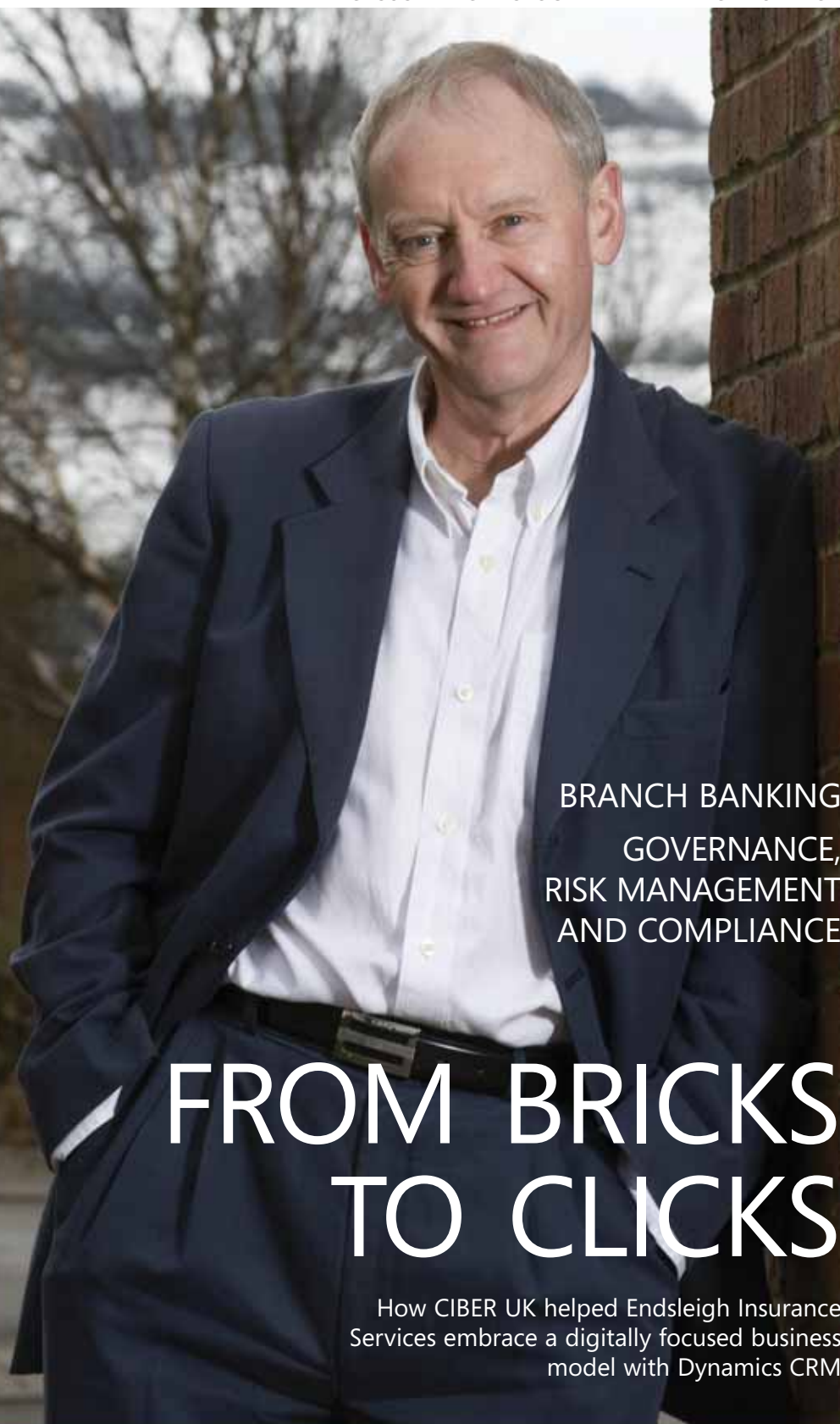


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"Newer, proven software technologies make it possible to reliably and cost-effectively backup branch offices at the central data centre."
Ian Masters, UK Sales and Marketing Director, Double-Take Software



SEE WHAT YOU SAY

WHEN IT COMES TO IM AND GROUP CHAT THERE ARE MANY IMPORTANT ISSUES TO CONSIDER, ESPECIALLY IN REGULATORY AND COMPLIANCE RISK. LUCKILY, HELP IS AT HAND, SAYS HOWARD TRAVERS

The use of instant messaging (IM) is growing at an exponential rate and with the recent release of Microsoft's Unified Communications (UC) suite, Office Communications Server (OCS) R2 2007, this is set to continue. While IM technologies have simplified and replaced e-mail for one-to-one conversations, chat is the natural extension for the replacement of group meetings, and a major new feature in OCS R2 2007 Group Chat.

Internet relay chat has been around for years, but the breakthrough came when innovative organisations like UBS extended that protocol to develop a persistent group chat product, resulting in a separate company called Parlano and the MindAlign product. Microsoft acquired MindAlign in 2007, and its adoption by many of the world's largest financial institutions has shaped the functionality of Microsoft's Group Chat, as many of those companies now plan to move to the UC platform.

When I was sales manager of Parlano in Europe, CXOs often questioned why they would need persistent group chat when they had e-mail, phones and portals. But once the penny dropped (often after a successful pilot) those same CXOs rapidly championed the concept and adopted it across the enterprise. Traders were attracted because they could create different 'rooms' for each market and conduct virtual meetings without leaving their desks. Group Chat offers a means of managing far-flung project teams and enabling faster, more informed investment decision-making.

There are, however, important issues to consider around IM and Group Chat, especially concerning regulatory and compliance risk. IM, including persistent group chat, is subject to the same stringent compliance regulations as e-mail. Many organisations are required to record and archive all communication data for differing retention periods in secure, tamper-proof storage facilities. They must also be able to readily retrieve the data when required for audit, compliance or e-discovery purposes, or face hefty fines for non-compliance.

Existing compliance solutions archive IM communications in e-mail format, which is not 100 per cent compatible with the persistent group chat feature. Group Chat data does not translate easily into e-mail format, so there is a possibility of data being lost, manipulated or corrupted before it reaches the secure data storage unit. Compliance officers need to know who spoke to whom and when, and the retrieval of data for e-discovery and audit purpose breaks down and

"Traders were attracted because they could create different 'rooms' for each market and conduct virtual meetings without leaving their desks"

becomes complex when you have a chat room with hundreds or thousands of users. Converting Group Chat into e-mail can only be achieved by putting the recipients into the body of the text. That makes reconstruction and interpretation of Group Chat conversations almost impossible and highly time consuming.

In line with the recent launch of Microsoft OCS 2007 R2 Group Chat, Formicary released the latest version of ChatSeer. Unlike other compliance solutions, ChatSeer identifies and indexes all IM communication, including attachments in their native format, enabling simple, quick and precise response to discovery and litigation requests. It was built based on two top-tier global investment banks' demand for a powerful compliance solution that would enable secure archiving and deliver fast, accurate response to all discovery requests while allowing users to communicate both internally and externally through all available channels improving collaboration, business relationships and information flow.

Some organisations may already have an archiving solution and require only a solution to store IM and Group Chat data in the same place. Others just don't need e-discovery tools beyond the basic ones that they have. For these companies, ChatSeer Lite logs all message traffic on IM and persistent group chat, and supports the native integration of EIM message traffic, access and permission controls.

The launch of OCS R2 2007 and Group Chat spells a new and exciting phase in the development of UC. The right approach can help financial firms to rise to the challenges presented by these new technologies, and make the most of the opportunities they offer. **F**

Howard Travers is business development manager of Formicary: www.formicary.net/microsoft