



Case Study



Southern Farm Bureau Life Insurance moves to a common computing platform to achieve goals

Do what matters

Business situation

Southern Farm Bureau Life Insurance Company (SFBLI) was established in 1946 to address its membership's specific needs relating to life insurance and financial planning. Today, its organization has branched into cities and towns all over the American south. This established company's home office, Southern Farm Bureau Life Insurance, located in Jackson, Mississippi, supports the agency's services in several states, including Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia.

SFBLI's continued primary goal is not merely to sell insurance, but also to provide service, value, protection and advice to each Farm Bureau member they serve through highly-qualified professionals.

There were a number of challenges the IT department was facing, with the key concern being an aging workforce with experienced mainframe application developers and systems programmers nearing retirement. Many of these individuals would be leaving within five years, creating a vast loss of knowledge with regards to mainframe operations. Additionally, it was becoming more challenging to recruit college graduates with mainframe knowledge. Most recent college grads were surprised to learn the company was still running on a mainframe. COBOL was no longer SFBLI's primary development platform and was becoming obsolete as it moved to C#.Net as its platform of choice.

"Regardless of what people in the industry say, the mainframe is an expensive platform to operate," says Charlie Allen, VP and CTO at SFBLI. "I wanted to try to flatten my IS spend and reduce it, if possible. Timing is everything; I wanted to make the move while I still had the staff to help pull it off."

Solution

Doing something as expensive and time consuming as rewriting or replacing the policy administration system that the company ran on was not a viable option. SFBLI quickly realized this would force it to hire many additional developers, which would have taken too long and cost too much money. The Avanade solution was much faster and less expensive. Moreover, the breakeven timeline on the cost of the engagement was two years.

Avanade began SFBLI's IBM mainframe migration project with a kickoff in November 2018 and ended with a successful cutover during first weekend of November 2020.

From the first time Allen met Avanade employees, he was impressed with their knowledge of the mainframe. He believed that to get off the mainframe, you must understand the mainframe, and Avanade's depth of experience covered that concern.

"Moving off the mainframe has allowed IS to achieve strategic IS goals. Having one common computing platform simplifies our environment and allows IS to focus more on the business rather than having to focus on the issues of supporting more than one computing platform."

– Charlie Allen

VP and CTO, Southern Farm Bureau Life Insurance

Results

Avanade's project and technical teams have always been responsive and very easy to work with, and Allen's experience was no different. Initially, he was concerned when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, how that would affect the project's completion. Still, Avanade's responsiveness and flexibility, and SFBLI employees' synergy, created a strong team that never missed a beat. Obviously, Allen would have preferred to have Avanade staff onsite throughout the project, but both Avanade and SFBLI staff made the remote relationship work exceptionally well. Allen genuinely appreciated the willingness of the Avanade organization in Europe to accommodate Central Standard Time in the US and to adjust their work schedules for results that not only met but exceeded expectations.

"I now have a staff who can take IS – and therefore the company – into the future, confident that for the foreseeable future, staff is knowledgeable and experienced on the platform and with the tools we provide them to do their work," says Allen.

"What can I say? I'm ecstatic with what Southern Farm Bureau Life Insurance and Avanade pulled off."

– Charlie Allen
VP and CTO, Southern Farm Bureau Life Insurance

NOTE: This story describes work that was completed by Ansysco, which was acquired by Avanade in November 2022.



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About Avanade

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