

Greek broker enters Lloyd's

Athens-based independent broker Matrix has continued to chip away at global domination, successfully becoming a Lloyd's broker last year. Intelligent Insurer speaks to Gerry Tighe, head of treaty at the firm, about how the company has secured itself as the leading reinsurance broker in Greece and Cyprus.

You've had a lot of success in a relatively short time. How have you achieved this?

With hard work, dedication, belief and a vision to build something that is exemplary in every way.

Matrix began life in 2003 as a subsidiary of the BMS Group known as BMS Hellas, so we are currently celebrating our 10th anniversary. In 2006 we completed a management buyout and rebranded as Matrix in 2011. Since then we've doubled our staff and increased our revenue to such an extent that we are now the leader in the Hellenic markets of Greece and Cyprus. We're now bigger than the multinational brokers—it's a David and Goliath situation.

Last year we were accepted as a full Lloyd's broker, which enabled us to take advantage of the specialty products and markets that Lloyd's has to offer. We now have seven full-time staff in our London, Lime Street, office covering all of the major classes in which we trade.

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What sets Matrix apart from other brokers?

We are a specialist, advanced provider in a local market, with a staff of just 60 across our Athens, Nicosia and London offices. Being relatively small, independent and management owned, allows us to respond with speed and flexibility to changing market circumstances. This gives us an advantage over the larger brokers, whose more complex management structures are possibly more cumbersome in their decision-making processes. Our clients also appreciate the stability and directness that our platform provides.

We also take great care when choosing our staff. I have worked in the reinsurance market for 35 years and understand that the quality of



Gerry Tighe

our staff is effectively the quality of our company. As our reputation has grown we have attracted staff who have previously held senior positions at major multinationals such as Munich Re, Allianz, Aviva, AIG, Zurich, Generali, Chubb and Cigna.

Has being Athens-based brought any challenges to the development of the business?

The Chinese symbol for crisis means danger and opportunity—so far we have taken advantage of some great opportunities. For example, many local Greek insurers lost part of their capital due to the haircut on Greek government bonds and could not find a replacement in the capital markets. Through our actuarial and modelling capability, we structured reinsurance

solutions that have enabled our clients to continue to trade at similar levels, or to grow. We have had a virtual monopoly in the placement of these solutions, due to our early response and analytical capabilities.

Being the largest reinsurance broker in the Greek banking sector, with 70 percent of the market, allows us to be at the forefront of restructuring, sale and merger opportunities.

The situation in Greece has also meant that being headquartered in Athens is extremely cost-effective in terms of office space and staff costs when compared to London or New York.

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For all these reasons we have not found any disadvantage to being Athens-based, in fact quite the opposite.

What's in store for the next 12 months?

Diversification through lines of business and territorially is our focus now. Specialty lines have always been at the heart of our operation and an area we will keep investing in. Becoming the major player in the larger local region is in the core of our long-term strategy. We're looking towards the Middle East/North Africa region, Turkey, Israel, Malta and the Balkan countries.

Over the last six years Matrix has, on average, grown by more than 35 percent per year, with an average annual return of 40 percent. This was achieved with zero debt and 95 percent client retention. In 2013 we are set to exceed €8 million of revenue, reinforcing us as the largest reinsurance broker in our home markets. We are confident that our strategy will allow us to continue to enjoy double-digit growth. ■