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Revolut wants to be a Swiss bank. Should Swiss private banks worry?

Revolut has applied for a banking licence from FINMA and plans to invest more than CHF 150mn to expand in the Swiss market. The neobank already claims 1.3 million Swiss customers, a penetration of around 24%, and expects to surpass 40% within two to three years. On the surface this is a retail story: Swiss IBANs, salary accounts, eBill. But Revolut's ambitions do not stop at retail, and the question for Switzerland's private banks is whether a fully licensed, well-capitalised, product-hungry neobank sitting in the pocket of a quarter of the population becomes a competitor for their clients or their clients' children.

Our short answer: Revolut is not a threat to the Swiss private banking model. It is a threat to Swiss private banks that have stopped practising it.

Charles-Henry Monchau, CFA, CAIA, CMT
Chief Investment Officer
charles-henry.monchau@syzgroup.com

What a licensed Revolut would actually offer

Today, Revolut serves Swiss customers on a cross-border basis through Revolut Bank UAB, which is licensed in Lithuania. It also has a representative office in Switzerland but does not hold a Swiss banking licence. That structure has been a ceiling: the fintech has been unable to offer salary accounts or franc-denominated investment accounts. Users could not route their salaries into the app, confining its utility mostly to foreign-exchange spending and holiday payments.

A FINMA licence removes that ceiling. The first wave is plain domestic banking: Swiss IBANs, salary accounts, eBill, merchant acquiring and access to the Swiss deposit guarantee scheme, with Pillar 3a and TWINT under consideration. Swiss headcount is planned to grow from roughly 30 to around 100 by the end of 2027.

The second wave is what should interest wealth managers, where the UK is serving as the template. Revolut plans to launch private banking services in the UK for clients able to deposit at least £500,000. It has also secured FCA permissions covering leveraged products, managed portfolio solutions and private wealth services, including discretionary portfolio management and advisory for retail, professional and high-net-worth clients. Beyond the regulatory groundwork, Revolut is building the human side of the business, recruiting a head of relationship management to lead a team of relationship managers. It is also pursuing product partnerships: reported discussions with Blackstone focus on integrating its products into the planned private banking offering, as Revolut continues to expand its private-markets team.

Combine these elements in a Swiss offering and the proposition becomes clear: a CHF current account, Pillar 3a, brokerage access to fractional shares, ETFs and crypto, discretionary mandates at a fraction of traditional providers' fees, Lombard-style lending, private-markets investments sourced from a marquee manager, and a relationship manager available via chat. All within a single app, onboarded in minutes and transparent, down-to-the-franc pricing.

The client experience is the real product

The products are not what should worry incumbents; most of them exist at every private bank in Geneva and Zurich. What Revolut sells is the experience around them: instant onboarding, real-time visibility of the whole balance sheet, no paper, no "your banker will call you back", the same interface for the CHF 5,000 travel card and the CHF 5mn portfolio. It commoditises execution and administration, and it does so at a scale that funds relentless product iteration, the group projects some USD 9bn of revenue and USD 3.5bn of profit for 2026.

That matters because a growing share of Swiss private banking clients – and nearly all of the next generation, already use Revolut daily. The bar for "digital" has been set by an app that a quarter of the country opens every week, not by a rival private bank. When the same app can hold a mandate, the client's question becomes uncomfortable: what exactly am I paying 1%+ for?

Who is most exposed

Not every private bank is equally at risk. The exposure is highest where the value proposition has quietly collapsed into custody, execution and a quarterly call.

- ▶ **Mass-affluent and lower-HNW franchises.** Clients with CHF 250,000 to 2mn, typically served in "advisory-lite" or standardised mandates, are the sweet spot for Revolut's model. They are digitally native, fee-sensitive and rarely need cross-border structuring or family governance. In the UK, the mass-affluent pool is estimated at some £9 trillion, more than the ultra-high-net-worth and retail segments combined, and Revolut's £500,000 threshold tells you where it is aiming.
- ▶ **Domestic-only Swiss banks with thin investment content.** Cantonal and regional banks, and private banks that grew on onshore Swiss clients rather than international ones, compete on proximity and trust. A locally licensed Revolut with Swiss deposit protection, a Swiss IBAN and a Pillar 3a product would challenge those advantages, while offering a lower-cost proposition.
- ▶ **Banks whose "digital transformation" stopped at e-banking.** If the client experience still relies on PDF statements, physical signatures and a three-week onboarding process, the contrast with Revolut is stark. Clients may notice the gap even if they never move their core assets.
- ▶ **The next-generation transfer.** The larger risk is not immediate defection but the coming wealth transfer. Heirs who have managed their finances on Revolut for a decade may have no loyalty to their parents' bank. If the inherited portfolio can be consolidated into the app they already use, the incumbent could lose the relationship without ever having a conversation.

Conversely, the model is less suited to the top end of the market. Ultra-high-net-worth and complex international clients often require multi-jurisdictional booking, trust and succession structures, bespoke lending against illiquid assets, direct access to portfolio managers, and an institution with the balance sheet, discretion and longevity to support complex needs. Revolut's regulatory track record is another consideration: its UK banking licence took three years to secure, following regulatory scrutiny of its compliance infrastructure. Any Swiss banking application would face FINMA's regulatory requirements, which are similarly rigorous. For sophisticated clients, these considerations are likely to remain relevant.

How Swiss private banks can resist and win

Resisting Revolut does not mean trying to out-Revolut Revolut. Established banks are unlikely to win an app-design contest against a company with 80 million users. They win by being what a super-app cannot be.

1. Re-price the commodity, re-value the advice. Custody, execution and basic reporting are becoming free. Banks that still bury a large part of their margin in those layers are exposed; banks that price explicitly for advice, portfolio construction, structuring and access have something Revolut cannot replicate at scale. Transparency is no longer a threat to margins, opacity is.
2. Make the human relationship the product, then digitise everything around it. The banker should spend his or her time on judgement, asset allocation in a shifting macro regime, succession, liquidity planning, a family-business exit, and none of it on paperwork. That requires investing in the unglamorous infrastructure behind the client experience: straight-through onboarding, consolidated reporting across custodians, digital signatures, and an app that can stand alongside Revolut. The goal is not to be the best app; it is to remove every reason for a client to prefer another one.
3. Own the content. A neobank can distribute a Blackstone fund, but it cannot produce an investment view, a CIO framework or a private-markets due-diligence process. Research, thematic conviction and a differentiated house view are the private bank's intellectual property. Publish it, teach it, make it visible on the client's phone, and make sure the mandate reflects it.
4. Compete on access, not on shelf. Co-investments, club deals, private credit, pre-IPO opportunities, curated hedge funds, tailored structured solutions, the things that require relationships, minimum tickets and expertise. A super-app will offer feeder funds; a private bank can offer a seat at the table.
5. Win the next generation early. Banks that wait until an inheritance brings heirs into the conversation risk losing the relationship before it begins. Engage children and grandchildren early, with low or no minimums, financial education and a digital experience they will actually use. The aim is to build a relationship with the family as a whole, rather than relying solely on the parent's existing mandate.
6. Lean into the Swiss balance sheet and the Swiss brand. Capital strength, decades of stability, a regulator with a reputation and a culture of discretion are assets a five-year-old licensee cannot manufacture. Say so, in a modern way.
7. Use partnerships and AI to close the cost gap. Banks that cannot build should buy or partner, core-banking modernisation, client-facing AI assistants, automated KYC. The cost-to-income gap between a neobank and a private bank will not close on its own, and a 70%+ cost ratio is not survivable against a competitor running at a fraction of that.

Bottom line

Revolut's Swiss licence is a credible, well-funded push into the bottom of the wealth pyramid and, over time, into the affluent and lower-HNW segments. It will compress fees on anything that looks like a product, and it will set the client-experience benchmark for every bank in the country. Private banks that have been quietly living off custody margins and a good address will feel it first.

But private banking was never really about the app. It is about judgement, access, structuring and trust across generations. The banks that double down on those, and that finally fix the digital plumbing around them, will find that Revolut clarifies their value proposition rather than destroying it. For those that struggle to articulate why a client should pay more than a few basis points, the question was already there; Revolut simply makes it easier to act on.

Welcome to Syzerland®

For further information

Banque Syz SA

Quai des Bergues 1
CH-1201 Geneva
T. +41 58 799 10 00
syzgroup.com

Charles-Henry Monchau, CFA, CAIA, CMT

Chief Investment Officer
charles-henry.monchau@syzgroup.com

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