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ACTUARIAL SOFTWARE WINS MICROSOFT INNOVATION AWARD

by Kevin Pledge

I recently attended the Microsoft World Partner Conference in Los Angeles. With 15,000 attendees, this is the largest conference in North America. To accommodate the large numbers keynote sessions were held in the Staples Center, and breakout sessions took up the LA Convention Center and several hotels.

Over the past few years I have been quite vocal about how little technology companies understand the needs of insurance companies and even that life insurance is different from P&C. The converse has also been true; many insurance software vendors care little about technology standards and practices and focus only meeting the immediate business needs. This can result in underperformance, incompatibility and leave gaps in security, governance and disaster recovery. The large technology companies all offer certification programs for developers and software; there is little excuse for software vendors who are serious about developing solutions.

Back to the Microsoft World Partner Conference: I didn't expect to run into any other actuaries at this conference as it is technology focused, so imagine my surprise on the first day when Van Beach of Milliman is called onto center stage at the Staples Center with Steve Ballmer to receive the Innovation Partner of the Year Award for Technical and High Performance Computing (HPC) for MG-ALFA.

The Technical and High Performance Computing Innovation Partner

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of the Year Award recognizes an Independent Software Vendor or System Integrator for achievements that enable scientists, engineers and analysts (and actuaries!) to solve the world's most complex problems through simulation and modeling. In particular Microsoft wanted to recognize a partner that innovated by enabling simulation and modeling in the cloud, using Windows HPC Server burst capability. MG-ALFA was the first actuarial software to integrate with Microsoft HPC (WCCS, at the time). They are currently developing a burst to Azure capability (Azure is Microsoft's cloud platform) through Windows HPC Server 2008 R2. Milliman is also building a Solvency II solution that will manage and run MG-ALFA natively on Azure.

For actuaries, solutions to problems that were previously impossible to analyze, were made possible through the scalability and capacity of distributed computing through HPC with in-house clusters. By harnessing the power of the cloud to augment in-house clusters, this scalability and capacity now becomes nearly infinite, on-demand, and marginal cost—with zero internal footprint. HPC and the integration with Azure has benefited MG-ALFA by increasing power and efficiency while reducing costs for customers.

Most importantly from my perspective, it is exciting to see an actuarial vendor win against other industries and pure technology companies. Not only does this mean that an actuarial vendor can follow standards and innovate with cutting edge technology, but also that the world's largest software company is recognizing the real business value that actuaries can drive when equipped with world-class software tools.

Congratulations to Milliman and MG-ALFA on this achievement.

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Steve Balmer greets
Van Beach on stage



Van Beach center stage
at the Staples Center



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