

Helping organisations match agility with security



Testimonial snapshot

Company

Somerford Associates

Industry

Technology

Company Profile

Somerford Associates was founded in 2001 to help businesses accelerate their digital transformation journeys. Its mission is to help customers solve business challenges quickly, but also gain the flexibility to cope with ever-changing demands. Somerford's customers range from finance, insurance and banking, to retail, media, and public sector organisations, and they all face a wide range of challenges that are unique to their industries. Somerford prides itself in tailoring its services to the business needs of each and every one of its customers – from setting technical strategies and devising proof-of-concepts, to implementing solutions and providing training and in-life support.

Business Situation

In 2016, Somerford identified the need to partner with an Identity and Access Management provider that could address the needs of customers with cloud or hybrid infrastructures. Somerford implemented Okta internally as a means of assessing whether it would be a good fit for its portfolio of security and business intelligence solutions. Finding that Okta was easy to use and implement, and offered seamless integration with its existing security solutions and data platforms, such as Splunk, Somerford decided to add Okta to their portfolio.

Solution

Somerford has since become an expert in leveraging Okta to help customers match agility with security by establishing IAM at the center of their IT strategies. There are currently 34 Okta accredited team members, alongside another six Okta certified team members across the Somerford sales, pre-sales and technical delivery teams, and this number will keep on growing.

Statistics

- 34 Okta accredited and 6 certified employees
- 13+ joint customers
- Partners since 2016

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Grace Maher
Head of Support and Presales, Somerford Associates

Recent **studies** suggest that COVID-19 has pushed companies over the technology tipping point. For some organisations, this has meant speeding up the adoption of digital technologies by several years. For others, it has meant the need for expert support to devise new strategies and practices to stay competitive in this new business and economic environment. For **Somerford Associates**, it has meant continuing to do what it does best since 2001: helping some of the largest organisations and government departments in the UK to accelerate their digital transformation journeys so they can solve business challenges quickly, but also gain the flexibility to cope with ever-changing demands in the long run.

Priding itself on tailoring services to the individual needs of its customers, Somerford's highly-qualified team of certified consultants assesses and advises on the right solution for each organisation at every stage of their technology programme – from setting technical strategies and devising proof-of-concepts, to implementing solutions and providing training and in-life support. “‘Enablement’ is the keyword here at Somerford,” explains Grace Maher, Head of Support and Presales at Somerford Associates.

“Figuratively, we hold our customers’ hands from wherever they are in their digital or cloud transformation journeys, offering strategic advice, support, training, and workshops until they are empowered to make the most of their technology and data autonomously. In this sense, we see our customer’s success as our success, too,” Grace explains.

When it comes to selecting technologies for its portfolio, enablement remains a keyword for the Somerford team, which looks at potential partners by assessing not only how a technology works in itself, but also how it enables customers to complement their existing portfolio of business intelligence and security tools. “Be it to successfully migrate to the cloud, or to leverage cloud investments better and more cost-effectively in the long run, identity is a fundamental part of the IT strategy of any business. And Okta is the best placed solution in our suite to connect everyone to everything,” Grace adds.

Selecting an optimal toolkit for matching agility with security

Powering business strategies with expert-level support

Delivering value through IAM and CIAM now and in the future

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Somerford's journey as an Okta partner began in 2016, when Okta was relatively new to the UK market. "We've been working in this sector since 2006, when we used to partner with providers for the on-premises world," says Grace. "At that time, we noticed a gap in the cloud market and we felt that we needed a partner that we could rely on to dominate that sector. We found that Okta develops solutions that are in line with what modern organisations need. So from day one of becoming an Okta partner, we also became Okta users."

To determine whether Okta was a good fit for Somerford and its customers, the Somerford team implemented and tested Okta internally first to assess what capabilities it could bring to the table, and then to gain confidence using them to create a suite of interoperability between security solutions and data platforms. "Okta is fantastic to implement and integrate with our other solutions," Grace recalls. "This is key because we have long-lasting relationships with our customers who use a suite of products from us, and when we onboard a new partner they expect to be able to leverage that, too. We became Okta Partners in 2016 and still feel it's the perfect choice for our customers and for our own future growth."

Before Okta, Somerford had to create user accounts for each employee across more than 40 applications, and provision them manually when new employees joined the team. With Lifecycle Management, it only needs to create one. "Okta has reduced our onboarding times from around 2.5 hours to less than 10 minutes –and that's including paperwork," Grace explains. This has helped the Somerford team to grow quickly as a company, while having this first-hand experience using Okta to solve challenges internally helps the Somerford team to pepper customer conversations with their own findings. "People are usually surprised to find that identity-related processes can be so simple, but we can confidently say from experience that they absolutely can," says Grace.

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But Somerford's confidence in using Okta doesn't come only from first-hand experience as Okta users. There are currently 34 Okta accredited team members, alongside another six Okta certified team members across the Somerford sales, pre-sales and technical delivery teams, all trained to consultant level – the highest level of accreditation available today - and this number will keep growing. "We never want to be just one-page ahead of the customer in the manual. We focus instead on having expert-level knowledge in-house," explains Grace, herself an Okta Technical Champion.

This commitment to training ensures that Somerford customers and team members alike are always up to date on new products and features, and well-informed on the world of identity and access management as a whole. "Okta Partner Sales and Presales accreditation training gives us a fantastic background in the identity space as a whole and teaches the value of identity management," says Grace. "When we're in meetings with someone who is in charge of that space within their own company, difficult questions are asked not just about specific products and features but about that wider, strategic knowledge in the area as well. So by investing in Okta accreditations, we're able to offer expert-level support to customers, while also empowering our team members to learn, join those difficult conversations, and grow professionally."

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Today, Somerford is an Okta Premier Partner and its customers range from finance, insurance and banking, to retail, media, and public sector organisations. While they all face a wide range of challenges that are unique to their industries, in recent years Grace has identified a focus they all share: the desire to deliver consistent, seamless experiences to customers with security and privacy. “As individuals, we’re becoming more aware that our information is valuable, and more selective about who we want to give it to and how. So businesses are putting Customer Identity and Access Management (CIAM) at the heart of everything they’re doing,” Grace explains.

For Somerford’s customers, this has become a focus in B2C environments, where customers engage directly with companies to buy products and services, and in B2B environments, to aid the communication between companies, partners, and vendors. Meanwhile, the Okta-certified Somerford team delivers tailored strategies to address the unique concerns of each customer, helping them to navigate anything from regulation compliance to teamwork when it comes to aligning business and IT priorities. Somerford’s support desk, proudly headed by Grace, resolves 95% of cases in-house within the week, with no need for extra support from Okta.

“We see ourselves as an extension to Okta,” she explains. “We offer highly-skilled consultancy and professional services on Okta’s behalf, and we support knowledge transfer internally, too. For example, when we have a great delivery with some lessons learned and useful hints and tips, we’ll make sure to share that with Okta so that Okta’s engineers don’t have to face the same problems we did, and we can all build up on our shared knowledge.”

In so doing, Somerford is helping many businesses that used to see IAM as a “have to have”, without much focus on the why or the how, to understand the importance of having secure and agile practices in place at all times. “The pandemic has emphasised the importance of marrying agility with security when it comes to IAM and CIAM, and being able to show customers a platform like Okta, that can deliver that seamless value and can be set up in a matter of days, really brings home the importance of investing in best-of-breed technology in this area right now and in the coming years,” Grace explains. “For five years we’ve been vouching for Okta, and because the results are clear and long-lasting, our customers vouch for us. Seeing them succeed with IAM and CIAM is really satisfying.”

About Somerford Associates

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