Case Study
Fairfield County Bank
Headquarters...........Ridgefield, CT
Assets........... $1.5B
Core Banking System......... Fiserv Cleartouch

Time for a Change:
Making the Switch from AML Manager to Verafin

Fairfield County Bank (Fairfield) in Ridgefield, CT, services customers with a wide variety of transaction behavior from the surrounding area. The AML tool they used from their core provider was not cutting it, and they felt as though they were going back in time. They needed a change, a platform that would provide quality alerts, satisfy examiners, successfully integrate with their core, and efficiently and accurately file reports and monitor ongoing suspicious activity.

Before Verafin

Jose (Joe) Neves has been a BSA specialist at Fairfield for almost eight years. After a host of problems with their previous software, Joe was disappointed and in need for something more.

Joe points to CTR preparation as an example. Creating the CTR was an arduous multi-step process that would take 20–30 minutes. Transaction conductors in particular were a problem. The system didn’t keep track of repeat conductors. “You would have to go in and re-enter the information when he came back a month later, which was the problem.”

Suspicious activity detection also had its challenges; for instance, reviewing alerts was inefficient. The software was creating multiple alerts for business with multiple signers. If a business had three signers, there would be three alerts, all relating to the same activity creating an unnecessary step in the review. “I’d have to go through and pick out the signers I knew were the same and just delete them as reviewed and then look at one of them to see if there was anything there.”

The system’s if/then rules were also fixed, limiting the amount of configuration changes the bank could make. Joe and his team were neither allowed to set their own rules, nor change individual customer parameters, and the system could not amalgamate different types of transactions which caused extreme inefficiencies.
Choosing Verafin

Joe recounts the process of seeking and choosing Verafin. “In 2012 we had an FDIC exam and in 2011 we had the state of Connecticut exam. Both examiners made comments about the program we were using. They said we were missing various things.”

After making some calls, Joe found that people had lots of positive things to say about Verafin. One thing that stuck out was the feedback on response time, and that most support questions are answered the same day. Additionally, Verafin employees could work from the same screen as those at the bank, a benefit the competitors did not offer.

The initial Verafin rollout focused on CTR processing. Joe wanted an easy, efficient, streamlined process. “When we first started looking at Verafin, that was one of the things that impressed me, the simplicity of pulling a couple of companies together where the same depositor came in and did the transaction.”

Dan (Drew) Cunningham, Joe’s replacement upon retirement, offers an interesting perspective on the software and its advantages. “I come from an experimental psychology research background. So I’m quite used to going through data sets and hypothesis testing. Being able to sort out bulk loads of transaction data within Verafin makes it very easy to export to Excel and run some statistical analyses to validate Verafin’s model. This enables us to zero in more quickly on interesting trends and patterns so we can present to our managers and others the things we want to follow up on.” He also noticed that the workflow “was fairly logical and intuitive. There wasn’t really a lot of need for training to understand the system.”

Joe has seen drastic improvements since implementing Verafin. “For one thing, it made working in the program, I’d say enjoyable. It got rid of all the headaches I had with [our previous solution]. First thing I hit every morning are the CTRs, which was a relief from previous experience. The other thing that I found extremely rewarding was that if Drew came in and did a deposit that first day that we used the program, and I put him into Verafin, and he came back a year later, Drew was still there as a conductor. I didn’t have to re-enter in any information, it saved it.”

The all-in-one nature of the Verafin solution is built for ease of use. It allows people to do what they need to do in one spot, eliminating the need for extra steps or time-wasting searches. “The big thing I like about Verafin is my ability to look at what I want to look at... That simplifies a lot of the paperwork. I can sort through things in one program without having to go out and look at two or three other programs to get the information I am looking for.”

JOE NEVES, BSA SPECIALIST

JOE NEVES on Case Management in Verafin
Case management functionality has also been helpful for the bank, says Joe. “The ability to add documents to alerts and cases makes it an excellent warehouse for documentation – no bulky paper files and folders.”

Most importantly, Fairfield is making connections that lead to detection of unusual activity. “I have filed a number of SARs based on the alert and the information that I was able to pull in Verafin,” says Joe. Drew adds: “We’ve seen instances where customers have tried to decouple themselves from certain entities and they no longer present themselves on our Fiserv reports. Because Verafin groups people and businesses together we see connections that Fiserv misses.” In other words, “we keep connections that some of our customers don’t want us to have.”

Since implementing Verafin, Fairfield has seen much improvement on their previous exam results.

Support and Training

Joe felt opening cases with Fiserv was a never-ending process, problems were never addressed or solved. Getting such quick answers and friendly service from Verafin is a huge plus for Joe and Drew especially considering their history of feeling ignored by their previous vendor.

Training on the application was unique for Joe, as he was trained on his own data so he could see potentially suspicious activity on the first day he logged in. “We weren’t looking at sample lessons that someone created, we were looking at our transactions and I think that made it a lot easier for us to understand a lot of the functionality of Verafin.”

Verafin’s support team is constantly raising their own bar for customer service, and Joe speaks to that level of service with high regard. “I have to give compliments to the support staff,” says Joe. “It is so rewarding to create a case and either get an email back with the solution or to get a call back generally within the same day. The support staff is very prompt in responding to any question. It’s great to get solutions within minutes, or at worst, hours instead of days, weeks or months.”

Another bonus of the support system at Verafin from Fairfield’s perspective is the online training via the Verafin Community site. “30–45 minute presentations that are there for something who needs to brush up or get familiar with anything have been quite helpful and have saved us a lot of time,” says Joe. “They’re easy to follow, and they’re written for somebody who is new to the program.”
Conclusion

After the experience with their previous solution, Fairfield was more than happy to come on board with Verafin, strengthening their BSA and compliance processes resulting in exams where there has been "much improvement." They are able to see a bigger picture of customer activity, easily drill down to specifics, and successfully serve their various customers. "The product is well organized and easy to negotiate," says Joe. "It's been a very satisfying experience."

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