

Case study: Global Bank, Africa

Background

Ever-increasing regulation and industry legislation makes life more complex and costly for financial institutions. It is no longer simply a case of keeping up with technology and reducing operational costs to maintain a competitive edge.

Mergers and acquisitions and a global perspective mean that organizations have to remain flexible in their approach to information management requirements, and the law demands it. Despite geographical boundaries and cultural differences, the risks need to be managed.

Crown was contacted by a global bank in Africa, to review current management of its group information as it was aware that in other African countries, financial institutions are facing severe penalties and expensive court battles, as a result of them not being able to locate information in a timely manner, if at all.

Africa faces unique challenges with IT Infrastructure and utility supplies. Inconsistent delivery of electricity to support IT systems (even with back-up generators and UPS systems) means that there is still a high dependency on hard-copy documents. While the many want to move into the paperless world, they still rely on original documentation to back up their information systems.

Problems

Crown was invited to meet the bank and to visit one of its records centers, as the bank believed that its troubles lay in how boxes of files were being stored.

On deeper investigation, it emerged that the issues lay not only in storage. Although their internal controls and systems were limited, many of the real challenges were linked to inefficient practices 'up-stream' at the point of processing information, managing that data and finally, the physical storage.

In order to address the storage issues, there were other areas that needed attention in the branches. The importance of correct data capture, accurate referencing, as well as web-based solutions to drive the standardization of process and procedure, were all considered. We also proposed scanning and imaging options and instant scan-back of files direct to staff.

With this latter option, Crown was concerned about the potential proliferation of emailed PDF-format images, likely to reside in staff email accounts – a potential data security and data protection challenge of some size.

Looking in more detail we identified that the bank operates a shared service center in India, providing back-room support to the business. They also provided image viewing and client database services, to other parts of the institution. The solution moved from emailed PDF images, to providing images via a remote SFTP server for uploading into the bank's internal systems.

This dealt with Crown's concerns about data proliferation, and also meant that costs would be kept to an absolute minimum, as only one copy of the image would ever be required.

The Solution

Following initial consultation program in the first country, Crown was asked to consider the requirements of the bank in nine further countries, throughout Africa. The challenge was to provide a solution to meet the needs of the central banking business, and to address the local concerns too.

The level of sophistication throughout the region varied considerably from one country to the next. Some parts were quite advanced in their document management programs while others had inaccurate, paper-based systems to manage their documents.

Some countries had good systems in place, while others had very few, if any, controls over how documentation was managed. It should be added that security was held in very high regard and without exception – the security of facilities was of a high standard.

Working throughout the Africa region presents a number of challenges, especially when one considers that, at that time, Crown did not own any management centers, or employ any people in any of the countries within scope. That did not deter the Crown team, the first thought always being to find an answer.

To address this issue, an expert team of Crown professionals was assembled to work in each country. This process formed part of the pre-implementation planning program. With a diverse region, the solution was surprisingly simple. Crown agreed to take responsibility for all facilities and to use the most suitable internet technology in the branch network to enable full controls over process. Scanning (imaging) items at source and delivering image files directly to the Service Center was a natural flow for certain document types.

We reviewed how mandates are created and managed and how other documents were processed. In addition, we considered options for the delivering electronic images to end users, how best to capture the data and where that should happen.

Probing into the inner workings of the bank, we were able to assess the bottle-necks in the business and provide solutions to overcome all of these.

Crown's structure to manage the relationship was established at a local level to ensure direct accountability and a full understanding of the needs within the local market. This is controlled

and supported by senior management in the region, with a regional account manager taking overall control over the whole relationship.

This was a perfect opportunity for Crown and the client to develop a service based around its needs, encapsulating a wealth of consulting expertise, project management and implementation skills, and of course, a huge amount of database reconciliation and document storage programs. Today the client benefits from a single partner that has standardized their process across Africa, making it easier for them to manage information, and allowed them to retrieve relevant information in a matter of minutes. Not only has this enhanced the delivery of services, but it has also reduced their unit costs in providing this service considerably.