

Case Study



Syplex supports rapid regionalisation by SQW

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Simon Pringle - Director, SQW North

Introduction

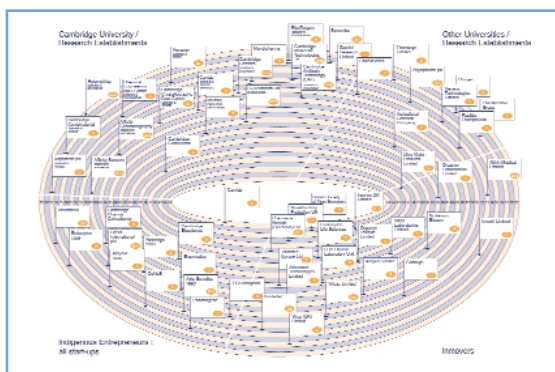
Since its formation in 1983, Segal Quince Wicksteed (SQW) has become one of the UK's leading independent economic consultancies undertaking research, economic evaluation, policy development, strategy and management assignments for clients such as private firms, governments, the European Commission, regional development agencies, charitable foundations, and academic and international financial institutions. It currently has over 50 consultancy staff, with its headquarters in Cambridge and additional offices in Edinburgh, Manchester, London and Hong Kong. Recent projects include an update on its highly respected 1985 review of the 'Cambridge Phenomenon'.

The Challenge

SQW underwent significant expansion during the late 1990s, increasing the regional base from the head office in Cambridge and an office in Edinburgh to additional operations in London and Manchester. The Cambridge head office was also relocated to new facilities in Histon. Effective collaboration is a key element in SQW's business, with staff needing to participate fully in project teams when working at home, abroad on project assignments or while mobile. The new de-centralised organisational structure required a significant uplift in IT infrastructure to support project teams based in multiple offices whilst containing communication costs.

The Solution

Simon Foote of Syplex Ltd had been working with SQW on a regular basis in the Cambridge office since the early 1990s to support the implementation of laptop computers, external email and communications. Simon Pringle, currently Director of SQW North in Manchester, recalls the state of play at SQW in Cambridge at that time:



The Cambridge Phenomenon, © SQW 1985



Key Features:

- Long-term relationship
- Extensive support for major expansion and regionalisation programme
- Long-term strategic thinking ensures cost effective and appropriate solutions
- Mobile workers in flexible project teams catered for to ensure effective collaboration
- Wide range of technologies implemented and supported



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"In common with many small companies, we were not maximising the value from our IT investments. We were operating with standalone workstations, had no unifying network and were not that effective at communicating electronically with the outside world. It was agreed that IT could be a source of competitive advantage to us. We were working on large-scale research projects and needed the capability to transmit thousands of surveys to interviewees.

We also needed our consultants to have real-time access to the server whether they were working out of another office or from home. The first stage was to put a network server in place and to standardise on Microsoft products; next, we implemented e-mail at the desktop and took steps to ensure that the Edinburgh office was also networked and connected via email. By about 1994, we knew we needed an expert resource that would take us to the next stage, which is when we formalised the relationship with Simon Foote."

In the mid 1990s, Simon implemented the GroupWise email, diary and document management system for SQW. This dramatically improved its ability to communicate externally and to share information internally, as well as fully supporting remote dial-in connectivity and access over the Internet.

Justina Molloy, IT Manager, explained Syplex's role within SQW:

"Simon and his colleagues have been a vital part of our IT operation for several years. They are involved in most aspects of IT infrastructure, in particular our local and wide area networks. They have played a significant role in nearly all of our major IT projects and also provide on-going support. Projects have included migration through the Windows family, facilitating remote connectivity through dial-up modems and most recently internet access to our email system, supporting the requirements of opening new offices and creating a VPN using ADSL connections to allow secure communication and collaboration between the regional offices. These projects have taken place against a background of on-going system maintenance such as regular upgrades to our Novell server software and the Groupwise email package, and the roll-out of new hardware, including pc's, printers and servers."

The original Cambridge-Edinburgh link had operated over ISDN, but this was not a suitable or cost effective way of facilitating collaboration between the four offices in the new regionalised company structure. Instead, the new offices were provided with relatively low cost local Internet connections using leased lines, and a Virtual Private Network (VPN) established between them and Cambridge. Subsequently this was upgraded to take advantage of inexpensive ADSL lines and is fully meshed to enable staff in all the offices to communicate in real-time.

While Cambridge remains the group headquarters, the IT infrastructure treats each office equally, ensuring that staff can roam between offices and use identical services anywhere. IT is managed centrally from Cambridge using Novell NDS with ZenWorks, and for security reasons the Internet services are hosted only in head office.

The Benefits

Syplex has assisted SQW to implement a highly effective IT infrastructure within and between all four offices. The company has invested substantially in IT throughout the last decade and has seen a huge increase in efficiency and productivity. Justina Molloy values the skills and attitude of the Syplex team:

"Syplex are great to work with. They are always well informed and assist us in developing our IT strategy. They are responsive to our requirements and put in whatever effort is needed, to ensure the job gets done. We have faced some major challenges together, in particular the head office relocation and the rapid regional expansion. The time-scale in which these had to be achieved put enormous pressures on the IT team, as we needed minimal disruption to all our IT facilities. That we achieved this was in large part due to Syplex's involvement."

Although less involved with Syplex now he is managing the Manchester office, Simon Pringle has also been impressed with their skills and dedication:

"Syplex really understand technology. They are also exceptionally good at analysing and understanding what a firm like SQW needs today and in the future – so we do not get short-term thinking from them."

Syplex will remain a favoured supplier at SQW, closely involved in the company's evolving IT plans including a consideration of wireless networking.

For further details on how Syplex Ltd can help you achieve your IT objectives:

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Or visit: www.syplex.co.uk