

case.study

Acorn Estates

Acorn Estates uses CML Software's Agency Suite. CML Agency Sales was installed at the branches for property sales. CML Agency Lettings was installed at the branches for residential lettings. CML Agency Lettings and Accounting were installed at the head office for pre-tenancy administration, property management and block/flat management. All the data is stored on the central server with local PCs running the client software. Backup of the server ensures that all company data is saved.

A Wide Area Network (WAN) was implemented using ISDN30 between the offices as broadband was unavailable at the time. The data connection was initially set to 128Kbps with expansion up to 1Mbps. This set up fixed the cost of internal calls and allowed for expansion of the data network if required.

Microsoft 2000 server was installed to run the MS SQL Server database and the branches were networked with PCs. Each branch network was connected to the

central office and server through the WAN. The PC's were set to run Windows 2000 to provide a stable platform for performance and lower cost of administration.

CML transferred the data from the existing system and customised the software to match Acorn's exact requirements which included:

- Transfer all properties, clients, applicants, agreements, purchasers, accounts and accounts reconciliation and history
- Configure:
 - Accounts
 - Reports
 - Client documents such as Rent Statements
 - Letters
 - Library codes
 - Bank transfers
 - Web uploads

Company Profile

Acorn Estates is now a 15 office estate agent offering residential sales, lettings and block/flat management. In addition, the company offers value added services such as insurance and mortgages.

Acorn employs approximately 180 staff, with roughly 6 staff per branch. The remaining employees are located at the central office, from where the administration and property management is carried out.

The branches have their own properties and sell/let them in a competitive manner; only having access to other branches property information after a certain period of time.

The Requirements

The existing computer system ran on Pick and Unix and the branches were networked via leased lines. This aging system needed to be replaced and the following key features for a new system were outlined:

Software was required to manage estate sales, residential lettings, property management and block/flat management.

Networking between branches was required to reduce inter-branch phone costs and enable real-time access to property and client information across all branches. It also needed to be capable of running over relatively slow links between the branches.

A contracted list of the specific functional requirements was agreed as follows:

- Capable of handling 10,000's of landlords and properties
 - Scalable database
 - Fast and flexible searching
 - Robust
- Multi-user
- Easy to use software
 - Windows front end
 - Clear displays
 - Simple navigation between screens
- High level of security
 - Restrict access by job
 - Branch and time based access restrictions
- Flexible and Configurable
 - Able to change as the business needs change and grows
 - Easily modify letters and other client facing documents
 - Change printed material such as wallcards when required
 - Add extra fields to database as required
- Extensive reporting capabilities
- Efficiency through automation such as
 - Print brochures and listings from system
 - Mailshots and automatic letter production
 - Statement runs
 - Automatic allocation of cash
 - Automatic bank reconciliation
 - Automated arrears chasing
- Historical records
 - File notes system
 - Keep history of clients and properties
- Strong accounts system
 - Full double entry accounting system
 - Trial balances
 - Batch posting
 - Clear and easy to use
 - Handle overseas tax
 - Extensive reports
 - BACS etc
 - Automatic Internet upload of available properties
- Support:
 - High quality support staff
 - Immediate response to problems
 - On-line support
 - Reconfigure system at short notice
 - Pro-active approach
- Data Transfer from existing system:
 - Complete data transfer from existing system
 - Customisation and configuration

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Why CML Software?

Acorn Estates chose CML Software because it provided all the functionality required. Significantly it was:

- Multi-user system
- Client/Server for good response over slow networks
- Centralized Database
- Robust with MS SQL Server back end
- Windows front end
- Full accounting system
- Highly configurable
- Integrated lettings and management systems
- Easy to use

Summary

CML Software has provided a robust accounting system for Acorn Estates and built an infrastructure that allows Acorn Estates to expand. Since the implementation of the CML Software applications, Acorn Estates have reduced administration costs and increased efficiency through increased access to business information and automating processes to allow better record keeping and auditing. In addition, this easy to use software has reduced staff training costs and the access to new technologies has allowed additional services to be offered to clients.

Since the initial implementation, Acorn has doubled in size, with 200 user licenses for the software. It has been possible for Acorn to expand their business without restructuring their IT and infrastructure. This was made possible by the initial design decisions made by CML Software, both in terms of the CML Software applications and for Acorn's hardware/network infrastructure.