

# SMALL COMPANY SOLUTIONS

## MUTUAL INSURER HELPS DEVELOP AN ALL-IN-ONE SOFTWARE PACKAGE

Evolution, by definition, is the hallmark of moving forward, but within the insurance industry, it can be the root cause of paralysis. Unyielding regulatory changes juxtaposed with the perpetual need for efficiency, cost effectiveness, statistical analysis and proficiency of audits can pose a confounding dilemma for small and medium-sized operations. With limited resources, they struggle to stay on top of the information technologies required to keep current.

**B**ut a small yet progressive company in rural Ontario is proving to be a lifeline for companies that lack the continual support of an in-house IT department. In fact, it might be argued that clients of SEH Computer Systems Inc. are even getting a leg up on their larger counterparts.

The reason, explains P. Kevin Remington, president of the Tavistock-based software developer, is that the primary objective at SEH is to deliver a comprehensive, turnkey system inclusive of all needs within the office, negating the need to “patch in” other programs for accounting, statistics, increased connectivity or even to enhance imaging capabilities.

“The biggest change in IT is the change itself,” Remington says. “At one time a company could get a LAN and be happy with a server and workstations. Now you need a print server, Web server, file server, administration server, and a server for

servers. While the technology has grown complicated and more specialized, insurance has also become specialized and complicated.

“Where do smaller companies put their investment dollars? Do they hire and maintain people for computer network technical support or just network administration? Or, is their money better spent on doing what their focus is, and that is insurance?” Remington queries. “If that is the case, then they need to hire computer technical support they can trust. That also leaves them to try and find someone who knows about everything.”

Unfortunately that person does not exist, he points out, especially at an affordable price for the small mutual insurance companies with total premiums written ranging from \$500,000 to \$26 million that comprise SEH’s client base.

Recognizing that such companies aren’t able to hire in-house experts, SEH is out to fill the niche. How it got

By Daryl-Lynn Carlson

## CORPORATE VISION

started doing just that is an interesting story of simple demand.

### Do It Yourself

SEH actually began as the computer department of a successful farm mutual in southern Ontario called South Easthope Mutual Insurance Co. In the early nineties, Ed Pellow, Easthope's manager at the time, was technologically savvy and keen on developing a practical system that was as adaptable as it was efficient. He spent much time out of the office on business and wanted to be able to return and check on developments, access statistics and update his analysis quickly on demand.

Under Pellow's direction, the computer programmers at South Easthope worked closely with the people in the company who'd be using the system as the software was developed. Pellow guided the programmers on the types of data his professionals required and briefed them on legislative and statis-



Remington says SEH believes clients should be accommodated, not dictated to. The goal is to help customers create the future they seek, not what an IT provider envisions.

tical requirements. Soon a completely new insurance application emerged as one of the best and most complete software systems ever for a p&c carrier.

Word got around. Other insurance companies were impressed with the performance, speed and efficiency of the system and before the software was

fully completed, five had implemented the program into their functions.

By 1996, with a sustained demand evident throughout the industry, the program's developers amicably left Easthope and set out on their own, establishing SEH, which today continues to develop and improve delivery and support for its three flagship products: Titan, a software system for insurance companies; Pathfinder for brokers, and Trailblazer for agents. The company is a close-knit operation with eight employees – six of whom are software developers – and is run out of a refurbished home to keep overhead costs in check.

“At this time we do not have a lot of excess,” says Remington, who was one of the original programmers with Easthope to leave to launch SEH. “We have a very lean shop with people who are performing amazing things. There are larger development shops that are caught up in red tape and are slow to

produce. We are able to maintain our basic processes and work as one team performing several specialized tasks. That is the only way we can manage to achieve our quality and standard.”

Besides continuing to develop requisite programs for clients' basic functionality along with bells and whistles for its software, SEH also provides comprehensive technical support and can forecast their needs for the future. “Our company focus is our major product, Titan,” explains Remington. “Our client focus is to have a solution for all their insurance processing requirements.”

He cites an example of additional functionalities that SEH continues to produce. “We have developed an application that is an electronic in/out board called Minder Pro. This product will give the entire office access to see who is in, out, in a meeting, at lunch, is not to be disturbed, and has a common calendar for company events. We are

not trying to replace products like Outlook or Palm calendars,” he says. “We are trying to make things easier in the office.”

Some of the applications they have developed were founded on a search for efficiency within his own company, Remington says. “One of our newer employees thought we needed a way to communicate without the phone or running all over the office. He added instant messaging to our Minder Pro.” The option is now available to SEH clients. “If we can find it handy, perhaps our clients will.”

## Meeting Needs

SEH is mindful that the evolution of technology means accommodating clients rather than imposing solutions on them, so its programmers schedule meetings with them routinely. “Our job is not to just supply what is available, but to help lead our clients into the future,” says Remington. Most impor-

tantly, he adds “that is not the future we want, but the future they want for their companies. We hold regular user meetings. At these meetings we present our company perspective and direction.

“We also spend time to bring something new to the users. We try to let them know what changes are happening in the industry. Should they use dual monitors? Should they use flat screens? Is a SAN the storage model they need? Is the latest version of Windows something they should install right away?”

So far, SEH has 13 clients at even more locations across Canada and none plan to change their software provider anytime soon.

Al Simpson, manager of Peel Maryborough Mutual Insurance Co. in Drayton, Ont., which writes up to \$5 million in coverage, says his company shopped around at the time that Ontario mutual companies were considering a centralized computer system. “We chose not to change it because we were happy with what SEH was doing for us and, in fact, they were doing more than what the other systems being considered had available,” he says. “Its integrity, the checks and balances in the system, are great.”

Germania Mutual Insurance Co. in Langenburg, Sask. is using SEH to finally move “into the computer world” in time for its 100th birthday, says Lorinda Buchberger, general manager. “We’ve been manual for 90 years. We just finished the data entry process, officially finishing entering all our data around the beginning of December, so it took us a whole year and a bit. For 2008, we are going to be strictly running on the Titan software. It’s very exciting for us.”

Germania in Langenburg is the head office and has about 40 agents selling throughout Saskatchewan. When the company made the decision to make the big leap, it undertook a lot of research and reference checks on any prospective providers it was considering.

“Everyone who was using them was happy with SEH,” Buchberger

## TITAN FEATURES

Consider a sampling of the functionality of Titan developed exclusively for the insurance industry by SEH Computer Systems Inc.

- Automatic rating for policy module
- Automatic reinsurance calculations
- Automatic statistics creation
- Complete integration of insurance functions and accounting functions
- General ledger, policy, claims, premiums receivable, investments, cheques
- Imaging integration
- Abeyance integration
- Notes/remark integration
- Inspection system integration
- Conversion from DOS application to 32-bit Windows application
- Integration with Windows API in a console application
- CSIO-compliant download to broker systems
- Printing overlay
- Printing archiving
- Minder Pro – an electronic in/out board
- Pathfinder – a broker system
- Trailblazer – an agent system

says, adding that the tech firm has another client in Alberta, which made Germania confident that it would be in good company, especially if relying on a system and support from a provider in Ontario. “We’re a small insurance company and to have someone else out West, we thought that would be very beneficial to us,” she says. “It’s huge. It’s like a different world,” she says of the divide in distance and mindset between the two provinces – not to mention that “it’s a lot of money.”

### Smooth Sailing

Yet so far the transition has been seamless and worry-free, she says, largely because SEH “has been very accommodating, even with our time zones being different. It’s like they’re almost at our back door.”

Nor has the distance factor been a deterrent for Southeastern Mutual Insurance in Moncton, N.B. “The words that I use to try and describe the system is that it runs my shop for

me,” enthuses manager Ray White. “It pretty much does everything from one end to the other and it handles it all so I don’t need to have any add-ons to run things, I don’t need to have anybody in here to get under the hood and fix the program. All is looked after.”

Southeastern has nine employees onsite and has commissioned SEH to also incorporate connectivity for all its captive agents for full access to its Titan database, says White.

He adds that in early December he met with a number of off-site agents to gage their satisfaction with the system and received only good reviews.

Remington, meanwhile, hints at some of the upcoming projects his team is working on for the near future. They range from an adaptation of SEH systems to the Smart Phone to enhance connectivity for professionals relying on limited-life battery laptops to a secure, Web-based resource for policyholders to be able to look online and see their insurance information. Stay tuned! **CI**