

# Cygnus raises the standard once more

Hailed as a ground-breaking solution on its launch almost 10 years ago, the 'bureau in a box' that is Cygnus went on to quickly establish itself at the top of the bureau data processing software tree – and the latest version only serves to cement that position, finds **James Lawson**.

Now almost a decade old, Cygnus has moved from impressive newcomer to the reliable warhorse of the data processing industry. Notable when released for combining customer data processing power with countless clever tweaks taken from years of bureau experience, the package has continued to benefit from development driven solely by the needs of its MSP and end user client base – and so always has some interesting new tricks to reveal. With its latest updates in mind, does Cygnus still set the industry standard?

## EVOLUTION, NOT REVOLUTION

If it ain't broke, don't fix it – and that applies in spades to the Cygnus interface. Vendors The Software Bureau have tinkered slightly over the years with various elements of it but the visual workflow builder remains the centrepiece of the application. Simple drag and drop lets operators quickly build processes for new jobs by linking the icons for the various modules, and customising each step simply involves double clicking on a module icon and filling in the right parts of a dialogue box. It makes handling what can be extremely complex, multi-step workflows as simple as humanly possible.

Import and export are slick, offering wide compatibility with other systems and XML linking is no problem. Postcodes are checked for validity on entry against the Royal Mail Walksort files and again, there's a huge choice of ways to audit,

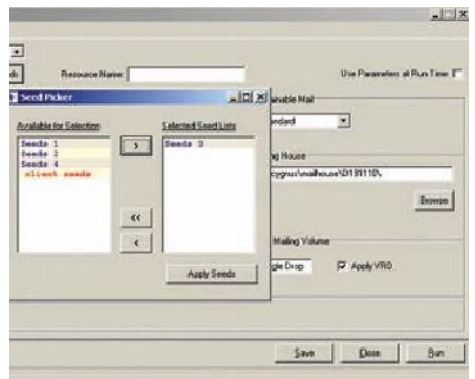
parse, validate and enhance imported name and address data, all driven by bureau experience and client needs.

As part of the package, you get a range of specialised reference files that bureaux normally have to build up themselves over years to help spot obscurities, strange characters and so on. Splits and merges, test cell creation or 1-in-N selection are a breeze using the Splerge module, while more detailed field editing is handled by the Manipulation module; both these tools offer automation via user scripting.

PAF processing is handled by the built-in Capscan module within which a gap-filled Electoral Roll (ER) product is now available for name verification and also to aid address checking. For example, it's possible to replace the original name with one pulled from the ER or to match to the ER instead of PAF. Given that a prospect's presence on the Electoral Roll is a useful piece of knowledge for marketers, this is a solid enhancement to the PAFing process.

The possibilities within Cygnus's deduping and suppression functions could fill two or more reviews on their own. The already excellent standard dedupe functions have been joined by a

[Record]	3
A1	BROADLANDS
A2	SUTTERTON DROVE
A3	AMBER HILL
A4	BOSTON
A5	PE20 3RF
A6	
ORIG_A1	8 MALTHOUSE LANE
ORIG_A2	CHURCH EATON
ORIG_A3	
ORIG_A4	STAFFORD
ORIG_A5	
ORIG_A6	ST20 0AZ

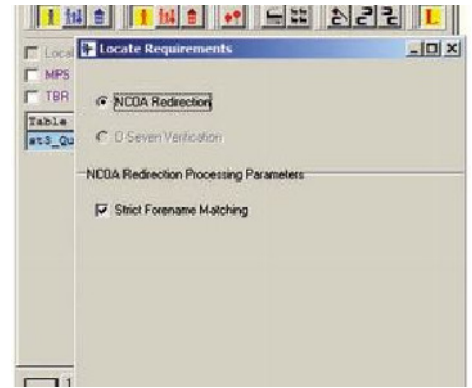
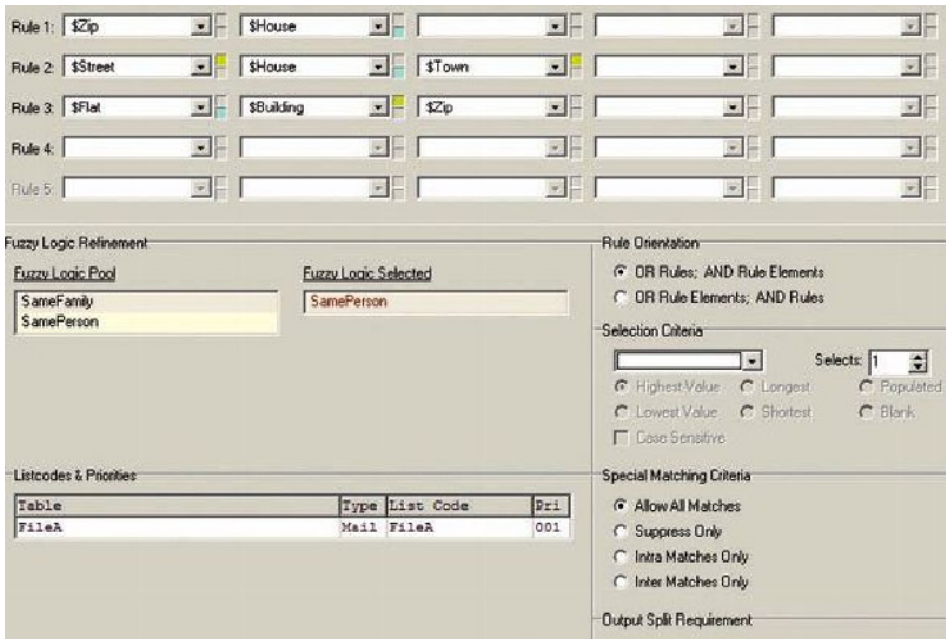


new KeyDupe option. Rather than the two-stage, geographically-grouped process already in operation, KeyDupe employs a more conventional key-based process that has been adopted mostly for reasons of speed and predictable processing times when handling very large files of 10 million records or more.

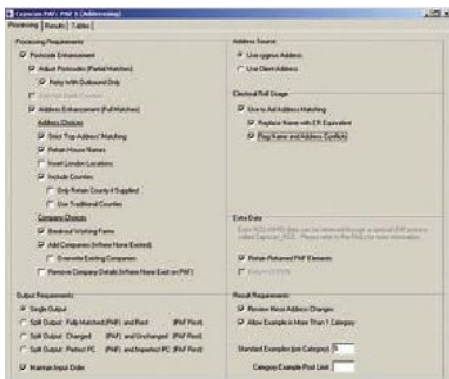
There's a choice of fields to match against, which number of runs to perform, and various other ways to finesse the matching process. It will look very familiar to anyone who has used other key-based matching systems: bespoke key groups and rule sets, various algorithms to choose from and the ability to employ fuzzy matching for name checking are just some of the options.

Offering embedded suppression files was a big upgrade some time back, but this is mostly transparent to the user. Encrypting industry-standard suppression files like Mortascreen and GAS and packaging them as part of the application is all about convenience. It means that users don't have to licence these files

**"With costs publically available for Royal Mail, the vendors have also developed a couple of ways to find the cheapest overall RM tariff for any mailing."**



**A host of new tools and functions make the latest version of Cygnus a stand out data processing option.**



## Pricing

Cygnus starts at around £11,000 per year plus installation for a single seat license. Additional licences can be added up to a site licence at £44,000. This includes all support, training, PAF, Royal Mail and DSA sortations and all updates. In addition to Cygnus, the Embedded Suppression module starts at £1,500 and this includes six UK suppression files including GAS, MortaScreen, TBR, MPS, Xpression and Disconnect and Reconnect. For an additional fee NCOA can also be added.

separately or index new suppression data to work with Cygnus. Likewise, all reference file updates arrive together with the programme upgrades.

Totting up suppressions and making monthly royalty payments happens with a few mouse clicks, and the Checkout function makes sure that nothing is missed, which is of value to the reference data owner as well as the software user. At the moment, embedded suppression is not available to use with KeyDupe but this makes little difference as the normal suppression process is more than fast and competent enough.

## LOCATION, LOCATION

A recent addition to the encrypted reference files is Royal Mail's NCOA, offering users the chance to find replacement addresses for goneaways. Branded as the Locate function, it is accessed via the dedupe module. Using Equifax's ReConnect is also an option, though this involves uploading data to that vendor's secure website and downloading new addresses rather than being able to run it all inside the programme. Conveniently, new addresses are automatically "burst" into their constituent elements and keys generated, meaning that this new data requires no more processing in order to continue with the current job.

Cygnus also caters for the deregulated mail market with its Downstream Access (DSA) module as part of its sortation functionality. Sortation choices for the "big three" – DHL, TNT and UKMail – pop up at the bottom of the dialogue box once the provider is selected. Normal Royal Mail sorts work for the other vendors such as Onepost and Targetmail.

With costs publically available for Royal Mail, the vendors have also developed a couple of ways to find the cheapest overall RM tariff for any mailing. Simply enter a few parameters, click "cheapest" and the software will run all possible combinations of Royal Mail's sortations then present you with the one with the best discount.

A slightly different function – "Try try again" – lets the user select various combinations of sortations themselves and run through them to find the best value combination. As end users negotiate their own rates for DSA providers, this optimisation is only possible with Royal Mail.

Bureau users in particular will appreciate the new seeding functions. Making sure that seed records within a final mailing list have the correct codes appended can be a fiddly job, but is essential to make sure that a full letter with all text and images is generated for each seed. Otherwise the client receives their seed letters

with missing elements, assumes the entire mailing looks like this, panics, and reaches for the phone to the bureau.

With this tool, seed records can be stored within Cygnus and these are inserted as part of the sortation process. The software highlights the number of seeds in a file and these can be individually checked; another example of this application's attention to detail.

## INDUSTRY STANDARD

Current development plans are a good pointer to what its clients' priorities are at the moment and automation is top of the list. This includes the ability to schedule and run jobs automatically which, slightly surprisingly, Cygnus is as yet unable to do. A related development is the ability to automatically change processing parameters via the command line without opening a job manually. This is currently possible for sortation but the potential for its application right across the package is extremely interesting.

This latest version (2.66) confirms Cygnus's place at the top of the bureau data processing software tree, while upgrades like the Embedded Suppression module also raise its appeal to end user clients a notch or two. If you were looking for the industry standard, you've just found it. ■