



Customer: Cheval Property Finance
Web Site: www.cheval.co.uk
Number of Employees: 30
Country or Region: United Kingdom
Industry: Finance services
Partner: Linksfeld Technologies

Customer Profile

Cheval Property Finance is part of the Cheval Group. Headquartered in Watford, its success is based on speed, flexibility, and service excellence.

Software and Services

- Microsoft Server Product Portfolio
 - Microsoft SQL Server 2005
 - Windows Server 2003
- Microsoft Visual Studio
 - Microsoft Visual Studio .NET 2005
 - Microsoft Visual Studio .NET 2008
- Technologies
 - Microsoft .NET Framework 2.0
 - Microsoft .NET Framework 3.5
- Windows XP

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Finance Company More Than Doubles Loan Processing with Web-Enabled Infrastructure

“Microsoft is a trusted name and I’m very Microsoft-centric because everyone knows how to use its core desktop applications. We wouldn’t look at anything else.”

Ellis Sher, Chief Executive Officer, Cheval Property Finance

Personnel at Cheval Property Finance used manual, paper-based systems to administer loan applications. The company worked with Linksfeld Technologies to create a Web-enabled loan-processing infrastructure—built on Microsoft® technologies—that delivers electronic, straight-through processing. Today, employees have more than doubled the number of loans they can handle in a single day.

Business Needs

United Kingdom-based Cheval Property Finance, established in 1995, is a leading lender in the short-term finance market more commonly known as bridging finance. The company is authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority (FSA) and holds a consumer credit licence, through which it enters into consumer credit agreements.

During 2008, the finance industry worldwide has felt the negative effects of the global credit crunch, which has significantly curtailed funds available to lenders such as Cheval. But companies like Cheval know the market will bounce back at some point in the future and want to ensure they’re in a good

position to take advantage of the upswing when it occurs.

In 2006, when the lending market was at its height, the company looked to automate its paper-based, manual systems for processing applications. The key drivers at the time were to exploit market conditions more effectively, but also to boost internal efficiencies to help overcome future downturns in the market.

Ellis Sher, Chief Executive Officer at Cheval Property Finance describes how labour-intensive the whole application process was. “Somebody would download an application from our Web site or call us on the

telephone. If the application was from our site, applicants would have to fax over the completed form, which would then be inputted into a spreadsheet. This was the beginning of a manual underwriting process that resulted in an ever-expanding paper document being passed back and forth between departments. A lot of time was wasted searching for files.”

The system severely restricted the throughput of applications and reduced the productivity of personnel. Sher says: “Our future success depended on being more agile across the company and exploiting every business opportunity as soon as it arose.”

Solution

Cheval turned to IT consultancy Linksfield Technologies for support. Sher says: “We’d worked with Linksfield in the past and its staff had proved their expertise in software systems and software development.”

Linksfield proposed building a loan-processing infrastructure from scratch using Microsoft technologies. “We had great confidence in Linksfield because it’s a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner. We use Microsoft systems in many areas of the business so we were confident in the technology too,” says Sher.

He adds: “If you’re going to build something mission critical, you need to make sure that you’re using a solid, reliable organisation. Microsoft is a trusted name and I’m very Microsoft-centric because everyone knows how to use its core desktop applications. We wouldn’t look at anything else.”

At this point the work that Linksfield had done for Cheval in the past really paid off. The partner understood the business from top to bottom and realised the importance of getting the processing platform’s design right before

any development work started. Once specifications were complete, Linksfield began work, creating a centralised data store holding all loan application information, which would be accessible across the business. The system became known by its acronym ELMER, which stands for Electronic Loan Management and Enterprise Reporting.

In 2007, the first version of ELMER went live. At the heart of the infrastructure was Microsoft SQL Server® 2005 data management software, running on the Windows Server® 2003 operating system. An ELMER client application—built using the Microsoft .NET Framework 2.0 and the Microsoft Visual Studio® 2005 development system—ran on desktops in a Windows® XP environment. Since then, ELMER has evolved rapidly. Today, it integrates with an intermediary portal called MARVIN for straight-through processing and uses the latest technologies such as the .NET Framework 3.0 and Visual Studio 2008.

When personnel work with the ELMER and MARVIN infrastructures, all client programs have the look and feel of Microsoft solutions, making them easy to use. What’s more, the whole solution is extremely secure, maintaining the confidentiality of people’s loan applications. Dr. Larry Shapiro, Director at Linksfield, says: “Due to the training provided and the technologies’ ease of use, Cheval personnel adapted quickly to the new and more efficient way of working with ELMER and MARVIN.”

Benefits

Because of ELMER and MARVIN, Cheval underwriters process more than double the number of applications in a day compared with previously. “I think back and I don’t know how we coped without ELMER,

MARVIN, and the Microsoft technologies that underlie them,” says Sher. The company is agile enough to respond quickly to changes in the loans market. Productivity is greatly improved so Cheval can overcome current economic conditions. But, importantly, when the market improves, it can scale operations and increase loan processing instantly.

- Brokers submit loan applications quickly and easily through the Cheval Web site.
- Customers track loan processing online, giving them an easy-to-access, up-to-date view of the status of their application.
- Brokers gain a response to their loan application faster, boosting customer satisfaction rates for Cheval.
- Applications are processed electronically without the need for paper files, making the business more environmentally sustainable.
- Employees no longer rely on the paper files being passed successfully between departments to process a loan.
- Personnel no longer receive e-mails requesting the location of a particular paper file, cutting the amount of distracting e-mail traffic.
- Centralised data storage gives every employee a “single version of the truth,” so information on loans is easily available and consistent across the company.
- Cheval management is more effective due to a single, accessible repository of real-time loan processing data.
- Microsoft technologies ensure a flexible infrastructure than can be scaled quickly to meet business needs.
- Best-practice system design and Microsoft solutions keep loan data secure.
- Linksfield gives Cheval peace of mind that it has a Gold Certified Partner on board, which understands its business needs and has proven it can complete projects on time and within budget.