

## National Counties Building Society builds on image



*National Counties Building Society is the UK's largest single office Building Society and committed to the independent development as a mutual organisation run for the benefits of its Members. The origins of National Counties can be traced to 1896 when the Fourth Post Office Mutual Building Society was established. The Society pioneered the development of investment accounts by post and in 1972 changed its name to National Counties Building Society to reflect the countrywide scope of their operations.*

From their Headquarters in Epsom, the Society provides a first class professional service to approximately 40,000 customers (12,600 borrowers and 27,000 investors) throughout the UK. The Society's efficiency enables them to offer highly competitive investment & mortgage services, with their products regularly appearing in "Best Buy" tables published in the national press and other media. With Reserves in excess of £83 million and Assets in excess of £500 million, the Society has the strongest capital ratio in the Building Society Industry, providing Members with unrivalled security.

In 1997, as a result of significant expansion, the Society began to look at its internal operations in respect of processing, storing and accessing Mortgage and Investment Applications - together with the associated paper correspondence. Applications were typically stored in their original hard paper copy in filing cabinets around the office - depending on the stage at which the application process had reached. With the number of applications and correspondence growing monthly, storage space was becoming an increasing concern, as was the time taken to retrieve the information. An average mortgage file for example, can contain 250 pieces of paper after 2 years, increasing to an average of 500 pieces after 7 years - occupying vast amounts of storage space, and taking lots of time to access.

National Counties examined a number of alternate products and solutions before selecting Hitec's DataStore™ Plus solution. One reason why Hitec was selected was as a result of the successful implementation two years earlier of a COLD/ERM (Enterprise Report Management) solution. The project objectives were to reduce storage space and increase employee productivity levels by improving efficiency, enabling the Society to provide an even higher level of Member service.



National Counties have installed three DataStore Plus scanning stations, with two permanent operators - enabling them to improve operations and reduce processing times. As an example, following the receipt of an initial Mortgage and/or Investment enquiry, the application is processed, which in turn produces a Mortgage/Investment file. This is now scanned and indexed, with the operators filtering out some of the correspondence. Once scanned, the majority of documents and correspondence are then shredded. Due to the nature of some key documents within the process, the original paper copy of 5 documents is still retained for 2-3 years prior to shredding. These are the Application Form, Valuation Report, Mortgage Offers and Amended Offers, Report of Title during the completion stage and then the Miras 70/76 Forms and Miras Status Change Form.

Users now access images electronically on screen from any desktop within the office. As a result of this, they only view the information they are looking for, rather than wading through all the other correspondence within the file - much of which is not relevant to the user making that specific decision. This has resulted in increased employee productivity and the provision of a far quicker response to Customer enquiries. Whilst the printing of documents from DataStore Plus is possible, users must obtain approval from Derek Hardcastle,

Controller of Management Services at National Counties before this may be completed – in a further attempt to reduce unnecessary paper copies of files and correspondence. Deploying DataStore Plus in this process has enabled National Counties to substantially reduce the Mortgage and Investment files - rather than maintaining the paper file containing on average 250-500 pieces of paper. As a result, a very large storage problem has been resolved. Other benefits delivered include improved protection and security of the Mortgage and Investment Applications. It is now also possible to complete Signature verification on-screen.

The culture change from paper to electronic based documents was well managed by the Society, and confidence in the new method of working grew quickly. Users ranged from those nearing retirement to school leavers, and now, those at both ends of the age spectrum welcome the benefits derived from operating an electronic archiving system, rather than one that is paper based. “There will always be one user who prefers paper, but this is because they are unable to adapt to the cultural change that electronic archiving brings. From a commercial point of view,” comments Derek Hardcastle, “DataStore Plus was and is the right decision in terms of the cost savings in employee time alone, and time is expensive - labour costs are our most expensive commodity. From an IT point of view DataStore Plus was also the right decision - the support issues on installations were minimal and now the system is practically self running, with system and service levels easy to maintain.”

Following the installation of DataStore Plus, National Counties have analysed their business processes, with a view to streamlining operations, reducing costs and

providing higher levels of service. The Society has been able to increase growth without increasing the number of employees - experiencing costs savings in a very competitive marketplace. “National Counties is a good traditional Building Society using technology to deliver better and more cost effective services to our Members” commented Derek Hardcastle. “The system is constantly evolving and both management and users are continually developing new applications and categories for archiving onto DataStore Plus.”

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