

Aries is always at the edge of competition offering personalized insurance services

The true value of the insurance broker comes during hard market conditions and Aries Marine Insurance Brokers has proven its loyalty and commitment on client's needs by enhancing new technologies in order to maintain personal relationships by embracing new technologies.

In the interview that follows Despina Kalfa, Marine Insurance Broker at Aries Marine Insurance Brokers Ltd. explains the company's ways of working in order to respond the client's needs during Covid-19 pandemic and describes the company's diverse portfolio of services and strategy to remain on edge of competition in the marine insurance market.



Despina Kalfa, Marine Insurance Broker at Aries Marine Insurance Brokers Ltd.

- Do you agree that the Covid-19 pandemic has put digitalization on the fast track in the marine insurance sector?

- Although the marine insurance sector has long debated the benefits of digitalization in order to boost its sustainability and address future challenges, the Covid-19 pandemic has indeed put into sharp focus the importance of adopting a digital strategy and moving away from traditional operating models to introduce more flexible ways of working.

For one, digital interaction is now essential to maintain and develop business relationships and take part in transactions. Covid-19 has forced companies to utilize technologies such as

Zoom, to substitute face-to-face interaction which has been historically the very heart of the insurance market – especially at Lloyd's. However, such technologies have proven very efficient and may indeed be here to stay.

Also, as the world has started to work remotely, data need to be accessed and transmitted digitally. Here at Aries, we have adopted a digital environment where data can be easily shared within the team from any place and at any given time, in order to respond to our client's needs in a quick and efficient way.

Marine insurance industry is and has always been about people, with personal relationships at the core of all operations. This pandemic has proven that such relationships can still be maintained whilst embracing new technologies in the absence of face to face interaction.

Overall, the marine insurance industry should view this global crisis as an opportunity to embrace digitalization and improve the services offered to clients.

- Describe the range of your company's H&M - P&I insurance services. Have you developed innovative insurance facilities and terms that your competitors are not able to match?

- Our company operates as a boutique firm maintaining a compact yet diverse portfolio of insurance placements, mainly for P&I and H&M. We have the required experience of having been involved in this business for many years and through many difficult and challenging insurance cycles. After all, the true value of an insurance broker comes during 'hard' market conditions when we need to draw on all our past experience to maximize savings for our clients.

Our competitive advantage is our personalized services, as our clients have direct contact with our specialized and focused team, instead of dealing with a sea of faceless people. From our perspective, we are able to develop closer relationships with our clients and better understand their needs, thus adopting the best plan of action in each case.

The personalization, continuity, and loyalty we offer to our clients and underwriters alike will always be difficult for our larger more corporate rivals to match and this we believe will always give us a competitive edge. The greatest testament to this is our long-standing client base.

- Do you agree that the increasing need for greener and sustainable shipping operations will lead to the rise of premiums and complexity of

risks in the years to come?

- Nowadays, more and more environmental regulations and restrictions are adopted by the IMO and the EU, as reducing the ecological footprint of the marine industry becomes increasingly important.

As most of these green technologies are still new, they create uncertainties as to how the marine insurance market will respond to them, indeed adding a level of complexity. Taking the example of the Sulphur Cap at the start of 2020, it is still unclear how exactly its introduction will affect premiums (if at all), although – arguably – it is expected to involve increased engine breakdown claims due to the use of different fuels and the crew's inexperience. If this is the case, it is only natural that underwriters will respond with higher premiums and/or deductibles as well as possible subjectivities.

It is our belief that the marine insurance industry should take a stance on promoting sustainable shipping by finding the optimal balance between retained risk and insurance premium, without putting the shipowners at disadvantage. After all, one could argue that advances in technology, newer, safer and more efficient vessels and the wide spread use of greener fuels should present 'less' risk to insurers and thus should not necessarily mean an increase in premium for all.

- Over the recent past years the H&M and P&I market have experienced considerable turbulence. What is your company's business model for achieving steady growth and sustained profitability in a world of continuing uncertainty?

- The marine insurance industry has indeed been experiencing a time of disruption in the last years. Our company puts faith in its people to guide our clients through this period of uncertainty, whilst presenting them with best possible insurance options. Our team is comprised of highly experienced professionals, whose many years of working in this field have equipped them with the knowledge and stamina needed to face any crisis.

- Are you involved in synergies and other cooperative actions to increase your market share?

- We have specialized associates to deliver high quality services to our clients as we cooperate with Underwriters and insurance brokers worldwide and we are dealing directly with all the P&I insurers relying upon our excellent and long-standing connections in the market. However, we strongly depend on our team and its direct interaction with our clients, both existing and prospective. As all companies, we are keen in increasing our market share, but we are keener in maintaining our distinctive advantages and personalized service to our clients, and we feel that it's the Aries team itself that basically offers this.

- Are you involved in CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) activities and what are your future plans?

- First of all, at Aries equality is promoted and there is no discrimination in regards with employment. Each employee is valued, considered and treated as an asset.

As far as the environmental impact of business is concerned, the last few years we have begun a gradual shift from paper-based systems towards a paperless office model, by taking advantage of technology and increased digitalization. At this stage, we have reduced our annual paper use by over 40%.

Also, we have a waste management plan in place for disposing rubbish and separating recyclable items by type, supervised by an appointed company employee.

Finally, we seek to extend this responsibility to our associates and work with companies that also embrace Corporate social responsibility practices.