

JAMES SHARP: Case Study.

“The way the business was growing, moving to larger premises was becoming imperative,” recalls Martin Entwistle, partner and advisor at dynamic Bury stockbrokers, James Sharp and Co, “but a move is always a chore, and shifting over a century’s worth of files was a daunting prospect.”

Martin’s other hat at James Sharp and Co is that of IT strategist. “Scanning the archive seemed to offer a solution to the immediate problem,” he says, “but I was conscious that a document management system could do so much more for the business in the long term, and I approached Paul Brooks for advice.”

Paul Brooks is Managing Director of Antar Information Technology Ltd, in Cheshire, which provides the ‘Stockaid’ stockbroking system to James Sharp and Co, as well as managing their hardware and software systems.

“Paul had known the guys at Softology for some time, and having seen a demonstration of their software, the document management solution was the obvious choice,” says Martin.

Sitting in James Sharp and Co’s smart new office suite in Bury, with a panoramic view of the Pennines that would be the envy of anyone, Martin remarks, “It has been a successful move and we have plenty of room for growth. More than simply archiving, the Softology document management software has effectively simplified a fragmented memory based filing system, developed over 125 years of trading, into a smooth client communications system.”

Client relationships are a key factor in James Sharp and Co’s success. “We provide a personal, bespoke, service”, stresses Martin, “and having the client correspondence to hand when we are talking with them is vital.”

Antar has enabled this by adding a ‘view button’ to Stockaid, which links into Softology’s API. This means that clicking a button when on a client screen displays the requisite documentation for the client, which, he adds, “includes email correspondence as well as scanned letters, newspaper clippings and PDFs.”

“Furthermore,” Martin comments, “compliance legislation means that we have to capture, and retain for retrieval, clear records of client identification such as birth certificates, passport and driving licence images, which was onerous in the days before electronic document management.”

Martin has a clear vision for the future. At the moment their mail is opened and the paper work directed to the relevant advisor, who scans it and retains the documents for actioning.

“We’re only scratching the surface of Softology at the moment,” he says, “there’s a wealth of functionality to explore, and the next thing we want to implement is document routing. It would be much better to scan the correspondence with Softology’s mail room function, and use their routing to move electronic documentation to the recipient.”

Martin concludes, “Routing scanned documents is going to require a change in culture, but I am looking forward to the day when electronic images become as much of the fabric of the business as paper has been, and the way James Sharp and Co’s staff have taken to the Softology system, I don’t think that time is far off, which can only be positive thing.”