



## Dataflow Case Study Charities



### At the Heart of the Matter

When the British Heart Foundation looked for a new Windows accounting solution it chose *dataflow~32*

It's frightening to learn that every two minutes someone in the UK has a heart attack and that half of them end in death. With heart and circulatory disease the UK's biggest killer, the work of the British Heart Foundation is critical. Founded in 1961, the British Heart Foundation (BHF) is one of the UK's top charities with an income last year of £69 million. Nearly 50% of this is from legacies while the remaining income comes from a range of fundraising activities including the annual London to Brighton Bike Ride and the sale of donated goods in over 400 BHF shops.

Over 77% of the money raised by the BHF goes to support medical research and last year saw the launch of a new Cardiovascular Initiative to fund new laboratories, equipment and research groups. The rest of the income goes into education and patient care including work in schools and providing vital equipment for hospitals, GPs and ambulances. The BHF pioneered the provision of defibrillators in ambulances and public places, an initiative that has since been supported by the Government.

Managing a charity on this scale with a London headquarters and nine regional offices presents similar challenges to running a good sized company. In fact, the accounting requirements are exactly the same. But there are some noticeable differences between charities and conventional companies. For example, with no sales and only donations, charities have to pay VAT on purchases but cannot reclaim any VAT back.

One of the other differences is that accounts departments in charities have to keep a close eye on their own costs. At the BHF, the 11-strong accounts team is headed up by chief accountant David Reynolds who has worked for the charity for 23 years. When he first joined the BHF, the annual income raised was only £1.5million.

As the Charity grew and revenues increased, David Reynolds took the step to upgrade the BHF's original accounting software in 1990. operating system.

Having looked at the market alternatives, dBFLEX from UK company Dataflow was selected, based on Microsoft's then standard MS-DOS operating system.



The choice turned out to be a good one and dBFLEX served the BHF well for almost a decade – a long time in software terms.

However, things do move on and in 1999 the BHF felt it was time to move forward to a modern Windows based solution that would support the expanding BHF organisation well into the new Millennium. This decision was also influenced by the fact that the existing databases used by the Medical Research and Cardiac Support departments that integrate with the accounts system were being stretched and needed to be upgraded.

But when David Reynolds went looking for a true 32-bit Windows solution and not simply a DOS package with a bolt-on Windows front-end, he was surprised by the lack of choice from the market leaders. Eventually he identified three possibilities: Access, Dynamics and *dataflow~32*.

Having experienced problems with US software vendors responding to requests for modifications to suit UK requirements, the BHF was nervous about Dynamics.



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Access, on the other hand, expected the BHF to change its accounting processes to suit the software rather than the other way round.

Like most charities the BHF has specific accounting requirements such as the ability to post recurring debits and credits, charge VAT to cost centres and not the VAT account, reimburse expenses without going through the purchase ledger and nominal ledger cheque writing.

**“..Dataflow was also more than prepared to make changes for us”.**

“Dataflow was the only solution that provided us with the features and flexibility we were used to in our existing DOS system and could meet all of our new requirements,” says David Reynolds. “Dataflow was also more

than prepared to make changes for us.”

The decision was made to purchase *dataflow~32* and a time-scale was put in place for installation and conversion – with no parallel running.

Most new software packages are run alongside existing systems for a period of time but with only a small staff and pressure to deliver reports, parallel testing was not a luxury the BHF could afford.

“I have to admit to being a little nervous about making the switch instantaneously,” says Dariush Mogtader, Managing Director at Dataflow. “We were confident about our software, but with so many factors involved we would have preferred a period of transition to iron out any problems.”

In the event, everything went smoothly. On Thursday 13 July, the BHF stopped using its DOS software and Dataflow had just four days to convert all the data, test the system and provide some initial training. On the 17 July the 20-user *dataflow~32* system went live at the BHF.

“I had a holiday booked for 18 August which I did not want to cancel and needed to produce management reports before I went,” says David Reynolds. Three weeks after *dataflow~32* went live, the reports were printed and David Reynolds went off on his holiday.

The transition had been relatively painless but not totally problem free. Some problems such as report and cheque printing needed to be sorted out and there was a performance problem that was down to hardware that needed to be resolved.

Training the BHF staff who had grown familiar with the old system also proved more time consuming than originally envisaged. “We were relieved and delighted with the move and it proved the strength and robustness of the software,” says Dariush Mogtader.

“An important factor in the overall success of the change was the fact that we had someone on-site, full-time for the first week to answer questions, provide training and address any problems on-the-spot.”

**“Good support is probably more important than the software itself”.**

“Good support is probably more important than the software itself,” says David Reynolds. “As well as seeing us through the critical first two or three weeks, Dataflow continues to help as we become more familiar with

the software and put it through its paces. If there is a problem they will sort it out.

“Now that *dataflow~32* is well established, the BHF is extending its use and realising some of the advantages of selecting a true Windows solution. A separate subsidiary company that runs the London to Brighton Bike Ride has been moved to *dataflow~32* and a trading subsidiary, BHF Ventures is also being transferred.

Features such as the ability to import and export data with simple drag and drop commands are proving to be a major benefit. Accruals data on 120 different items from Microsoft Excel can be imported within minutes and apportionment – to split costs between various departments and cost centres – takes a fraction of the time it took with the old software.

While Dataflow supported the BHF’s existing management reporting system in *dataflow~32*, the BHF is now moving to the more powerful Analyzer solution and is also taking advantage of the integrated fixed asset management system from Assetware Technologies. AssetPro is one of a range of packages that seamlessly integrates with *dataflow~32*.

Other changes are also planned, including linking the accounts system to the bank and allowing BHF staff to key in their own purchase orders. “Once again, Dataflow has proved to be a good choice for both its software and support. *dataflow~32* has provided us with a modern 32-bit Windows solution that allows us to do a lot more to enhance, simplify and streamline accounting processes at the BHF.

We are only just realising some of the benefits, but I believe in taking things a step at a time. After all, too much stress is not good for your heart.”

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