



New face at the helm

It's been an eventful 12 months for **Julian Porter**. Shortly after launching his own consultancy firm he also became chairman of AirSP, tasked with guiding the association's ambitious plans for expansion.

Derek Austin reports.

Julian Porter seems to be enjoying life as an independent consultant after years working for various big firms in the London market. Last year he set up his own company FactorRe and earlier this year he was voted in as the new chairman of AirSP (the Association of insurance and reinsurance Service Providers).

After eight months in his new role he says he has been pleasantly surprised at the opportunities there are

Membership is no longer restricted to smaller companies, with some big names such as Capita and KPMG now also in the fold.

Does the inclusion of the bigger players risk losing the distinct character of AirSP which was formed largely with smaller service providers in mind? Porter thinks not. 'Perhaps when it started it was mostly for the "one man band" type of outfit, but within the bigger organisations they

his predecessor and further expand the membership base, as well as promoting its role as the voice of service providers within the market. 'AirSP has been around for seven years now and it has developed a lot over the past couple of years,' he says. 'Peter Matthews [the outgoing chairman] certainly gave it some push and drive, and deputy chairman Steve Goate [a former colleague of Porter's from Reinsurance Solutions] has done a lot for it.

'We have some new board members this year – Ashley Prager, Philip Seaman and Romy Comiter – who bring new ideas and enthusiasm. Rotation of the board and the chairman helps keep it fresh, I don't think anyone wants it to become complacent. I still see big opportunities out there.

'It does take up time and not everybody appreciates that it is all done on a voluntary basis,' adds Porter. 'That is a key thing about AirSP – compared with some other market organisations, the membership fees

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for niche service providers. 'There is a lot more happening than I envisaged, I am encouraged by that.' This would also seem to be good news for AirSP. Membership of the association has been building steadily over the past year and now stands at 75.

tend to have divisions that specialise in, say, the reinsurance market or the debt purchase market, so membership will be focused on that division rather than the whole group.'

Porter says his aim as chairman will be to continue the good work of

are remarkably low, predominantly because, apart from the secretarial duties, everybody works on a voluntary basis. So a lot is achieved for a rather small overhead, hence membership fees are very good value.'

The original intention with AirSP was for it to act as a clearing house whereby member firms would pass on work to other suitably qualified members, and this benefit still persists. 'From my perspective, there have been opportunities to quote for work through AirSP; there is this attitude, if an opportunity occurs that one member cannot deal with, there is the ability to share that among the membership and find a way of accommodating clients within AirSP,' says Porter.

Around ten per cent of current members are based outside the UK, and Porter is keen to expand this overseas presence with the appointment of area representatives in key geographical markets tasked with growing the membership and liaising with other relevant market bodies. AirSP board member Colin Gray of Gray Wolf Group has taken on the role of AirSP representative in North America and the intention is in due course to find similar representatives in Europe, Asia/Australasia and Africa.

The roots of Porter's own insurance career lie in Africa. Following in the footsteps of his father, who had worked for various Lloyd's brokers, his first insurance posting took him to Johannesburg with Norwich Union, first in personal lines and then the marine department. Coming back to the UK just in time to enjoy the long hot summer of 1976, he then went to work on aviation claims for Norwich Union, moving on to EW Payne's aviation reinsurance back office in 1981 and subsequently into the non-marine department. Here he saw the fallout from the LMX spiral and hence the problems that were to dog the London market in years to come.

'It needed a bit of financial discipline applied to it,' remarks Porter. 'Brokers were very relaxed in those days – money came in, money came out, so long as they had a cash pool that kept their account in credit they didn't mind too much about the ins and outs of it.' In time, a reorganisation led to the back office relocating to Witham and the establishment of Reinsurance Solutions to manage

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the run-off from Bowrings. It later became part of Sedgwicks and then Marsh. 'By 1999 we had a massive legacy portfolio to look after within Reinsurance Solutions which was a big operation, employing perhaps 200 people. So that was my first experience of the run-off legacy market.'

After taking a year off in France to recharge, Porter came back to join CMGL/Lambourn in 2004 in a business development role straddling both run-off and live operations. Capita acquired CMGL in 2007 bringing fundamental changes to Lambourn. Feeling that Capita's business model, while good for big outsourcing or insourcing scenarios, was less well suited to his own *modus operandi*, Porter subsequently left Capita in August 2009.

After attending Monte Carlo as a sole trader for the first time, he decided to set up his own consultancy, FactorRe. This, he says, is all about offering a niche service. 'I have four key areas of focus: commutation; debt collection; debt purchase; and specialist insourcing – using my own knowledge of people with certain skill sets who fit specific individual roles with London market companies or syndicates on a temporary basis.'

As noted earlier, he sees plenty of scope for the smaller service provider in today's cost-conscious business environment. 'People are definitely more cost focused,' says Porter. 'There is a drift among the big employers, be they brokers, outsourcing firms, underwriters, to an attitude of taking on a core workforce, fulfilling their additional needs on an "as and when" basis with individuals they

may be in contact with directly, or people like myself and others that can provide resource. The old "nine-to-five, job-for life" attitude is completely gone and more and more people make a career out of projects of three months here, four months there.

'So the number of smaller operators will also increase, and hence the opportunity for AirSP membership to expand as the number of people in that market expands to meet the needs of the bigger corporates.'

Porter is a great enthusiast for the flexible working that new technology allows and says his life has changed since he got an iPhone. 'You can be virtually anywhere and still work, you can have a few days away but still keep in touch and move things along.' This has enabled him to grow the business while still finding time for the outdoor activities – sailing, fishing, golf – he enjoys. 'Because of technology you can have that degree of flexibility, and more and more people find they like that freedom – though the downside is you never fully escape! But the freedom it offers is worth that tie. I've had the most fantastic time since I went solo.' ●