

has won the prestigious Pensions Management magazine

# award

for Best SIPP Administration and Service for the third year running.



**FINANCE DIRECTOR, RENATA SOSNA**, talks about how a customised Microsoft Navision implementation from Cambridge Online Systems Limited facilitated significant improvements in service provision and contributed to the winning of the Award.

**IPSWICH BASED SUFFOLK LIFE** is a self-defined David amongst the Goliaths of the Pensions provider market. It is also relatively young, having been established in 1971 by a group of Solicitors. In the intervening decades, the group has demonstrably lived up to its mission statement "The personal touch in providing quality solutions" and has also adhered consistently to the disciplines of the law firm from which it originated.

Winning the Self-Invested Personal Pensions (SIPP) category in the Pensions Management magazine Awards for three consecutive years, in competition with substantially larger providers, is a considerable achievement. Launched in 1998 to drive up the levels of service from Pension Providers, the Awards are based on votes received from Independent Financial Advisers (IFAs).

Of course, a great many factors contribute to award-winning service. Employees have to be qualified and well trained; they also have to care about service delivery and to be willing to go beyond the norm in meeting customer expectations. Systems, both manual and IT-based also need to be in place to aid efficiency. Renata Sosna, Finance Director at Suffolk Life, recalls the problems the group was experiencing in 2000.

We had just completed our year end audit and were concerned to see disparities between our Sage Line 50 Accounts system and our Paradox database in the way financial information was being handled. The database, which we used to manage our pension schemes, was also becoming slower and slower, and we were having to work flat out to handle basic tasks such as issuing detailed annual statements to policyholders or making the monthly, quarterly and annual statutory returns to the Financial Services Authority. It was taking days to pull together information that should have been at our fingertips, and we were in danger of grinding to a halt if we grew our business according to our projections.

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# on time

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Determining that they needed a professional Accounting system to handle individual and group double-entry bookkeeping requirements for their policyholders, and to cope with other reporting and administration requirements, Suffolk Life set about identifying the most appropriate solution. Renata Sosna undertook web and magazine searches and also sought the advice of a professional external consultancy firm to draw up a shortlist. Specialist SIPP software was rejected on the basis that it could not handle FSA group returns, but five suppliers in total were asked to respond to a detailed ITT. Of these, Suffolk Life selected Cambridge Online Systems Limited.

Founded in 1978, and with an enviable reputation for effective IT consultancy and implementation, Cambridge Online is a leading provider of Microsoft Navision Software with one of the largest numbers of installed Navision sites in the UK. Renata Sosna felt they had demonstrated clear competitive advantages over the other suppliers:

They responded in great detail to the ITT and had clearly done some original thinking around our requirements. At the presentation, they fielded

the full team that would be working with us, not just the sales personnel that would move on to the next opportunity immediately after the deal was signed. You need to see the people who will be working at the coalface, but it's still surprising how few suppliers have taken that on board! We had confidence in them, technically and also that they could work to our tight timescales. Navision is a technically superior Accounting system with hundreds of thousands of implementations worldwide, and the fact that Cambridge Online were relatively local to us was an added comfort factor.

Conscious of the need to provide maximum reassurance, Cambridge Online also proposed a special diagnostic service that would look in detail at Suffolk Life's IT requirements and map them against the functionality of the Navision system. This was provided at a fixed fee which, if Suffolk Life proceeded with Cambridge Online, would be deducted from the total project costs. The diagnostic phase commenced in May 2001, and proved highly successful both in demonstrating the capabilities of Navision and also in developing high levels of rapport with,

and confidence in, the Cambridge Online team. It also eliminated the necessity for a time-consuming and expensive pilot phase.

Suffolk Life bought a core Navision system from Cambridge Online, to deliver an integrated solution handling all the group accounting and payroll requirements, plus a considerable amount of bespoke development to tailor the system to their pension scheme administration requirements. A new menu item, SIPP Administration, was created. This gives access to special SIPP-related screens without the necessity to use the core Navision application. Custom reports for pension schemes were also created by Cambridge Online. The new Navision-based system went live at Suffolk Life on 5th November 2001, a date which Renata Sosna remarks was chosen as most appropriate for the "big bang":

Extensive testing, reconciliation between the output of the old and new systems and staff training prior to the switch over had shown that there was no necessity for parallel running of Navision and the old Sage Line 50 and Paradox systems. Cambridge Online brought the project in within budget, on time, and fully functioning.

We have no dedicated IT team here at Suffolk Life, so relied very heavily on them, and they came up trumps in making the process as smooth as possible. They are immensely skilled and helpful. One of their undoubted strengths is that they retain their staff for long periods of time, which means they can provide continuity of service and develop an in-depth knowledge of Navision's capabilities. They are also exceptionally nice people with a talent for building strong customer relationships - and that mapped very well with our own core values.

The benefits of the customised Navision system were readily apparent to Renata and the 65-strong team at Suffolk Life:

The most obvious is that we had a single, integrated, system to manage, but others include demonstrable productivity gains (clearing backlogs and handling considerably larger volumes of business without additional staff deployment) and the ability to share data amongst diverse users. Some 95% of the monthly statements are now issued on time, and this despite a more than 200% growth in policies administered since 2001.

▼ Suffolk Life Annuities Limited is an Ipswich based Financial Services company specialising in providing Self Invested Personal Pensions (SIPPs)

▼ Cambridge Online is a leading provider of Microsoft® Business Solutions Accounting & ERP Solutions specialising in the supply of Microsoft Navision®

▼ The Solution  
A customised Microsoft Navision system providing integrated accounting, payroll and pension administration

▼ Benefits  
Able to handle massive growth without the need for additional staff

Significant reduction in administration time required for each policy

Reduced administration overhead enabling staff to focus on providing an enhanced level of customer service

Flexibility to react to legislation changes

▼ Technology  
Microsoft Navision 3.70

Microsoft SQL Server 2000

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# partnership

with **Cambridge Online**

Reporting for the pension payroll is no longer a primarily manual process, and the system has also facilitated greater efficiency in tracking information pertaining to customers and IFAs. Importing and exporting of data is now a very smooth process, with very simple integration between Navision and other packages such as Excel. Security within Navision is very comprehensive, so we have full confidence in the integrity of our data.

Suffolk Life also have an ongoing commitment to project a youthful, efficient and dynamic face in a traditional and complex market - and, to this end, are working on simplifying forms and other documents. By making these available in the Navision system, they believe they have a significant USP over more staid competitors.

Future plans include the development of a portal-based web facility which will enable IFAs to view data on policies and customers stored in Navision. Far from replacing direct contact with Suffolk Life advisers, this is simply an added-value out-of-hours service that will be available in Q1 2005.

The winning of the Pensions Management Award for Best SIPP Administration and Service in 2002, 2003 and 2004 is, believes Renata, a reflection of the increased efficiency that Navision and the Cambridge Online custom development has brought to Suffolk Life's service provision to their IFAs:

There's no doubt - Navision has helped us deliver on our promises. The data we need is either on a single screen, or easy to locate, so we can always give a timely and effective personal response. We have built our reputation on providing added value by way of service over and above anything our competitors offer.

The Awards are testament to our consistent success, and the partnership with Cambridge Online, which has delivered such an effective Accounting and SIPP Administration system, is an essential component of our winning formula ■



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