibility, responsiveness and personalisation.

Although most UK master trusts now offer mobile access, the report noted that overall quality remains 'average' and far below the levels expected of world-class digital products.

Members frequently encounter browser redirects, clunky forms, and jargon-heavy copy – barriers that can quickly turn engagement into frustration.

"Many of the apps we use daily are designed for quick, frequent 'micro-interactions' – whether it's checking a message, a social feed, or a bank balance," explains Standard Life head of digital and user experience, Andy Young.

"Pensions, by contrast, are long-term relationships measured in decades, not days, presenting a unique challenge for engagement."

Young stresses that if the industry wants to connect more meaningfully with users, it needs to rethink how it presents and supports long-term savings in a digital-first world.

Clarity over complexity

Young says one of the most significant barriers lies in complexity, particularly at the point of sign-in.

"If the process feels slow or confusing,

users disengage before they've even begun," he notes.

"Once inside, many dashboards try to show everything at once but end up prioritising nothing, which makes it hard for users to find what really matters."

He adds that users expect apps to feel native to their devices, whereas pushing them to a web browser breaks that flow and feels outdated.

PensionBee chief technology officer, Jonathan Lister Parsons, agrees that simplicity must be the guiding principle for pension apps.

"Simplicity is about clarity, not dumbing down," he says.

"Our performance charts are presented in clear, relatable terms, showing how savings have grown over time, rather than overwhelming customers with benchmark data or technical indices.

"We also use storytelling techniques and contextual education within the app to help users interpret what they're seeing, with quick links to blogs or key information. It's about empowering people to make sense of complex information, not shielding them from it."

Echoing this, EV managing director, Chet Velani, says the key to digital success lies in breaking down complexity into smaller, more rewarding steps.

"Consumers expect first-class digital interactions, yet the gap between complex pension processes and seamless consumer tech remains too wide," he argues.

"The answer lies not just in better apps, but in creating simplified, interactive tools that work across all channels – web, mobile, or within existing portals."

Velani notes that EV's partners have seen a 31 per cent increase in completion rates for interactive planning journeys and average engagement times of nine minutes on results pages, after breaking down complex financial concepts into small, focused steps.

"These outcomes," he says, "show that members engage when the experience feels intuitive and personalised".

Signs of progress

There is no doubt that a streamlined app experience can make a significant difference to engagement and satisfaction.

Data from Scottish Widows found that when members downloaded its app, they were three times more likely to check their pension than when using web services alone.

Usage was also highest between 7-9am and 7-9pm, demonstrating that digital pension engagement was increasingly fitting around daily routines.

"Pension apps are evolving from being places where members check their balances to becoming trusted digital coaches"

Despite the concerns raised, the BehindLogin report did find signs of progress, with Standard Life ranked top overall for the breadth and reliability of its core digital journeys, followed by Scottish Widows.

Legal & General (L&G) was commended for showing how pensions can feel "intuitive and even enjoyable" through engagement-led design, while Aviva was recognised for accessibility.

L&G managing director of workplace savings, Katharine Photiou, says the response to its new app has exceeded expectations.

"Since launching in September 2024, our app has logged more than 12.5 million visits, with 70 per cent of users returning every three months and 50 per cent monthly," she says.

"The app's success comes from features members actually want to use. For example, using open finance, members can connect their different pensions and bank accounts for more effective planning."

For Parsons, the ability to act instantly is one of the most significant shifts in pension engagement.

"Immediacy is critical because it bridges the gap between saving and reward," he explains.

"Traditionally, pensions felt distant – something to be dealt with in your mid-60s. By allowing customers to see live balances and make instant top-ups, the app brings savings into the present tense.

"That sense of control transforms behaviour; when people can see the impact of small actions immediately, they're more motivated to stay consistent and engaged."

And Smart Pension chief product officer, Bahea Izmeqna, says we are already seeing a shift towards clear, actionable insights.

She describes the positive impact of tools such as a pension calculator, which shows users the expected retirement outcome based on their current contributions.

"We are seeing members use this tool and, in turn, increase their contributions or make one-time contributions to secure a better life in retirement," she continues.

"Crucially, members can implement those changes directly within the app without having to navigate elsewhere or contact support. This seamless link between insight and action is proving effective – members who use the calculator are more likely to increase their contribution rate compared to those who visit the contribution change page alone."

Innovation

Policy and technological developments could soon give this shift even greater momentum.

The Financial Conduct Authority's (FCA) targeted support proposals aim to create a new regulated service to bridge the gap between unregulated guidance and full financial advice.

The proposals would allow firms to offer ready-made pension suggestions to groups of consumers with common characteristics, such as those not saving enough for retirement or holding excess

cash in a current account.

Delivered at scale, pension apps could become a natural vehicle for such personalised nudges, using existing user data to prompt action.

Photiou supports this broader purpose for pension apps, arguing that to create digital tools that people want to use, they need to go beyond providing a 'snapshot' of savings.

"True engagement demands more than awareness – it requires action. Personalised push notifications, for example, can prompt users to act at pivotal moments relevant to their needs," she suggests.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is set to play a growing role in this digital evolution, too.

Velani says that "from chatbots that guide members through their options, to tools that enable hyper-personalised journeys, AI can enhance engagement and outcomes across the board".

Parsons adds: "Tools like smart projections, retirement goal tracking, and personalised nudges can help customers understand not just what they have today, but what they might need tomorrow."

"We're also exploring how AI can make customer interactions even more intuitive and responsive, while keeping our human-first ethos intact," he explains.

Meanwhile, the long-awaited introduction of pension dashboards could soon offer app users access to all their pension information on their

phone, at the click of a button.

Last month, the Pensions Dashboards Programme confirmed that the MoneyHelper Pensions Dashboard was entering the next phase of testing, with a low volume of individuals using a real dashboard with real pensions data.

The latest phase followed the successful completion of the first rounds of usability and industry expert testing, which provided insights to help inform the first live iterations of the dashboard.

Young says dashboards and other technological innovations mean "pension apps are evolving from being places where members simply check their balances to becoming trusted digital coaches".

"As dashboards, open finance and AI-driven personalisation become more common, the potential to deliver smarter, more tailored guidance grows," he adds.

"But that must be done with transparency and control firmly in the hands of the member."

Looking ahead, Izmeqna believes the next phase of development will combine personalisation, AI, and deeper integration.

"Each has value on its own, but the real potential of these technologies comes when they can be used together," she argues.

"For example, using AI to deliver personalised insights, building on tools such as a pensions calculator, or to connect different financial tools into a single, seamless experience.

"We see this as the next phase of digital engagement; using technology not just to inform members, but to tailor guidance and make it easier for them to act."

Measuring success

The shift towards better digital design also has regulatory implications.

Poor user experiences

could threaten compliance with the FCA's Consumer Duty framework and undermine forthcoming value for money (VFM) assessments.

Customer service and engagement are expected to play an increasingly important role in these evaluations, alongside investment performance and charges.

Proposed VFM metrics include user satisfaction, ease of use and engagement – although the FCA and The Pensions Regulator have invited the industry to suggest further measures.

The possibility of further scrutiny of user experiences, including on pension apps, is likely to raise industry standards and thereby boost engagement.

Ultimately, though, digital success will depend as much on culture as on code.

"Global tech brands invest heavily in understanding user behaviour and iterating rapidly – two things the pensions industry has been slower to adopt," Young claims.

"If I could offer one piece of advice, it would be to start small and iterate. Success won't come from one standout feature, but from consistently enhancing every journey, all the time."

He concluded that "a fast, responsive loop between user feedback and feature development is what keeps pension apps relevant, innovative and engaging for the long term".

Indeed, the future of pension apps may not hinge on one breakthrough technology but on steady, continuous improvement, learning from the digital experiences consumers already love.

Just as we instinctively reach for an app to check our balance, track a parcel or plan a journey, the real test for pension providers will be whether checking in on our future feels just as effortless.

Only then will pension apps truly take their place among the digital tools that shape our everyday lives.

Written by Callum Conway

