



New insurer pledges to be “broker-friendly”

Icon Insurance, set up last year as a subsidiary of Australian-owned QBE, has announced that it intends to offer UK brokers “the kind of service that big insurers have forgotten about.”

Ian Jones, head of Business Development at Icon, says that brokers have a vital and continuing role in the insurance industry, particularly in the SME and micro-business markets in which Icon specialises. “The broker can deliver quality, long-term business,” says Jones, “and not surprisingly, expects a degree of support and co-operation in return.”

Icon’s enthusiasm for the broker is not surprising - until last year, Jones and his team were themselves brokers, until bought out by Limit, QBE’s London-based operation. “Most brokers are lively, entrepreneurial, go-ahead business people,” says Jones. “They work hard for their clients - and expect insurers to work hard too.” He’s unimpressed by the direction he believes the big names in insurance are heading, deriding what he describes as “the lowest-common-denominator, call-centre driven culture”.

Icon has launched a high-profile marketing campaign to attract broker business. What’s on offer is a combination of good old-fashioned service and technology-driven efficiency, backing up a range of specially-designed, carefully targeted products. “What we’re doing is putting back into play the things that other insurers seem to have walked away from,” says Jones. He says that poor use of technology and bad systems have bedevilled the industry, which is why Icon have invested considerably in the development of their own IT. The Internet is central to the Icon operation. “It’s an on-going process,” says Jones. “At the moment, brokers can communicate with us through our website, get information and quotations and download documentation - but that’s just a start. We’re moving towards full on-line trading for brokers - and when we’re happy we’ve got it right, we’ll launch it.”

Technology is however only part of the story, Jones insists. “Technology is what *enables* you to do better business,” he says. “What’s far more important is *attitude* - and ours is that if we want to do business with these guys, we’ve got to work for it, we’ve got to respect them. And that means that we don’t palm them off with telemarketing operatives when they need expert advice, we don’t spend our time trying to screw down their levels of commission and we don’t poach their customers by undercutting them on price.”

Icon may be swimming against the tide as far as other insurers are concerned, but it’s a welcome direction for brokers with small business clients.

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