

Crossing the Pond

SWORD CIBOODLE—THE FORMER GRAHAM TECHNOLOGY—PLANTS A FLAG IN NORTH AMERICA



HUGHES

There are myriad companies fortunate enough to be successful in their market of choice—city, state, region, or country. A subset of those might take on the risk of breaking into a new market, but only a brazen few would make the move in the midst of an economic recession. United Kingdom-based customer-oriented business process provider Sword Ciboodle is one of those few.

“What excites us about Sword Ciboodle is the brand [it’s] created in the European market,” explains Natalie Petouhoff, senior analyst at Forrester Research. “It has a very light approach to the industry, and I expect that part of what customer service professionals are seeking is a different kind of experience when they interface with a software company. That is what Sword Ciboodle is looking to deliver.”

Established in 1986, the company made a name for itself as Graham Technology before a wave of acquisition-related branding changes. Last April, Graham was acquired by global technology company Sword Group as part of Sword’s effort to extend its reach into North America. Consequently, “Graham” went through a couple of transformations—first adopting “Ciboodle” (the name of its flagship customer interaction platform), and then becoming “Sword Ciboodle” to reflect its new corporate parent.

Amid these name changes, the company also set up shop in several North American locations, including Chicago and New York, and snagged several large North American customers, including JPMorgan Chase, Sears, and VistaPrint. The mere opening of new offices wouldn’t be enough to attract customers of that caliber; solid technology has to reside at the core.

In 2008, Forrester not only named Sword Ciboodle the sole leader in process-centric customer software, but also named the company a strong performer in its Forrester Wave for Enterprise CRM Suites. Petouhoff explains that the vendor is forward-thinking in that it looks at customers’ processes first before tailoring software to match; many customer service hubs fail to start with the strategic piece. “A lot of times, companies are taking software and trying to mold it to their processes,” she says. “That’s where a lot of organizations get into trouble. Sword Ciboodle determines what the process is behind creating great customer experiences, and then moves forward. It’s a very strategic way to design [a customer service] software package.”

Michael Maoz, research vice president and distinguished analyst at industry-analyst firm Gartner, says that he believes Sword Ciboodle has taken some good first steps, but will need to tackle three specific goals to continue penetrating the North American market: expand its industry-vertical expertise, improve uptake among systems integrators, and establish a partner ecosystem. While Sword already boasts project deliveries alongside Accenture, Atos Origin, Dimension Data, and PA Consulting Group, Maoz says that more of these stories will bolster the company’s reputation. If others—including Capgemini, Deloitte, and IBM—begin to train staffers on Ciboodle as a tool, he explains, that will further benefit the company’s North American push.

“Sword Ciboodle has not provided a strong point of view on a specific industry in the United States yet,” Maoz explains. “Look at banking or insurance, as that is where [companies] need complex business-process support in that area. That’s what we’ll have to see as the company... tries to grow.”

And we’ve only seen the tip of this particular Sword thus far. Maoz emphasizes that by no means has the company hit a wall in its expansion efforts, and that Sword Ciboodle may one day shed the “Rising” half of our Rising Star label. “Certainly, this is a work in progress,” he says. “It’s a very strong company with a good product.” —*Christopher Musico*

Snapshot



SWORD CIBOODLE

- CEO: Mike Hughes
- FOUNDED: 1986
- REVENUE: Not disclosed
- HEADQUARTERS: Chicago (for North America); United Kingdom (for global operations)
- EMPLOYEES: 292
- CUSTOMER COUNT: 58, including BT, Egg, JPMorgan Chase, Sears, Pacificorp, VistaPrint, and Vodafone