

Interview with Alexis WILDMAN, Managing Director for Belgium, Head of Marine Europe & Nordic, RSA Luxembourg S.A.

«What distinguishes our operation is our people»

Alexis WILDMAN began her role as Managing Director of RSA Belgium* in 2020. After a year in the job, we talked to her about the strategy and plans for the future of RSA Belgium, as well as about her experience during the pandemic.

Alexis, you were appointed last year as the Managing Director of RSA Belgium. How was your first year in the role?

I was looking for a new challenge but I was not expecting the first year to be like this. It's certainly been a testing 12 months for everyone. We've all encountered great difficulty personally and professionally during the pandemic. Starting a new role in a new market has been tougher because of this, but I've been fortunate to have some great people around me who have supported me along the way.

When you acknowledge to yourself that you should only focus on what you can control, then it simplifies what can initially seem like a highly complex situation. Ideally, I would have had a chance to meet more people face to face to get a true feel for how they operate, but meeting people has largely been remote. Despite this, we've been able to move the business forward, implementing the plan created at the start of 2020 which carries us into our future strategy.

It helps that the European business has largely operated as a virtual entity. The aim has always been to nurture a connected European business and the pandemic has merely accelerated that. 2020 turned out to be an excellent year for RSA Luxembourg. When the performance is strong it enables you to start looking ahead and identifying new ways to build on solid gains. After 21 years at RSA I'd say I've never been prouder of the way the team in Belgium have faced the challenge – their resilience, the collective spirit, the results. It's been really impressive.

How would you define what RSA Belgium is today and what do you value most about the company?

RSA Belgium is a specialist insurer. We are dedicated to Property, Casualty and Marine insurance for commercial clients. We are mainly focused on mid-market to large clients who require a high level of specialisation, risk management and expert capacity to look after their risks and international exposures. Our Global Network allows us to follow them to more than 170 countries and territories.



What distinguishes our operation is our people. To excel in this segment you need great specialists in different areas (such as underwriting, claims, risk engineering and operations), who build long-term relationships with policyholders and brokers and work with them to find solutions to manage risk in a comprehensive, efficient and sustainable way.

Another example is the valued-added service we offer through our Risk Consulting team with the «RSARED» tool, which collects real-time, accurate and up-to-date risk engineering data on clients' exposures worldwide. With this, the customer is able to monitor and assess risks effectively and we can help formulate constructive recommendations to improve risk profiles.

What are the immediate plans of RSA Belgium and your approach?

Given that 2020 was strong, we have now assessed where we are and how to build on the excellent performance. This isn't about revolutionising the business, but about taking what we have and looking for ways to accelerate the momentum. So, lots of tweaks and enhancements rather than re-engineering.

RSA Belgium is important for Europe. What's clear to me is that we're a highly stable element of the European business and can help in the future plans to grow across the continent. I want more people to work with us, to see what a great team we have and how we always put customers at the heart of what we do. Having talked to our customers, I know they really value the way we operate and how we have supported them. I'd like more companies to be aware of and benefit

from the expertise available by talking to the team in Belgium.

What is your focus at RSA Belgium?

Our strategy is designed to provide sustainable and profitable growth. Our Property, Casualty and Marine areas are strong. The focus will be on identifying the customers and brokers who share our approach to insurance. We also want to maintain a diverse portfolio with multinational and domestic risks. Using data intelligently by our technically skilled team is how we achieve this.

We want to build long-term tripartite relationships with our customers and brokers. Identifying customers who we can provide value to and who share our interest in long-term partnerships is important to us. We know we provide an outstanding service, and so the relationship has to be sustainable for all parties. All businesses face challenging and competitive times, and we are mindful of the pressures faced executives in by boardrooms across Europe.

Can you tell us how RSA delivered strongly in 2020?

Underwriting actions we took two years ago have put us in a very strong position to grow in a confident and sustainable manner. Lots of our competitors are pulling out of markets where we can now strongly compete.

We are very proud of how far we have come over the last couple of years. We are also a much more data-driven company, which makes our performance measurement more credible and reliable. This paves the way for continued improvement in managing our exposures and understanding our portfolio mix.

As we are now part of the Intact Financial Corporation, we have access to additional expertise that adds even more capability.

What does the acquisition by Intact Financial Corporation mean for RSA Belgium? What are you looking forward to?

I'm very positive about it. Initially, after spending 21 years at RSA, a part of you feels sentimental that an era is coming to an end. However, I quickly got over that first reaction, as it's clear to see the many advantages for our employees and customers. It makes great business sense.

I think Intact see us as a business with lots of potential for growth and a good culture. They have admired us for some time and have a good track record for acquisi-

tions. The fact that this is the first outside North America also shows the level of confidence they have in our people and the portfolios.

Although this is a takeover, it's a two-way journey as we will learn from one another. In the UK and Europe there is no overlap with Intact's business. We will be building on what we do well and now have access to their expertise, data and automated pricing tools, as well as many other skills. From what we have seen there is a lot of alignment, and I believe the combined companies will be stronger together and give us all a more secure future.

How has the industry learnt from last year?

The pandemic has taught us that we can all adapt to change when put under immense pressure. We've all been deeply affected and 2020 is a year we will never forget. I think, when we all come back to work without restrictions, we will be more flexible and have a better understanding of one another. Let's hope that can happen soon. I know some people miss the interaction and contact with people in an office. Others have enjoyed the reduced journey time and peace of working from home. I've always taken a progressive approach to how our working and personal lives interact, learning a lot from European and Scandinavian colleagues I've worked alongside.

However, I think everyone has come to accept some working from home as the new norm rather than the exception and maybe seeing a colleague's child or pet jump into the camera shot – my cat is often disrupting team meetings, and feels part of the team now! As an organisation, we need to make the changes work for everybody. We all spend a lot of time in work and the environment needs to be one in which we are all comfortable. It's about a healthy balance which in turn promotes high performance.

How has the pandemic that we have lived through changed you?

I'm very family-orientated but have often worked away from where I live. Currently this is in the UK and my family have muddled through the difficulties of the pandemic, enjoying spending more time than usual together when we could, but I have an apartment in Brussels that I'm hoping to visit more often when the restrictions are lifted.

I love running, but the lockdowns in the UK have delayed my plan to run my first marathon! This was scheduled to be in

Brighton in April 2020 but will now happen in September of this year. I promised myself I would do the distance after several half marathons, I've combined it with raising money for charity, so I owe my sponsors 41km!

This interest outside of work gives me a good distraction and a reminder to step away from the laptop and get that healthy balance now that I no longer 'commute' each day.

How would you describe yourself and how does your personality affect your professional life?

I like to think that people see me as open, friendly and balanced. I enjoy getting to know new people and really understanding how they think and what's important to them. When you find out what someone is passionate about you really see their true self and motivations.

In my professional life I want to know and understand, coach and motivate my team. This stems from good communication. When you have this, great teams can be built. And teamwork is the critical component of a successful business; no one person or department is more important than the other. Underwriting isn't more important than finance; operations is no less important than sales. We need to work together as one machine, all striving for the same thing. If we are all successful, then our time in work is enhanced.

I see my role as being the oil in that machine. Yes, I need to be there to create and direct the strategy, and to be ultimately accountable to the regulator for how we operate. But my main aim is to understand people and create a culture where they can be themselves and thrive. Creating that culture is vital.

I've seen first-hand that there are some experienced, hardworking people in the Belgium office. I'm not here to tell them how to technically do their jobs, but to establish the direction we're heading in and make it easy for people to get on with their roles, which in turn makes it easy for our customers to transact with us. With the solid foundations we have I'm looking forward to continuing that journey throughout the rest of 2021 and beyond...

* RSA Belgium refers to the Belgian branch of RSA Luxembourg S.A. (Standard & Poor's: rating A), which is a part of RSA Insurance Group Ltd.

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