

Case Study:

NAHL Group PLC



Background:

NAHL Group PLC has grown from its inception as National Accident Helpline in 1993 to become a leading UK consumer marketing business focussed on the UK legal services market.

In 2006, LDC invested in the business via an MBO, and in October 2009, Inflexion Private Equity also acquired a stake.

Over the past four years, we have been helping to build the operating boards at NAHL Group through a mix of interim placements and executive search assignments.

A long term partnership: how it began

We were first introduced to the then CEO Samantha Porteous by Inflexion, following on from their investment. A period of rapid growth and acquisitions meant that the IT infrastructure of the business was coming under increasing pressure and struggling to cope with the demands of the business.

Samantha wanted to add a new board level post of Operations & IT Director to tackle the immediate issues and upgrade the capabilities of NAHL's IT systems. We introduced an interim IT Director Jonathan Merry to kick-start the project whilst we undertook a full executive search. The search process resulted in Richard Rickwood joining the business as Operations Director, and Jonathan was also retained on a permanent basis.

A long term partnership: building NAHL's management team

Over the next few years, as the business grappled with the challenges presented by rapid growth, acquisition integrations, regulatory change and a negative industry reputation, Marble Hill Partners continued to work with the business, making several extremely successful introductions.

After the acquisition of PPI Claimline, the business adopted a group structure, led by Samantha as Group CEO. She initiated a search for a Divisional MD, resulting in the appointment of Russell Atkinson in October 2012, and in April 2013, Richard Rickwood was promoted to MD for PPI, reporting to Sam.



Russell Atkinson

Russell also flourished, steering the business towards an IPO and floating NAHL on AIM in May 2014. As part of this process, PPI Claimline was divested, Samantha stepped back to a non-exec role and Russell was promoted to Group CEO. The float delivered a very profitable exit for Inflexion and LDC.

Having taken the company public, Russell once again retained our executive search services for a Commercial Director. We introduced Paul Havenhand at the end of 2014, where he remains, currently holding responsibility for revenue generation for NAH.

Trust, confidence and understanding

So, why has NAHL Group PLC continued to use Marble Hill Partners to build the capabilities of its management team? Having worked with us as both a candidate and a client, **Russell** has a good insight into the search process from all angles.

'As a candidate, the process was very good throughout. Key for me is whether what you get sold by the exec search firm is what ends up being delivered. That's exactly what happened with Marble Hill – I was kept up to date, very clear about the process and what stage I was at, and I was delivered what was promised, which is not always the case with recruiters.'

Russell believes that it is essential for an opportunity to be properly 'sold' to candidates in a positive and honest way that aligns with the client's brand. Having worked with the NAHL management team for a number of years, both under private equity ownership and post-exit, we have developed a very detailed picture of the business. We know the personalities within the team, the business strategy and the investors – and understand their requirements from a technical as well as a cultural perspective.

'Each time I've used Marble Hill, I've found them to be excellent partners delivering a diligent solution as well as having a very clear understanding of our business. They know our business, know our ethics and understand our culture, and have consequently delivered excellent candidates.' Says **Russell**.

NAHL also felt that being able to use one firm for executive search as well as interim solutions was hugely beneficial. The deployment of our elite interims can drive rapid change as we work closely with the management team to shape the character and strength of their leadership board for the long term.

'It's fantastic to see people who we've placed do well and achieve success for themselves and the business they are leading. With the IPO, Russell and his team have achieved a step change for NAHL Group PLC, and are continuing to grow through more recent acquisitions.' Says **Arden Tomison**, Director at Marble Hill Partners.

Timeline:

1993	National Accident Helpline was founded.
2006	LDC invests into the business through an MBO.
2009	Inflexion acquires a stake in NAH, alongside LDC.
2011	NAHL acquires PPI Claimline in February 2011.
2011	Marble Hill Partners places interim IT Director Jonathan Merry in March 2011.
2011	Marble Hill Partners conducted a full executive search for a COO, and placed Richard Rickwood in October.
2012	Marble Hill Partners began an executive search for a Divisional Managing Director, placing Russell Atkinson in October.
2013	Richard Rickwood is promoted to MD of PPI Claimline.
2014	Russell leads a successful IPO in May, listing on AIM with an introductory share price of 200 pence. He is promoted to Group CEO, and Samantha takes an NED role. PPI Claimline is divested as part of the IPO, resulting in Richard leaving the Group.
2014	Russell approaches Marble Hill Partners to conduct an executive search for a Commercial Director. We placed Paul Havenhand into the role in September.
2015	NAHL Group PLC undertakes further acquisitions, including Fitzalan Partners in February 2015 and Bush & Company in October 2015.
2015	Richard Rickwood rejoins the Group in February as MD for Fitzalan Partners.
2015	Samantha Porteous steps down from the board.
2015	At the time of writing (November 2015), the share price since IPO in May 2014 has risen to 425 pence, an increase of over 100%.



Talk to us about how we can help to build your management team

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