Faster introduction of IT and telecommunications services

Client brief: Ecclesiastical Insurance Group

The Ecclesiastical Insurance Group (EIG) has been established for over 110 years, providing insurance for churches and church people. Over the years EIG has diversified to become a broad based financial services company, offering a wide range of insurance products and financial services.

EIG provides these services principally to clergy, laity, those concerned with church property, and others connected with the church.

EIG has a highly ethical approach to the way it conducts business.



EIG'S SERVICES

The Ecclesiastical Insurance Group offers an extensive portfolio of services and products appealing to a broad community, one which consists of all those seeking a unique approach to the modern necessities of insurance and financial investment.

These products and services are divided into two distinct areas:

Insurance Products: which includes a range of policies for household, motor, and travel, together with specialised insurance cover for businesses from care homes to industrial premises and nursery schools to motor fleets.

Financial Services: which includes savings and investment products such as OEICs, ISAs, investment bonds, pension planning products, life assurance, permanent health insurance, critical illness cover and mortgages.

EIG maintains all these services with the support of a continually evolving IT and telecommunications infrastructure.

PROCUREMENT OF TELEPHONE SWITCH (1998)

In order to meet increasing demand for its business services, EIG needed to acquire and install a new PABX. They gave IPL the job of identifying suitable potential suppliers and preparing an ITT that they could issue to these suppliers. IPL designed and managed workshops in which the many EIG requirements were elicited and recorded. These were divided into those that had to be satisfied immediately and those that were to meet longer term needs. The new PABX had to serve some 750 DDI lines, and provide facilities for, among others, ISDN at the desktop, ACD, CTI, video imaging, and teleworking. IPL drew up a draft ITT and approached potential suppliers both to test their interest, and to review their products. All this was done in a very short timescale and at very short notice. The ITT was issued, the supplier selected, and the PABX successfully installed.

EMAIL ROLLOUT (1999)

EIG is organised as a number of autonomous groups and business entities, operating from a number of sites. Its IT infrastructure spans these groupings and locations. When EIG wanted to roll out a new company-wide email system, it called on IPL to plan the project. IPL ran a planning workshop, prepared the programme plan that ensured the rollout was co-ordinated with existing projects and across all work groups. They then handed over the plan to EIG to manage the rollout.

ACQUISITION OF A LIFE AND PENSIONS SYSTEM (2000)

The Financial Services Division of EIG is responsible for its life and pensions products. These systems were mainframe-based and were not ideally suited to grow in line with EIG's intention to continue its expansion in the UK. EIG had issued an ITT for a replacement system to a number of suppliers and tasked IPL with evaluating the responses that had been received.

IPL proposed using the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) for comparing the responses, because of its superiority compared with more traditional methods. Traditionally, the decision-maker first defines their decision criteria, then associates a numeric weighting with each criterion, and then allocates

scores for each alternative solution that represents, in their view, the 'closeness of fit' to each of the criteria. Finally, the individual scores are multiplied by the weightings to arrive at a total score for each alternative. The alternative with the highest score is the best choice.

This approach has a number of limitations. In particular, it is difficult to decide and then justify the quantitative values associated with weightings and scores, and to carry out 'what-if?' analysis to test the sensitivity of the solution to changes in weighting. A small change in weighting may affect the final solution.

AHP does not have these limitations and is based on the decision-maker making simple qualitative pairwise comparisons of the relative importance of criteria, eg 'a supplier's financial solidity is much more important than that they show up well in reference visits'. These qualitative judgements are automatically translated by AHP into quantitative weightings.

The Expert Choice® software tool, designed especially to support AHP, was used during the assessment and all the criteria and the scores were recorded in an Expert Choice AHP model. The assessment model containing some 70 independent criteria in a three-level hierarchy was built by IPL and validated by the EIG team in about three weeks, and the detailed proposals from 8 suppliers were evaluated in a similar time.

THE OUTCOMES

EIG managers have been delighted with the work that IPL has carried out for them:

'Although EIG is a successful specialist insurer, it is not large enough to cost-effectively employ highly specialised IT and telecommunications staff that are infrequently used. Where appropriate we use external expertise and to this end we have established an excellent working relationship with IPL, and we have come to rely on their expert skills when we need help. IPL responds swiftly, their staff fit in well with our own, and they understand how we work. They form a seamless and vital part of our drive to use technology to improve the services we offer to our clients.'

Nigel Giffin, Research and Business Support Manager, Management Services Division

'We needed our new PABX to satisfy three aims: to meet current EIG needs that we already recognised, to support our future growth, and to provide us with a solid modern communications hub. IPL understood what we needed now, and made sound suggestions for what we should allow for in the future. They prepared the ITT very quickly and efficiently, allowing us to go out to tender confidently. The PABX was installed successfully.'

Mrs Jan Arnold, Communications Manager

'IPL enabled us to compare the solutions and suppliers for our new Life and Pensions system in a way that exactly reflected what was important to us. The method they selected and the assessment model they developed compelled us to make our criteria visible, allowed us to record our decisions simply, and to test the strength of our final choice. The method was very quick, and allowed us to get a really good feel for the characteristics of the alternative solutions and their suppliers. We are now confidently going ahead with the selected supplier.'

Mark Goodale, General Manager, Financial Services Division



FURTHER INFORMATION

Contact:

Dave Jackson
IPL Finance
Eveleigh House
Grove Street
Bath
BA1 5LR
UK

Telephone: +44(0) 1225 475055
Facsimile: +44 (0) 1225 444400
Email: finance@iplbath.com
http://www.iplbath.com

Project Brief IPL 001 BRF F 4.0 web
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