

# Accreon & Manion:

## A Case Study in Benefits Administration Architecture



Building a benefits administration system can be a tricky prospect for a tech solutions consulting firm. Not only do you need the personnel, track record, and expertise in your industry, but you also need to know your client's industry inside and out. Without a breadth of knowledge of their needs, challenges, and likely future obstacles, there is a very good chance what you build could be rendered obsolete in the blink of an eye.

This dual-expertise is one of the key reasons why Accreon has had such a long and mutually beneficial relationship with Manion Wilkins & Associates dating back to 1999. Accreon is an industry leader in providing IT solutions for healthcare, public services and innovation. Manion is a pioneering Canadian firm that provides best-in-class third party benefits administration, payments and consulting services.

When the two firms first explored working together 18 years ago, Manion had a system that needed to be upgraded and optimized. Beyond just updating the technology, Accreon was asked to find a way to make the system more efficient. Manion has three branches to their business: (1) Benefits Administration, (2) Claims, and (3) Pension Management.

“Lori Cleghorn is the IT Project Manager at Accreon who has been a point person on the Manion project since 2001. She recalls the unique challenge that particular build posed.

*“It's three huge systems, and before we rebuilt, they were separate so the data wasn't always in sync and the systems couldn't talk to each other,” she said. “We built all three of those systems under one roof, and now all the data lives together, everything is connected.”*”

Cleghorn pointed out that six of the people working on the Manion project today have been there since 2002, before the build was complete. A point not lost on Howard Cadesky, the current Chief Operating Officer at Manion.

“We’ve been working with the same people now since before my time so they have a very strong understanding of our business which is absolutely critical when trying to build a complex system,” Cadesky said.

The ‘very strong understanding’ comes from the fact that from the very beginning, the two firms worked as one to ensure everything would be as it should.

“Right from day one, we were part of the team, we weren’t doing work on the side and bringing end results back to them,” Cleghorn said. “The two companies became very integrated.”

In the end, what that collaboration produced was a system that was described as “a flexible, powerful, stable, interactive system that outpaces what is already out there in the industry.”

Lori Cleghorn would agree with that assessment. “You can’t find a system out there like the one they have today where you find all three branches of their business in one application.”

The close working relationship also proved to have ancillary benefits for the team at Manion.

“When we started, not everyone we worked with at Manion had built a system before, and many didn’t really understand how to think about it in terms of requirements and design. In addition to doing the work, we helped guide them through the process of building a system.”

For Accreon, launching the system was not the end of the working relationship with Manion but rather, just the beginning. Following the launch, the two entered into a multi-year contract which included evolving the system and expanding the scope of work.

Cleghorn believes that given the rapid rate at which the industry changes these days, staying ahead of the curve is critical to long-term success.

“We’ve been in constant enhancement mode ever since the launch,” she said. “It’s not like we’re just maintaining the system, we’re constantly evolving it to ensure Manion remains on the leading edge of the industry. We’re always asking ourselves ‘what’s the next thing to become more efficient, to help the client bring in more business?’”

For his part, Cadesky attributes that approach as a big reason why the two firms will continue to be partners in the years to come.

“I think the nature of the staff at Accreon has a lot to do with it. At no point in time did we ever feel they were just out to make money as a customer. They clearly recognize that our success is their success.”

“It’s not a normal supplier-company relationship,” Cadesky said. “This is very much a partnership working with them. It’s almost as if they work here even though they’re at a distance.”