

## High-security off-site archive vault

### Swiss Life outsources five miles of documents to archiving specialists

**DOCUMENTS CONTAINING SENSITIVE DATA ABOUT THEIR POLICYHOLDERS AND THE COMPANY ARE AMONGST SWISS LIFE'S MOST PRIZED POSSESSIONS. IT'S THEREFORE NO SURPRISE THAT THE INSURANCE PROVIDER IS ENTRUSTING THE STORAGE OF THESE DOCUMENTS TO AN ARCHIVIST EXPERT LIKE IRON MOUNTAIN.**

In a unique operation, the service provider has scanned all the old holdings of around 80,000 life assurance files for Swiss Life and archived the relevant hard copies in its high-security archive centres.

The insurance sector is one of the areas that has to manage and archive an enormous quantity of documents with highly sensitive information. This is still often done by hand. While today, practically all new documents are produced digitally, insurance companies in particular have to deal with extensive old holdings of life assurance and pension policies in paper form. These files in particular, compared with other documents, have very long retention periods of up to ten years following the termination of a policy. Other records, bills or inventories must also be stored for ten years. There are numbers of

reasons to explain the fact that the management of these documents is often complicated and costly. In order to be able to locate individual documents quickly and store them safely, insurers require a complex archiving and management system and enough storage space. In addition, a room in which files are stored ties up financial resources that could otherwise be used more profitably. Furthermore, the documents must of course also be protected against fire, water and unauthorised access.

#### STORING SENSITIVE DATA SECURELY

This was the challenge Swiss Life was faced with. In 1999, the company decided to store its paper documents that were subject to storage obligations with the archiving specialist, Iron Mountain. Swiss Life Germany, whose head office is in Munich, is one of the leading suppliers of private and company insurance solutions. The insurance specialist currently provides around 50,000 companies from various sectors and of all sizes in Germany with company pension schemes. In the financial year 2007, the insured sum reached a volume of 30.4 billion euros. In Germany, Swiss Life manages holdings of 1.2 million main insurance policies.

There were several reasons behind Swiss Life's decision to outsource its archiving to an external service provider. *"Firstly, as with other insurance companies, keeping files is not one of our core skills or processes,"* Thomas Hübner, Head of Applications Management at Swiss Life revealed. *"However, for us it goes without saying that the documents should be stored in accordance with the requirements of the German Data Protection Act (BDSG)."* The legal provisions regulate the secure treatment of personal data processed manually or using IT systems. In addition, by outsourcing its files, Swiss Life can save space at its offices.



### SCANNING INTO THE DIGITAL ERA

In order to make the management of its paper files even more efficient, at the end of 2006 the insurer decided to have its old holdings of around 80,000 life assurance files digitalised. While new insurance documents were already available to Swiss Life employees in digital form, they still had to request and process some older documents in paper form. The insurer wanted to put an end to that situation by digitalising everything. The company's aim was to thereby make long-term savings, as access costs would be lower and documents would get to the service teams faster.

Thus, Swiss Life looked for a specialised external service provider by means of an invitation to tender and ultimately decided on the archiving specialist Iron Mountain. *"We had already had very good past experience with Iron Mountain in the area of paper archiving. In addition, we were convinced that the company could supply all the services associated with archiving, scanning, transporting files and data exchange from one source,"* said Hübner in support of his decision. *"Last but not least, the good price-performance ratio and the confidence-inspiring meetings in advance of the contract were crucial."*

### FIVE MILES OF FILES

Iron Mountain first delivered a number of test scans so that Swiss Life could approve of the scanning quality. Over a period of four months from February 2007, around 80,000 files from the old holdings were scanned by Iron Mountain employees in 18 batches with an average of 4,500 files per week. The data transfer of the scanned documents into Swiss Life's digital archive was undertaken electronically on a daily basis. Since the digitalisation of the old holdings of life assurance policies was completed, those Swiss Life employees who are authorised to do so have been able to access the digitalised documents in the Swiss Life archive directly and easily from their PCs – with complete ease of access and comfort. Through digitalisation, the time spent accessing documents has been considerably reduced and, in addition several persons can consult an electronic file at the same time. Swiss Life's employees access the documents around 33,000 times per month, for the purpose of processing or paying life assurance policies for example.

The originals of Swiss Life's files are stored safely by Iron Mountain in its archive centres in Markt Schwaben and Fürstenfeldbruck, which have proved to be veritable strong rooms for documents. Special early smoke detection alarms, fireproof walls and steel doors prevent smouldering fires or

fires inside the archives, without damaging the documents with water from sprinkler systems. The smoke detectors used are directly connected to the local fire brigade via direct phone lines. Permanent climate control and management ensure the documents are always stored at the ideal temperatures and atmospheric humidity. The temperature range in the archive is 11°C to 30°C with an atmospheric humidity of 35% to 60%. In this way, deviations of more than 5°C in temperature and 8% in atmospheric humidity per day, which could cause damage to paper documents, can be avoided. Computerised zone access controls and video surveillance ensure 24/7 that only persons who are authorised to do so can enter the building. Naturally, all of the archive's employees are bound to comply with the provisions of the BDSG, in particular regarding the protection of personal data. Regular inspections, maintenance and repairs by independent, external service providers ensure that the technical safety equipment and other building technology always comply with the current safety regulations.

*"We are the back-up archive for the entire correspondence of Swiss Life Germany and its German subsidiaries. Even the documents that Swiss Life scans in itself are all archived by Iron Mountain in paper form,"* reported Günther Wagner, Business Development Manager at Iron Mountain. The following figures demonstrate that numerous and well-ordered files have been piling up in the extensive archives since 1999: the archiving specialist now manages around 20,000 archive boxes for Swiss Life, which corresponds to around five miles of files. And the stocks are growing: approximately 2,700 additional documents are added to the archive every day.

### NO CHANCE OF A MIX-UP

If the insurer needs certain original paper files, it can simply search for them on Iron Mountain's "Iron Mountain Connect™" Internet portal and order them at any time, 24/7. The original documents will always be delivered within 24 hours. In order to facilitate the supply of the documents within such a short time, the archiving specialist indexes the documents it stores and provides them with an individual bar code. *"In this way, we can archive business documents simply and securely, find them, supply them and follow their movements,"* Wagner explained. In order to make sure that the documents do not fall into the wrong hands during transportation from the archive centre to the client, Iron Mountain uses its own vehicle fleet with specially secured transporters and additional security devices such as GPS tracking.

Swiss Life analysed the outsourcing of its life assurance files in advance of the arrangement by means of a return-on-investment calculation in order to make sure that it would pay. According to this analysis, the investment costs for the external archive service would already be amortised after around 3.2 years. In particular, it showed that it would be possible to improve the efficiency of the process, as digitalisation would ensure a significant reduction in system breakdowns and several employees would be able to work on a document at the same time. The technical implementation of research results also led to a simplification of work processes. *“We have been able to reduce our delivery and access costs to practically zero,”* Hübner was happy to report. *“We are satisfied with Iron Mountain’s services, as the team has really identified with our project and attaches great importance to quality assurance.”*



**Thomas Hübner**  
Head of Applications Management  
at Swiss Life. (Source: Swiss Life, 2008)



**Günther Wagner**  
Business Development Manager  
at Iron Mountain.  
(Source: Iron Mountain, 2008)



**Fürstenfeldbruck Archive Centre**  
Around five miles of Swiss Life files  
are stored in Iron Mountain’s archives.  
(Source: Iron Mountain, 2008)



**Fürstenfeldbruck Archive Centre**  
At Iron Mountain’s archive centre in  
Fürstenfeldbruck, Swiss Life stores around  
20,000 archive boxes with documents.  
(Source: Iron Mountain, 2008)



**Swiss Life Head Office**  
Swiss Life manages a volume of 1.2 million  
main insurance policies in Germany.  
(Source: Swiss Life, 2008)



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