

Case Study

Customer:

MAP Underwriting at Lloyds

Industry Sector:

Financial

Solution:

IT Outsourcing



Underpinning the underwriters...

Managing Agency Partners (MAP) is one of the foremost independent underwriting agencies operating within the Lloyd's of London insurance market. Formed in 2000, the firm has worked with leading outsourced IT specialists, Midlands-based PCMS Group, to oversee the smooth and efficient operation of its IT infrastructure.

James Denoon-Duncan, managing director of MAP, takes up the story:



"When the company was originally founded seven years ago, we partnered with another organisation and shared resources for functions such as IT, so as to make use of economies of scale. However, by 2005, it had become clear that both organisations had outgrown the working relationship we used to have. The two companies had evolved in slightly different directions and we took the decision to pursue our own paths.

"At that time, we had in any case reached a point where the company was large enough to need a dedicated, specialist provider to service its requirements. We knew that the choice we were faced with was a significant one and that the provider we chose would be with us through a crucially important phase of the company's growth, so the decision was one that we could not afford to get wrong. We therefore elected to hold a 'beauty parade', with an initial list of 14 possible providers, which we then whittled down to four companies from whom we requested a fully detailed proposal.

"At the end of this process, PCMS emerged as the clear favourite amongst the partners. Whilst neither the cheapest, nor the most expensive, the company was by quite some distance the one that best understood our requirements and looked to have the flexibility to work and grow with our business.

"Although within our business we are heavily reliant on computers, we are much more adept at using them than we are at maintaining them. What we were looking for was a company that would not only manage the system but also provide us with guidance and advice on potential solutions for our requirements. In effect, what we needed was a partner who could give a more consultative service, over and above the scope of a standard maintenance contract. That was where PCMS was so different from the rest of the companies on the shortlist."



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James Denoon-Duncan, Managing Director - MAP



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Richard Smith, Managing Director - PCMS Group

For further information

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Richard Smith, managing director for PCMS, says that this flexibility is the key to the success of its relationship with MAP:

"Now we are some 18 months into the contract, we have a real understanding of MAP's business and how it runs. But - more importantly - we have a real understanding of where they are going, which means we are able to give MAP the benefit of our experience when advising the company on hardware decisions, for example. The relationship between PCMS and MAP has been a very successful one and I think that the future looks extremely promising going forward. MAP is very happy with the level of service we provide and we have allowed the firm to eliminate downtime from its operations and its personnel to focus fully on their core business activity rather than concern themselves with the vagaries of the IT system.

"We currently host and manage MAP's entire IT estate, covering the monitoring and maintenance of all the company's hardware and network infrastructure. Whilst MAP itself is effectively a nine-to-five business, our monitoring takes place around the clock, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This enables us to know the status of the network - and each of the components of it - at all times, so that if there is any kind of equipment failure, we are able to address it before it can affect the smooth operation of the business.

"We operate two sites to cover MAP's requirements completely. Our primary site in London contains the servers that effectively run the company's IT estate, although we have a secondary back-up site at our premises in Coventry to ensure that the company's data would be preserved in the event of a total failure. All core applications are duplicated onto the backup site to allow for a seamless transition in the event of one of the sites going down and enable the business to continue unimpeded. I am glad to say that we have never had to implement our disaster recovery plans, although it is comforting to know that they are there if we need them. The continued provision of IT services and maintaining the integrity of customer data are issues which are critical to any business concern, especially an underwriting company.

"We have also recently implemented a new 'e-vault' system, which automatically archives all email communications for future reference. Furthermore, the company's journaling system captures and stores every email that is sent or received by the company's email server, even after they have been deleted. This provides a comprehensive evidentiary trail should the company need it for whatever reason. The system also tracks any amendments made to particular emails when they are being forwarded, to give a complete picture of what has been sent or received by any individual."

The complete outsourced solution provided by PCMS has been ideal for MAP, according to Denoon-Duncan:

"Our relationship commenced in 2005," he recalls. "The system went live in May 2006 and has worked extremely well from the outset. There was a smooth transition and we experienced no problems with the migration from one system to the other. In fact, from a user's perspective, people did not notice any material difference whatsoever. Where we have seen a real change is in the improved performance of the system as a whole and shorter response times in terms of correcting problems with our IT as and when they occur. The platform we operate is now extremely stable, so that problems are less likely to occur in the first place. When they do, we have our own system, managed by highly-trained IT professionals so resolution is much speedier.

"Previously we had access to on-site technicians, which sounds intuitively as if it would lead to a quick response. However, the reality was that it could be hours before one was actually available to attend the office where the specific problem might be. Now, when there are technical issues the technicians in the call centre can log on to our network remotely to address the problem immediately. We experience much less downtime due to equipment problems as a result, and staff are able to devote their time to their work, rather than grappling with their computers.

"Overall, the relationship between the two companies is a very strong one. PCMS listens to our needs and adapts to them. On occasions when refinements have been identified with the processes that are in place to make them even more efficient, PCMS has been able to take action with the flexibility and responsiveness that we have come to expect from them.

"This versatility was the main reason we chose to partner with PCMS in the first place. As an organisation we are ourselves expanding and needed a provider that would be able to grow with us. We have recently undertaken a large project to archive all of our files, which will improve our backup and restore capability and PCMS's assistance will be indispensable in this respect."