

Brokering growth in Greece

The tight knit Greek and Cypriot markets offer a plethora of opportunities in this economic climate. Intelligent Insurer speaks to Gerry Tighe, head of treaty at Matrix Brokers and a specialist in this market, about how the company has benefitted.

Q How has Matrix become a major player in the Eastern Mediterranean market?

A Matrix was originally incorporated as BMS Hellas in 2003 by BMS Group. This was an initiative of our CEO, Dimitris Tsesmetzoglou, with a view to capitalising on our expertise in the Greek and Cypriot markets. In 2006, the BMS Group decided to exit international reinsurance and concentrate on North American business. This gave us an amazing opportunity to acquire the company from BMS Group and create a local broker with international reinsurance expertise. BMS Group was extremely supportive of the MBO and, as a result, we licensed the BMS brand and continued to trade under the name of BMS Hellas. Graham McKean, the BMS Group chairman at the time, agreed to take on the role as our chairman, a position that he still continues to hold today.

After the management buy-out, having spent the last 30 years working in the London market, I decided to relocate to Athens and, over the last five years, we have consistently grown the business year on year. We closed our

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first year with just under €1 million of brokerage and 10 employees.

I am pleased to say that we just closed 2010 with €5 million brokerage, 30 staff and a 40 percent profit margin before tax. We have also opened our own offices in London (in the Lloyd's building) and Nicosia, Cyprus.

Q How have you managed to grow so rapidly in difficult times?

A Our core business comes from our insurance company clients in Greece and Cyprus. We live and breathe these markets, have very long-term relationships and fully under-

stand the issues that keep our clients awake at night. The management of Matrix has a fully hands-on approach and we personally work directly with the senior management of our clients.

The big brokers like to 'institutionalise' their client relationships because the account executives are mostly not part of senior management, whereas our client relationships are principal to principal. We also have a strategy of only employing staff of the highest calibre and have been successful in attracting individuals from amongst others Munich Re, Chubb, Allianz and Generali.

We find that the big brokers are only interested in cherry-picking the large treaty programmes and will not provide support for

small or medium-sized accounts or facultative business. We are tribunalised at Lloyd's and run binding authorities for numerous classes and so can offer an unparalleled service for our client's day-to-day facultative needs. When it comes to specialist niche areas, we partner with the third-party specialist brokers, allowing us to bring in 'best of class' partners when required.

Q What are your expectations for Monte Carlo this year?

A Monte Carlo is very important for us, as it gives us an opportunity to meet with the senior management of many of the reinsurers and brokers that we deal with. Here we can



Gerry Tighe, head of treaty, Matrix Brokers

float some of the new ideas and concepts that we have been considering during the year. There is still no substitute for a one-to-one meeting when it comes to this sort of thing. Relationships in this industry are still incredibly important and I believe that there will always be a place for the Rendez-Vous at Monte Carlo, as it is the premier event where the global industry can get together and meet face to face.

Q What messages will you be putting across at the event?

A It is interesting that when written in Chinese, the word crisis '危机' is composed of two characters, one representing danger and the other opportunity. As we are based in Athens, we will be getting lots of questions about the dangers, and we can answer these and also highlight the amazing opportunities that have been created. We also will be introducing the new team that we have acquired, specialising in the Middle East and North Africa. This is part of a plan to diversify our business and is already proving to be even more successful than we had envisaged. Lastly, as the saying goes: "It's not the size but what you do with it that matters".