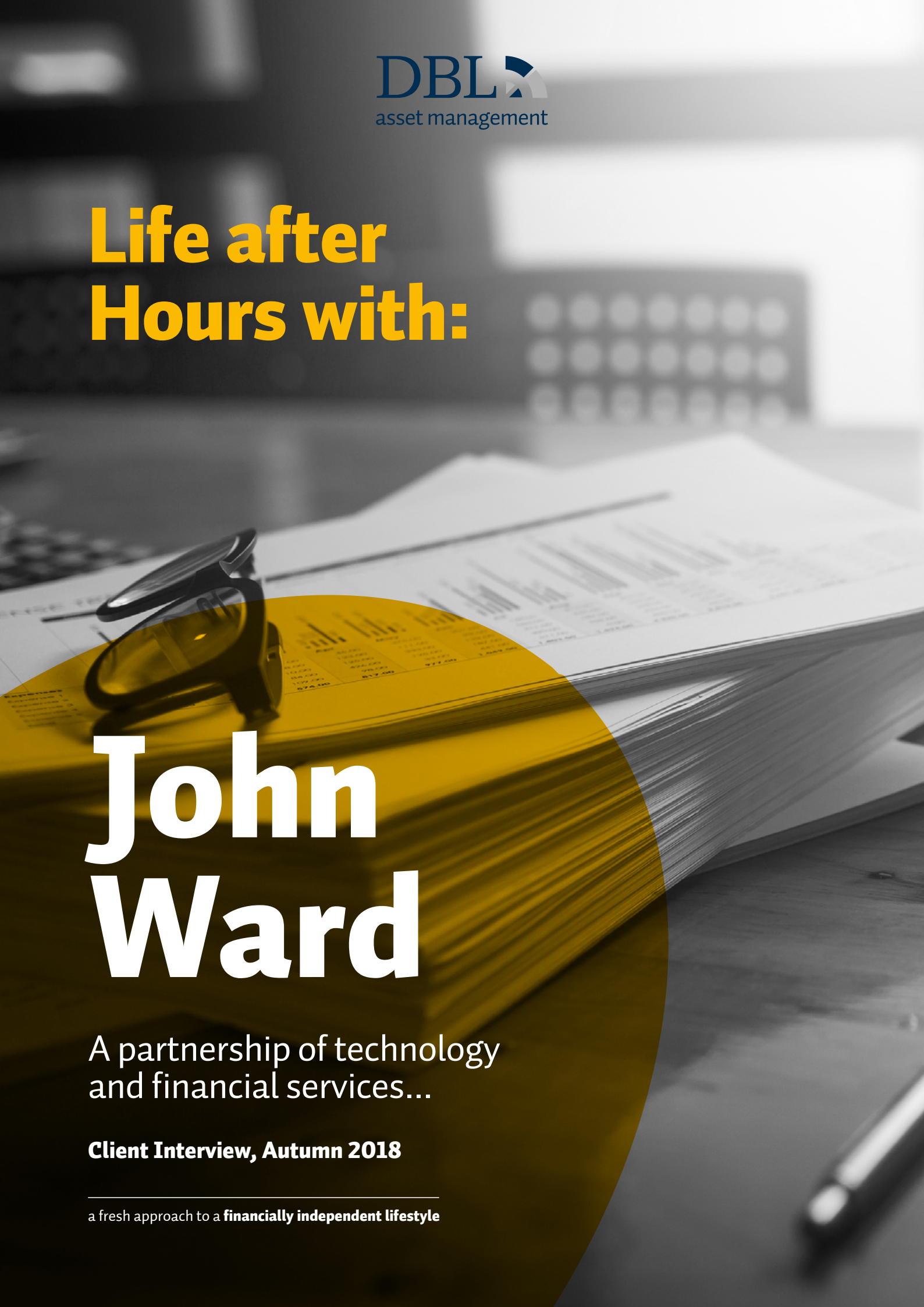


Life after Hours with:



John Ward

A partnership of technology
and financial services...

Client Interview, Autumn 2018

a fresh approach to a **financially independent lifestyle**



John Ward set up Awareness Software Limited in 1999. Based in Hazel Grove, the company provides tailored IT solutions to UK businesses.

Over the last 19 years, the business has steadily grown from being just John and one other director to a company of forty-three staff. Initially, they each worked from home, starting with just three clients, then moving to offices in Springfield House in Wilmslow, where John met Dacre. The company's next move was to larger premises in Bollington, where they were for thirteen years, before moving to Hazel Grove last year.

Awareness Software works in both the public and private sector, in education, construction, distribution, manufacturing etc, with whoever may need help with their IT services. John explained that they position themselves as a company's outsourced IT company. People often need half a dozen people, someone good at networking, printing, email, back-up etc. Instead of needing to take on six staff, by using John's company they get the full service.

What have the successes been?

Growth of the company has been entirely by client referral or through a number of acquisitions along the way.

When Awareness Software moved to Hazel Grove, it was an opportunity to centralise operations, having previously acquired offices in Handforth and Newton-le-Willows.

In John's view, he would highlight the strong team they have developed as one of their major strengths. He says it has taken a long time but through various acquisitions, they have kept the best people.

John is also proud of their high client retention figures. People do not tend to leave them, which he attributes to their excellent customer service. In fact, the only companies they lose are those which go bust or get acquired.

Linked to their high retention figure is the fact that all their new business comes from client referrals, which is a sure sign of happy clients. This also means they do not have to spend any money on marketing.

What have been the main challenges?

John outlined that managing the clients' expectations was one of the key factors in a successful IT project. This can be made difficult when they get huge price hikes from US providers like Microsoft, which they have to pass on to the client.

Obviously, it is also important to stay abreast of technology, which never stands still. Helping clients recover from ransomware outbreaks through business continuity and disaster recovery plans is a key part of what they do. "It is really rewarding to be able to help in a time of crisis," said John.

How did John's involvement with Dacre and DBL come about?

Both John and Dacre have grown their companies at a similar time. John was, in fact, just across the corridor from Dacre when he started training as a financial adviser, with Paula. If they needed a new laptop, other hardware or technical support, John would deal with it. When Dacre and Paula moved offices to Kennerley's Lane, Awareness Software provided support and now look after all their IT systems, hosted on the Awareness Software cloud.

On the financial side, Dacre has always encouraged John to put a little bit aside for the future and he advises him on his pensions. John commented that Dacre is accessible, always there when he needs him and a safe pair of hands. Not surprisingly, much of John's investment is into the business and the properties associated with it, although John says he knows Dacre would rather he put more into his pension pot.

'It is a reciprocal arrangement,' said John, 'We advise him on IT and he advises me and some of the directors and staff on their pension planning.'