



In the fiercely competitive mail order fulfilment market, one organisation is taking great strides towards winning the battle for service supremacy. That firm is Clientbase Fulfilment and a critical component of its expertise is Elucid, the leading multi-channel software solution from Sanderson.

Suitably fulfilled

The fulfilment market is crowded and highly competitive, but one business that is carving a real niche for itself is Clientbase Fulfilment. This specialist firm provides outsourced services to the home shopping industry and is enjoying a growing reputation for superb service driven by its ability to forge and maintain excellent client relationships.

The £3.5 million turnover business was established in 1999; it employs around 90 core staff, although contract workers are used to boost numbers to as much as 150 during peak times. The head office is in Heathfield, Newton Abbott, from where Clientbase offers its full end-to-end outsourced solution for the management of home shopping businesses. This

site comprises offices and warehousing; another site, just a few miles away at Modbury, is home to the contact centre operation.

Customers vary in size and scope of contract, and range from major German catalogue firms – for which Clientbase acts as the UK contact and returns centre – to home-grown mail order firms such as M&G, through to US-owned Day-Timer.

Although Clientbase Fulfilment was established just under ten years ago, the company's founders worked together previously in similar organisations. Director Rob Smeddle says he has witnessed immense changes to the home shopping sector in terms of service provision: "We've had to adapt enormously over the years. When I first started in

Rob Smeddle *Director*

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this business 25 years ago, by far the majority of orders arrived by post, accompanied by cheques. Now, it’s very different: at least 40% of orders come via the web, 55% by telephone and only 5% by post.” This means, of course, that fulfilment houses need a solid and adaptable technological infrastructure to be able to cope with the multi-channel nature of orders.

Four years ago, Clientbase’s directors realised that they needed new software if they were to progress and expand at the planned rate. The increase in demand for web-driven order fulfilment meant that Clientbase was finding it more difficult to meet clients’ complex business demands. “The system we had was good at the time, but technology had moved on and, as such, it had very basic functionality,” explains Smeddle. “We knew we had to find a system that would have the capability to manage all the intricacies of home shopping fulfilment – and that meant, in particular, finding a solution which would interface easily with clients’ websites.”

Clientbase began the search. “Elucid was really beginning to build a strong reputation in our sector, so it soon came to our attention,” recalls Smeddle. Several systems were evaluated before the shortlist was drawn up. “We investigated the systems thoroughly, but Elucid’s functionality shone through from the outset,” he says. “In particular, we were very impressed by its strong

warehousing module. We could see that this system combined in-depth functionality with a very modern, fresh front end that would make it simple and easy for operators to use. We were also impressed by its excellent reporting capability – in our business, client reporting is a critical part of the service offering.”

For a fulfilment house like Clientbase, there is a requirement for several areas of expertise. High-quality services are essential, as Smeddle says: “One area of expertise is a well-managed contact centre, which takes orders by telephone or email and meets all the customer service requirements. We also have to run a slick warehousing operation, from where we pick, pack and despatch stock – quickly, accurately and efficiently. But the other part, which is effectively the engine room for any business like ours, is the requirement for specialist software to manage the entire process, from end to end. The Sanderson solution does that, and more, and it’s testament to its role in this operation that I include it in our proposals for new business. We have what is widely recognised to be the best-of-breed home shopping fulfilment solution – and that’s part of our pitch now.”

Once implemented within Clientbase the process of migrating its clients to the Sanderson solution began. “We started with one or two clients and tested those thoroughly for a few months, to make sure the system was totally



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robust and suited for each client’s operation,” he says. Now, the system is used for order management, warehouse management and payment processing. More than 90% of all the orders Clientbase handles are credit or debit card purchases, so card processing functionality has been vital to the company’s enhanced offering to clients and to its ability to expand.

The ease of implementation – both for Clientbase and, subsequently, its key clients – has been matched by the system’s ease of use for new operators. Key to Clientbase’s success is its ability to increase capacity to meet peak demand for its clients, and it is vital that temporary contact centre operators can be up and running swiftly. “Elucid is functionally rich but user friendly,” says Smeddle, “and it’s praise indeed to be able to say a system is so intuitive and easy to use. It helps our efficiency, keeps call times down and keeps talk time down. When you work to a price per order, as we do, if calls take 50% longer than we think, we could blow our margin.”

Clientbase has been able to streamline its processes and boost efficiency using the Sanderson

solution. The benefits have been extensive throughout the company – and for its clients, and their customers in turn. Take financial reporting: “We have complete transparency and can report on each order. That’s vital in this business – attention to detail is a prerequisite, and that includes detailed reporting,” says Smeddle.

Clientbase has also found real value in the system’s ability to offer prompts for up-selling – as well as for cross-selling if a particular product is out of stock. The part-pick functionality is proving extremely beneficial too: “It surpasses anything I’ve ever come across before,” confirms Smeddle.

Indeed, across the organisation, Clientbase has new-found capability, functionality and visibility. “We wouldn’t be where we are today without the web interface capability that Elucid offers,” adds Smeddle. “And the stock management capability within the warehouse has been transformed... we’re really in a totally new era.”

This new era, in fact, has even seen business expand to a new continent for one client. For several years, Clientbase has been managing

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the UK and Ireland operation for US-owned client Day-Timer, a long-established specialist supplier of personal organisers and time management systems. This client was migrated to the Sanderson solution at the beginning of 2008 and so successful was the move that, soon afterwards, Day-Timer approached Clientbase with a proposition. “Day-Timer asked us to take over the fulfilment operation in Australia and, crucially, to manage both the Australian and New Zealand operations using the Elucid system,” says Smeddle. Two of Clientbase’s key project personnel visited the Australian operation to carry out assessment and training, and the contact centre team there has now been taken over by Clientbase. This means that Day-Timer now has three business operations – in the UK, Australia and New Zealand – running on the Sanderson system.

The achievement of this was helped enormously by Sanderson, says Smeddle. “The combination of the Sanderson people and the Elucid product has been absolutely brilliant. They have supported us in this project to make sure we were able to manage the implementation efficiently and smoothly.”

As well as the usual challenges posed by a new multi-currency operation, the project also entailed development of a continuity model for product re-ordering: “Day-Timer has a complex

and sophisticated model that needs to be managed and fulfilled properly on a modern system. The service team is in Australia, but the database sits here in Devon and all the technology management takes place over here. Elucid enables us to do that. We could never have contemplated a project of this nature without Elucid, there’s no question of that.”

As the business expands, Clientbase is confident that it can meet the demands of new clients, now that it has a modern, leading-edge solution: “We know that Sanderson will continue to develop Elucid and it will continue to be a leading solution for our market.” This includes functionality such as instalment billing, which will enable Clientbase to manage a TV shopping channel client via the Sanderson solution.

For the future, Clientbase is focused on doing what it does best – offering a highly competitive fulfilment service backed up by best-of-breed technological capability. The Elucid system from Sanderson is pivotal to the company’s growth plans and its ability to support business-to-business as well as business-to-consumer demands means that Clientbase is confident that this partnership will continue for many years.

For more information on Clientbase visit www.clientbasefulfilment.co.uk