The Return of Accountability

A Conversation with Westminster American Insurance Company

A good way to gauge your success is to talk with your customers. A better way is to have a third party talk to your customers. We asked O'Brien Communications Group (OCG) to talk with John Scott, President of Westminster American, and to record the conversation. The following Q&A derives from that conversation:

OCG: How did you find out about Finys in the first place?

John: I met them at the NAMIC Management Conference several years ago in San Diego. We weren't actually looking for a new system. But when we met Scott, got to talking, met Kurt, it made sense to make the move.

OCG: What was it about that first impression?

John: Everyone at Finys understands insurance lingo, which I think was missing in any other vendors we had vetted or used. It just seems like, from the start, Finys used the same words we did. I didn't feel like I had to explain to them what we do.

OCG: We hear lots of horror stories about implementations and such going bad and dragging on for years. You went from zero to production in 50 weeks, in 10 states, with Commercial Package, BOP, and Commercial Umbrella. How did you pull that off? It had to have been teamwork.

John: We dedicated several people in our office to the project. Finys dedicated people. We used Marias Technology to help with requirements gathering, testing, and implementation. We started at the end of 2018 with a mandate of issuing policies from the Finys Suite on 1/1/2020. So, 50 weeks is a real number. We got every policy out on time, and it was a fast, slam-dunk implementation.

OCG: This is likely self-evident, but one of your objectives in acquiring a new system had to have been growth, correct?

John: Yes. Without Finys, growth would have been hard over the last 18 months. But with Finys, we started at about $32 million in written premium at the end of 2019 and are hoping to hit $60 million this year with only a modest increase in staff. We're lean and mean. That's why we need our IT to be lean and mean with us.

OCG: Has your growth been in any particular areas?

John: In the past year-and-a-half, we've grown a lot in Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

OCG: Finys mentioned they helped you improve your time to complete inspections. What kind of inspections?

John: We do building inspections. We used to handwrite them and manually keep track of inspection requests when they came in because they weren't attached to a file. Now we can request inspections through the Finys Suite, so

underwriters don't have to spend time chasing inspection requests that have been outstanding for months. Sometimes those handwritten reports were here, but we just didn't know how to get our hands on them.

OCG: Finys also suggested you have substantially improved print output. What is that? And how much stuff do you actually have to print anymore?

John: In the past, what showed onscreen wasn't necessarily what would be on the policy when it went out. The accuracy definitely improved. We're also working on timing — automating output and sending copies to agents, which also helps us comply with state insurance regulations.

OCG: Which of the modules from the Finys Suite are you using at present?

John: Policy Administration, Billing, and Claims. And it's funny: I tend to overlook claims because I assume it's the easiest.

OCG: Are you using Business Intelligence (BI) or the Design Studio toolset?

John: We're starting the process of using BI. I'm champing at the bit to get that. It's at the forefront of what we're doing with them. And we've had discussions about the Design Studio. We're relying on Marias for product specs and such just now. We have a new CIO who's been working with Aaron Smuda to translate my wish list into a reality list for Finys.

OCG: We understand, since you started working with Finys, there's been a change in your AM Best rating. Is that true?

John: The day our policies went live on Finys, our company was purchased by NI Holdings (NODK). We acquired

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their A9 rating. So, while that didn't have anything do with Finys, the new rating gave us the ability to write a lot more business. And Finys gave us the ability to keep up.

OCG: I know we've talked about your growth. Are you confident in the scalability of the Finys Suite?

John: Yeah. Our biggest account up until three months ago was a three-and-a-half million-dollar schedule of apartments. That account would have literally shut our previous system down. It slowed Finys down a little. But we can still work. So, we can write more accounts and larger accounts without having to encounter what I call the spinning circle of death.

OCG: If you were asked to be a reference for Finys, is there anything else you might add to what you're shared with us?

John: There's one more thing I didn't really touch on. Finys is always accessible. We never feel like we get the runaround, like we can't get a call back or get a hold of somebody when we have some mission-critical issue, like getting policies out. They always answer. They always kind of give us a timeline of what they're doing and when they'll be doing it. Everyone here likes the clear ticketing. With our previous vendor, there was no ticket system. We talked about things and emailed about things for years, and nothing happened. We can view the Finys ticketing queue and always know where we are. We never have to wonder.

OCG: That might be called accountability and responsibility to your customers. Would you suggest those are dying arts?

John: I'd say Finys is bringing them back.

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