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Shareholders Service Group

[A Broker-Dealer with an ECM Foundation for Dedicated Service—and Growth.](#)

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Shareholders Service Group (SSG) was co-founded in 2002 by Peter Mangan and Bob Reed, financial services executives with over 60 collective years of experience in the brokerage services and financial advisor industry. Their goal was to provide high-quality, dedicated services for independent registered investment advisors.

From the beginning, Laserfiche® enterprise content management (ECM) software has provided a technological foundation to help SSG provide that high-quality, dedicated service. “Based on our business experience, how paper-intensive our business would be and the necessary controls around that, we knew it was incredibly important to have a well-known, well-respected document management system,” says Dan Skiles, executive vice president of SSG. “Laserfiche certainly knew FINRA and understood the importance of the documents that we use to run our business.”

Over the past decade, the firm has expanded—as has its use of Laserfiche to manage its documents electronically. “Our business is growing dramatically, and so the scalability and reliability of Laserfiche has been critical to that success for us,” Skiles says.

“When we started, we had zero advisors, and today we’re pushing almost 1,000. Keep in mind those advisors have accounts—from as little as four or five to several hundred. Laserfiche has been there with us the whole time,” he adds.

Content management that improves customer relationships

Key to its usefulness, Skiles says, has been Laserfiche’s customizable folder structures, which makes it easy to use in different business units. “We have multiple departments—trading, new accounts, operations, cash management—all using Laserfiche for their various business processes. And the fact that it’s flexible enough to meet their needs, even though their roles and responsibilities are different, has helped us to have a cohesive group responding appropriately to clients as we use their documents.”

Skiles also lauds Laserfiche’s ability to manage documents of all types and ages, using various metadata and comprehensive search capabilities. “We’re a heavily regulated

business, so yesterday's documents are just as important as today's," he says. "The fact that Laserfiche has grown with us, and is scalable and reliable as we grow our staff, has been critical in our overall success."

It's this best-of-breed ease-of-use, he says, that has been especially practical when it comes to getting everyone on the same (paperless) page. "Certainly one of the things we've noticed with Laserfiche is how user-friendly it is, so that our staff—from someone who's been on staff for eight to ten years to someone we just hired as an intern last year—can immediately be productive," he says. "Because everyone in the firm is responding to clients, a short learning curve is critical."

The result, according to Skiles, is a foundation for not only managing content, but also relationships. "When you run a broker-dealer, your documents are critical. They represent agreements. They represent authority," he says. "With Laserfiche, with the way we're able to work within the system, we have control of our clients' information. They're impressed by our ability to retrieve a document while we're on the phone with them, which ultimately strengthens that personal relationship."

Smoother audits

Regulators, too, have been impressed, as they were earlier this year. "We had FINRA come in to our office for their regular audit. Laserfiche was such a critical component of that because everything that FINRA wanted related to our documents," Skiles recalls. "Everything they asked for—new account applications, authorizations to do this for a client, this agreement that was established with this client, transfer instructions from other financial services firms—was in Laserfiche, so we were able to provide it to them electronically."

The cost of compliance has nearly doubled in the past three years, reaching an estimated annual cost of more than \$25 billion, according to the Securities Industry Association's Report on the Costs of Compliance in the U.S. Securities Industry. As Skiles points out, in an increasingly demanding regulatory environment, deploying an ECM solution not only improves the bottom line, but also helps simplify audits.

"It's a big deal," he continues. "Let me tell you, when you're sitting there with FINRA and you want to respond efficiently and effectively to their requests, removing some of that anxiety is worth a lot to both your sanity and your sleeping at night."

“That’s why we have rules that if it’s not scanned, it doesn’t exist. It’s so critical with our growing staff that we all have access to the same information. Now with nearly 1,000 advisors, we all have access to information at the click of a button.”

The competitive value of “technology strength”

The 2011 InvestmentNews Technology Study showed that, in the financial services industry, increased productivity was by far the most common consideration in technology spending. Automating routine, rules-based tasks allows staff at top-performing firms to spend more time serving clients.

When it comes to ROI, Skiles highlights the availability of information as one of Laserfiche’s defining factors—something that moves beyond getting rid of paper and filing cabinets. “Certainly the immediate ROI that comes to mind is not having documents and filing cabinets all over the place. But with a growing firm, the ROI I most appreciate is how quickly we can make an employee efficient. I can hire someone and have them up and running with Laserfiche in less than a day.”

The result, he says, is that SSG has kept operations optimal and compliance concerns to a minimum while also maintaining its competitive edge. “There’s been, obviously, competitive pressure on trading, and then of course the regulations have increased dramatically. What’s helped us a lot is technology,” he says.

“We took more trades over five days in August this past year than we did the first month that I was at the firm more than three years ago. And what’s exciting about that is that our trading desk was able to accommodate those trades just because of technology. Bottom line is that it does show you the technology strength that you have in this business.”

Hobey Echlin is a Writer/Researcher in the Laserfiche Marketing department and is active in the Laserfiche Luminaries program.